

There are three basic types of externals:

1. BODILY ADJUSTMENTS – for example, posture, voice or speech alterations, and physical handicaps.
2. ORNAMENTS – sets, costumes and makeup
3. PHYSICAL STATES – for example, drunkenness, exhaustion, feeling hot or cold, or illness.

The way to incorporate an external into your work is to make it as habitual as the lines of the script so that it can exist independent of the action.

Bodily Adjustments

Voice

If you are playing a part that requires you to speak with a Russian accent, you analyze the script for action and you learn the accent separately. You practice the dialect until it becomes second nature to you. The same goes for vocal quality. If a director tells you to be more commanding and use the lower register of your voice or tells you to be meeker and use the higher register or use more breathe. You must practice until you are able to do this automatically. You must do it so that you are not focusing on the details of your voice.

Physical

A physical alteration of your body is the same. It must be worked on until it becomes second nature and is not something that draws your focus out of the scene and the other person or people in the scene.

If after you have analyzed the script you find that your character is handicapped, if they have a limp or are physically impaired in some way you then decide on the specific changes you must make in your movement in order to convey that. Perhaps wearing a heavy leg brace or a stiff knee or ankle brace will cause you to walk in a way that adds that detail to your character without pulling you out of focus.

Or you may have to add specific movement from the director, in either; you must practice so that the adjustments are not your focus. Accept them, work them and play the scene.

When working with externals try to keep in mind the “less is more” way of thinking. Fulfill the requirements of the script, but don’t become bogged down with physical externals to the point that you distract yourself or distract from your performance. The more attention you draw to an artifice the less truth is in it. People who walk with a limp are used to it to the point where they rarely notice it, it becomes part of their natural physical state. People with speech impediments live with it and so it becomes part of their nature.

Ornaments

Ornamental externals are sets, costumes and makeup. None require a change in either your analysis or your body movements. They MAY cause you to move in a certain way, however, because of their restrictions.

EXAMPLE:

A person who is outside in a thunderstorm being battered by rain will move differently than one who is in a warm Living room. If you must climb over rubble and debris to complete your action it will be different than if you must only walk across an open field.

EXAMPLE:

A person in a suit of armor walks differently from one in tights and a tunic or jeans and a T shirt

Ornaments can be specified by the script or suggested by the director, the costume designer or even you, the actor. YOU should only suggest an ornament if it HELPS your action.

EXAMPLE:

An Ornament required by the script is in AVATAR with the character Jake Sully. He is paralyzed and is bound to a wheelchair. To play the part without the wheelchair would be out of line with the intentions of the writer. You must allow the chair to be a part of your presence not the focus of it.

The director may suggest (or demand) an ornament that the script does not call for.

EXAMPLE:

You are cast as a pirate in Pirates of the Caribbean 10 and the director wants you to wear an eyepatch.

Will this change your analysis? No. But it may add an air of menace to your performance without having to PLAY menace.

If you are doing a period piece, certain ornaments are necessary to create the illusion of that historic period.

Makeup is approached the same way as costuming. If you are playing someone who is sick, you may be wearing makeup that makes your eyes look red and swollen. This is an external that aids the actor so they do not need to attempt to PLAY the sickness. You may also use makeup for technical reasons such as age makeup. In any case makeup is meant to aid the actor not as something for the actor to focus on outside the other person in the scene.

Physical States

The most difficult of the three types of externals are those requiring a physical state. It is necessary for your audience to perceive the illusion of exhaustion, sickness or drunkenness so your job is to create the illusion of these states, not to actually experience them. Take exhaustion, for example, it requires some physical adjustments and semblance of psychological alteration. To play Exhausted you must figure out the physical manifestations like: slurred speech, heavy limbs, wobbly or slow movement, loss of balance heavy eyelids etc. You must again get to the point where these movements are natural so you do not have to concentrate on them during performance. Once you make a physical external “natural” it will naturally express itself through the action. Then this will create the illusion specific to that scene.

EXAMPLE:

ACTION- To call an aggressor’s bluff.

EXTERNAL – You are exhausted

Your speech might be slowed so you have to make every word clear. In order to gain the upper hand you may have to think about what you’re saying longer to make sure you choose the right words.

ACTION- To show a friend a good time

EXTERNAL – You are exhausted

You may become punch drunk and silly.

To approach externals like being hot or cold or sickness look to how you would alleviate the symptoms therefore allowing the external to express itself through your action. Something as simple as pulling your jacket closer in a scene that calls for feeling cold shows us that external.

After you have found a good action and chosen a few tools you may also want to think in terms of physical activities you might choose to help you execute your action. Physical activities can be in response to externals.

Some guide lines for physical activity:

1. Does the activity specifically aid the action you have chosen for the scene?
2. Does it violate the given circumstances of the script or directions?

Have confidence in your common sense you cannot use a lightsaber if you are portraying Hamlet.

There are activities that you choose during the rehearsal process many activities are the result of living impulsively in the moment. The best sign that an action is working and the actor is really living in the moment is when their impulses begin to express themselves. When they begin to act before they think.