



# Writing About Tina

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The following writing guidance provides students with model paragraphs about the main elements of the show to support Live Production analysis.

Your examiner will want to see the correct use of technical terms where appropriate. Have this list with you when you are writing about Tina and see how many you can include.

### **Set**

**Key terms:** colour; texture; scale; levels; space, size, style, shape, stage configuration: transition; trucks: lifts; location: versatile set; truss; headers; revolve; TV panels (used in the TV studio scene): projection; trapdoors; fly in/fly out.

### **Sound**

**Key terms:** music; sound effect; soundscape; levels; fade; reverb, speakers; amplifier; routing; echo; microphone; live; recorded; diegetic and non-diegetic sound; concert sound

### **Lighting**

**Key terms:** focus; levels; lantern; strobe; gobo; Fresnel; spotlight; LED; parcan; shadow; snap; fade; crossfade; house lights; projection; mood and atmosphere; hexagonal lights; concert lighting; lighting bars; moving lights; projection (projectors front of house, above the stage or LED screen)

### **Costume**

**Key terms:** cut; colour; pattern/print; distressed/broken down; fit; shape; texture hair; wigs; make up; accessories; hats; shoes; bags.

### **Acting & Performance**

**Key terms:** Age; height; build; pitch, pace, pause, projection; accent; diction; tone; volume; interaction; eye contact; spatial relationships; physical contact; use of space; gesture; mannerism; gait; posture; demeanour; facial expression; action/reaction/interaction









**Annotation activity:** for each photograph, annotate it with technical terms that you could use to describe what you can see. This will also provide you with helpful revision material before a written exam where you have to discuss live production.

As well as identifying what you can see, you should also note down what it communicates to the audience. An example is below

*TV panels, inspired by footage of Tina and Ike performing on the TV show.  
Clear indication of era.*

*Circles on video screen, matching the colour of the TV panels. Creates the dynamic of being on a live TV show, rather than a concert (the projection technology did not yet exist for live performances and the designers have stayed faithful to what was available at the time).*



*Tina's gold fringed dress emphasises the movement/choreography and the colour of the dress catches the light. The eye is always drawn to the brightest object on stage, so this ensures Tina is our focus. It also emphasises the physical distance between her and Ike at this point.*

*Wooden flooring on stage helps to create the wide range of locations: the generic wood means that the set is highly versatile.*

“Write about a moment in the production where sound, lighting and/or projection combined to create successful moments”

At the beginning of *Tina*, the curtain rose to show Tina Turner preparing to go on stage in Rio de Janeiro in 1988. As Tina walked up the steps upstage centre (each of which had a strip of LED lights on the front) towards the cyclorama, the LED screen which covered the entire height and width of the stage showed the view from the wings of the stadium stage: a rectangle of ‘lights’ – as if they were the lights of cameras and torches of the crowd at the concert. There were also two strong beams of moving light, from upstage which cast Tina in silhouette. As the actor was wearing the iconic ‘Tina wig’, it immediately directed the audience’s attention on her, ensuring that she was our main focus now, and throughout the narrative.

Because this is a memory play, it is important for the audience to understand that the next scene in the play is a moment from Tina’s childhood. The lighting and video projection assisted in this by creating the idea of entering into the past: the lights were more of a sepia hue than the bright, high intensity concert lights in the previous scene. Instead, a light from a high angle upstage left lantern cast light towards the downstage area, on a diagonal. This was matched with the placement of a tree trunk which was upstage right, and the canopy of leaves was created on the video wall. The light appeared to come through the leaves and tree branches, helping to create the location of a Baptist church meeting being held outside. Before the leaves emerged on the back wall, there was a swirling, milky pattern on the screen, as if we were emerging through the strands of memory. As the pattern gradually faded, the colours changed to horizontal colours of hazy blue and a sandy yellow colour to represent the sky and dusty fields of Nutbush, Tennessee. As time passed through the passage of a day, and then through several years, the colours of both the lights and video screen changed to reflect dusk and dawn and also included a time lapse video of people (including the young Anna Mae/Tina) working in the cotton fields.

I thought that the way in which video projection and lighting was highly effective because by altering lighting intensity, and using gobos to direct and shape light, Bruno Poet and Jeff Sugg were able to create a clear sense of location for the audience. I also thought it was successful in placing a very bright, concert style of lighting immediately before a gentler use of colour and video for the Nutbush scene. Much later in the play, Tina acknowledges that she is “just Anna Mae” and so it made me think about how Tina has her concert/public persona and a very different private, individual character as a mother, partner, daughter and sister. I think the use of technical design was very important in reminding me of this.

My favourite moment was when lighting and video was also combined with sound at the end of Act One when Tina escaped from Ike and had to cross a motorway/highway. Tina emerged from upstage right to stand upstage centre and was initially placed in silhouette against a very bright, white screen. In order to create the taillights and headlights of cars, a series of overhead lights (3 rows) appeared to move across the stage. These were created by very narrow focussed circles to create an abstract sense of cars moving in opposite directions. Tina then ran downstage in between these lights as they appeared to travel across the floor. (In reality, these lights are created by the individual lights in the batons that are suspended above the stage flashing on and off in sequence).

There was no attempt to make this a naturalistic depiction of a highway: instead the video wall had streaks of red horizontal colour, round orange and yellow shapes resembling headlights and then sudden moments where the screen was completely dark. This successfully created the danger and tension of Tina running across a busy motorway. The recorded sound of blaring car horns and cars driving at high speed also heightened the drama. As well as the recorded sound, the live band played an adapted version of *Proud Mary* – insistent drums (which also reminded me of rapid heartbeats), guitar (sometimes reverberating) and the brass section of the band playing ascending notes of a scale were timed to match the lighting and video content. The stage itself was bare, and only Tina was onstage but I gained a strong sense of location, mood and atmosphere as a result of the combination of the three elements of lighting, sound and projection/video.

Now that you have read this response that describes scenes at the beginning and end of Act One, identify another part of the production which you think successfully creates mood, atmosphere and location through lighting, sound and video/projection.

You could consider:

- *Private Dancer* (to include the corridor of light that allows the audience to see Ike as he attempts to shoot Tina).
- *I Can’t Stand the Rain* – how moving image, the combination of video and ensemble to create the streets of London, lighting and live song communicates Tina’s emotional experience in London.
- Tina’s performance of *What’s Love Got To Do With It?* at The Ritz – a pivotal moment in her career
- The finale (often referred to as the Megamix) – the ‘concert’ at the end of the show

**Challenge:** Which of these scenes is about creating a spectacle for an audience, and which are more about storytelling and developing narrative? Why is it important that there is a delicate balance between the two?

**For even more evaluative detail:** how have the various designers increased their use of technical elements in order to build up to the spectacular finale, and why have they not used the full range of lighting /sound/projection effects from the very beginning? (HINT: Think about a) the period in which *Tina* is set b) the narrative arc and audience experience.)

## “Explain how costume communicated character in one production that you have seen”

Mark Thompson’s costume design for Tina Turner contributed very successfully to the narrative journey of the characters in *Tina*. Through the use of shape, colour, texture, style and fit Thompson demonstrated how Tina’s character changed from a young girl raised in Nutbush, Tennessee to the global superstar that she now is.

At the beginning of the production, Anna Mae (Tina’s real name) is seen as a young girl in a white, short sleeved smock dress, with white socks and brown boots. This is what she wears in Nutbush, Tennessee, the daughter of a poor cotton farmer. This dress communicated her youth, but also the level of poverty of her family. In an early ensemble scene, Anna Mae’s costume is not distinct from the other Nutbush residents – they wore simple cotton clothing, which had been distressed to look old, stained with sweat and the effort of farming. The adult actor playing Anna Mae when she arrives in St. Louis wore a version of the same dress, (with an apron added to show the domestic work that she has been doing to make ends meet). It was important that Anna Mae arrives in St Louis wearing this to show the strong contrast between her and her mother Zelma and sister Alline, who have been trying to fit in with the larger city life. It also helped to emphasise later on, just what a different life she goes on to live as Tina both in her daily outfits and her concert costumes.

The first time that the audience saw Tina on stage, we actually saw her in a concert costume which is very different to the costume described above. Tina wore a short, pink leather halter-neck dress, black fishnet tights and black stiletto slip on shoes. The dress was tight, with the hem sitting mid thigh with a small ruffled skirt. This dress is a copy of the iconic dress that Tina wore for her concert in Rio de Janeiro in 1988 when she performed to over 180,000 people. From the very beginning of the show, the audience knows that she becomes a star: by showing us the final costume first, Mark Thompson has provided us with a contrast with which to compare Tina/Anna Mae’s humble beginnings and reminds us of the many obstacles that she has had to overcome.

Many of Tina’s costume changes occurred on stage, for example when she changed from her Nutbush outfit to go out with her sister’s friends to see Ike Turner performing at Club Manhattan, where they first meet. The smock dress is removed (its seams are kept closed with magnets for easy removal during the number *Shake A Tail Feather*). Tina’s wig was also changed from a short “press and curls” style to a looser short style. The physical change which reminded the audience that she is already starting to change from the young naïve girl from Nutbush and is preparing to enter a new phase in her life.

Using this as a starting point, how can you continue this response to include costumes from later on in the production?

## “Describe how one performer created an emotional response from the audience”

One of the most effective parts of the production for me as an audience member was when Tina has taken an overdose of Valium pills but is forced to perform *Proud Mary*. Halfway through the number, she leaves the stage, has a fight with Ike and then runs across a highway (motorway) to escape to a motel where she knows she will be able to hide from Ike. This scene was highly effective because it created a strong sense of tension and also elicited high levels of sympathy for Tina as she ran away from her abusive husband.

At the beginning of *Proud Mary*, the actor stood downstage centre, in front of a microphone on a stand which had emerged from a trapdoor in the stage. She shakily pulled a dress strap higher on her shoulder and then stood looking straight at the audience as if summoning the strength to continue. She gradually started to sway as the chords of the song were played by Ike who had entered via the revolve behind her. As the musical number gained its full energy, the actor playing Tina executed the choreography with the high energy and precision that the audience would expect from Tina the artist. However, she suddenly stopped and all of the energy and enthusiasm seemed to disappear as she then removed her iconic gold, fringed dress and stood in her brown silk slip. The audience were suddenly reminded that Tina is not just a performer, but a woman who has suffered a great deal of abuse and she was no longer able to continue. It suggested to me that as she removed the dress, she also lost the ability to continue living in this way.

After having a physical fight with Ike, which included kicking, hitting and scratching him, Tina then ran off stage and reappeared upstage in front of the LED screen. She was in silhouette and because of the scale of the set and the brightness of the lights, she suddenly seemed very small and vulnerable – a complete contrast to the artist we had seen moments before in *Proud Mary*. She then ran down stage, dodging through the lights (which were directly above the stage, representing the different headlights of the cars she was dodging on the highway). Her movements were much more erratic, again contrasting to the way in which she had been dancing moments before.

After appearing to cross several lines of busy traffic, the actor playing Tina stopped down stage centre – the same place that she had begun singing *Proud Mary*. However, this time she was stood with slumped shoulders and very still, and as she began to speak to the hotel night manager (whom the audience does not see), she began to wring her hands to show her anxiety. Her vocal tone was friendly as she explained that she needed a room despite the fact that she was unable to pay for it as she had no money of her own. The actor appeared breathless and spoke quickly but haltingly to show her distress.

To show the moment that the manager had given her a bedroom key, Tina held her hand up in the air and opened her palm. She then slowly brought her arm back down again and it suggested to me that she had suddenly found a little bit of freedom and security of her own, away from Ike. I felt very sorry for her, but also a sense of relief that she had managed to escape. However, because this came at the end of Act One, it also created a tension and anticipation because I did not know whether Ike would come looking for her or not.

This response describes the end of Act One of *Tina*. Using the same structure and focussing on both **describing, analysing and evaluating** what you saw, write about another moment in Act Two in which you think an actor was successful in gaining an emotional response from you as an audience member. Remember that you **CAN** give personal responses, rather than relying on generalised statements about how the entire audience responded.