

What are the “Given Circumstances”?

By analyzing the given circumstances, the actor can better understand who they are, where they are and understand the motivations of the character

From Acting Magazine By Tonya Tannenbaum

The “given circumstances”, in acting, are just as the name implies. They are the situational and environmental circumstances affecting the life of the character that are thrust upon, or given, to the character, by the script.

To be effective, the actor must operate within the confines of these circumstances and use them to understand the character’s motivations and actions.

Breaking down “Given Circumstances”

Just as real-life human beings must live within, and adjust to, the circumstances in their lives, so, too, must characters in a script.

An extremely wealthy person, for example, is shaped, to some degree, by their wealth. They must adjust to the pressures and pleasures of their extreme wealth. Unless, of course, they choose to give up their wealth. Their wealth might affect their behavior, attitudes, goals, experiences and outlook on life.

The same is true, conversely, for a poor person born into a rough neighborhood. He or she might adopt certain mannerisms and manners of speech to fit the environment. Their environment will affect the way they dress, their behavior, their relationships. Their poverty might affect their self-esteem, education, aspirations and life choices.

A Character’s Given Circumstances

The given circumstances, in a script, function the same way. A character is essentially born into the world that the script writer has created.

The script writer, for instance, might create a world where the character lives in the 1950’s, comes from a well-to-do family, is young and reckless, and madly in love with his high school sweetheart. The actor must take these circumstances into account when developing their character.

These circumstances inform the actor as to how they must interact with their parents, siblings, friends and the high school sweet heart. People in the 1950’s dressed differently than they do today. They had a different way of speaking. Everything, from what they watched on television, how they socialized, the norms and mores they adhered to were all significantly different. The actor must understand these circumstances and adjust the character accordingly.

Though a character’s circumstances are largely given to them by the script, the “given circumstances” are also influenced by others involved in the production. The show’s director, designers and the other actors all play a factor in the character’s given circumstances.

To be effective, the actor must operate within the confines of these circumstances and use them to understand the character’s motivations and actions.

By analyzing the given circumstances, the actor can better understand who they are, in relation to other characters. They can better understand the time of day and/or the time period in which each scene takes place. They can also better understand the motivations of the character and, therefore, take truthful actions and make stronger character choices.