

SETTING

the STAGE

Set decorations—the props and furnishings that fill out a set or location—are key elements of production design. They include not only furniture and its accessories, but paint color, wall hangings, greenery and food items as well. The décor of a room is its overall style and is suggested primarily by the furniture. Common décors include modern, traditional, rustic and European, but the décor of a specific set may be more haphazard or mixed. Set decoration conveys valuable information about a script’s characters and helps tell the story visually. Consider, for example, a scene set in a lawyer’s office. The décor of the office is ultra-modern and hints at success. We wouldn’t be surprised to find a wall of hardbound law books there, but if we noticed dust on all the books, we might assume they weren’t getting much use, or cleaning. Chinese takeout cartons and an electric shaver on the lawyer’s desk, a toothbrush and toothpaste on his filing cabinet and a blanket on the couch tell us the office doubles as a living space. A desk calendar with a lot of blank space suggests business is slow.



Describe four props in the room related to your character and explain how those items suggest your character’s occupation, hobbies and tastes:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



Taken together, these set details describe not a successful lawyer, but one who has no clients and has to live in his office to make ends meet. Sometimes details like these are mentioned in the script, but often they are added by the production designer. As production designer Dean Tavoularis (*The Godfather* trilogy, *The Outsiders*) notes, “Whether it’s a period or a contemporary story, one should always think about what possessions characters might have in their environment.”

Invent a character or pick one from a favorite novel. Imagine a room (bedroom, living room, office, etc.) that your character might spend time in. What type of room is it?

Describe the décor, or style, of the room. Is it funky? Conservative? Is it cluttered or sparsely furnished? Neat or messy? Are the walls bare or covered?



Share your room details with a classmate. Based only on these details, have your classmate guess the sex, personality, occupation and social background of your character.

Now, using your props, create some action for your character in that room. Describe what your character is doing and imagine how your set enhances the story:

ELEMENTS OF SET DECORATION:

DÉCOR: Style or mode of decoration, as of a room, building, or the like

PROP OR PROPERTY: Object used by an actor or displayed as part of a set