

BREAKING GLASS

Unlike many other sound effects, which can be simulated with devices or materials unrelated to the original source of the sound, breaking glass can not be imitated by any other materials or processes. Any flaw in its performance or any attempt to imitate it by other means would be instantly detectable because it is a sound that we are so familiar with. The sound of breaking glass draws a visceral, empathetic reaction in the audience member, affecting them in an emotional space between heart break and anxiety. It's as if the guilt of the breakage is automatically attributed to the one who hears it or as if the broken vessel has a bodily connection to the empathizer, belonging to them like an organ or a distant appendage. These emotional responses can be exploited as metaphorical devices by the playwright in the construction of a narrative. In the metaphorical use of the sound, consider yourself a composer when orchestrating the particular character of the breakage, whether it is an exceptionally heavy and violent implosion, a slow crack, or a long-winded trickling breakage of multiple small crystal vessels. In most cases, the sound effect is used in conjunction with the scripted breakage of an actual object on stage, and so the accurate depiction of the particular circumstances of that breakage must be carefully considered in the orchestration of this sound effect with the following practical concerns.

The sound of breaking glass can only be manipulated for the purposes of theatre in its amplification, and timing. The only variations in materials can be the shape, number, and scale of the glass objects being broken, and the material upon which the broken pieces land. The nature of the projectile that breaks the glass, as in what type of object has caused the breakage, or if the glass has simply been dropped, has some impact on the resulting sound created. The result of an assault on glass is usually the same.

Glass used for breaking off-stage is obviously a single-use prop. As such it can be a costly effect to produce. The best way to cut costs is to source glass from demolition sites or recycling facilities. However, for a particularly crystalline effect the expense of using second-hand glassware may be worthwhile. As mentioned before, the sacrificial glass can take different forms, with some slight sound variation to suit the script's demands. These can include a framed pane of glass, which will produce a different effect than a tray of glasses crashing to the ground.

The surface upon which it lands must also be considered. Additionally, one must take into account the sound of the object that has caused the breakage and where this projectile lands, the accompanying sound to the breaking glass.

One must never rely on the adequacy of the sound created by the actor with the props dropped on stage in the dramatization of the breakage, even in the rare occasion that real glass is used as the actor's prop. There must always be a doubling of the effect off-stage to amplify the sound to a dramatic level if you wish to incite a reaction in the audience. Generally, this amplification is achieved by using a resonant surface such as sheet metal for the glass to land on or an actual microphone and amplifier can be used with caution.