

One-Act Playwriting



According to Aristotelian Hierarchy of Elements

What is a script?

A set of instructions for every person involved in the production of a play, including the actors, director, technicians, and designers. A successful script balances the entertainment of an audience with the effective delivery of instruction to the production team.

What do audiences want?

Whether consciously or unconsciously, audiences want some kind of emotional experience; to be absorbed, amused, or transformed.

The Six Elements

Plot

The events and action which drive the story forward. Includes beginning, inciting incident, rising action (responses by protagonist), climax, and resolution.

- What are the stakes?
- How does the conflict impact the characters?

Character

People in action to achieve their goals. They are influenced by the plot and vice versa.

- What are the character's goals/needs/motivations?
- How are they going to get those things?
- What gets in their way?

Thought

Theme or message; underlies the story and characters' actions. Don't get caught up on the perfect theme too soon.

- Why do their actions matter?
- What conflicts are they responding to?
- What did they learn?

Diction

What is said and how. Don't get too caught up before knowing the other elements which inspire dialogue.

- How does line delivery affect meaning?
- Why is your character saying each specific line?
- Does it sound natural?

Spectacle

Visual elements! Costume, makeup, staging, lights, etc.

- What visual elements are integral to the storytelling?
- Is what you're envisioning possible live on stage?
- What elements can be saved for the production team to determine?

Song

Auditory; what is heard. Includes actual sound/song or rhythm/beats of the writing.

- Can sound elevate any moments in the script?
- Are you writing in a poetic or epic style?
- How does the rhythm of a line affect its meaning?

As you get started...

Germinal Ideas

These are one-to-two sentence long formulations of the ideas that first come to your head.

They may include:

- Plot outline ideas
- Conflict ideas
- Dialogue exchange
- Character ideas
- Goal for a theme to write on
- etc.



Remember a play script is...

NOT a novel

- Avoid over-describing the physical details of actions or surroundings unless absolutely necessary to the plot, an important beat, etc.
- Lots of decisions should be left up to the directors.
- Goal: straightforward and concise. A large majority of the writing should be dialogue only.

NOT a movie

- Avoid imagining the action of your script like a movie, involving light changes, character actions, sets/locations, or visual effects which are only possible with movie sets editing.
- Goal: achievable in a live setting. For most one-act plays, within a fairly small venue, budget, and production time.
- It may be helpful to physically visualize demands on paper or with a model.

Play Formatting Example

CHARACTER 1 **Use 12 point Courier font. Run time = ~1 min/page**

Write your dialogue here. It should be aligned to the left with normal margins. Do not use quotation marks.

(Character actions and written beats should be in parenthesis and aligned with character names.)

CHARACTER 2 **Character names are always CAPS, indented ~2 in.**

(Sarcastically) Tone tags are totally not important.

(Beat.)

Always leave a space before the next character speaks

CHARACTER 3

Formatting is important to ensure that those producing the play can get the information they need fast and easy and actors can read lines clearly.

(CHARACTER 1, CHARACTER 2, and CHARACTER 3 exit stage right.)