

The Playwriting Process

The first step that you need to know about writing a play is that it truly is a process of discovery. You can't possibly imagine how your play is going to turn out before you write it. In fact, if you choose real-life characters based on people you know, or through research, they will actually write part of the play for you.

All you need to do is put these characters "on stage," give them a problem to overcome and then watch and listen to what they say and do. You become as much a reporter taking notes and recording conversations as a struggling playwright. Remember this as you write your play.

Setting: Describe where and when the story takes place.

Main problem: What is the main problem faced by the characters in the play? What do they have to do to overcome this problem?

Complication: What complication or added problem makes it difficult for the characters to find a solution to the main problem? How can this complication help you to add humor or suspense to your play? What can your characters do or say to help solve or further complicate the situation?

Solution: How do the characters finally solve the problem and bring the play to an end?

Message: What, if anything, does your play have to "say" about life to your audience? Is there a moral, a lesson, a point?



Play Structure

A play should begin with a dramatic situation that is so strained and unstable that it leads to action. This action either progresses, delays or reverses the events. Either way, it presents a new situation that is often less stable than the first. This process repeats itself until certain events result in a stable situation. The following is an outline of plot structure:

1. **Opening situation:** The events at the rise of the curtain, including the exposition that gives the background or reveals what has happened before the curtain rises.
2. **Initial incident:** The first event that suggests there will be a change in the situation; an incident to which you can trace all future action.
3. **Rising action:** Additional events leading to the climax.
4. **Climax:** The highest point of emotional intensity that occurs near the end of the play and to which all action has been leading.
5. **Falling action:** After the climax, the brief events in which the outcome is resolved.