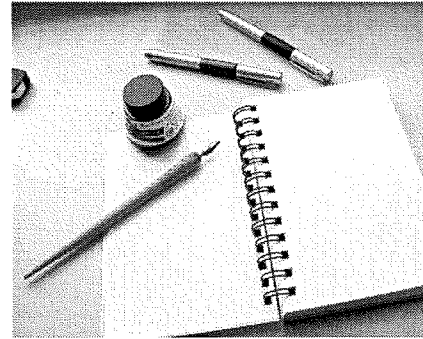


IV. THE PLAYWRIGHT

This person is responsible for creating dramatic characters, the play's structure and action, and dialogue.

IV.1 ~ ELEMENTS OF SCRIPTWRITING

Dramatic Characters By carefully emphasizing certain features of a character's personality while eliminating others, a dramatist can show us in 2 hours the entire history of a person whom it could take us a lifetime to know in the real world. Types of Characters are below:



1. **Extraordinary characters** in most important dramatic works of the past, the heroes and heroines are extraordinary in some way. They are larger than life. Historically, major characters have been kings, queens, bishops, members of the nobility, or other figures clearly marked as holding a special place in society.
2. **Representative or Quintessential characters.** When characters from everyday life replaced kings and queens as the leading figures in drama, a new type of character emerged alongside the extraordinary character. Characters of this new type are important because they represent an entire group. Rather than being notable as "worst," "best," or some other extreme, they are important as representative characters. A good example is Willy Loman, in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, who has lived by a false dream: the idea that if he pulls off being "well-liked," he will be successful and rich.
3. **Stock characters:** Many leading characters in drama are not complex or complicated; rather, they represent just one particular characteristic of humanity. They are referred to as *stock* characters, and they appear particularly in comedy and melodrama, though they can be found in almost all kinds of drama. In today's television, the familiar figures on weekly situation comedies are good examples of stock or stereotypical characters. Consider Phoebe, the scatterbrained neighbor on *Friends*, or the overprotective mother on *Everybody Loves Raymond* who is constantly judging her daughter-in-law.
4. **Minor characters:** These characters play a small part in the overall action of a play. Generally they appear briefly and serve only to further the story or to support more important characters. Typical examples of minor characters are servants, soldiers, and so forth; but even figures such as generals, bishops, and judges are considered minor if they play only a small role in the action.
5. **A narrator or chorus:** Generally, a *narrator* speaks directly to the audience. He or she may or may not assume a dramatic persona as the other characters do. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example, a narrator is Scout (one of the main characters) as an adult, looking back at her childhood. Ancient Greek drama had a chorus (usually consisting of 15 performers) who in song and dance commented on the action of the main plot and reacted to events in the story. Use of a chorus or narrator creates a *dialectic* or direct connection between people outside the play (the audience) and characters in the central action.
6. **Nonhuman Characters:** Dramatic characters who are animals or robots, for example, are rare. When they do occur, however, it is their human qualities that are emphasized.

USING DRAMATIC CHARACTERS EFFECTIVELY: JUXTAPOSITION AND INTERACTION

PROTAGONIST AND ANTAGONIST These terms come from Greek theater. The *protagonist* is the main character of the play, and the *antagonist* is the main character's chief opponent. It is through the contest of these two characters that their individual qualities are developed. Note, however, that the antagonist is not always a character – it can also be an element of nature, or the protagonist may fight with himself and his own moral compass.

CONTRASTING CHARACTERS Another way dramatists contrast characters is by setting them side by side rather than against one another. Frequently, a playwright will introduce secondary characters to serve as counterparts to the main characters, like Batman and Robin. This technique of setting parallel or contrasting characters beside one another is like putting certain colors next to each other. For instance, dark green looks much darker when seen next to pale green.

ORCHESTRATION OF CHARACTERS Characters in a play serve as contrasts, counterparts, or complements to each other; sometimes one group of characters is set in opposition to another. Characters are placed together in certain combinations to obtain maximum effectiveness. A protagonist may be opposed to an antagonist; minor characters support major characters; and individual characters are orchestrated into a whole.

The ultimate goal of this orchestration is to recreate truths seen in real life. Dramatic characters are symbols of people; therefore, the basic confrontation in theater is with ourselves.

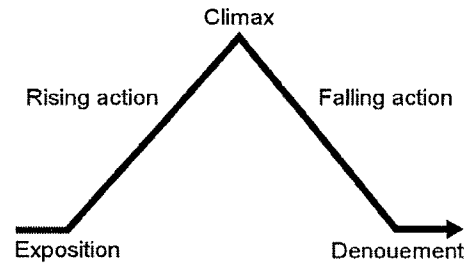
IV.2 ~ DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

CONVENTIONS

The playwright provides the words the characters speak and the actions they perform. The playwright also decides how the events in a play will unfold: where the action will take place and over how long a period of time, as well as the sequence of episodes in the action. In other words, the playwright must *dramatize* the story—transform it into *action* and conversation, which is called *dialogue*.

In developing a drama, the playwright must be aware of certain conventions and rules that have developed through the centuries. These include how a story is turned into a plot, how characters interact, how action is carried forward, and how the play is resolved.

Dramatizing a story entails creating a dramatic *structure*. Every work of art has some kind of structure, or framework. It may be loosely connected or tightly knit; the important thing is that the framework exists. In a sense, the structure of a play is roughly like the structure of a building. Architects and engineers work together like playwrights and directors. An architect and an engineer plan a skeleton or substructure which will provide the inner strength for a building. They determine the depth of the foundation, the weight of the support beams, and the stress on the sidewalls. Similarly, a playwright and a director establish a premise for a play which serves as its foundation; they introduce various stresses and strains in the form of conflicts; they establish boundaries and outer limits to contain the play; they calculate the dynamics of the action. In short, they “construct” the play.



ESSENTIALS

In theater, structure usually takes the form of a *plot*, which is the arrangement of events or the selection and order of scenes in a play. Plot, in turn, is generally based on a *story*. What’s the difference, you might ask? A *story* is a full account of an event, or series of events, usually told in chronological (time) order. *Plot*, as opposed to story, is a selection and arrangement of scenes taken from a story for presentation onstage. It is what actually happens onstage, not what is *talked about*.

The story of Abraham Lincoln, for example, begins with his birth in a log cabin and continues to the day he was shot at Ford’s Theater in Washington. To create a play about Lincoln, a playwright would have to make choices. Would the dramatist include scenes in Springfield, where Lincoln was a lawyer? Would he include the Stephen Douglas debates? Would there be scenes with Lincoln’s wife, Mary Todd? Even when a play is based on a fictional story invented by the playwright, the plot must be more restricted and structured than the story itself: characters and scenes must still be selected and the sequence (order) of scenes decided upon.

In creating a plot, the playwright decides at what point in the story the plot will begin, what characters will participate, what scenes will be included, and in what sequence the scenes will occur. Two ingredients are essential: action and conflict.

People and Action The subject of theater is always people—their hopes, their joys, their mistakes, and their fears. But drama also needs action. The terms *to act* and *to perform* are used in theater to denote the impersonation of a character by an actor or an actress, but these words also mean “to do something.” At its heart, theater involves action.

Conflict People are often defined by the way they respond to challenges. If they cannot face up to a challenge, that tells us one thing; if they meet a challenge with dignity, even though it defeats them, that tells us something else; if they triumph, that tells us something else again. In our own lives, we come to know our families, our friends, and our enemies by seeing how they respond to us and to other people, and how they meet crises.

In life this process of challenge and response can take years, but in the theater we only have a few hours, and the playwright must therefore devise means by which the characters will face and be tested by challenges in a short span of time. Through this test, the true meaning or message of the play is brought out.

IV.3 ~ THE RULES OF THE GAME

In order to make certain that events onstage will be dynamic and that characters will face a meaningful test, conventions or “ground rules” have evolved for dramatic structure. A good analogy would be the rules in games such as card games, video games, and sports. In each case, rules are developed to ensure a lively contest. Theater is more diverse and complex than most sports, and theatrical rules are not so clearly defined or enforced. Nevertheless, there are similarities that point up the ways in which a play makes its impact.

Limited Space Most sports have a limited playing area. Theater, of course, is usually limited to a stage; but there is also a limit within the play itself. The action of a play is generally confined to a “world” of its own—that is, to a fictional universe which contains all the characters and events of the play—and none of the characters or actions moves outside the orbit of that world. Sometimes the world of a play can be restricted to a single room. The key is to remember that play scripts are not movies—playwrights must consider the space they have available to them, and how they will make their plot come to life within this confined area.

Limited Time Sports events put some limit on the duration of action. The time limit in theater can be looked at in two ways: first as the length of time it takes a performance to be completed; second, as the time limit placed on the characters within the framework of the play itself. For the first, most theatrical performances last anywhere from 1 to 3 hours. For the second, and more important limitation, is the time limit or deadline *within* the play. This means the time that is supposed to elapse during the events of the play, the time covered by those events—a few hours, a few days, or longer. Frequently, we find in a play a fixed period within which the characters must complete an action.

Strongly Opposed Forces Most sports involve two opposed teams or individuals. This ensures clear lines of force: good guys versus bad guys or home versus visitors. In the simplest dramatic situations, one character direction opposes another—the *protagonist* versus the *antagonist*. The goal is to create friction or tension, such as with the Montagues versus Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*, or Stanley versus Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. One device frequently used by dramatists to create friction between forces is restricting the characters to the members of one family, so that parents versus children, or sisters versus brothers, or husband versus wife have no means of escape.



A Balance of Forces In most sports, there are rules designed to ensure that the contest will be as equal as possible without coming to a dead draw. In theater, a hard-fought and relatively equal contest is seen in what has been said about opposing forces: Jean stands opposite Julie; Blanche stands opposite Stanley. In good drama, the audience must be able to see the plot from multiple perspectives.

Incentive and Motivation Good

drama never lacks motivation. If characters don't have a reason for doing what they do, we all lose interest and empathy.

IV.4 ~ CREATING A DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

Working within the conventions mentioned above, the playwright sets out to develop a dramatic structure, which begins with the crucial opening scene of the play.

Opening Scene The first scene starts the action and sets the tone and style for everything that follows. It tells us whether we are going to see a serious or a comic play and whether the play will deal with fantasy or with affairs of everyday life. The opening scene is the clue about what lies ahead; it also sets the wheels of action in motion, giving the characters a shove toward their destination.

Obstacles and Complications Having met the initial challenge of the play, the characters then move through a series of steps—alternating between achievement and defeat, between hope and despair. The moment they seem to accomplish one goal, certain events cut across the play to upset the balance and start them on another path. In theater these may be *obstacles*, which are challenges put in a character's way, or they may be *complications*—outside forces or new twists in the plot introduced at an opportune moment.

Crisis and Climax As a result of conflicts, obstacles, and complications in a play, characters become involved in a series of *crises*. A play usually builds from one crisis to another. The first crisis will be resolved only to have the action lead to *another* crisis. The final and most significant crisis is called the *climax*. In the final climax, the issues of the play are resolved, either happily or unhappily.

Varieties There are several basic types of dramatic structure. *Climactic* form, first used by the Greeks, is the most common. Its characteristics are a plot beginning quite late in the story, a limited number of characters, a limited number of locations and scenes, little or no unnecessary material in the plot, and a cause-and-effect chain of events. This form is most like a narrative story.

Episodic form involves a plot covering an extended span of time, numerous locations, a large cast of characters, diverse events (including mixtures of comic and serious episodes) and parallel plots. Shakespeare's plays are good examples of episodic form.

