

## Script Creation and Analysis

### Information and activity

A play starts with an idea. It may be an idea for a character, or an idea that suggests a relationship. You may have an idea for a whole story. There are no rules for ideas. If you have a lot of them, you may find that a play is the best vehicle for enlarging and developing them into a form that you can share with others.

Some playwrights map out their ideas, and always know where the story is headed. Others begin with a scene, and go where the story takes them. Again, there are no rules. Something to remember: a play tells us about characters in a dramatic situation, and that means conflict. When you are spinning ideas, the ones that involve forces in opposition – character against character, usually, or character against situation – will give you the most dramatic start.

Consult the elements listed below for help with structure, but don't think of them as a map. Work with characters and conflicts that are compelling for you, and see where your play takes you.

### The Elements of Dramatic Structure

In 1863 Gustav Freytag wrote a book called *Technique of the Drama*. His book presented an approach to analyzing the structure of plays that has withstood the test of time. According to Freytag, the principal elements of dramatic structure that give shape and coherence to a play's plot are:

- **Exposition**—the part of the story that introduces the characters, location and time of the action and gives the audience all the background information they need to understand the characters' situation.
- **Complication**—the first moment in the story that clearly shows the main character (protagonist) in conflict with those characters and/or forces (antagonist) that thwart his or her desires.
- **Rising action**—the part of the story that focuses on the various ways in which the main character tries to overcome his or her opposition to get what he or she wants.
- **Climax**—the highest point of interest in the play where the situation in which the main character has been struggling changes in such a radical way that the final outcome of the story must soon follow.
- **Falling action (resolution)**—the part of the story that focuses on the aftermath of the main character's triumph or defeat.
- **Denouement**—the working-out of the various organizational details in the plot that takes place in a play's final moments and explains to the audience how all the play's events relate to each other.

### Starting at the Beginning

A strong opening scene catches the attention of the audience and draws them into the story. (The complication will generate a conflict of some sort, which is always an attention-grabber.)

The list below suggests some possible ways to begin that crucial first scene.

- With a specific action like:

- one character slapping another across the face
- a character opening a bottle of champagne
  
- With a striking image like:
  - a single character in chains standing in a pool of light looking out toward the audience
  - a group of characters posed for a formal family portrait around an empty chair
  
- With evocative sounds like:
  - explosions and bursts of gunfire in the distance
  - a scream
  
- With movement as when:
  - an angry or enthusiastic crowd rushes in
  - one character is chased by a group of characters
  
- With information given directly to the audience by:
  - a chorus figure who sets the scene and will reappear at regular intervals to comment on the action
  - the main character talking about what he or she has planned for the other characters
  
- With dialogue between:
  - minor characters, who introduce the audience to the situation facing the main characters
  - main characters

### **Exercise**

Choose one of the examples of how to start a play from the list or dream up one of your own and brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- What do you imagine is happening in this scene? (Exposition: Who? What? Where? When? Why?)
- Who are the characters?
- What is their relationship to each other?
- What is motivating their actions—what do they want to have or to do?
- What does each of them do for a living?
- Where is the scene taking place?
- What is the historical period of the action?
- At what time of day does the scene occur?

Take the raw material you've generated in your answers and develop it into a fantastic opening scene for a play. And if you're happy with the results, move to scene two and beyond. 😊