

WRITING A SCRIPT

FIRST IDEA

There are many ways to start writing a theatre script. It might be;

1. A life experience.
2. A story that you have heard.
3. An idea you want to explore.
4. The image of someone doing or saying something that you want to follow further.
5. An emotion about the world that you want explore.
6. A news paper article.
7. A world or historical event.

HOW TO GET STARTED

It's always best to write something that you know and have experience in – most of the best plays are very personal and very close to the author's heart in some way.

From there you might do one or several of the following things;

1. Jot down a brief description, or synopsis, of what you want to write.
2. Or you might just begin by trying to write some dialogue or scenes which you can keep expanding.
3. Read or research around the idea or story.
4. Try and decide what characters you will focus on.
5. Envisage the structure of the story you want to tell – this might come about by simply beginning to write and seeing where this leads you.

FIRST DRAFT

These should lead you to trying to get a first draft of the work onto the page, where you can see the story, characters and setting of the work. Try to write freely without censoring yourself during this draft.

Once you have a first draft, ask some of your fellow students or friends to read the script for you. This will allow you to see more objectively the story you are telling.

RE-DRAFT

From here you can focus on some more technical and detailed aspects of the script. This stage requires an enormous amount of self-criticism. Here are some questions and points to help with this re-drafting process;

1. Who are the characters?
2. What are they doing at every moment? eg. What do they want and how are they trying to achieve it? This will help ensure your characters are interesting at each moment.

3. Do the characters have secrets from each other?
4. What do the characters want in life and how does this play express that?
5. Are they just talking or are they driving the story along with their actions?
6. How do they speak and do they all have distinctive voices? Is this realistic?
7. Are all the characters necessary for the story you are telling?
8. Is the plot being told in the best possible way?
9. What is the structure of the work?
10. Do you need to cut or add any scenes?
11. Is what you hear being read actually what you intended to write?
12. What is the style of the piece and is your language and character action serving this style?
13. What are the major events that occur throughout the play?

STYLE

There are many styles of theatre and each style will approach these questions in a different way. For example the Naturalism of Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams or some Australian writers (not David Williamson); the absurd approach of writer's like Samuel Beckett or Eugene Ionesco; or the great socio-political dramas of Brecht. These writers all solve the fundamental questions of writing a script and what is drama in different ways.

Some useful tips for your script;

1. Set the scene – details such as time of day, setting, and actions of the characters in the scene are very important.
2. Format your writing, clear spaces between each character's speech so it's easy to read.
3. Give enough information for the reader to imagine what the characters are doing. This might not need to be explained in stage directions but could come out in the dialogue.
4. Make sure any stage directions are clear.
5. Re-read and revise and edit your writing.

CHECKLIST

1. Does each scene start with a description of the setting?
2. Are scene changes clearly indicated?
3. Are stage directions clear to distinguish from the dialogue?
4. Is it easy to see which character is talking? (Often the character's name is in bold)
5. Are the names of the characters on the left of the page and on separate lines?
6. Are stage and setting directions in the present tense?