

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

PLAYWRITING:
WRITING CONVENTIONS

STATE THEATRE
COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA

PLAYWRITING CONVENTIONS

Plays have particular writing conventions - this means that plays have expected formatting that make it easier for directors, actors, etc. to understand. When writing a play, you will need to:

Create a character list

Most plays begin with a list of the characters involved, including basic details. e.g. Karen (early 30s, female) is an anxious administrative assistant married to Adam. Try to keep this information as succinct as possible, keeping it to the most important points - this allows the director and actors to interpret the character and base it largely on the dialogue and action within the actual script.

Indicate the scene

Each scene should begin with the particular scene number e.g. Scene One/1, Scene Two/2. Scene changes should occur when there is a break in time and/or when the action is taking place in another location.

If your play has multiple acts, you will also need to list the act number at the beginning of the act e.g. Act One/1, Act Two/2. You may also want to indicate when the act ends (e.g. End of Act One/1) and or when an Interval is suggested.

Include stage and setting directions

Stage directions include any information that is important to the action on stage. It may include:

- the setting of a scene (sometimes referred to as 'setting directions')
- a character entering/exiting the scene
- the action or expression of a particular character, where this action is necessary to the plot

It is best to keep stage directions in present tense and as minimal as possible. For example, while it is important to include stage directions indicating someone has thrown a glass of wine in someone's face, it is not important to indicate when the character is taking a sip of their wine - unless it is integral to the action that the sip is taken at a particular time.

Stage directions are usually written in *italics* (or sometimes UPPERCASE) to ensure they are easy to spot within the script and are not mistaken for dialogue.

Clearly indicate the speech of each character. It should be easy to see which character is speaking at any time. Using UPPERCASE or **bold** and clear spacing usually work best. For example:

KAREN This apple tastes rotten. What do you think?

Karen offers apple to Adam. He takes a bite.

ADAM I don't know what you're talking about. It tastes fine to me.

For further examples, please see:

https://australianplays.org/assets/images/files/ASC_script_format_example.pdf



CHECKLIST

Once you have completed your first draft, go through the script and ensure it follows the right conventions/formatting by using the checklist below:

- Does each scene start with a description of the setting?
- Are scene changes clearly indicated?
- Are stage directions clear to distinguish from the dialogue?
- Is it easy to see which character is talking?
- Is it easy to differentiate stage directions from speech?
- Are stage and setting directions in the present tense?

TIP

Read or skim through a few play scripts. Consider not only the kind of information and level of detail included in the stage directions, but also the style or formatting choices (e.g. use of italics or parentheses).

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