

Elementary Playwriting Guide

What is a play?

A **play** is a story that people (actors) act out on stage in front of an audience.

Every play has a **beginning, middle, and end**.

Every play has characters.

- The **main character** is the most important character.
- The main character has a **goal**—something they want or need.

In a play, characters speak dialogue to one another out loud. This is how the audience knows what they're thinking, what they are trying to do, etc.

Another way the audience knows what's going on is by what the characters are doing. We call this ACTION. Characters SPEAK DIALOGUE and TAKE ACTION on stage and that brings the story to life.

This is different than in books, where the author can describe what a character is thinking or feeling. In a play, we have to hear or see the character experience their thoughts/feelings in order to know what is going on.

Some helpful terms for thinking and talking about plays:

A play has a Plot - The plot is what happens in the story.

Conflict - Conflict is the problem in the story. Something or someone makes it hard for the main character to reach their goal.

Dialogue - Dialogue is what the characters say.

Stage Directions - Stage directions are special instructions that tell actors what to do on stage. They might tell an actor to walk, sit, run, smile, or look surprised. *Stage directions are not spoken out loud.*

When writing a play, you need to make sure you use a script format that is easy to read. There are a lot of different opinions on how a script should look. We recommend using the very simple template illustrated on the following page.

Elementary Playwriting Guide

TITLE OF MY PLAY (Always give your play a title!)
By MY NAME (Don't forget your name!)

TIME AND PLACE: A Playground in Ames in the year 1942 (Explain where the play happens and when:

CHARACTERS: (List your characters and anything we need to know about them:)
LISA - a 5 year old girl
BENNIE - Her toy Tiger

Then begin writing your script. Start by giving a brief description of the world your play is happening in, then the dialogue. Remember to tell us who is talking every time.

Stage Directions are usually written in italics, so they look different from dialogue. It is also helpful to indent them just a bit.

Lisa, a 5 year old girl, sits on the merry-go-round in the middle of a park in Ames, Iowa. It is fall, so there are leaves on the ground. She talks to her toy Tiger:

Always skip a line between stage directions and dialogue...

LISA

I wish we could have cake for lunch today. Cake is the best. I don't understand why mom and dad say I can only have cake after I've finished my supper. Cake should be something you get to eat all the time, any time you want!

To her surprise, Tiger actually answers her! She almost drops the toy in surprise!

TIGER

I feel the same way about roast chicken!

(Make sure you also skip a line between different character's lines)

LISA

Aah! You can talk?

TIGER

Yes. And I'm very hungry. Do you have any roast chicken?

LISA

I'm sorry, but no. How come I didn't know you talked?

TIGER

Well, I am very shy and also, you never talked about food with me before. Food is my favorite subject.

LISA

I bet mamma would give me a bit of roast chicken if I ask.

Elementary Playwriting Guide

TIGER

I could help you eat it so that you have room for cake afterwards!

LISA

Sounds like a plan!

Lisa and Tiger run off to find mama.

THE END.

On the next page, you will see the script again, without writing notes, so you can better see what the format looks like and use it as a guide for writing YOUR play!

Elementary Playwriting Guide

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By MY NAME

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CHARACTERS:

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BENNIE - Her toy Tiger

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