



How to Write a One Act Play and Sample Script

Getting Started!

A good one-act play focuses on one main action or problem; there's not time to get into complicated layers of plot. It's a good idea to keep your play to one set and as few scenes as possible. A one-act play is 9-12 pages with four characters or less.

Many great resources are available online by searching on keywords: "writing one act plays"

Theme

- Ask yourself, what is the play about? Revenge? Self-discovery? Romance?
- Your mind needs to be clear about the theme
- Characters, plots need to point to and support the theme

Plot

- Different in one-act play from a full-length play. In a one-act play, there is only time for one significant event
- Determine the place for hero, where all can be won or lost
- Events leading to this can be included without being shown to audience
- The events that follow must be inferred or understood by the audience

Character

- There is not much area to develop all the characters – limit-four
- The hero or the protagonist's character needs to be more developed and focused on
- The antagonist can be developed to show conflict
- Some other characters can also be a little bit developed to move the story forward

Dialogue

- Economy is the key aspect here
- Each line must be crafted carefully to focus on the theme, the incident and the character of the protagonist
- The dialogues need not be terse, but concise and full of meaning
- Dialogues irrelevant to the plot, must be altered or omitted immediately.

Protagonist/Hero: pro-tag-o-nist | noun - the leading character or one of the major characters in a drama, movie, novel other fictional text

Antagonist: an-tag-on-ist | noun - a person who actively opposes or is hostile to someone or something; an adversary

Plot: plot | noun - the main events of a play, novel, movie similar work, devised and presented by the writer as an interrelated sequence

Dialogue: di-a-logue | noun - conversation between two or more people as a feature of a book, play or movie

Creative: cre-a-tive | adjective - relating to or involving the imagination or original ideas, especially in the production of an artistic work

SAMPLE SCRIPT

HOW TO WRITE IN PLAYSRIPT FORMAT

By

Someone U. Know

Someone U. Know
Address as well as
Phone Number and
E-Mail

♥ O'Leary, 1998 [As soon as you write something creative, it is automatically copyrighted as yours. You can also call the copyright people in Washington, D.C. who are nice and helpful or mail a copy of the manuscript to yourself to keep sealed until that moment in court when you get to use it as proof. Meantime you should always put the ♥ down with your name and date so people are reminded they aren't supposed to steal your characters or words. Titles can't be copyrighted and anyone can use them.]

ACT ONE**Scene 1**

A stage in a small edgy big city theater. There are two chairs CS [center stage]. The THEATER DIRECTOR, a young, edgy, big city guy is sitting in one of them. The PLAYWRIGHT enters. Like all playwrights, this character is so charismatic some of the spotlights implode trying so hard to compete with intense light as PLAYWRIGHT walks toward other chair.

THEATER DIRECTOR

Do you know how to write dialogue in format?

PLAYWRIGHT

Haven't a clue.

THEATER DIRECTOR

You center the name of the character talking and put the name in caps...That's short for capital letters.

PLAYWRIGHT

Is that right.

THEATER DIRECTOR

Then you write the dialogue without quotation marks. Then you space and do the same thing with the character talking back.

PLAYWRIGHT

And being confrontational? Talking back and giving the first character a hard time? I mean if I were to start arguing with you? If I were to get loud? (Shouts) If I were to be a very

PLAYWRIGHT

Misunderstood kind of character who won't...BEHAVE!

THEATER DIRECTOR

That would make for conflict and interest and good theater.

PLAYWRIGHT

So if I just have people saying nothing much about anything...? If they just talk about what interests me and nothing much happens, it's not so good?

THEATER DIRECTOR

(Snoring. Wakes up)

...huh? Right! Yes. You'll put everyone to sleep if your characters have no conflict.

PLAYWRIGHT

What if I want to write some action that happens without any dialogue going on?

Then you describe it over here as succinctly as possible. You also have to put any characters you refer to in caps. In other words, if the PLAYWRIGHT is going to walk DS or US [downstage – toward the audience – or upstage – toward the back] or SL or SR [stage left which is the actor's left or stage right, the actor's right] you describe it over here. It should be significant. Don't write a novel here. And don't direct the play's dialogue. The directors like to do that and can get kind of huffy if you do their job for them. And don't have a character doing what that character wouldn't be caught dead doing. The actors like to become real people and if you make their characters into jerks they can get pretty steamed.

PLAYWRIGHT

(Leaning toward DIRECTOR)

What if, like, my friends..? They all like talk like this? Can I, like, write dialogue like...you know...like they really talk?

(Beat) [This means you want the actors to wait a second as though they are thinking or need a little time to react. If you want them to wait a longer time, use (Pause).]

DIRECTOR

Please do. Although with only a few lines of dialogue, you could make your friends sound intelligent. You could also place them in the last century or a thousand years in the future and you can also set them down in any kind of place you'd like.

PLAYWRIGHT

Like a cave? Or a racetrack? Or a funeral? Or the middle of the ocean?

DIRECTOR

Assuming they can swim.
(Pause.)

PLAYWRIGHT

I can do anything.

DIRECTOR

Exactly. Just put it in the right format and we'll believe every word.