

Playwriting

A Guide for Students

Celebrating the imagination in each of us!

the Renaissance

The Renaissance

Greetings Aspiring Playwrights,

This packet is designed to provide you with helpful information, as well as support and inspiration, when submitting a script to the Renaissance Theatre's **Young Playwright's Competition**.

Playwriting is a unique skill in that it allows the writer to capture and share the way they see the world. A play tells a story, moment by moment, in a symbolic, imaginary, realistic or surrealistic style. It can be comic, tragic, melodramatic, slapstick, or parody. The possibilities are endless. There is nothing more amazing than when a playwright combines or defies any of the known styles and structures to find their own voice. Please think of this contest as an opportunity to try something new. Take a risk!

I hope that you'll take advantage of the educational workshops the Renaissance has to offer. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need more information.

Good luck!

Domenick Danza
Director of Education
Renaissance Theatre
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The Renaissance

Ohio Young Playwrights Contest

Renaissance Performing Arts Assoc. is proud to announce its first annual Ohio Young Playwriting Contest for middle and high schools students. Script will be judged in two categories:

1. Grades 6 – 9
2. Grades 10 – 12

Finalists' scripts will receive a staged reading at the Renaissance on April 22, 2010 at 6:00 PM, as well as be included in the commemorative book.

Winning scripts will be produced on June 26, 2010 at 8:00 PM on the Renaissance stage.

Judges:

1. The Renaissance staff will read all submissions and choose finalists scripts.
2. Celebrity judges (TBD) will read finalist scripts and choose the winners.

Submission Guidelines: Submitted scripts can be any style (comedy, farce, satire, tragedy, political, etc.). Submissions will not be returned and must meet the following criteria:

- 1) one piece per playwright;
- 2) include title page with playwright's name, address, day and evening phone numbers, and e-mail address;
- 3) include character page with descriptions and ages;
- 4) standard playwright format;
- 5) script length: 10 to 20 pages (in standard 12 pt font size with pages numbered);
- 6) cast size: no more than six actors needed;
- 7) no musicals;
- 8) no binding or staples.

Submission Deadline: March 2, 2010, 5:00 PM

Mail Submission to:

Domenick Danza, Director of Education
Renaissance Performing Arts
138 Park Ave. West
Mansfield, OH 44902

The Renaissance

Getting Started Helpful Hints for the Young Playwright

This packet contains a brief summary of the tools the playwright employs when constructing a play. These include:

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Playwriting Workshops at the Renaissance

Free Introductory Workshop: These workshops will take place at the Renaissance Theatre and are designed to get students started on their submissions by reviewing the guidelines and going over the formatting requirements. For schedule and registration info contact Domenick Danza, Director of Education at 419-522-2726 x251 or Domenick@mansfieldtickets.com.

The Young Playwrights Unit meets Saturday from 9:30 – 11:00 AM at the Renaissance Theatre. It is open to middle and high school students with a serious interest in playwriting. Students must commit to the entire session at registration. Enrollment is limited. For schedule and registration info contact Michael Thomas, Artistic Director at 419-522-2726 x 249 or Michael@mansfieldtickets.com.

Playwriting Vocabulary

**Before you start writing your play,
familiarize yourself with these playwriting terms.**

Protagonist: main character

Antagonist: opponent; adversary; obstacle

Comedy: a story where the protagonist achieves his/her goal

Tragedy: a story where the protagonist does not achieve his/her goal

Inciting incident: the launching pad of the play; the action or short sequence of actions that constitutes the point of attack.

Rising action: the sequence of actions and events that leads to the climax.

Climax: the action that resolves the conflict; the central dramatic question is answered; comes late in the play.

Falling action: the acceptance of the situation derived from the climax; the resolution.

Objective: What the character wants/needs/desires.

Format: the way the script appears on the page.

Theme: main idea.

Conflict: the problem.

Resolution: the solution.

Dialog: two or more characters talking in a scene; one line must react to the previous line.

Monologue: one character speaking.

Elements of a Scene:

Who: character; relationships; traits.

What: activity.

When: time (day, season, year, etc.).

Where: location (address, city, state, country, etc.).

Why: reason for being there; objective

How: plot; the beginning, middle and end of a story.

Outline the Story

You'll find it helpful to use this outline form when you begin your play. This will allow you to organize your thoughts and ideas, as well as give you an overview of the story's structure.

This is the story of _____
who wants more than anything to _____,
but can't because _____.

Where: _____
When: _____

Inciting Incident:

Climax:

Characters (relationships) & Objectives (wants/needs):

Developing the Characters: Character Biography

This exercise will help you bring your characters to life by defining their personality, identifying their physical characteristics and exploring their qualities and traits.

Playwright Name: _____

Play Title: _____

Character Name: _____

Physical Characteristics

Age: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Height: _____ Weight: _____

Eye Color: _____ Body Type: _____

Hair Color and Style: _____

Vocal Quality: _____

General Appearance: _____

External World

Family Situation: _____

Marital Status: _____

Close Friends: _____

Education: _____

Occupation: _____

Financial Status: _____

Leisure Time Activities: _____

Internal World

Personality Type: _____

Special Qualities & Talents: _____

What does this character want more than anything else in the world?

What does this character fear more than anything else in the world?



An Exercise in Dialogue Writing

Before starting your play, try writing a short dialogue scene.

1. Writing for a play is different from narrative writing because in a play the entire story is told through dialogue.

Dialogue: a conversation between two or more character.

Monologue: one character speaking.

2. Choose a location for a scene and two characters. Make sure the relationship of these two characters is clear (examples: Mother/Daughter; Boss/Employee; Bully/Nerd).

3. Write the first character's name on the page in the center of the first line. Write the first line of dialogue of this character starting at the left margin. Start with the first character requesting an object, personal belonging or favor from the second character.

4. Skip a line and write the second character's name in the center. Starting at the left margin, write a line in response to the first character's line.

5. Continue with the scene. Good dialogue writing responds to the previous line spoken (or written).

6. Script Format:

- Character names appear in the center of the line.
- Dialogue lines start at the left margin.
- Skip one line between a character's line and the character name on the next line.
- Stage directions appear in parenthesis.
- If stage direction appears in the line of dialogue, it pertains only to the character who is speaking.
- If stage direction appears in a line by itself, it pertains to different characters, and is indented from the left margin, and in parenthesis.

7. When the scene is completed, have two people read it aloud. Remember, they are not to read any stage direction. All stage directions must be acted out.

8. Listen to the flow of the dialogue. Ask:

- What was good about the scene?
- Did the dialogue lines respond one line to the other?
- What were the characters' objectives (wants/needs/desires)?
- Was there a conflict? What was it? Did it resolve?
- Was the dialogue natural sounding? Did it sound like people really talking?

Additional Observations:

If you cannot go to the theatre to see a play, listen carefully to dialogue scenes in a movie or on TV. Ask yourself:

- Did the dialogue respond one line to the next?
- Was the dialogue natural sounding?
- Could you tell the objectives of the characters through the dialogue?
- Was the conflict clearly expressed through the dialogue?

Listen to conversations with people around your house or at school. Use that as a model for writing dialogue.

Formatting Your Script The Acting Version

Each play submitted to the Renaissance Theatre's Young Playwright's Competition must follow the standard formatting guidelines.

Script Formatting is the way a script appears on the page.

Most of us have seen a published version of a script. The next three pages are examples of how an acting version is formatted.

The **acting version** is purposefully spread out differently on the page than a published version.

A **publisher** wants to get as much on a page as possible to keep costs down.

An **acting version** purposefully spreads out on the page so the actors, director and stage manager can make notes throughout the script.

The script you submit for the Ohio Young Playwright's Contest must contain the following:

1. A Title Page: This gives the reader the title of the play as well as the name and contact information of the playwright.
2. A Character/Time/Place Page: This outlines for the reader the characters in the play, the time period the play takes place, and the location of the action.
3. Script Pages: 10 to 20 pages in standard 12 pt font size with pages numbered.

Please follow the model outlined on the next three pages. They offer a clear description of the format accepted by any theatre across the country for an acting version of a new script.

If you have any questions about formatting your script, please contact:

Domenick Danza
Director of Education
Renaissance Theatre
domenick@mansfieldtickets.com
419-522-2726 x251.

Title Page

The script title and playwright should appear in the center of the page:

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf

a play by Edward Albee

Draft date: October 13, 1962
(this is the date the script was completed)

Playwright's name and contact info appears center at the bottom of the page:

Copyright 1962 by Edward Albee
Playwright's Address
Telephone number
Email address

Character/Time/Place Page

If Possible, the header should have the title of the play: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*
the Playwright's last name: Albee
& the page number: Pg. 2

Characters: (contains the name, age and brief description of each character)

Martha: 52, a large boisterous woman, looking somewhat younger.

George: 46, Martha's husband, thin; hair going grey.

Honey: 26, a petite blond girl, rather plain.

Nick: 30, Honey's husband, blond, good looking.

Time: (states the time period of the play - day, date, year – can be “the present”)

1962

Place: (explains in detail the location(s) of the action of the play)

The living room of a house on the campus of a small new England college.

Script Page

If Possible, the header should have the title of the play: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*
the Playwright's last name: Albee
& the page number: Pg. 3

Act I, Scene 1 (center at top of page)

(stage directions
3 tabs in)

*Set in darkness. Crash against front door.
Martha's laughter heard. (stage directions in italics)
Front door opens, lights are switched on.
Martha enters, followed by George.*

GEORGE (character name in center & caps)
Martha, it's two o'clock in the...
(dialog lines up to left margin)

MARTHA (character name in center & caps)
Oh, George!

GEORGE
Well, I'm sorry, but...

MARTHA
What a cluck! What a cluck you are.

GEORGE
It's late, you know? Late.

(3 tabs in) *Martha looks about the room. (stage directions in italics)*

MARTHA
What a dump. Hey what's that from? (imitates Bette Davis) "What a dump!"
(when stage directions interrupt a line of dialogue, they appear in parenthesis)

GEORGE
How would I know what...

MARTHA
Aw, come on! What's it from? You know...

GEORGE
...Martha... (3 dots indicates a cut off or a trailing off)

MARTHA
WHAT'S IT FROM! (caps indicates shouting)



Short script to read for inspiration, structure, or just plain fun!

35 in 10: Thirty-Five Ten-Minute Plays

compiled and edited by Kent R. Brown
The Dramatic Publishing Company
www.dramaticpublishing.com

Time Flies and Other Short plays

by David Ives
Stage N Screen
www.StageNScreen.com

New One-Act Plays

edited by Eric Lane
Penguin Books

Seattle Children's Theatre: Six Plays for Young Audiences

Edited by Marisa Smith
A Smith & Kraus Book

Books on Playwriting

Jump Write In!

Writers Corps: Judith Tannenbaum & Valerie Chow Bush
Jossey-Bass, an imprint of Wiley
www.josseybass.com

Young Playwrights 101

By Jonathan Dorf
YouthPlays Press
www.youngplaywrights101.com

The Playwright's Process

by Buzz McLaughlin
Back Stage Books