

DAY ONE:

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PLAYWRIGHT

1) What is different about today? What event breaks the routine of life?

Make it a bold event. Start with high stakes.

2) What do the people you are creating want and need from each other?

Everything you say on stage is to elicit a reaction from the person you are talking with. Use strong verbs when constructing connections between your characters: I want to ____ you.

3) What are your character's secrets?

Every person has a secret. Develop those secrets. Tennessee Williams characters are rich, layered and filled with secrets, read his plays.

4) How are you going to use your quiet?

Create non-verbal dialogue by using pauses and silences. Every character has a reason to speak. Every character has a reason not to speak.

5) The colon is a playwright's best friend.

Punctuation is a common trap. Rather than looking at a character's speech as a line, consider every sentence a thought. Use short sentences and stay away from exclamation points. A character's thoughts and words should be exciting without the assistance of punctuation. Stay out of the actor's way when it comes to emotions. An exception to this rule is the use of colons. A colon is an indication of breath. It can drive a character's speech to the end of a thought and create an urgency that remains undisturbed by actors and directors.

6) What is your love story?

Every play has a love story. Discover your love story, it makes theater human and real.

7) What does your world feel/taste/smell/look/sound like?

Give us a clear set of given circumstances. Build a specific world and live in it. What painting is hanging on the wall? What music do your characters listen to? Be a smart writer: research what was happening in the year(s)

your play is set. Example: "The Glass Menagerie" takes place during the Great Depression. The cultural climate of 1937 informs the world of the play and how the characters communicate.

8) What is the emergency?

Create an emergency. Raise the stakes. Make your characters connect with urgency. Example: The fire in "The Three Sisters" is an emergency upsetting the world Chekhov created.

9) Word economy:

Pauses and silences carry the same impact as words. Remember word economy: only use words with weight and purpose.

10) How does it end?

Don't wrap it up with a bow. Forget about a beginning, middle and end. A successful ending leads to the beginning of a new story.

11) Give yourself to the audience:

Remember Sam Shepard's device: "Now that's a true story, true to life."

12) Be bold. Take risks:

Your stage is a laboratory, fail often: Risk. Fail. Risk again.

13) The most important rule of playwriting:

There are no rules. Break conventions. Find your own voice. Don't think outside of the box-- get rid of the box entirely.

EXERCISE #1: TWO CHARACTERS

(A is waiting. B enters. A leaves.)

SETTING: An empty dining hall. 5:00pm. December 20, 2014.

CHARACTERS: ARLEY and BOLO.

ASSIGNMENT:

- ARLEY is waiting in the dining hall.
- BOLO enters at some point.
- They talk to each other.
- ARLEY exits.
- BOLO remains on stage.

A few things to consider...

- 1) Keep it simple. No monologues. Use your quiet.
- 2) Your stage directions should be clear and simple. The actors need to know what their actions are and what their words are. Please do not tell them what they are thinking, feeling, wanting, wishing, expressing, etc. That is the job of the actor, not the writer.
- 3) Make the characters present in the world you are creating. That is, be aware of their senses. Know where each character is coming from before the start of the scene, and where they are going after the scene.
- 4) Try not to directly answer questions. This is a powerful device in playwriting. It gives the scene a place to go. Example:

MEL: How are you today?

CARLY: My mother used to talk to me in that same, soft way.

Instead of:

MEL: How are you today?

CARLY: Good.

- 5) No less than three pages, no more than five.

EXERCISE #2: THREE CHARACTERS AND A MONOLOGUE

(B is waiting. C enters. A enters. B and C leave.)

SETTING: The same dining hall. 9:00am. December 21, 2014.

CHARACTERS: BOLO, CAMDEN and ARLEY.

ASSIGNMENT:

- BOLO is waiting in the dining hall.
- CAMDEN enters, out of breath.
- ARLEY enters at some point.
- The three characters interact.
- BOLO and CAMDEN exit together.
- ARLEY remains on stage.

A few things to consider...

- 1) Keep it simple. Use your quiet: remember the difference between a pause and a silence.
- 2) Be very aware of the setting. Create an emergency, use your given circumstance.
- 3) Give one character a monologue.
- 4) Create non-verbal acting with very brief stage directions.
- 4) No less than three pages, no more than five.