

# Third Workshop in Playwriting

## Creating the Manuscript Format



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# Helpful Hints in Creating Your First Draft Dialogue

1. After you've written at least two scenarios of the same idea and have addressed all five parts of the story play in your latest draft, you're ready to start the first draft of the dialogue.
2. It's helpful to draft your first dialogue copy using the manuscript format. It's also best to do this first draft by hand, instead of composing on the computer. When you first start using the format, you'll be "wrestling" with Word and this will slow down your creative process and also cause you some frustration. So, you want to capture your first draft dialogue using the easiest method of writing it out long-hand.
3. Follow the action as described in your scenario. As you hear the characters "speak" in your head, write down what they say, without censoring yourself, or trying to write it perfectly the first time. The goal is to capture it as best as possible. If your characters start to go off in a different direction than your scenario, allow that to happen. It's your subconscious trying to help you express your idea. You can always revise it later and get it back on track with the scenario, or accept it as your play.
4. Write your first draft completely, from the beginning to the end. Set it aside for a day or two and then come back to it. If you're happy with most of it, then the next step is to type it in manuscript format.

## Standard Manuscript Format: Title Page

**Title** (Centered roughly a third of the way down the page.)

(Double space down from the title and then center:)

**A One Act Play, or A Full length Play (or A Play in Two Acts), or A Short Play**

(Double space down and center:)

**By**

(Double space down and center:)

**Name of Author**

Then toward the bottom of the page, (roughly six or seven lines up) hit the right-justify space configuration, and type on the right side the following: (Be sure that all four lines stay on the first page, at the bottom.)

© Year of writing(Optional)

Name of Author

Telephone

E-mail:

(Insert a header before you start typing the rest of the play. Put your last name in the upper left corner, and then tab over to the right side, and then type the title or an abbreviation – then a dash – and insert page number. Be sure to mark the box that says “different first page”.) Close header.

Mencher

Fish Whisperer - 2

**Characters** (Center this)

Name of character in bold – brief description, including age, gender and anything else needed to describe the basics of the character. Double space between Character descriptions and bold the character names. For example:

**TOM:** A man in his late forties, good-looking and rugged. He is married to Joan.

**JOAN:** A woman in her late twenties, considered plain and delicate. She is married to Tom.

**Time and Place** (Center this)

The entire action of the play takes place in: etc. etc. etc. Or break this out in scenes if it's a one act with more than one location; and/or acts. Example (For full-length plays):

Act One, scene one: the bar

Act One, scene two: the bedroom

Act Two, scene one: the courtroom

Act Two, scene two: the bedroom

**For a short play or a one act**, don't write “Act One” – you only describe the location (briefly) and when your play takes place. For example, “The entire action of the play takes place at a counter in the department of motor vehicles office.”

## Other Script Mechanic Details:

- **Margins: Top, Right and Bottom: 1 inch; the left margin needs to be set at 2 inches for binding.** Binding is either (2 or 3-hole punched) in a hard-bound two or three ring binder, or hole punched and placed in a folder that secures the pages.
- **Character names are in all caps and centered.**
- There should only be single spacing between the character name and first line of dialogue or internal note to the actor. Then double space between the end of the line and the next character's name.
- **Watch out for "widows" and "orphans".** Widows are a character name with no dialogue attached at the top or bottom of a page. Orphans are dialogue with no name attached. If dialogue continues to another page then the Character's name is repeated center, with the word (Continued) in parentheses right after the character name.
- **The internal note to an actor is indented to the first tab setting.** (Inset from left margin approximately 5 spaces, and put in parentheses.)
- All stage directions such as set description, entrances and exits, sound cues, and light cues are centered in same position as character names and then from this center location to the right margin. Use *italics* and **bold** to indicate all entrances and exits. The first line of the stage directions in the play should be "Lights Up to Reveal..." followed by a brief description of what we see.
- **Dialogue begins on page three.** There is no page number to appear on the title page. The playwright's last name appears in the upper left hand corner and then title and page number are at the right in the header for each page, except for the cover page.
- **At the very end of the script, it should have:** Blackout. Curtain.

## Some hints when using Word to create the script:

1. **Open Word program. Next, immediately choose “No Spacing” in the section for format selection.** This means you’ll be typing single-spaced lines and won’t get the annoying default settings associated with “Normal” or other formats offered by Word. Use your tab button as needed to maneuver on the page.
2. **Always set up your margins and headers AFTER you’ve done the title page as page one. When you have moved the cursor on to page two (Character descriptions and Time and Place information), then set up margins, headers and page numbers.** Don’t use anything but the “Left” alignment for the layout, except for centering the title, Character list, Time and Place headers. Use the “Center” alignment for these. Use the “Right” justified setting for page one at the bottom in listing your copyright date, name and contact information. Be sure to set it back to “Left” alignment after you’ve used either Center or Right.
3. **Save and label the file with the title of your play and “v1” at the end.** If title is too long, then abbreviate it. As you do rewrites or edits, always save the new version under a progressive indicator: For example: My Play Title v2; etc. Keep your old drafts in case you change your mind later about wanted to reincorporate something from a previous version. As you type your script, hit “Save” often.
4. **Your dialogue ALWAYS starts on page three.** For a short play or ten-minute play, your file should contain no more than 12 pages.
5. **There is one aspect of Word that is unavoidable.** As you type your opening line on page three (after you’ve tabbed over to the middle of the page) of “Lights up to reveal...” and you come to the end of the first sentence, it’s going to pop you over to the far left margin. Simply tab over to the middle again and continue typing. When you hit the end of the second line it most likely automatically then line up in the middle for typing your third line. This is fine until you have to type the first line of dialogue, which should line up on the left margin and not in the middle. After you’ve double spaced down two lines and typed in the character name in all capital letters, then hit “Enter” to drop down one line. You’ll notice it still is aligned in the middle of the page. You want to then hit “backspace” to get the cursor over to the far left margin. If the line of dialogue is longer than one line, it’ll pop over to the far left margin on its own. This little trick is necessary to get it in the right format. After you’ve done this a few times, it will come naturally to mind.

# Homework:

Type the first five pages (or more) of your script in manuscript format.

Include a title page.

Include on the second page your Character list. (Don't forget to insert your header with the necessary information first before you type the Character list.)

Include on the second page your Time and Place descriptor.

Your dialogue starts on the third page.

Bring this file on a data stick to our last class.

## Questions to Answer about your Play After You've Finished Writing It.

(These are to help you examine your play objectively, or to assist you if you're dissatisfied or confused by it.)

- What is the main problem?
- Is the main conflict directly caused by trying to solve the problem?
- What's the obstacle?
  - Is the solution in:
    - Overcoming the obstacle
    - Going around it
    - What the protagonist does
    - What the antagonist does
    - Something that is obscurely related to the problem or obstacle?
    - Outside the story entirely – (dues ex machina?)
    - Destroying the obstacle
    - In the “environment” – objective source
- What is the “worthy theme”? (For melodrama: the moral)
- What are the extremes of your solution and the plot?
  - How far can you go one way?
  - The other?
- What's at stake? What are the consequences, either way?
- Why does it matter to you that you tell this story?
- Who are the people in your play?
- Are you satisfied with your play?
  - Why?
  - Why not?