

Mastering the Stage: Playscript Essentials

Learning objective: To understand and identify the key structural features of a playscript, including stage directions, character names, and dialogue formatting.

Review these flashcards to master the components of a playscript. Use them to test your knowledge of how to write for the theatre.

What is the purpose of a 'Character List' at the beginning of a playscript?

The character list introduces all the people or animals appearing in the play, often providing a brief description of their role or personality.

How are 'Stage Directions' usually formatted in a playscript to distinguish them from spoken words?

Stage directions are usually written in italics and enclosed in parentheses or brackets to show they are instructions for the actors, not words to be spoken aloud.

What is 'Dialogue' in the context of a playscript?

Dialogue is the spoken interaction between two or more characters, written without quotation marks, with the speaker's name clearly displayed on the left.

What does a 'Scene Heading' tell the audience and the crew?

The scene heading describes the setting, such as the time of day and the location, helping the reader visualise where the action is taking place.

Why do playwrights use 'Parentheses' around stage directions?

Parentheses are used to clearly separate the physical actions or emotional tones from the spoken lines, preventing confusion during rehearsals.

Explain why stage directions are vital for a successful performance.

Stage directions are essential because they provide context for character movement, tone of voice, and visual atmosphere, which are not conveyed through dialogue alone.

Compare and contrast a narrative story with a playscript.

A narrative story focuses on descriptions and internal thoughts, whereas a playscript focuses on dialogue and external actions designed to be performed by actors on a stage.

Justify your answer: Why should a playwright avoid using long paragraphs of text in a playscript?

Playscripts are meant to be performed, long paragraphs can slow the pace of the scene and make it difficult for actors to deliver dialogue naturally.

What might happen if a scriptwriter failed to include stage directions for an important moment, such as a character entering a room?

The actors would not know where or when to enter, potentially causing confusion on stage and disrupting the flow of the performance.

In a script featuring Pip the bookworm, how would you write an instruction for him to 'scurry across the stage excitedly'?

(Pip scurries across the stage excitedly).

If you were writing a scene where Max the monkey is solving a maths puzzle, how would you indicate his tone of voice?

You would place a stage direction in parentheses before his dialogue, e.g., (Max speaks with great enthusiasm and focus).

Evaluate the importance of the character name placement in a playscript.

Placing the character name at the start of each line is crucial for clarity, allowing actors to quickly scan the page to find their lines and understand the sequence of the conversation.