

A Play

1. Start with an Idea

- Find an idea for the basis of a play, usually with a **plot** and storyline that involves a series of events.
- A play can be about something that really happened or something fictional. Anything from a news story to a photograph to an interesting person might spark an idea. Lots of good first plays are short, around 8-10 pages.

2. Determine the Conflict

- Think of a **conflict, or** a main problem that the characters face, which will be central to the plot, to make it more dramatic.
- A play's plot usually proceeds in the following way:
 - i. the beginning describes the characters and conflict
 - ii. characters try to solve the problem, creating the **rising action**
 - iii. their action leads to a **climax**, or turning point, and
 - iv. **falling action** leads to a resolution that sums up how things end

3. Setting

- The **setting** of a play is where it takes place. This could be a historical era, a foreign country, a single room or even inside a vacuum.
- Scene changes are a good time for characters to switch locations.

4. Characters

- A play should have between three and eight characters. Each character wants something and has a goal or objective.
- List each character and give detailed descriptions for each one, including their name, age, physical appearance, personality, hobbies and interests, fears, secrets, abilities, motivations, occupation and relation to other characters.
- Even if the characters are animals or inanimate objects, they'll still have unique qualities.

5. Dialogue

- A play is nothing without **dialogue**, the conversations characters have!
- Dialogue should move the story forward and reveal the characters' relationships to each other, and also show their moods and personalities.
- Dialogue should sound believable and real—there can be pauses and contractions, just like in everyday speech.
- It helps to study real-life conversations and practice reading dialogue aloud to see how it sounds.

6. Format

- A play is divided into *scenes*
 - i. **Scene 1:** Introduce principal players, the place and the problem through dialogue.
 - ii. **Scene 2:** Some crisis arises and the problem is complicated by some new element, which will probably be some event and accompanied by several new players to offer more acting opportunities.
 - iii. **Scene 3:** Resolution of the problem by the players.
- Using the correct playwriting format helps put all these aspects together in an understandable way. An example of playwriting format follows below. Note that when writing character descriptions, the more detailed they are, the more depth actors can give to their performance.

A Play

THE SNOW DAY By Elise Williams

Cast of Characters:

SUSAN, a friendly, 30-something mother
JANE, her 13 year old daughter
CHLOE, Jane's best friend, also 13 years old
SAM, Susan's husband and Jane's father, worried about work
JOE, a 13 year old neighbor of Jane, sometimes teases her

Setting:

The play takes place in a suburb of Boston during a particularly snowy day when schools are unexpectedly closed.

ACT I SCENE 1

Stage Directions are messages in parentheses, aligned to the right margin, from the playwright to the actors and crew telling them what to do and how to do it. They should be brief, and written in the present tense. They describe action and visuals, not inner thoughts.

Character names are written in ALL CAPS. For example:
(Early morning, snow falling. Sidewalk in front of a suburban house. JANE appears in front of the house bundled up for winter weather and wearing a backpack. SUSAN comes out of the house and runs to catch JANE.)

SUSAN

Jane, wait! The radio just announced that your school is closed today because of snow!

JANE

Really? You're not just teasing me, are you? Do I really get a snow day?

(CHLOE enters, also wearing a backpack, and walks over towards JANE.)

CHLOE

Hi Jane, what's going on? Aren't we walking to school together today?

Conclusion: Notice in the format above that the character's names are ALL CAPS, **bolded**, and centered just before each character's line of dialogue. Stage directions are at the beginning of a scene and anywhere else where action, props, or descriptions need to be explained for the cast and crew.

Marks are awarded as follows: (see below)

1. Setting: skillful, creative description – **5 marks.**
2. Plot: interesting, creative, original ideas – **5 marks.**
3. Tone/mood (atmosphere): skillfully established – **5 marks.**
4. Dialogue: effective, excellent use of vocabulary – **5 marks**
5. Characters: well-rounded, believable, engaging personality – **5 marks.**
6. Structure/layout: correct formatting – **5 marks.**
7. Writing process: planning, drafting, refining, editing, proofreading, final draft – **5 marks.**
8. Language – punctuation, spelling and grammar – **5 marks**

A Play

Rubric for assessing a written play

Grade 5/6

	5	4	3	2	1
Setting (implied or overt as suits the text type)	Skillful, creative description of setting	Good description of setting	Adequate description of setting	Some description of setting; lacks detail	Inappropriate or no description of setting
Plot development through mono/ dialogue	Interesting, creative plot with effective mono/ dialogue and excellent use of vocabulary	Plot is developed adequately; some originality and good use of vocabulary	Plot development is evident but basic	Plot is weak or unclear; purpose of mono/ dialogue is not apparent. Weak vocabulary inhibits plot	No plot; writing is random. No thread in mono/dialogue (illogical)
Tone or mood (atmosphere)	Skillfully establishes tone or mood	Tone and mood established and consistent	Establishes tone or mood adequately	Tone or mood is not firmly established	Mood or tone is not established, or is not clear
Characters (development or characters through mono/ dialogue)	Well-rounded, believable characters with engaging personality	Characters are well developed; well-formed personality emerges	Characters adequately developed; consistent development	Characters are one-dimensional; inconsistently described	Characters not or very poorly developed
Formatting conventions and associated vocabulary	Uses the correct formatting with no mistakes	Correct formatting with only one or two mistakes	One or two errors in formatting; minor language errors	Significant errors in formatting and/or language	Many mistakes with formatting; or has not used correct format
Use of the writing process: Plans, drafts and refines the text, edits first draft and proofreads final draft	Excellent use of the writing process has produced a refined final draft. Proof reading has eliminated mistakes	Good use of writing process; evidence of progressive improvement in writing piece, mistakes still evident	Has used the writing process but has not translated it into a well-developed piece of writing	Some use of parts of writing process (very basic planning or evidence of editing of first draft) but many errors still remain	Little or no proof reading or editing done: writing still has many uncorrected errors
Language use: punctuation, grammar and spelling	Excellent use of language; correct sentences, punctuation and spelling. No errors in subject-verb concord	Creative use of language; mostly correct sentences, punctuation and few spelling errors. One or two errors in subject-verb concord	Most sentences are correct; some errors in language use punctuation and spelling. Several errors in subject-verb concord	Sentence structure fair but very basic; several errors in language use, punctuation and spelling. Has not grasped subject-verb concord	Poor sentence structure; many errors in punctuation and spelling. Many errors in subject-verb concord; understanding compromised

**Ideas for the basics of the play
Plot & Storyline**

Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 3

Setting:

**Crisis that arises / rising action /
climax**

Resolution of the problem

Principal players:

Characters, descriptions & relationships

The problem: