

TIP: PLAYS, LIKE SPACE STATIONS, ARE MADE UP OF SMALL PARTS. TACKLE YOUR PLAY ONE PART AT A TIME.

## IN YOUR BLOOD?

Are certain types of people genetically bent toward writing plays? Scientists think so. Below, check off the traits that apply to you. If you mark five or more, you may have "the gift."

READ ON THE TOILET	SOMETIMES HUG SELF	PAYING OFF DEBT	65-75% COMPASSIONATE	FAIR-TO-GOOD KISSER	ODDBALL IN SCHOOL	ATTRACTED TO MIRRORS	THINK RAIN CAN BE NICE	STRONG TYPING SKILLS	HUNGRY FOR LOVE	WATCH SUBTITLED FILMS
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## SOME HANDY TIPS

### a DO NOT AIM FOR THE SKY

To avoid biting off more than you or the audience can possibly chew, keep your first play simple. There will be lots of time for monolithic, multi-layered, Russian-novel-length opuses later.

### b WRITE IF IT HURTS

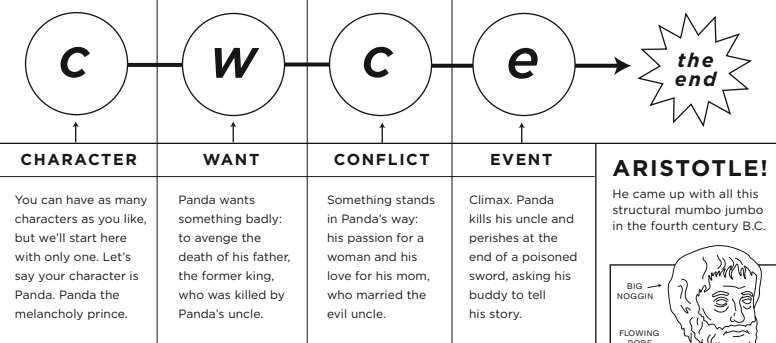
If you don't feel like writing at first, do it anyway. It's like jogging or taking out the trash. Some of the best stuff comes after you've booted your own ass into gear. Later, once it's a habit, you can relax.

### c EMBRACE OBSCURITY

You have a better chance of gaining fame as a plumber than as a playwright. So get used to your name not being a household one, and leave the red carpet and magazine interviews to those bastards who get all the lucky breaks.

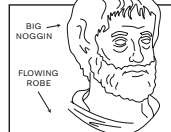
## STRUCTURE IN 4 EASY STEPS

Note: If you resist writing with structure, see the "Bathroom Plays" section of this guide.



### ARISTOTLE!

He came up with all this structural mumbo jumbo in the fourth century B.C.



NOTE: THE ABOVE DIAGRAM APPLIES TO 97% OF ALL PLAYS. GO AHEAD AND CHECK. GO AHEAD. IF YOU WANT TO SHATTER THE RULES OF DRAMA, START BY GETTING TO KNOW THEM.

### TRY A LITTLE PLAY

Good news: Your first play can be 10 minutes long. It can be two minutes long. Can it be one minute long? Yes it can.

SHORT PLAYS, TINY PLAYS, TEENSY PLAYS!

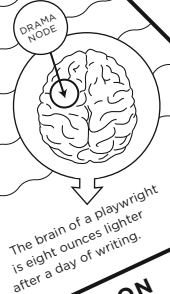
### UNKNOWN PLAYWRIGHT BIO:

NAME: Dana Hoang AGE: 27  
STARTED: Wrote first play last year, based on her grandmother's diary. Currently works at Tully's Coffee.

### FAMOUS PLAYWRIGHT BIO:

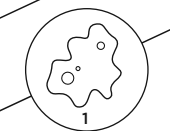
NAME: Tom Stoppard AGE: 69  
STARTED: Wrote first play at the age of 23 after quitting his day job. It took three months to write the first draft.

ANSWERS THE FOLLOWING: HOW & WHAT & WHY?

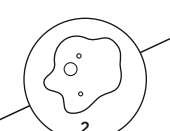


The brain of a playwright is eight ounces lighter after a day of writing.

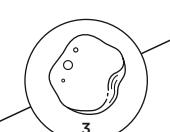
### EVOLUTION



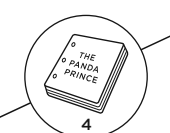
In the first draft, the play is globulous and unsculpted. (Some writers create near-finished first drafts. They are aliens.)



In the following drafts, the play begins to take shape.



Now the play is ready for some healthy feedback.



Viola. For better or worse, this baby belongs in front of an audience.

## REHEARSE YOUR SIGNATURE

Though it is very, very, very unlikely that you will become a famous playwright, it is still possible. As a precaution, prepare your signature for the day you may be asked for an autograph. Practice below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## BATHROOM PLAYS

These are shows that have no story or characters or anything captivating, seeking instead to challenge the audience with bold, daring confusion. These plays are often authored by people who are blinded by their own light, and should be performed by the creator alone, in front of the bathroom mirror.

Note: Fans of avant-garde theater who take offense at this statement are invited to write a bold, confusing play about it and perform it in front of their bathroom mirrors.



HAVE YOU EVER SNORED THROUGH A PLAY, THINKING YOU COULD WRITE A BETTER ONE? ARE YOU CURIOUS ABOUT THE STRANGE NUANCES OF PLAYWRITING? IF THE ANSWER IS YES, GET READY TO BE INFORMED AND POSSIBLY DAZZLED.

# HOW TO WRITE a PLAY

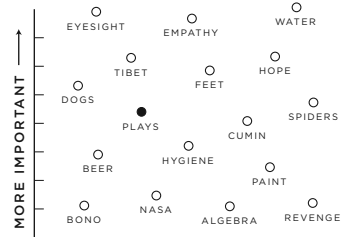
AN ALMOST COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

ART & WORDS BY TIM SANDERS

## THEATER CRITICS: INFERNOS OF HATE?

Critics are like forest fires. They play a useful role in our ecosystem but are steered by unpredictable forces. Their power will either boost your play or crush it like a quail egg. When critics come to your show, smile at them. Offer a back rub. Then hunker down and pray that they spare the patch of woods that is your play.

## HOW IMPORTANT ARE PLAYS?



## WRITE FROM THE GUT

Always strive to write about something that stimulates you down to your knickers. Chances are you'll write better if you do. Check any of the following possibilities:

- Pandas
- Justice
- Saturn
- The tundra
- Swinging
- Lost love
- The Bay of Pigs
- Easter

### UNKNOWN PLAYWRIGHT BIO:

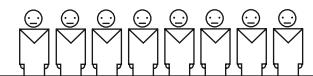
NAME: Scott Mole AGE: 38  
STARTED: Wrote first play two years ago titled *Oxblood: A Critical Look into the Legend of Paul Bunyan*. Currently works as a waiter.

### TRY A PEN NAME

- Pat Goodfellow
- MC Play Play
- Anne Shirley
- Lord of the Script
- Gilbert Blythe
- Mrs. Brisby

### PREACHING TO THE CHOIR

Plays are produced by and for liberals. If you want to ignite social or political change, there are nonviolent protests that need you. If you insist on writing a play with a message, keep it subtle, for your audience's sake. It's not impossible to change the world with theater. It's just incredibly unlikely.



### ACTIONS VS. FEELINGS

Try not to let your characters *tell* the audience how they feel. Make their words *active*. Instead of Jim saying "I hate that panda," make him say "that panda stole my innocence and now it's *payback time*."

## THE AUDIENCE

While writing, picture yourself mowing your audience's lawn or walking their dog. Your job is to serve them. If you do it well they will appreciate you — but never as much as you want them to.



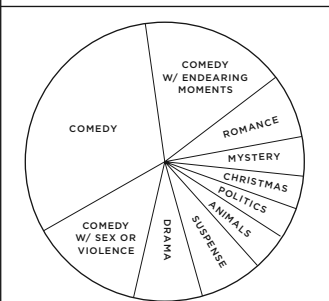
AUDIENCE = HOLY GRAIL

### YOUR TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC

Below, compare ticket prices to your odds of success.

\$50 - \$100	You have <b>NO CHANCE</b> unless you're Neil Simon or you serve dinner with the show.
\$25 - \$49	You have <b>NO CHANCE</b> unless a big local theater options your play, which they can't risk doing.
\$15 - \$24	You have a <b>SLIGHT CHANCE</b> , assuming you've got street cred in the fringe community.
\$1 - \$14	You have a <b>50-50 CHANCE</b> if your show is sharp and your poster looks hot.
FREE	You have a <b>GREAT CHANCE</b> of convincing your friends and family to come. No one else will.

### THE BIG QUESTION: WHAT DOES THE AUDIENCE WANT?



NOTE: PLAYS THAT BENEFIT THE AUDIENCE TEND NOT TO SPOON-FEED.

QUIZ: GIVEN THE DIFFICULTY OF WRITING AND PRODUCING PLAYS, WHY DOES ANYBODY BOTHER? PICK THE ANSWER:

- Masochism
- Fear of money
- Sex with actors
- Fleeting magical moments
- Pure, uncut moxie

### DEALING WITH SUCCESS

You prevailed. Everyone came to see it, and the critics polished your shoes. Months of work have paid off. Go drinking, get up tomorrow, and start a new one.

### DEALING WITH FAILURE

You bombed. Nobody came to see it, or if they did, they left at intermission. Months of work, all for this. Go home, cry hard for an hour, then start a new one.

## GOOD DIALOGUE VS. BAD DIALOGUE

**BAD**  
SHEILA: Jim... I'm a panda.  
JIM: You're a panda?  
SHEILA: Yes Jim. Yes I am a panda.

**GOOD**  
SHEILA (to Jim): I'm a panda.  
JIM: You're what?  
SHEILA: You heard me. A panda.

Bad can be good, never vice versa.

## FILL-IN-THE-BLANK DIALOGUE

SHEILA: Kip, I'm... not who you think I am.  
KIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
SHEILA: I'm a panda. Please don't leave.  
KIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
SHEILA: Oh, I get it. You bastard.  
KIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
SHEILA: But how can the truth be wrong?  
KIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
SHEILA: Say it, then! For once in your life!  
KIP: \_\_\_\_\_

REFER TO THESE HOT TIPS AFTER YOU FINISH YOUR FIRST DRAFT:

GET WARM BODIES  
Rewrite it again, then get some actors to read it out loud. This will fill you with adrenaline + joy + worry.

GET FEEDBACK  
Read the draft and make notes. Rewrite it, then show it to a friend who is smart, kind, and honest.

GET DISTANCE  
Lock your draft in a drawer or a vault. Don't look at it for at least two weeks. Resist the urge to peek.

FACT: PLAYWRIGHTS, LIKE JET PILOTS, BELIEVE THEY ARE COOL.

YOUR PLAY MIGHT END WITH A BIG CLIMAX... OR IT MIGHT END SUBTLY OR SOFTLY OR SADLY OR SWEETLY.

THIS ALMOST COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE WAS WRITTEN AND DESIGNED BY CANDLELIGHT WITH A GOOSE-FEATHER QUILL ON THE SPOT WHERE YOUNG WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE IS SAID TO HAVE TRIPPED OVER A SHIH TZU, BEEN KNOCKED OUT, AND WOKE AS A PLAYWRIGHT.