

Playwright's Checklist

A few questions to ask yourself about your play

Ask yourself these questions as you enter the revision process--answer them honestly--and help yourself to a better play.

Format

- Is the speaker's name ever on one page, while the dialogue that goes with it is on another page? (If so, get them together.)
- Are the margins for dialogue and stage directions consistent? Are the speakers' names and the scene/act headings the only things centered?
- Is my title page correct? Does it have the necessary contact information (name, age, phone number, school, grade, teacher name)?

Dialogue

- Have I eliminated ninety-nine percent of filler words like "well," "uh," "OK," "all right," etc.? While they are meant to make dialogue sound "realistic," they don't really add anything.
- Have I punctuated the dialogue accurately? Have I gotten someone else to read it out loud in front of me so that I can hear if the punctuation makes sense? It's super important to put periods, commas, dashes, semicolons and whatever else you're using where they belong.
- Have I run a spell check? Have I proofread by reading aloud to make sure nothing has slipped through? Often, you can misspell a word into another correct word that your spell check won't detect. Have I given the play to someone else who has a good editor's eye?
- Do I avoid dialogue which is only there to "tell" about the characters? Can I replace it with an action of some kind?.

Stage Directions

- Are the stage directions clear, concise and grammatical?

- Do I use the stage directions to describe what happens but not to write a novel or long descriptions of characters' feelings?
- Is it clear which character is supposed to do an action or perform a stage direction? Don't assume that it's obvious--usually, you should mention the character specifically.
- Have I given a specific time and a specific place (e.g. a living room, not merely inside a house) at the beginning of the play?
- Have I introduced each character with a one-line description (age, gender if it's not obvious, and a phrase of description)? This is crucial to help a potential director determine who could be cast in the role, or simply to help a reader get a handle on your play.

Other Things to Think About

- Does the play have a clear conflict with a beginning, a middle and an end? Does the conflict build as the play goes on? Remember that two characters arguing isn't conflict. **Conflict is driven by characters trying to get what they want.**
- Are the stakes high enough? It has to be crucial to each character that she gets what she wants.
- Is there a ticking clock? Time pressure always creates additional tension.
- If the play requires research, do you have your facts straight?
- Is the tone of the play consistent? You don't want a play to be a comedy for the first ten pages and a family drama for the last ten.
- Is your play's title both catchy and fitting?
- Does the play begin at the right point? Sometimes a play begins too early when it should begin in the middle of action.
- Does every scene have conflict? Characters who desperately want things don't ever stop trying to get what they want.