

**Eastern Region –
North Carolina Odyssey of the Mind
Tech Skills Fair Saturday, November 14, 2009
Script-Writing Workshop**

Writing a script for a play basically means answering the questions we all learned in school - who, what, when, where, why and how!

The Who: Characters. Characters need to have personalities and physical descriptions developed for them to help them interact with each other and determine how the audience will respond to them. Think especially about your main character, an opposing character, and all the supporting players you will need in your cast.

Try this! Think about what you want your main character to be or do by filling in some of the **Character Creation** factors below:

- Name, age, sex
- Cultural, ethnic, geographic background
- Physical description
- Dress
- Mannerisms, typical gestures, expressions
- Voice (inflection, tone, volume, etc.)
- Education/occupation
- Family
- Past history
- Strengths (moral, physical, intellectual)
- Weaknesses (moral, physical, intellectual)
- Values
- Motivation
- Likes
- Dislikes

The Where and When: Setting. The setting of a play is both the time and the place of the story. The setting may change depending upon the plot or, in Odyssey of the Mind, the requirements of the long-term problem.

Try this! Think about creating your place and time as well as any problems involving different set changes:

- Where - Place(s)
- When - Time (s)
- What research will you have to do to create an accurate Where & When?

The What: Situations/Conflict. Characters have to have reasons to be brought together in certain settings (time & place) to interact. Some plays have characters struggling against each other or outside forces.

Try this! Brainstorm situations for your characters. Some examples are:

- a birthday party where pony rides are the entertainment
- a football game where a fight breaks out between rival fans
- an opportunity to read an older sister's private diary
- a Walmart store 3 days before Christmas
- a vacation beach house during a hurricane

The Why: Motivation. Characters must have an incentive, drive, or need that causes them to act in a certain way. Motivation is what makes us feel and act the way we do. Universal motivators include love, hate, jealousy, trust, ambition, envy, and greed.

Try this! Go back and look at the characters you created earlier. Do their motivations line up with the strengths, weaknesses, values, likes, dislikes you gave them? Examples:

- the 90 lbs. weakling wants to get noticed by the girls like the muscular dude
- the greedy king wants to turn everything he owns into gold
- the plain, overworked girl wants a chance to go to the prince's ball

The How: Plot. The plot of the play is the sequence of events - what happens, first, second, third, etc. - and involves the characters, situation(s), setting, and conflict or cause & effect.

Try this! Develop a plot for a script from one of the examples below. Remember to include the setting, characters, basic situations, conflict or cause & effect, and a resolution.

Examples:

- A meets B at C's birthday party.
- A discovers that B is also interviewing for a job that A desperately wants.
- A finds an injured alien from Mars who has escaped from B's laboratory.
- A wants to visit Disney World. B wants to go camping in the desert.

Now that the basic elements of the story have been created - characters, setting, situations/conflict, and plot, it's time to write a script! The story's action will take place through a series of scenes and acts. Since the audience can't see into the mind of the characters, the characters must make their thoughts and feelings visible through spoken dialogue, facial expressions, gestures, and physical movements. Therefore, you will need to write stage directions and dialogue for your characters.

Dialogue: A play is developed mainly through dialogue, the speech of the characters. Dialogue must add something to the play by developing the audience's understanding of the characters and their relationships, revealing conflicts, or moving the plot along.

Stage Directions: Instructions on how the character should behave through expression, attitude, voice, gesture, and movement. Directions not only tell performers what to do and how to act, they also give details about the set and props (movable objects). When writing directions, be as short and clear as possible. Sometimes even one word will work. For example:

Jason (opening the door, laughing): Oh, I doubt that will happen...

Quentin (breaking in and shouting): Watch out for the first step, it's a big one!

Jason (yell): AAAAhhhhhhh!

Try this! Take the following Aesop's fable and turn it into a short scene with dialogue and directions.

The Farmer's Quarrelsome Sons

A farmer's sons were quarrelsome. When he was unable, after much talk, to persuade them by what he said to change their ways, he decided that he would have to do it by action and told them to bring him a bundle of sticks. When they had done as he told them, he gave them the sticks all together and told them to break them in two. When they couldn't do it, although they tried with all their might, he undid the bundle and gave them each a single stick. They broke the sticks easily, and their father said, "Well now, boys, it's just the same with you; if you stick together, your enemies won't be able to get you in their clutches, but if you quarrel, you'll be easy to catch."

Good Luck! Just for fun - here are some good luck, bad luck superstitions of actors and actresses. Be sure to include or **not** include them in your script!

Good Luck Signs:

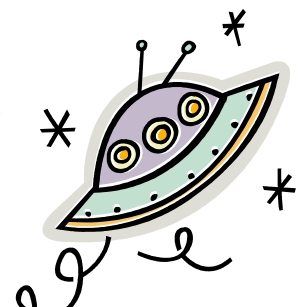
- An actor's shoes squeaking on first entrance on stage
- A part calling for wearing a wig
- Discarded shoes landing flat and right side up

Bad Luck Signs (there are lots more of these since actors and actresses are very superstitious!)

- Costumes in blue or yellow are supposed to make actors forget their lines
- no real jewelry, drinks, or flowers on stage
- Never look in another actor's mirror while he/she is putting on makeup
- No whistling in the dressing room. A whistler will be asked to leave the room, turn around three times, and spit before being allowed back inside.

Sample Script Format

Cleo's Dream *



Characters:

Cleo, a student at Alpine School

Mrs. Dewey, the librarian at the school

John, the class brain

Michelle, the class athlete

Jackson, the class clown

Mrs. Caesar, Cleo's mother and an astronomy professor at the local college

Mr. Bainbridge, a local businessman obsessed about UFO sightings

Scene I

Time: Wednesday after school is out. Present time.

Scene: The school library. Mrs. Dewey is busy at the check-out desk Cleo opens the door, hauls her book bag in behind her, and crosses to where her friends are sitting.

Cleo (groaning): Why does the teacher always give us more homework on Wednesday?

Michelle (lifting the book bag easily): I think you need to lift some weights if you're going to do this much work!

John (looking up, worried, from his laptop screen): Homework may not matter if Mr. Bainbridge's latest UFO sighting is real. He claims 6 alien spacecraft landed last night near the abandoned silver mine outside of town.

Jackson (laughing and punching John on the arm): I thought I was the nut, not you. Do you really believe in UFOs?

Cleo (frowning and standing up): I'll call my Mom and see if she knows anything.

Jackson (smirking): Yeah, ask her if the little green men have showed up yet!

Scene 2

Scene: The astronomy observatory. Mrs. Caesar is looking through a telescope eyepiece and reciting coordinates to her assistant recording them on a laptop.

Mrs. Caesar (excited): The last set of numbers is 74.356W 45.007N! (She pulls a ringing cell phone out of her pocket and hands it to her assistant) Whoever this is, take a message. I'm too busy to talk. This is the greatest discovery since...