Basic elements of script writing

FOR many people, drama is a passive, laid-back hobby where you simply relax and watch the professionals (and amateurs) hard at work. Others, however, choose to assume a more active role by picking up pen and pad to share their creativity with others.

SO, once you decide to begin, the actual task of writing the script is one of the last steps, because it is **preceded** by other actions, though not necessarily in any order. Many people brainstorm or 'mind map' certain ideas, usually on a few pages of their constant companion, the writer's notebook. But first, let's discuss characters.

Characters are the vehicles through which your story will be driven to its logical conclusion; therefore, they must be interesting. A good character, no matter how average – or at the other end of the scale superb – must have some **imperfections** or human failings with which the audience can identify. This is what builds a connection. More important than their names or appearances are the emotions and **motivation** which **compel** your characters to act the way they do in the story.

The next task is to identify the relationships between your characters at the outset. 'Outset' because in many stories the characters' situation may change as the play progresses.

Continuing on the note of inter-character relationships brings us to probably the most important element of any drama/script – conflict.

Conflict

Conflict means two **opposing** forces that clash until eventually there is resolution. Can you imagine a super-hero story without a villain? Or a romantic story without difficulties appearing between the lovers? Nobody cares to see or follow the fortunes of people who are already happy; audiences watch drama to see people fight for happiness, as we all have to do in reality.

Thus conflict can come in two forms; the first of which is internal – the struggle within one's self. For instance, having a big test to study for while your friends are all out partying. You will have an almost overwhelming temptation to join them, so it stands to reason that you'll have inner conflict about what to do. The second, more common type of conflict is external; that which **emanates** from an outside source or sources. For example, your parents want you to stay home and join the whole family at Chinese New Year, but you want to take off for a week's holiday in Bali.

Plot

Next we take the characters' motivations and sew them together into the plot. This is a series of events in which characters are introduced to the audience and to each other as they decide which path(s) to take to achieve their goals and the many obstacles they will inevitably encounter.

While thinking about your plot, there are a few (previously touched upon) aspects you should keep in mind. These include the Three-plot Scheme composed of the first act – exposition – which tells us who's there, what's happening, and so forth. Act 2 hosts the complication, where problems arise and inter-character relationships are tested. Act 3 is the resolution or solution to problems in most plays; or it could be a catastrophe, an ending that results in horrible tragedy.

Once you have your basic ideas, flesh them out into the plot structure and then begin filling in details of what you want each scene to accomplish. Once you've got a good outline, walk it through by giving the characters pace and dialogue.

Dialogue

The key to dialogue is to make it feel natural. So think of what you might say in an individual character's situation. If there still is dialogue that doesn't sound right coming from any character – such as announcements of forthcoming happenings or reflections on previous events – then this is left to narration, the play's announcers. Try to keep narration to a minimum because audiences prefer to see a story happening in real time as much as possible.

Now enough of instruction. You've learnt all the basic features of a script, so it's time to let the mighty winds of brainstorming blow free! Take a tight hold of your pen and jot down the many wonderful ideas you know you've got waiting to become a stage play!

Exercise

Create a simple story plot using three characters, two settings, and one central conflict. Map out characters' motivations, the actions they take to achieve their aims, and the obstacles they encounter. Begin to sketch out a detailed story outline, and then share the result with a classmate for feedback.

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GLOSSARY

1. precede (v. 處在…之前)
2. imperfection (n. 不完美)
3. motivation (n. 刺激)
4. compel (v. 強迫)
5. oppose (v. 反對)
6. emanate (v. 發源)