

THEATER-MAKING AT HOME

GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



CREATING CHARACTERS & WRITING DIALOGUE

NAME :

SCHOOL / ORGANIZATION :



BE FEATURED!

**Are you interested in sharing your characters and their scene
with the Geffen community—and beyond?**

**If so, submit a video of your scene being performed
or submit a written copy of the scene, which may be
recorded on video by Geffen artists.**

**If selected, your scene will be featured on the
Geffen Playhouse website.**

All submissions must be accompanied by
a completed consent form.

To download a consent form go to
<https://tinyurl.com/theatermaking>

If you have any questions, contact
Brian Allman, Manager of Theater Education at
BrianA@geffenplayhouse.org

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CHARACTERS & DIALOGUE



THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE PRODUCTION OF *KEY LARGO*. PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

The different elements of live theater make it a truly magical experience. Think back to plays you may have seen, such as *Key Largo* at the Geffen Playhouse. Many aspects made the show exciting: the sound and lighting effects in the middle of the hurricane, the intricate set design that made you feel as if you were actually in the hotel, and the dramatic acting. Before all those elements came together, the production started with a script and the script began with a story the playwright wanted to tell.

Anyone can write a script, and with time and practice anyone can tell their story powerfully. The next few pages will help you get to know some of the layers that become the foundation for a script, as you create two characters and write dialogue for them, to tell your own story.

Follow the steps and get creative! Remember, writing takes time and revision. Give yourself space to come up with ideas, look them over, adjust, and keep going.

Though these steps have been designed to guide you, there is no wrong or right way to write. As you continue to write in the future, feel free to explore other techniques. What's most important is using your voice and telling your story!

HAVE FUN!



For more projects and theater warm-ups, please visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/theatermaking>

ACTIVITY

PICK A SCENARIO

Before you begin to write, you should have an idea of the story you want to tell. The following are scenarios for 2 characters upon which you can base your scene. Pick one to customize or use your own!

**2 FRIENDS
CANNOT AGREE
ON WHERE
THEY WANT
TO GO EAT**

**A TALKING PET
AND THEIR
OWNER
GO FOR
A WALK**

**A STUDENT IS HAVING
A DIFFICULT TIME
STAYING AWAKE
IN CLASS AND THEIR
TEACHER ASKS TO
SPEAK WITH THEM
AFTER SCHOOL**

**2 PEOPLE
ARE PLANNING
A SURPRISE
BIRTHDAY
PARTY**

**2 PEOPLE
ARE RUNNING LATE
AND CANNOT
FIND THE
CAR KEYS**

**2 STRANGERS
ARE ON A BUS
AND THE
BUS HAS
BROKEN DOWN**

**A YOUNG KID
IS PLAYING WHEN
THEIR TOY
COMES TO LIFE
FOR THE
FIRST TIME**

**2 NEIGHBORS ARE
TRYING TO FIGURE
OUT WHO KEEPS
LEAVING SURPRISES
ON THEIR
DOORSTEPS**

**2 STRANGERS
BOTH WANT
THE LAST BOX
OF CEREAL
AT THE
GROCERY STORE**

Create your own scenarios! Describe possible scenarios between 2 characters by writing a one-sentence summary for each scenario, below:

ACTIVITY

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

When creating characters, it is good practice to take a deep dive into all the different aspects that make them unique. When playwrights or actors take on new characters, they often answer a list of questions and fill in details that help provide insight to who these characters are. Just like you, characters have backstories, likes and dislikes, and values, which inspire the choices they make and what they do and say.

With your chosen scenario in mind, fill in the next pages. Getting to know your characters will help you write your dialogue and tell your story. Remember, these are just starter questions; feel free to think of and answer your own.

CHARACTER 1 NAME:

AGE:

DESCRIBE THEIR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE:

3 WORDS TO DESCRIBE THEIR PERSONALITY:

WHERE DO THEY LIVE, WITH WHOM DO THEY LIVE,
AND WHAT DOES THEIR HOME LOOK LIKE?

SLOGAN OR QUOTE TO LIVE BY:

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO THEM?

TOP 3 LIKES:

TOP 3 DISLIKES:

FAVORITE PERSON & WHY:

ACTIVITY

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

CHARACTER 2 NAME:

AGE:

DESCRIBE THEIR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE:

3 WORDS TO DESCRIBE THEIR PERSONALITY:

WHERE DO THEY LIVE, WITH WHOM DO THEY LIVE,
AND WHAT DOES THEIR HOME LOOK LIKE?

SLOGAN OR QUOTE TO LIVE BY:

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO THEM?

TOP 3 LIKES:

TOP 3 DISLIKES:

FAVORITE PERSON & WHY:

INCLUDE ANY ADDITIONAL NOTES ABOUT YOUR 2 INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS HERE:

ACTIVITY

RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Now that you have a good idea of who your two characters are as individuals, you will figure out who they are together. Regardless if they are friends, strangers, or family, you will decide how they feel about one another. This will help you create dialogue between the two of them as they engage in the selected scenario.

Respond to the prompts below with both characters in mind.

CHARACTER RELATIONSHIP

WHAT IS THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ONE ANOTHER? WHERE AND HOW DID THEY MEET?

WHAT WAS CHARACTER 1'S FIRST IMPRESSION OF CHARACTER 2?

WHAT WAS CHARACTER 2'S FIRST IMPRESSION OF CHARACTER 1?

HOW DO THEY FEEL ABOUT ONE ANOTHER IN PRESENT TIME?

THINK ABOUT HOW EACH CHARACTER RESPONDS TO LIFE EXPERIENCES: WHICH CHARACTER IS...

MORE LIKELY TO BE OUTSPOKEN:

MORE LIKELY TO BE PATIENT:

MORE LIKELY TO BE OPTIMISTIC:

MORE LIKELY TO PANIC:

MORE LIKELY TO MAKE DECISIONS:

MORE LIKELY TO BE SHY:

MORE LIKELY TO BE ANGRY:

MORE LIKELY TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX:

ACTIVITY

SCENARIO BREAKDOWN

You have now chosen a scenario, created two characters, and explored their relationship. With these choices in mind, you will create a summary of how your scenario will unfold.

Decide the following based on your scenario:

- the conflict between the two characters
- how they decide to solve it.

Write 1-2 sentences summarizing the beginning, middle, and end of the scenario. Having an idea of how your story will play out will help structure the words you choose for your characters' dialogue.

WHAT IS YOUR SCENARIO?

WHAT IS THE MAIN CONFLICT BETWEEN YOUR CHARACTERS AND HOW WILL THEY SOLVE IT ?

**USING 1 - 2 SENTENCES SUMMARIZE WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BEGINNING OF THIS SCENARIO.
(THIS SHOULD INTRODUCE THE CONFLICT)**

**USING 1 - 2 SENTENCES SUMMARIZE WHAT HAPPENS IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS SCENARIO.
(THIS SHOULD INCLUDE THE PEAK OF THE CONFLICT)**

**USING 1 - 2 SENTENCES SUMMARIZE WHAT HAPPENS IN THE END OF THIS SCENARIO.
(THIS SHOULD INCLUDE SOLVING THE CONFLICT)**

ACTIVITY

WRITING DIALOGUE

Dialogue is a written or spoken conversation between two people. Now you will take everything you've worked on so far and choose the words that your characters will say to one another.

When writing dialogue, a monologue, or full script, writers make sure each word matters as they decide what is being said. You already know who your characters are and what is happening between them; now you will decide what they will say to play out the story and reveal who they are.

You will start off with a limited number of lines to ensure what matters most is being said, and then you will get a chance to expand what the characters are saying. Follow all the steps until you have fully developed dialogue for the selected scenario.

SCENARIO:

CHARACTER 1:

CHARACTER 2:

**TELL THE WHOLE STORY USING ONLY 6 LINES.
BOTH CHARACTERS SHOULD SAY 1 LINE EACH IN THE BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END OF THE SCENE.
BE SURE TO SAY WHAT MATTERS MOST AND THAT YOUR SCENARIO IS CLEAR!**

BEGINNING (SHOULD INTRODUCE THE CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

MIDDLE (SHOULD INCLUDE PEAK OF CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

END (SHOULD INCLUDE SOLVING THE CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

ACTIVITY

WRITING DIALOGUE

Tell the whole story using **12 lines**. Both characters should now say 2 lines each in the beginning, middle, and end of the scene. You can add to what you've already written or find a stronger way to tell the story with additional lines.

BEGINNING (SHOULD INTRODUCE THE CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

LINE 3:

LINE 4:

MIDDLE (SHOULD INCLUDE PEAK OF CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

LINE 3:

LINE 4:

END (SHOULD INCLUDE SOLVING THE CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

LINE 3:

LINE 4:

ACTIVITY

WRITING DIALOGUE

Tell the whole story using **18 lines**. Both characters should now say 3 lines each in the beginning, middle, and end of the scene. You can add to what you've already written or find a stronger way to tell the story with additional lines.

BEGINNING (SHOULD INTRODUCE THE CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

LINE 3:

LINE 4:

LINE 5:

LINE 6:

MIDDLE (SHOULD INCLUDE PEAK OF CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

LINE 3:

LINE 4:

LINE 5:

LINE 6:

ACTIVITY

WRITING DIALOGUE

END (SHOULD INCLUDE SOLVING THE CONFLICT)

LINE 1:

LINE 2:

LINE 3:

LINE 4:

LINE 5:

LINE 6:

ACTIVITY

BRINGING YOUR DIALOGUE TO LIFE

You have now written a script for a scene with two characters!
Here are some things you can do to continue working on your script:

Expand the dialogue, going beyond 18 lines.

For each line, note what sort of emotion the character is feeling.
How might they say each line? Are they whispering?
Screaming? Speaking really quickly or slowly?

Take a photograph to represent each scene.

Create a tableau to represent the scene. A tableau is “a silent and motionless depiction of a scene created by actors.” (CA Department of Education Glossary of Theatre).

Have someone read it with you (either someone at home or to someone virtually).

Use a platform like Zoom, TikTok, FaceTime, or other to record yourself and a friend performing your scene.

MAKE A SKETCH TO REPRESENT THE DIALOGUE SCENE.

REFLECTION

We hope that creating your own characters and writing dialogue helped you better understand the creative process of a playwright and what is involved in writing a script.

Take a moment to reflect on your writing process and how it felt to write your script and bring it to life.

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED ABOUT CREATING CHARACTERS AND WRITING DIALOGUE?

WHAT PART OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS DID YOU ENJOY MOST?

**HOW MIGHT YOU APPLY THIS SPECIFIC WRITING TECHNIQUE (OR PARTS OF IT)
TO A FUTURE WRITING PROJECT?**

**HOW MIGHT TELLING THE STORY OF TWO DIFFERENT CHARACTERS WORKING OUT A CONFLICT
HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE?**