

Formatting it Forward

You've asked for it for years, and now we can give it to you – a template for formatting your plays and musicals. These suggested formats are drawn from suggestions of over a hundred distinguished dramatists, literary managers, teachers of dramatic writing, producers, professional theatres and publishers. We felt we had to build some kind of consensus before we put it to you, our membership, as any kind of standard.

As you'll see, after months of research and discussion, we concluded there are really two acceptable formats for plays: a more traditional format (known to almost everyone) and a more modern or contemporary approach that allows greater flexibility in the architecture of the page (and some would argue, easier reading). The format for musicals seemed much less fluid in discussion – the standard remained the standard from just about every point of view we consulted. It is the Guild's belief that these formats present a model that will work well for most professional opportunities. Knowing how radically different formats can be from writer to writer, here are few additional ideas to consider:

These models are only suggestions – suggestions we'd like you to consider. However, you should continue doing what you do individually if that makes the most sense to you. If you're looking for guidance, and many of you are, we offer these models for those who've repeatedly asked for them. We feel that as your Guild, we should set the standard. Some would argue that there should be no model for formatting – that each writer should define for themselves what works best for the story being told. Admittedly, not all stories or styles of writing will work within a standard format. Therefore, use your better judgment in deciding the architecture of the page.

However you format your plays and musicals, remember to work towards two purposes: easy reading and the ability to approximate performance-length of the written story.

There is an industry standard (though some may say old-fashioned) of using the 12-point Courier-New font; we've also noted that Times New Roman is used in more modern formatting. With the proliferation of computers and word-processing programs, there are literally hundreds of fonts to choose from. Whatever your choice, we recommend that you maintain a font size of 12 points – thereby assuring some reliable approximation of performance time.

Though you wrote the story, someone has to read it before anyone sees it in a public performance. Therefore, make your manuscript easy to read by employing a format with clearly delineated page numbers, scene citations and act citations. Headers and footers are optional.

If you're using a software program to format your work such as Final Draft, be aware that you have the ability to create your own format in these programs that can be uniquely named, saved and applied to all of your manuscripts. (We're proud to note that the Guild is working with Final Draft on incorporating our templates into their software. More news on this later.)

Usually between the title page and the first page of the story and/or dialogue, there is a page devoted to a character break-down. What's important to note on this page is the age, gender and name of each character. Some dramatists write brief character descriptions beside each name.

While it is cost-effective for both xeroxing and mailing, realize that some institutions prefer that you don't send double-sided documents. We recommend that you inquire about preference.

There is no right or wrong way to signify the end of a scene or act. Some writers do nothing but end the scene; others write "black out", "lights fade down", "End Act 1" or some other signifier that the scene or act has concluded.

The binding margin should be 1.5 inches from the edge. All other margins (top, bottom, right) should be 1.0 inch from the edge.

Finally, if you'd like additional material, such as what the first page of a play looks like with scene citations and "At Rise" descriptions, visit our web page at www.dramatistsguild.com and click into the Members Lounge. We'll update that area regularly with sample query letters, sample resumes, etc.

NEXT MONTH: cover page and musical formatting examples. To see these examples now, please log into the Members Lounge of our web site and click on *The Dramatist* - current issue.

Guildworks

From Tennessee Williams' Not About Nightingales

TRADITIONAL PLAY FORMAT

Essential page
numbering**

16.

Dialogue
begins 1.5
inches from
left side to
account for
binding.
Dialogue is
single-spaced.

BOSS

(removes cover from basket)

Speak of biscuits and what turns up but a nice batch of
homemade cookies! Have one young lady - Jim boy!

(Jim takes two.)

BOSS

Uh-huh, you've got an awful big paw, Jimmy!

(laughs)

Show the new Arky-what's-it to Miss Daily news - or is it
the Morning Star? Have a chair! I'll be right with you -

(vanishes for a moment)

Sweat, sweat, sweat's all I do these hot breezy days!

JIM

(sotto voce)

He thinks you're a newspaper woman.

BOSS

Turn on that fan.

(emerging)

Well, now, let's see -

EVA

To begin with I'm not -

BOSS

You've probably come here to question me about that ex-
convicts story in that damned yellow sheet down there in
Wilkes county - That stuff about getting Pellagra in here
- Jimmy, hand me that sample menu!

JIM

She's not a reporter.

BOSS

Aw. - What is your business, young lady?

(She opens her purse and spills
contents on floor.)

Stage action is
indented 3
inches from
left; put in
parenthesis. A
blank line is
inserted before
and after.

Dialogue
extends to
1.0 inch
from right
margin

Stage action
reliant on the
proceeding
dialogue is
indented to the
left of the
character name.

Character
name in all
caps; in the
center of the
page.

Standard font
for this
formatting is
12.0 point.
Courier New.

Stage action is
indented 3.0
inches from
left margin
and enclosed
in parenthesis.

**There are many ways to paginate your play, from the straight forward numerical sequence
of 1, 2, 3 to an older format of 1-2-16, (meaning Act 1, Scene 2, Page 16).

From Tennessee Williams' *Not About Nightingales*

MODERN PLAY FORMAT

Essential page
numbering
16.

Dialogue
begins 1.5
inches from
left side to
account for
binding.
Dialogue is
single-spaced.

Character
name in all
caps; in the
center of the
page.

BOSS

You've probably come here to question me about that ex-convicts story in that damned yellow sheet down there in Wilkes county – That stuff about getting Pellagra in here – Jimmy, hand me that sample menu!

JIM

She's not a reporter.

BOSS

Aw. – What is your business, young lady?

EVA

I understand there's a vacancy here. Mr. McBurney, my landlady's brother-in-law, told her that you were needing a new stenographer and I'm sure that I can qualify for the position. I'm a college graduate, Mr. Whalen, I've had three years of business experience – references with me – but, oh – I've – I've had such abominable luck these last six months. – the last place I worked – the business recession set in they had to cut down on their sales-force – they gave me a wonderful letter – I've got in with me.

Dialogue
extends to
1.0 inch
from right
margin

She opens her purse and spills contents
on floor.

Stage action
begins in the
center of the
page and
scans to the
right margin.
A blank line is
inserted before
and after.

BOSS

Anybody outside?

EVA

Yes. That woman.

BOSS

What woman?

EVA

The one from Wisconsin. She's still waiting –

BOSS

I told you I don't want to see her.

(talking into phone)

How's the track, Bert? Fast? Okay.

Standard font
for this
formatting is
12.0 point,
New Times
Roman..

Stage action
reliant on the
proceeding
dialogue is
indented to the
left of the
character name.

Sailor Jack's mother, MRS. BRISTOL, has
quietly entered. She carries a blanket.

MRS. BRISTOL

I beg your pardon, I – You see I'm Jack Bristol's mother, and I've been wanting to have a talk with you so long about – about my boy!