

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Open Educational Resources

LaGuardia Community College

---

2018

### Playwriting Project [Theater]

Celia Braxton

*CUNY La Guardia Community College*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/lg\\_oers/48](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/lg_oers/48)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

## Playwriting Project

By Celia Braxton, Ph.D., Adjunct Assistant Professor  
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

### I. Guided Freewrite Pre-write prompt-REQUIRED

Early in the semester we spent some time discussing the difference between ritual, performance and theatre. Ritual may have received less room in our discussion than performance vs. theatre, but rituals are a very rich source for theatre.

1) What ritual(s) did you participate in as a child? What ritual(s) have you participated in more recently in your life? Look at the list below now. (2 min) (**Powerpoint suggested**)

Possible ritual types and rituals – examples not prescriptions!

Religious? (examples -- some may mix with family or social depending on who you are)

- Funeral?
- Wedding?
- Baptism or Bris?
- Regular weekly religious observance?
- Special religious holidays or observances?

Family (examples – some may mix with religious or social depending on who you are):

- Thanksgiving morning? Dinner?
- Birthday party?
- Aqiqah?
- Trimming the tree or lighting the candles?
- Christmas evening? Morning?

Social? (examples):

- Lunch with the same 3 friends at the same table every day?
- Getting stopped and searched?
- Baby or wedding shower?
- Graduation?
- Getting arrested?
- Watching the Superbowl?
- Clubbing or going out with a group of friends?

Personal (examples):

- How you start your day?
- The sequence in which you dress or eat?
- Turning TV on every time you are alone?
- Getting ready for a date?
- Going to bed?

Work-Related:

- Getting to work:
  - Riding the subway?
  - Riding the bus?
  - Riding the commuter train?
  - Stopping for coffee and ...?
- Opening/closing the office/store?
- Getting ready to go out on the floor?
- Inventory?
- Training people?

**Which rituals** specific to your childhood or your current circumstances can you remember *right now*? Write *as many as you can* in the next **ten minutes**. Write what you remember without trying and when it runs out just go on to a new one and write what you remember without trying, etc. Don't stop. Don't pick your pen up. If you can't think of anything just write something like um um um help help help until something comes to you and then just write it. [Sample]

**The following instructions may be oral, or a combination of PPT/printed and oral**

**2)** Choose your favorite three (3). What would a disruption in each of these rituals cause to you or another person? Write about each one of them separately. What would happen IF the Ritual was interrupted by you? By another person/character?

**3)** Choose ONE. Which of the three you wrote about is richest for you, jumps off the page to you? Write it again on a new place on your paper (1 min)

**4)** Keeping the pen moving and in contact with the paper, write for three minutes each in answer to the following questions. (Instructor will provide timing for each change.)

- Why do you want to bring this subject to the world? (3 min)
- What scares the shit out of you about writing this play? (3 min)
- What amazing thing could happen if you did write this play? (3 min)

## ASSIGNMENT:

“Everything influences playwrights. A playwright who isn’t influenced is never of any use.”

- Arthur Miller

“I believe that one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that in order to create something universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific.”

- Lorraine Hansberry

“A stage play is basically a form of *uber* schizophrenia. You split yourself into two minds, one being the protagonist and the other being the antagonist. The playwright also splits himself into two other minds: the mind of the writer and the mind of the audience.”

- David Mamet

As part of our study of theater and its components, we have learned that one major player in the production of most pieces is the playwright. For this assignment, you will try your hand at writing a short play. You can choose to write on any subject, so the possibilities of the content of your play are quite vast, but remember the good advice from our textbook, *The Enjoyment of Theater* (Chapter 7): “Write what you know.”

Use the writing exercise that we did in class as a jumping off point and don’t forget to try and have fun with it! These writing exercises and our subsequent conversation in class should have generated some ideas for the major theme(s) in the play, characters, setting, and conflict.

## **TASK:**

Write a 5 to 10-minute play (five to ten pages)

Use the writing exercises that we did in class as a jumping off point and don’t forget to have fun with it! These writing should have generated some ideas for the major situation in the play, characters, setting, and conflict.

As you write your play, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the ritual? Be specific about it.
2. What is the scenario of the ritual? What usually happens? Think it through step by step.
  - 2.1. How/when does it begin?
  - 2.2. What is the middle?
  - 2.3. How and when does it end?
3. How does each character respond to the ritual?
4. What disrupts the ritual?
5. When and how is the ritual disrupted?
  - 5.1. What are the SPECIFIC circumstances?
  - 5.2. How does the disruption affect the ritual?
  - 5.3. How does it affect Characters? Relationships?
  - 5.4. Is the effect Immediate? As the scene progresses?
6. What CONFLICT does the disruption create?
7. Are any or all of the conflicts resolved?

**FORMAT AND SUBMISSION:**

The play must be typed in font sized 12 and in Times New Roman, and submitted to Blackboard/ePortfolio on DATE DUE by 11:59pm. Anything submitted after that date will be counted as late and dropped one letter grade. The script itself must be a minimum of 5 pages in length, *not including* the Cover Sheet or the Character, Setting, and Director's Notes pages. SEE PAGE TWO FOR REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF THE SCRIPT.

**Oral Communication Ability (75pts)**

In addition to the written play script, you must record a speech of between 2 and 3 minutes reflecting on your work on the play, where your ideas came from, and how you feel your characters or plot interconnect with these sources.

**PRESENTATION:**

- The speech should be recorded as a video, using your Smartphone/iPhone or your computer.
- Consider who your audience is: faculty from the Theatre, Communications, English, and other programs or departments with whom you might take a class or be taking a class right now. Present yourself accordingly, with a professional appearance.
- Practice your speech after you write it, and before you record it, so you know what you are going to say and how you are going to say it.

**WRITING THE REFLECTIVE SPEECH:**

1. Remember, your audience does not know your play. Therefore you need to give a brief summary stating where and when the play is set, who is the main character, and what he or she expects from this ritual (what s/he is searching for or what s/he wants). State how the interruption of the ritual becomes an obstacle – or a catalyst--to reaching the goal for the character. Then briefly state the main thing s/he does to overcome the obstacle, or take advantage of the catalyst, to reach the goal. Can you pinpoint an event that is a turning point for the character?
2. In the rest of your speech you should consider both academic and life-experience as sources for or connections with your play:
  - a. Specifically discuss texts, theories, information, and skills you have learned in other classes, such as English 101 or 102, Business 101, Sociology or Anthropology courses, History courses, or Science courses if your play involves science. Also consider courses you took in high school.
  - b. Specifically discuss news or current events that inform the play.
  - c. Think about how your play is related to your own experiences and culture. Talk about experiences that inform the ritual, the play, or an individual character.
  - d. Does any character exhibit skills or knowledge you have developed inside or outside of school? Some examples of these skills include:
    - writing skills you have or are developing, in school and in extracurricular activities
    - craft skills (carpentry, embroidery, fixing things, cooking...)

- sporting skills of any kind
  - musical, dance, and/or other arts-related skills
  - work skills: nursing, retail work, office work, laboratory work, etc.
- e. How do these skills or this knowledge influence or effect a character in the play and his or her actions? (Does not need to be the Main Character.)
3. Conclude by singling out one thing you mentioned in the speech that you feel was most important for you in writing the play or one thing working on the speech itself has helped you understand.

The speech must be recorded and uploaded to COURSEWARE OR EMAIL on DATE DUE by 11:59pm. Anything submitted after that date will be counted as late and dropped one letter grade.

**Here are the Elements/Formats that must be included in your play script:**

1. A Cover Sheet: The first page should only include the title (or working title) of your play as well as your name.
2. Character Names: The second page should include the names of each character and, if you choose and if appropriate, a brief description of each character.
3. Setting Description: Please include a brief description of the setting(s) for the play. This may include but is not limited to the geographical location, time period, and/or what the scenic elements should look like (set, costumes, lighting, props, etc.)
4. Genre/Style: Feel free to explore any genre or style you wish. As a playwright, you are certainly not limited to creating a contemporary, realistic play. If the themes and ideas you have in mind fit a specific genre or style that is not rooted in realism and you'd like to explore a different, more fitting option, go for it!
5. Director's Notes: You may want to include notes to anyone who may be directing, designing, performing, or producing your play as to what your expectations and guidelines are for any production of your play. (For example: *Costuming for all of the characters should be designed in white fabrics. No color except white should be used.*)
6. Scenes: Your 5 -page play might take place all in one scene, or you may choose to write several scenes. This is completely up to you. There are no restrictions on how many scenes you need to have.
7. Format: Character Names should be capitalized and start on the far left margin of the page, followed by a colon to show clearly who is speaking which line. Stage Directions should be noted by parentheses and should also be italicized to make it clear to any actor or director that these are not to be spoken. (See the scripts we have read in class.)

8. **This is a Play not a Film:** As you are writing, please keep in mind that you are not writing for a film, but for the theater. Terms and descriptions such as “EXTERIOR – DAY”, “CUT TO” “CLOSE UP ON” or any other term from film or video are completely inappropriate to this project and will drop you a grade. Remember also that while lighting and stage technology can create an awe-inspiring array of different places and moods, the faster and more different the settings, the LESS is generally available to make the changes—the fewer scenic elements, props and costume changes will be available.

Note: You may find that 5 pages of material is not be nearly enough for you to fully explore your idea(s) in the play. In that case, you may want to write what would be considered an *excerpt* from a full length play. You may want to explore only one or two scenes from a larger concept that you have. In that case, and if you have an idea, you may include a summary of what you imagine would come before and/or after the scene(s) that you’ve written.

**NOTE:** These are suggestions for grading the play itself. You may change or even delete a couple, or make up your own. For instance, you might feel grading on genre/style is a bit advanced? Or not.

**Grading Rubric:**

1. Does this play effectively present a clear plot or conflict? **(35%)**

- Is the conflict of the play clearly presented and explored through the action?
- Is the action of the play clearly related to the main idea/theme?
- Will this play hold an audience's interest and will they care about the outcome for the characters? Does it draw the reader into the world the playwright has created?

2. Are the characters presented in the play specific and distinct to the reader? **(30%)**

- Do each of the characters have clear and distinct voices?
- Is there an intended purpose for each character in the play?

3. Is the genre/style clear and distinct? **(15%)**

- Is it a comedy (what kind?), a tragedy, a household drama, an adventure story, a romance, a coming-of-age, a melodrama, etc.?

4. Is the setting as described appropriate to the genre, plot, characters, and physical action?  
**(15%)**

- Does the setting add to the dramatic nature of the piece or is it simply a place holder?
- Did the playwright pay attention to the important details of the setting/environment?

5. Format: Does the script meet guidelines 1, 5, and 8 presented in the assignment handout?  
**(5%)**

## SUGGESTED SCHEDULING

***Note to instructors:*** Chapters or lessons on play structure, viewing and reviewing a play, and Playwrights and Playwriting should have been assigned and discussed before this assignment is begun.

Date A: Freewrite prompt given in class. Discussion of the project assignment.

*Following class: some discussion and answering questions, but use for other course work.*

Date B: One week later. *First draft of 2-3 pages of dialog due in class.*

Using one of the student's work, model methods of asking/responding to neutral questions:

“What was the best thing about the play? What did you understand about the play or a particular character? What confused you? Which character do you think is the protagonist? What do you think he/she wants? What character needs more development? What did the play make you think of?” ***Playwrights do not answer the group's questions. They make notes about the questions asked and the confusions voiced. The answers to the questions will be in the re-write.***

- First draft of 2-3 pages of dialog; share in groups of 3 or 4—read aloud.
- Each group discusses each play following the above method.  
*Following class – some discussion and answering of questions may still be necessary, but use for other course work.*

Date C: One week later: *Final draft of completed play due.*

Date D: Very Next Class: *Oral speeches due on ePortfolio.*