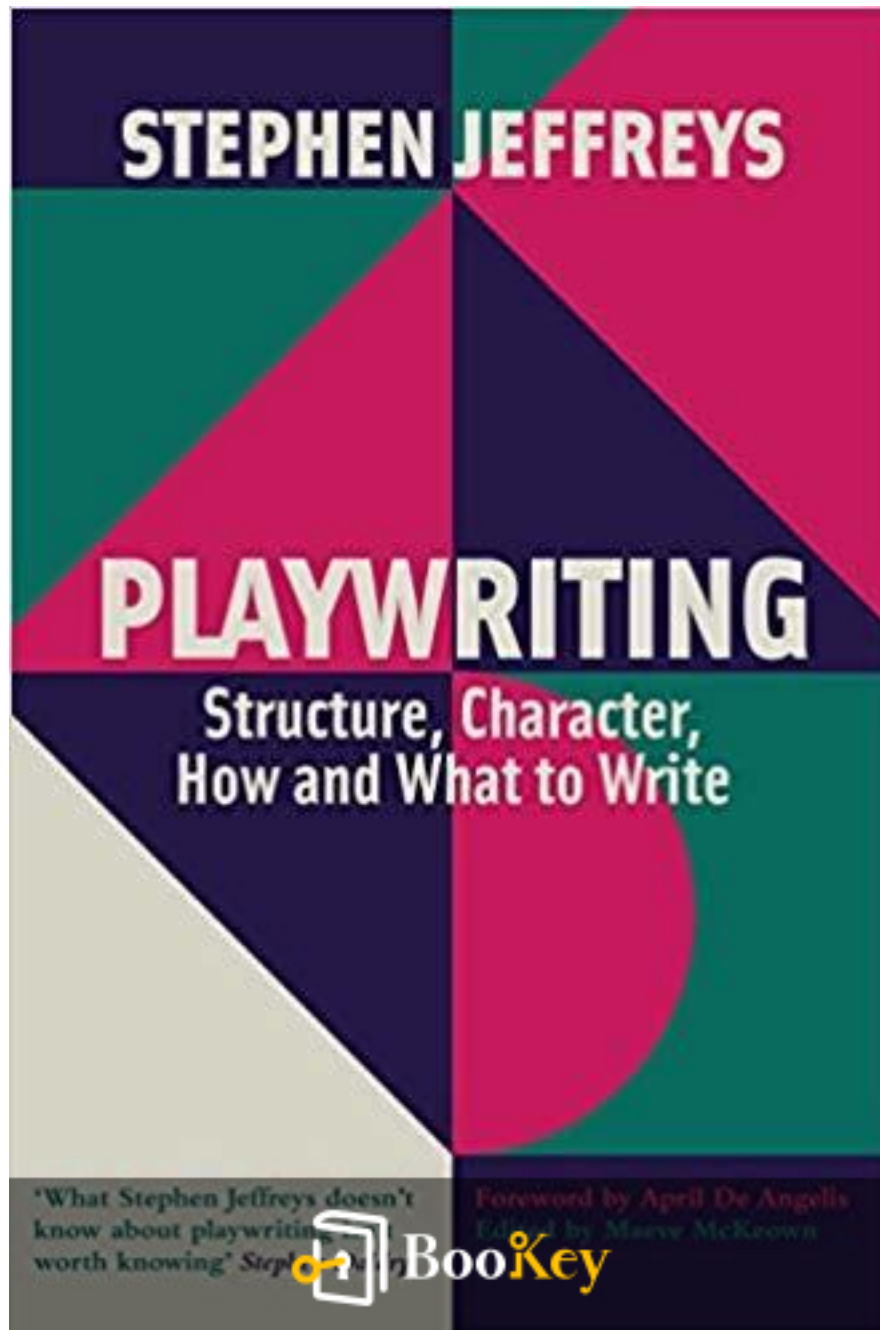


Playwriting PDF (Limited Copy)

Stephen Jeffreys



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Playwriting Summary

Unlock the Secrets to Crafting Compelling Plays.

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About the book

In "Playwriting," Stephen Jeffreys draws from over twenty years of experience leading acclaimed workshops that have shaped the skills of numerous contemporary playwrights and theater artists. This comprehensive guide serves as a practical manual for both novice and seasoned writers, delving into the fundamental structures and elements vital to crafting impactful plays.

The book begins by emphasizing the importance of character development, teaching readers how to create compelling, multi-dimensional characters through an intricate understanding of story arcs and character depth. Jeffreys provides practical techniques for writing engaging dialogue and dynamic scenes, essential tools that breathe life into a script.

He introduces the concept of evaluating and approaching material through various perspectives, encouraging playwrights to think critically about their ideas. Central to this exploration is the foundational framework known as the "Nine Stories," which categorizes core narratives that resonate universally and help in structuring engaging plots.

Edited by Maeve McKeown, this edition also features a Foreword by playwright April De Angelis, which highlights the book's relevance in today's theatrical landscape. Overall, "Playwriting" is more than a guide; it

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is a vital resource packed with insights and strategies, empowering anyone passionate about theater to refine their craft and deeply understand the art of storytelling.

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About the author

Stephen Jeffreys is a respected British playwright, screenwriter, and educator celebrated for his impactful contributions to contemporary theater. His career, which has spanned several decades, is marked by innovative and thought-provoking plays that delve into intricate human relationships and pressing societal issues. Jeffreys rose to prominence with works such as "The Libertine," a play notable for its clever dialogue and rich character development set against a historical backdrop.

In addition to his writing, Jeffreys plays a crucial role as a playwright-in-residence and educator, imparting his knowledge through workshops and masterclasses that nurture emerging talent in the field. His book "Playwriting" serves as a significant resource for aspiring writers, offering insights and practical advice that enhance their storytelling capabilities. By blending personal experience with a deep understanding of theatrical principles, Jeffreys has not only advanced the craft of playwriting but has also inspired a new generation of creators.

In this context, the chapters following his introduction delve deeper into his notable works and the themes they explore, including personal ambition, societal critiques, and the complexities of human emotion. As the narrative unfolds, readers are introduced to key characters and settings that illustrate Jeffreys' vivid storytelling and thematic concerns, ensuring an engaging and

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cohesive exploration of his contributions to theater.

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Chapter 1 Summary: I. Story Structure

Summary of Chapter 1: Dramatic Structure in Playwriting

Introduction to Dramatic Structure

In the world of playwriting, structure is often dismissed as a rigid and uninspiring element. However, it is a vital synthesis of creativity and technique that forms the backbone of effective dramatic writing. At its core, dramatic structure intertwines the essential components of story, time, and place, establishing a comprehensive framework that guides the crafting of plays.

Three Key Points About Structure

1. **Simplicity:** A successful dramatic structure distills the complexities of story, time, and place into an intuitive format that becomes more fluid for playwrights with practice.
2. **Creativity:** Mastery of traditional structures empowers playwrights to explore innovative and unconventional storytelling methods.
3. **Efficiency:** A well-defined structure streamlines the writing process, reducing the need for extensive revisions by providing a clear roadmap for the narrative.

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Understanding Theatre Events

Theatre holds a unique position compared to television, as audiences are fully engaged and expect compelling beginnings that capture their attention. The first act should be crafted to build anticipation for the unfolding story, with a gradual increase in intensity and pace leading to the climax.

Key Considerations

Playwrights must thoughtfully plan for intermissions, strategically placing engaging moments to keep audiences captivated. Post-interval, the audience's refreshed state makes humor and engaging dialogue particularly effective.

Three Elements of Story

1. **Conflict:** Central to any captivating narrative, conflict reveals character depth and propels the plot.
2. **Reversal:** To sustain audience interest, playwrights should incorporate unexpected twists to avoid predictability.
3. **Delimitation:** Clearly defining the story's boundaries is essential; every effective plot contains a structured beginning, middle, and end.



Analysis of "Macbeth" as a Model

Shakespeare's "Macbeth" serves as an exemplary model for understanding dramatic structure, divided into three parts:

- **Part One:** Establishes Macbeth's internal and external conflicts that pave the way for his ascent to power.
- **Part Two:** Chronicles Macbeth's descent into tyranny, where escalating violence and paranoia heighten the narrative stakes.
- **Part Three:** Depicts the societal pushback against Macbeth, culminating in his ultimate downfall.

Levels of Conflict

Compelling narratives typically feature three tiers of conflict: inner (character-based), interpersonal (between characters), and extrapersonal (against societal norms or nature). Each layer must be adeptly integrated to create a rich, engaging story.

Advantages of Conventional Story Structure

Utilizing established story structures helps decompose extensive writing projects into approachable sections, while still allowing flexibility in thematic exploration and climactic moments. A robust structure not only enhances narrative depth but also facilitates a thorough examination of



characters and the societal ramifications of their actions.

Final Thoughts

The chapter concludes by underscoring the intrinsic appeal of the number three in storytelling, found across diverse mediums such as fairy tales and magic tricks. Playwrights are encouraged to outline the individual arcs of characters, especially within ensemble pieces, ensuring a cohesive and compelling narrative that resonates with audiences.

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Chapter 2 Summary: II. Time and Place Structure

Summary of Chapter 2 from "Playwriting" by Stephen Jeffreys

Chekhov's "Three Sisters": Dramatic Structure and Character Development

This chapter opens with an analysis of the rhythmic structure in Anton Chekhov's iconic play, "Three Sisters." The narrative rhythm begins smoothly in Act One, reflecting the sisters' naive hopes to move to Moscow. However, as the plot progresses, particularly in Acts Three and Four, the rhythm becomes fragmented, mirroring the characters' disillusionments and declining fortunes. A significant turning point occurs when Andrei, the sisters' brother, proposes to Natalya during a lunch party—a moment that marks a critical decline in his ambitions and simultaneously jeopardizes the sisters' dreams. The character of Irina undergoes a poignant journey throughout three key stories, showcasing her growing disillusionment with love and work, contrasting sharply with the maid Anfisa, who finds a new sense of purpose after losing her job. This exploration of different character arcs illustrates how shared journeys can yield diverse outcomes, holding the audience's attention and reflecting the complexities of human experience.

Time and Place Structure in Playwriting

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Transitioning from character analysis to structural elements, Jeffreys emphasizes the importance of time and place alongside story in the realm of playwriting. He outlines the distinct challenges and opportunities in structuring plays based on these elements. Plays can be categorized into various types based on their time and location: closed time and closed place, often termed "pressure-cooker plays," evoke emotional intensity within a confined setting, while open time and open place formats offer broader societal contexts and narrative flexibility. This section illustrates how the manipulation of time and place can significantly enhance the emotional depth and coherence of a play.

Types of Dramatic Structure

Jeffreys categorizes dramatic structures into four primary types:

1. **Closed Time, Closed Place:** These plays, set in one location in real-time, create a sense of emotional pressure (e.g., Arthur Miller's "The Price").
2. **Open Time, Closed Place:** These unfold over an extended period in a single setting, allowing for gradual character development (e.g., "Duet for One" by Tom Kempinski).
3. **Closed Time, Open Place:** While continuous action shifts between various locations, it adheres to real-time progression, a structure that is notably rare in theatre.
4. **Open Time, Open Place:** The most prevalent structure, providing



flexibility with different scenes and timelines, typical in many three-act plays.

Understanding Scene Changes

The chapter concludes by examining the significance of scene changes in maintaining narrative momentum. Jeffreys suggests employing varied techniques, such as music, character monologues, or visual transitions, to keep the audience engaged and ensure coherence throughout the play. These tools not only enhance the emotional and structural impact of a piece but also allow for creative exploration within the playwright's vision.

In summary, this chapter serves as a comprehensive guide for aspiring playwrights, shedding light on the intricate interplay of structure, character complexity, and the narrative experience on stage, ultimately enriching the art of playwriting.

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Chapter 3 Summary: III. Experimental Structures

In Chapter 3 of "Playwriting," Stephen Jeffreys examines the limitations of conventional dramatic structures in contemporary theater and advocates for experimental approaches that challenge traditional norms. He critiques the formulaic tendencies prevalent in Hollywood films and encourages playwrights to explore innovative forms that can reveal deeper insights into characters and societal issues.

Jeffreys begins by advising that the use of structural experimentation should align with the content of the play. While experimenting with form, playwrights may sometimes find that a straightforward narrative is more effective in communicating unique themes. He cites the works of playwrights like David Mamet as examples of how clear storytelling can enhance a compelling perspective.

The chapter dives into various ways to disrupt time and place in narrative, offering specific frameworks for playwrights to consider:

- 1. Disrupted Time, Closed Place:** Plays utilizing this structure can prompt personal reflection in the audience through nonlinear storytelling, exemplified by Louise Page's "Salonika."
- 2. Disrupted Time, Open Place:** Caryl Churchill's "Top Girls" employs



simultaneous dialogues among historical female figures, skillfully weaving complex themes of gender and society, challenging linear narratives.

3. Disrupted Time, Simultaneous Place: Sheila Yeger's "Self Portrait"

shifts between timelines, blending contemporary events with vignettes from artist Gwen John's life to explore character development deeply.

4. Open Time, Simultaneous Place: "Good" by C. P. Taylor portrays a character's moral unraveling within the Nazi regime, interspersing various relationships and illustrating the internal conflict vividly.

Moreover, Jeffreys introduces innovative narrative techniques that push the boundaries of storytelling. Techniques like minimalism foster reflective contemplation by focusing on the aftermath of events. Conversely, inundation inundates audiences with information, complicating their engagement with the narrative. He also advocates for interruptive devices, as seen in Caryl Churchill's "Heart's Desire," and repetition that underscores the cyclical nature of existence, akin to Samuel Beckett's "Play."

Additionally, appropriating familiar social rituals can serve as a narrative framework that guides audience expectations while leaving room for reinterpretation.

As Jeffreys explores character depictions, he emphasizes subverting conventional arcs to represent fragmented identities. For instance, Martin



Crimp's "Attempts on Her Life" complicates the notion of identity through a character's ongoing narrative manipulation, prompting viewers to reevaluate their understanding of self.

Finally, Jeffreys asserts that theater reflects intricate relationships among the world, the artist, and the audience. He argues for innovative methods that engage audiences as active participants, urging them to critically consider their roles within the theatrical experience.

In conclusion, Jeffreys posits that the power of dramatic expression lies in the willingness to experiment with structure and narrative. By embracing unconventional techniques, playwrights can forge compelling and dynamic experiences that provoke thoughtful engagement and break free from the constraints of traditional storytelling.

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Chapter 4: I. The Three Dimensions of Character

Summary of Chapter 4: Characterisation

Introduction to Characterisation

In this chapter, we explore the nuanced art of characterisation in playwriting. Playwrights often navigate the fine line between basing characters on real-life personalities and creating fictional ones. This duality highlights the intersection of psychological insight - often linked to intuitive, right-brained thinking - with structured, left-brained considerations. The trend of crafting characters based on real people is especially prevalent in film, yet theatre allows for greater creative invention and ambiguity.

Character Complexity and Actor Interpretation

Characterisation is not solely the playwright's domain; it is a collaborative endeavor where actors infuse roles with their unique interpretations. A single character can manifest in various ways across different productions, and the text encourages playwrights to celebrate this diversity in portrayals rather than resist it. This collaborative nature enriches the theatrical experience and invites audiences to engage with characters on multiple levels.



The Three Dimensions of Character

Understanding characters requires examining three critical dimensions:

- 1. Character's Story:** This encompasses a character's journey, backstory, and future implications. A comprehensive backstory—made up of pivotal past events—provides essential context, while current desires propel their actions throughout the play. Speculation about their future potential also enhances understanding.
- 2. Character's Breadth:** This refers to the observable traits that define characters—such as their physical appearance, habits, and idiosyncrasies. While these surface characteristics help shape identity, they should not limit the character's depth or complexity.
- 3. Character's Depth:** Here, we delve into the deeper motivations and truths that drive characters. Pressure and conflict reveal true selves, and the text criticizes overly simplistic portrayals by contrasting superficial traits with profound inner truths.

Engaging with Characterisation

A delicate balance between predictability and surprise is essential in character development. Examples from classic literature and theatre

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illustrate how a character's changing motivations as they pursue their goals create compelling narrative arcs.

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Chapter 5 Summary: II. Working with Character

Summary of Chapter 5: Playwriting

Chapter 5 delves into the intricacies of character development and motivation in playwriting, emphasizing how characters act as the driving force behind the narrative. It highlights the varying degrees of self-awareness characters possess regarding their objectives; for instance, Iago from Shakespeare embodies a clear recognition of his malevolent intentions, while Hedda Gabler's actions stem from unconscious desires. This chapter asserts that as the plot unfolds, characters might experience significant shifts in their motivations—often triggered by pivotal moments known as 'inciting incidents'—which clarify or transform their goals.

Character arcs are a central focus, with major characters typically following a three-part structure—introduction, conflict, and resolution—while minor characters usually navigate simpler two-part narratives. The responses of characters, whether they meet their goals or face failure, are essential in advancing the story and engaging the audience. Writers are encouraged to carefully consider the journey of each character, ensuring their desires are multi-dimensional and their conflicts with others enrich the overall narrative.

Furthermore, the chapter discusses the outcomes of characters' pursuits,

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suggesting that modern playwrights often prefer ambiguous conclusions that linger on thematic implications rather than offering tidy resolutions. This complexity invites deeper contemplation from the audience.

To create compelling characters, playwrights are urged to balance surface traits with deeper psychological layers. By drawing inspiration from real-life behaviors and nuances, writers can avoid character oversimplification and maintain an element of mystery about their motivations.

The relationships between characters are equally vital, as these connections reveal different aspects of their personalities. Tools like character grids can assist in mapping and deepening these interactions, ensuring that even minor characters are robustly developed.

Writers can also utilize personality frameworks, such as Jung's Compass and the Myers-Briggs typology, to devise varied character profiles that interact in meaningful ways. This understanding of personality dynamics fosters richer storytelling.

Ultimately, the chapter emphasizes that effective character development is a multifaceted endeavor, demanding careful thought about motivations, arcs, and relationships. By engaging with the complexities of their characters and employing diverse techniques, playwrights can create narratives that resonate powerfully with audiences.

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Chapter 6 Summary: I. Six Kinds of Logic

Six Kinds of Logic

Introduction

In this chapter, Stephen Jeffreys recounts an influential moment from his early career when renowned playwright Peggy Ramsay provided him with valuable guidance. She emphasized the importance of using both creative and analytical thinking, suggesting that a balance between imagination and logic is essential for effective playwriting.

Types of Logic in Playwriting

Jeffreys identifies six types of logic that are crucial for crafting compelling theater. These types are grouped into three pairs, each offering a unique approach to narrative construction:

1. Deductive and Inductive Logic

- **Deductive Logic:** This method begins with a definitive thesis or guiding idea, ensuring that the plot remains structured and cohesive. However, this can sometimes reduce characters to mere vessels for the



thesis, leading to a lack of depth. An example can be found in George Bernard Shaw's "The Devil's Disciple," where characters serve primarily to support a central argument.

- **Inductive Logic:** In contrast, inductive logic starts with small incidents that gradually weave into a larger narrative. While this approach encourages creativity and originality, it can risk aimlessness without a clear guiding direction.

2. Causal and Off-the-wall Logic

- **Causal Logic:** This type emphasizes the relationships between cause and effect in storytelling, which is vital for maintaining coherence.

However, too heavy a reliance on causality can stifle creative freedom.

David Mamet, a significant voice in contemporary theater, advises playwrights to focus on critical actions that drive the plot forward.

- **Off-the-wall Logic:** This style incorporates unexpected elements and randomness, allowing for surprising twists that can captivate the audience.

However, overuse of this approach may lead to a disjointed narrative.

Playwright Eugène Ionesco exemplifies this with his absurdist works that defy conventional storytelling norms.

3. Dialectical and Poetic Logic

- **Dialectical Logic:** This approach highlights the interplay of



contrasting ideas, such as thesis and antithesis, fostering a deeper understanding and resolution through synthesis. It is particularly effective for exploring political and ethical themes in plays, encouraging writers to thoughtfully engage with differing perspectives.

- **Poetic Logic:** Here, the focus is on metaphorical language and structural elements that enrich the narrative's thematic depth. This method enhances emotional engagement through vivid imagery and symbolic connections, as seen in Henrik Ibsen's works, which often blend realistic portrayals with aspirational themes.

Conclusion

Jeffreys encourages writers to reflect on their predominant logical styles while embracing a diverse array of approaches. By experimenting with different modes of thinking, playwrights can create more balanced and dynamic narratives. This playful exploration of logic can yield richer creative output and allow for deeper thematic investigation within their works.



Chapter 7 Summary: II. Dialogue

In this chapter, the author delves into the nuanced art of writing dialogue, challenging the notion that it is purely an innate talent. The text provides insight into various dialogue styles and techniques, with the aim of helping playwrights cultivate their unique voice. Four primary types of dialogue are examined: ordinary speech, character-based dialogue, the authorial voice, and neutral dialogue, each serving distinct purposes in storytelling.

Ordinary Speech is characterized by its unpredictability, reflecting how people communicate in real life. Drawing from historical context, such as the Watergate tapes featuring President Nixon and his aide Haldeman, the chapter identifies key elements of everyday conversation: non-sequiturs that disrupt logical flow, false starts where speakers hesitate, frequent interruptions, self-corrections, the use of private codes, and the likelihood of grammatical errors. By incorporating these features, playwrights can create more authentic and relatable characters, making their dialogue resonate with audiences.

Character-based Dialogue emphasizes the individuality of characters through their speech. This technique allows for the exploration of characters' psychological profiles and social histories. Inspired by Willy Russell's **Educating Rita**, the dialogue between Rita and Frank exemplifies how word choice and sentence construction reveal their



educational disparities and enrich the dynamic between them. A well-crafted dialogue imbued with character-specific language enhances both character development and plot progression.

In contrast, the **Authorial Voice** presents a cohesive style where dialogue reflects a unified tone rather than distinct character identities. Joe Orton's **Loot** serves as a prime example, where wit and satire dominate the exchanges, showcasing the author's unique voice over individual character differentiation. This technique reveals the importance of language as a tool for comedy and critique, focusing on the overarching narrative rather than individual backstories.

Neutral Dialogue offers a balanced approach, where individual character voices blend subtly with the playwright's style to emphasize the dramatic situation. Caryl Churchill's **Light Shining in Buckinghamshire** demonstrates this method, with dialogue that prioritizes situational impact over character complexity. This minimalist approach underscores how simplicity can yield powerful moments, enhancing the dramatic tension without overshadowing the narrative.

To further refine the craft of dialogue writing, the chapter introduces **Grice's Conversational Maxims**, which outline principles for effective communication: Quantity (providing sufficient information), Quality (avoiding false statements), Relevance (staying on topic), and Manner (being



clear and orderly). By understanding and occasionally subverting these maxims, playwrights can create dynamic dialogue that engages and captivates audiences.

Additionally, the chapter highlights **Max Stafford-Clark's technique** of assigning specific actions to dialogue. By designating transitive verbs (such as "Calms" or "Teaches") to each line, writers can clarify intentions, guide performances, and enhance character interactions. This strategy not only aids in pre-writing but also enriches existing dialogue, bringing fresh perspectives and depth to scene development. Ultimately, by exploring varied actions, playwrights can uncover new dimensions in their characters and narratives, making the dialogue a vital component of their storytelling toolkit.

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Chapter 8: III. Writing Scenes

Summary of Chapter 8: Dialogue and Action in Playwriting

Chapter 8 explores the intricate relationship between dialogue, character actions, and the structure of scenes in theatre, highlighting how these elements interact to convey meaning and engage audiences effectively.

Grice's Maxims and Dramatic Dialogue

The chapter begins by discussing Grice's Maxims, which are rules for effective communication that stress clarity and brevity. However, in the realm of theatre, particularly in classical works like Shakespeare's **Hamlet**, breaking these maxims can lead to richer dialogue. Ambiguity can evoke suspense and tension, illustrated by a notable case of misunderstood language leading to dire consequences. This sets the stage for the chapter's exploration of how dramatic dialogue, while often convoluted, can reflect deeper themes, such as the confusion seen in Florian Zeller's **The Father**, where a character's dementia is expressed through fragmented and unclear conversations.

Enhancing Dialogue Through Action

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The author introduces Max Stafford-Clark's technique of focusing on 'actions'—transitive verbs that clarify a character's intentions in each line of dialogue. This method serves to enhance performance clarity, as writers are encouraged to anchor their dialogue in the characters' desires, allowing conversations to flow naturally from character motivations. By prioritizing these actions, playwrights can identify repetitive behaviors and experiment with unconventional responses, thereby enriching character interactions and dynamics.

Scenes as Units of Change

Scenes are defined as the fundamental units of dramatic action that reflect change. The chapter stresses that this change does not solely pertain to dramatic shifts; even subtle alterations can drive a narrative forward. Through technical exercises, the chapter emphasizes visual and structural elements in scene writing, using one-minute scenes to illustrate varying pacing and timing, showing how each element contributes to audience engagement.

Left-Brain and Right-Brain Approaches

A masterclass exercise encourages participants to engage their analytical and creative faculties. In a left-brain exercise, focus is placed on the schematic representation of scenes, promoting the idea of displaying emotions through



actions rather than relying solely on dialogue. By this means, playwrights can manipulate the rhythm of their plays, enriching the audience's emotional experience.

In contrast, the right-brain approach involves spontaneity, demonstrated through improvisational tasks where characters and settings evolve from random selections related to personality archetypes based on card suits. This playful exercise culminates in a scene aboard a ferry, showcasing complex interactions between two characters, Martin and Ange. This underscores the chapter's theme of embracing randomness to breathe life into characters and narratives, encouraging emerging playwrights to welcome unpredictability in their creative processes.

Scene Creation Exercise

The chapter concludes with a practical exercise to stimulate creativity in scene development. Writers are prompted to randomly select settings and character traits, guiding them through structured steps to craft engaging dialogue. This fusion of technical skill and creative freedom aims to enhance playwrights' abilities, inviting them to explore the possibilities within their craft while remaining grounded in effective writing techniques.

By weaving together these elements, Chapter 8 provides a comprehensive guide for aspiring playwrights to refine their dialogue and scene



construction, emphasizing the importance of character intentions, emotional dynamics, and engagement strategies in theatrical writing.

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Chapter 9 Summary: IV. Subtext

Summary of Chapter 9 from "Playwriting" by Stephen Jeffreys

In Chapter 9, Stephen Jeffreys delves into the intricacies of dialogue and scene writing, emphasizing the crucial role of conversational principles, particularly Grice's maxims—clarity, brevity, and order. He illustrates how subverting these guidelines, akin to the character dynamics found in Shakespeare's "Hamlet," can amplify dramatic expression, creating engaging and often unpredictable interactions among characters.

Jeffreys introduces a practical technique inspired by renowned theatre director Max Stafford-Clark, known as the “actions” method. This approach involves assigning a transitive verb to each line of dialogue to clarify a character's goal or intention—verbs like "Calms," "Goads," or "Teaches" direct the action of the dialogue. By grounding conversations in character objectives, writers can craft richer, more purposeful exchanges, particularly beneficial when the narrative's direction is still evolving.

The chapter further distinguishes between two approaches to scene writing: the left-brain, analytical strategy focusing on structured visual composition and rhythmic flow, and the right-brain, creative method that embraces improvisation and spontaneous brainstorming. Through exercises like

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creating one-minute scenes, Jeffreys encourages writers to explore the shape and dynamic placement of actions, fostering both clarity and creativity in their scenes.

In his guide to character development, Jeffreys proposes a unique exercise using playing cards to randomly assign personality traits, which promotes organic character creation. Participants in a collaborative session crafted distinct characters engaged in a scene aboard a ferry, organically unveiling tensions and relationships through character interactions.

The chapter further stresses the significance of subtext in playwriting, categorizing it into three dimensions: intellectual (the characters' intentions), emotional (their feelings), and physical (sensory experiences). This layered understanding allows dialogue and actions to convey depth, enriching character interactions and enhancing audience engagement. Jeffreys cites Anton Chekhov to exemplify how subtext can underlyingly drive character dynamics without overtly revealing intentions.

To effectively develop subtext and scene intricacies, Jeffreys encourages practical exercises where writers first explore various layers of subtext informally. This practice not only sharpens clarity and impact in dialogue but also bolsters the playwright's capacity to depict nuanced character interactions.



By seamlessly blending structured techniques with improvisational exercises, this chapter acts as a comprehensive resource for writers seeking to elevate their craft and deepen audience engagement in their plays.

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Chapter 10 Summary: I. Types of Play

Chapter 10: Choosing Your Material

In this chapter, we explore the intricate process of selecting themes and topics for plays, emphasizing the significance of personal and creative motivations in playwriting. Since crafting a play is a labor-intensive journey, understanding the rationale behind thematic choices is crucial for achieving success in this art form.

Ideas vs. Evaluation

While generating ideas might come naturally to many writers, the real challenge lies in evaluating their potential. Writers must exercise caution to avoid investing too much time and energy into concepts that may not be fruitful. This critical assessment is key to refining one's direction and ensuring the viability of a chosen theme.

Foxes and Hedgehogs: Two Types of Writers

Drawing on Isaiah Berlin's famous analogy, the chapter distinguishes between two types of writers. Foxes are versatile and eclectic, exploring a wide range of subjects, which can make their voice less consistent. In



contrast, Hedgehogs are focused and often center their work around a singular theme. While their work can risk being repetitive, it often leads to profound insights. Writers must identify where they fit within this spectrum to better understand their creative approach.

Types of Plays

The chapter presents an array of play types designed to inspire new material for playwrights. These include:

1. **Autobiographical Plays:** Drawn from the writer's own experiences, these plays reflect broader societal themes and often resonate with contemporary issues.
2. **Zeitgeist Plays:** Rapidly composed, these works capture the essence of current societal trends, encapsulating collective experiences.
3. **Parallel-world Plays:** These narratives utilize personal memories set in imaginative contexts, allowing for creative expression without direct confrontation of personal truths.
4. **Specific-experience Plays:** Rooted in unique personal backgrounds, these plays present distinct and compelling stories.
5. **Researched Plays:** Requiring thorough investigation into unexplored topics, these plays are enhanced by authenticity, often incorporating observational research and specific formats like microcosm plays, verbatim plays, and workshop plays.



6. **Historical Plays:** These link past events to present themes, using historical figures to enrich the narrative with depth and relevance.
7. **Adaptations:** This type involves transforming other literary forms, such as novels, into plays, thereby reshaping existing narratives for the stage.
8. **Form-led Plays:** By experimenting with various structural forms, playwrights can discover fresh and innovative creative outputs.
9. **Specific-commission Plays:** These respond to requests from theatre companies for particular themes while ensuring that the playwright's unique voice is maintained.

Conclusion

In conclusion, aspiring playwrights are encouraged to reflect on their writing processes and the diverse sources of material available to them. By recognizing their personal inclinations, leveraging research, engaging with societal trends, and experimenting with different formats, writers can cultivate growth and innovation in their craft. This chapter serves as an essential guide, urging playwrights to consider both their creative impulses and the many avenues through which they can develop engaging theatrical works.



Chapter 11 Summary: II. The Nine Stories

Summary of Chapter 11 from "Playwriting" by Stephen Jeffreys

In this chapter, Stephen Jeffreys navigates the intricacies of crafting staged historical biographies, underscoring the need to move beyond traditional narratives that trace a character's life from birth to death. Instead, he advocates for a focused thematic approach that highlights key moments, citing examples like Edward Bond's **Bingo** and Brecht's **Life of Galileo** to illustrate how specific events can capture the essence of a character's journey.

Jeffreys encourages playwrights to delve into lesser-known historical contexts, such as the Luddite uprisings or China's Cultural Revolution, allowing invented characters to illuminate contemporary issues through a historical lens. By transposing modern themes into past settings, playwrights can offer insights into current political dynamics.

The chapter also addresses play adaptations, pointing out that condensing narratives from novels can evoke strong emotional responses. Adaptations of flawed novels often reveal deeper complexities, providing a rich foundation for theatrical work. Furthermore, incorporating a diverse cast and vibrant visual elements can significantly enhance the audience's experience.

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As playwrights might face creative block, Jeffreys suggests that exploring new forms and structures—such as multi-act plays or unconventional character relationships—can rejuvenate their writing process.

Additionally, the chapter explores the dynamics of specific-commission plays, stressing the delicate balance between adhering to a playwright's vision and fulfilling the expectations of commissioning bodies. Successful collaboration requires staying aligned with one's artistic voice to create impactful work.

Jeffreys introduces the concept of "The Nine Stories," proposing that theatrical narratives often conform to nine archetypal categories, each characterized by unique conflicts and resolutions. These archetypes serve as foundational storytelling tools for playwrights:

1. **The Love Story:** Centers on romantic conflicts and obstacles.
2. **The Orpheus Story:** Revolves around loss and the pursuit of something precious.
3. **The Rival Siblings:** Investigates rivalry dynamics, either literal or figurative.
4. **The Spider and the Fly:** Highlights entrapment, common in detective narratives.



5. **The Love Triangle:** Examines the complexities of intertwined romantic relationships.
6. **The Fatal Flaw:** Features characters whose vulnerabilities lead to their ruin.
7. **Cinderella:** Celebrates the victory of good over evil.
8. **The Hero Who Keeps Going (Hercules):** Explores sustained struggles against adversity.
9. **The Debt That Must Be Paid (Faust):** Questions the moral consequences of sacrifices and agreements.

Jeffreys also touches on the innovative potential of inverting these archetypes and combining them, which can lead to fresh explorations of themes and character relationships.

In conclusion, the chapter inspires playwrights to embrace history, adapt existing works, and creatively re-imagine traditional narratives. By doing so, they can craft new and engaging stories that resonate with audiences in the theatre.



Chapter 12: Redrafting

In the realm of playwriting, the journey from a first draft to a polished final piece can be daunting, particularly during the redrafting phase. This process is marked by several key challenges and strategies that can significantly enhance the quality of a script.

The Challenge of the Second Draft

Redrafting is a critical, yet often difficult, undertaking for playwrights. Once the first draft is complete, it is advisable to step away from the work for two to three weeks. This break allows the writer to return with fresh eyes, akin to experiencing a live performance. This perspective helps in identifying weaknesses in the script more readily. As you re-read, it's useful to mark problem areas with a pencil, highlighting the aspects that need attention.

The Pros and Cons of Computers

The use of computers in the writing process presents both advantages and disadvantages. While they may tempt writers into incessant tweaking of dialogue—often leading to time wastage without meaningful improvement—computers also facilitate targeted revisions. It's important for writers to avoid blanket edits and instead develop a focused list of specific issues to address, allowing for a more systematic approach.



Analyzing Movement and Relationships

To enhance physical interest in a play or to deepen character relationships, playwrights can employ various exercises. One effective method involves diagramming character interactions, which helps visualize their dynamics and evolution throughout the story. This analysis can uncover complexities that may not have been evident in the initial draft.

The Importance of Fine-Tuning

Drawing from extensive experience at the Royal Court Theatre, the author emphasizes that the distinction between a successful play and an unsuccessful one can often be minimal. A thoughtful rewrite should strive to bolster the work, enhancing its strengths while diligently seeking areas for improvement. This process requires a discerning eye to preserve what resonates while addressing what falls flat.

Getting Feedback on Your Draft

Finally, obtaining feedback is an invaluable part of the revision process. Engaging with a trusted reader can illuminate what aspects of the script are effective and what may require further refinement. Over time, developing an instinct for quality writing comes from consistent practice and reflective



evaluation of one's work.

In summary, redrafting is an essential, albeit challenging, phase of playwriting that benefits from strategic breaks, targeted revisions, and constructive feedback, all of which contribute to crafting a more compelling and dynamic script.

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Chapter 13 Summary: Submitting Drafts

In these chapters, the author delves into the intricacies of submitting drafts for theatre and film, highlighting the varying expectations and the necessity of timing and originality in each medium.

The discussion begins with the significance of optimal timing and quality in theatre script submissions. Writers are urged to refrain from submitting drafts until they feel the work is polished and represents their best effort. Early submissions can be detrimental, as they risk unfavorable comparisons with later, more refined drafts, which may dampen the enthusiasm of script-readers, who are often the gatekeepers to production opportunities.

Transitioning to the perspective of script-readers, the text illustrates how these readers form impressions swiftly—often within the first few pages. They prioritize originality and unique perspectives over technical finesse. The author references Sarah Kane's provocative play, "Blasted," as a prime example of a work that stood out due to its originality, encouraging writers to trust their instincts and cultivate their distinct voices rather than mimicking others.

In a contrasting approach to film script submissions, the author points out that first drafts are more readily accepted in this realm. Here, scripts function as negotiation tools, and writers are reminded that excessive concern for



perfection at this stage is unnecessary. The nature of film development often involves substantial alterations through feedback and collaborative discussions.

The overarching message emphasizes the critical role of quality in theatre script submissions while recognizing the more flexible expectations in film. Writers are encouraged to hone their unique voices and present their best work, ensuring they captivate audiences in both mediums effectively.

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Chapter 14 Summary: Lunch Theory

Lunch Theory: A Strategic Guide for Playwrights

Introduction to Lunch Theory

At its core, "lunch theory," or perhaps more aptly termed "coffee theory," emphasizes the significance of strategic communication for playwrights during meetings with potential commissioners. These interactions can be pivotal in securing commissions that provide future stability for the artist.

Strategic Approach

When invited for lunch or coffee by someone interested in commissioning a play, having a clear strategy is essential:

1. Prepare Multiple Ideas: It's important to have at least three distinct ideas ready to present. This showcases your versatility and preparedness as a playwright.

2. Order and Presentation of Ideas:

- **First Idea:** Start with a sacrificial idea—this is a weaker concept you

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are willing to lose. Presenting this first allows you to set a low bar.

- **Second Idea:** Next, present your favorite concept, the one you are truly passionate about. This is your chance to captivate the commissioner and garner genuine interest.

- **Third Idea:** Always have a backup ready. If your initial ideas fail to resonate, be prepared to improvise and offer a third suggestion.

Dining Considerations

When dining with potential commissioners, opt for dishes that are easy to handle, such as soup or stew. Avoid complex items, like lobster, which can create awkward moments—perhaps reminiscent of a past unfortunate experience that taught the importance of choosing manageable food.

Conclusion

Successfully navigating the dynamics of lunch meetings is crucial for playwrights looking to secure commissions. With strategic idea presentation and thoughtful dining choices, playwrights can enhance their chances of leaving a lasting impression that could lead to future opportunities.



Chapter 15 Summary: The Four Criteria for Accepting Commissions

In the chapter titled "**The Four Criteria for Accepting Commissions**," essential guidelines for selecting writing projects are outlined. Aspiring writers are encouraged to evaluate each potential commission through four critical questions:

1. Does the project align with my own interests and message?
2. Is there a financial incentive?
3. Will it provide enjoyment during the creative process?
4. Could it enhance my professional reputation?

If the answers to all these questions are negative, it is advised to decline the offer. This framework helps writers manage their time effectively, as every commission requires attention that could otherwise be spent on personal projects that might better reflect their individual voice or goals.

In "**Starting Your Career**," the chapter stresses the importance of nurturing one's personal writing style during the initial phases of a career, where opportunities may be scarce. Writers are encouraged to pursue projects they feel passionate about, which aids in developing a distinct voice that can resonate with readers and attract future opportunities.

As writing careers develop, the chapter "**Avoiding Overcommitment**" war



ns against the common pitfall of overwhelming oneself with too many simultaneous commissions. Early successes can create a false sense of security regarding workload management, leading to pressure and eventual burnout. Writers must remain vigilant about their limits to maintain their creativity and enjoyment of writing.

The chapter "**Challenges of Commissions**" addresses the dual-edged nature of commissioned work. While they provide financial stability, they can evolve into sources of stress if expectations become unrealistic. Writers are advised to manage these expectations by keeping ideas under wraps and downplaying their progress to alleviate pressure. This approach allows them to maintain a healthier relationship with their work and creativity.

Overall, these chapters emphasize the balance between financial needs and personal fulfillment, guiding writers to navigate the complexities of commission work while remaining true to their artistic integrity.



Chapter 16: Abi Morgan

Summary of Chapter 16: Tribute to Stephen Jeffreys

In the early 1990s, the author encountered playwright Stephen Jeffreys at the Royal Court bar, where he was part of a course titled ‘Creative Theatre – New Writing.’ This setting proved fortuitous, as Stephen stumbled upon one of the author’s early, forgotten plays, prompting an unexpected reading that would ignite their professional relationship.

During the author's year under Stephen's mentorship, the lessons imparted were profound. Stephen’s teaching style was notable for its depth and insight, setting a high bar for creative writing education. His distinctive presence, marked by long coats and an unconventional hairstyle, added to his artistic identity, making him not just a mentor but a vibrant figure in the playwright community.

Stephen Jeffreys was celebrated for his imaginative storytelling and originality, exemplified in his notable plays, such as "Valued Friends," "The Clink," "The Libertine," and "A Going Concern." Each work highlighted his innovative spirit and versatility, ensuring that his contributions to theater resonate well beyond his lifetime.

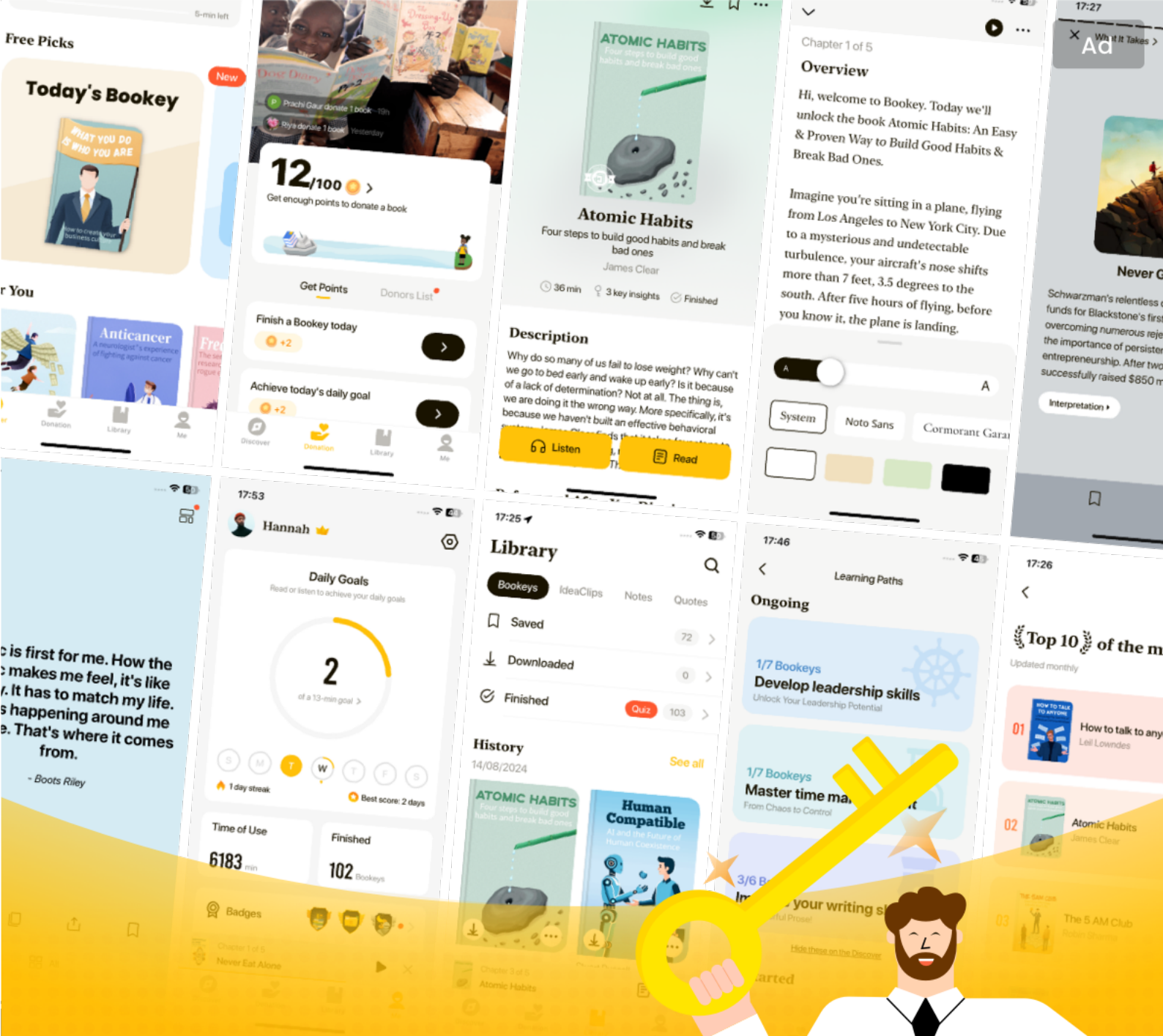


The author reflects on Stephen's remarkable mentorship, emphasizing his generosity and passion for nurturing emerging writers. Stephen was more than a teacher; he served as a champion, fostering a supportive environment for writers to find their unique voices. This sense of encouragement was echoed by peers, who also recognized Stephen's lasting influence and kindness, cementing his legacy as a beloved figure in their artistic journeys.

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Chapter 17 Summary: I. Fifteen Dos and Don'ts of Playwriting

Fifteen Dos and Don'ts of Playwriting: A Comprehensive Overview

In the realm of playwriting, understanding the fundamental elements of storytelling is essential to crafting a compelling and engaging narrative. Below are the key principles that aspiring playwrights should consider to refine their craft and produce impactful works.

- 1. Starting Point:** A common pitfall in writing plays is beginning too late in the narrative, often around what feels like "page 30." This implies that key foundational elements have not been established, leaving the audience disoriented and disconnected from the story.
- 2. Story Focus:** Playwrights must be vigilant in selecting the right story to tell. Many works either misidentify the heart of their narrative or fail to present the strongest version, diluting emotional impact and thematic resonance.
- 3. Character Development:** A well-crafted character arc is crucial for depth and engagement. However, many plays leave characters on incomplete journeys, resulting in arcs that feel unresolved and lack



emotional payoff.

4. Protagonist Visibility: It's vital to establish a clear protagonist among the cast. Too many characters vying for attention can lead to muddled narratives, making it difficult for the audience to connect with the central figure.

5. Exposition Integration: Effective storytelling weaves exposition seamlessly into action, maintaining engagement. Overly obvious exposition can disrupt flow and pull audiences out of the narrative.

6. Off-stage Action: While off-stage events can serve a narrative purpose, excessive reliance on them diminishes the visual engagement of the audience. The thrill of seeing events unfold should largely occur on stage.

7. Use of Symbols: Symbols and metaphors are potent tools for enriching a script, but they should be purposefully integrated rather than haphazardly scattered throughout the play.

8. Raising Stakes: Successful plays elevate stakes through character journeys without resorting to unrealistic extremes. Writers should avoid two mistakes: not raising stakes at all and resorting to melodrama through excessive tension.



9. **Conclusions:** An effective play requires a satisfying conclusion. While real life may be open-ended, a narrative should provide closure so that the audience feels a sense of completion.

10. **Dialogue vs. Conversation:** Dialogue in plays should serve a specific purpose or convey essential information. Superfluous conversation can detract from the script's intent and emotional weight.

11. **Plot Development:** Progression is crucial in plot development. Beware of plays that linger on set-up without advancing the narrative through character actions and developments.

12. **Plausibility:** Striking the right balance between surprise and recognition can create fulfilling outcomes. A successful play surprises the audience while still feeling inevitable and believable.

13. **Visual Action:** Finally, recognizing the visual nature of theater is essential. Dialogue alone can't convey the entirety of the story; action and movement add layers of meaning that enhance the audience's experience.

By adhering to these principles, playwrights can craft narratives that are not only coherent but also resonate powerfully with audiences, enriching the theatrical experience for all involved.



Chapter 18 Summary: III. Types of Chorus

In "The Art of War," the incorporation of a chorus serves to enhance storytelling by providing various dimensions to the narrative. By exploring different types of choruses and their functions, the play deepens its exploration of Sun Tzu's philosophies on strategy and conflict. Here's a concise summary of how each type of chorus can contribute to the overall message and atmosphere of the play:

1. **The Straight Chorus:** This type directly supports and amplifies Sun Tzu's principles, reinforcing his teachings on warfare and strategy for the audience.
2. **The Dissenting Chorus:** Here, one or more members present opposing views, challenging the dominant narrative. This encourages critical thought and adds complexity to Sun Tzu's ideas.
3. **The Morphing Chorus:** Chorus members take on specific roles from the play, transforming into characters to vividly illustrate key points and themes. This dynamic shift brings the teachings to life.
4. **The Interactive Chorus:** This engaging form allows the chorus to directly interact with the characters, eliciting responses and creating a dialogue that enhances the drama.



5. **The Split Chorus:** By dividing into two factions, the chorus enacts debates, showcasing contrasting perspectives on strategy, thereby enriching the narrative tension.

6. **The Commenting Chorus:** Acting as an omniscient observer, this chorus provides commentary on the actions and dialogues within the play. Their insights deliver information that characters may overlook.

7. **The Ironic Chorus:** This form plays with irony by delivering Sun Tzu's proclamations while subtly expressing disagreement through body language and tone, highlighting the complexity of the ideas.

8. **The Transforming Chorus** This chorus shifts into a set of characters representing broader themes, such as loyalty or betrayal, then seamlessly reverts, maintaining the thread of narrative while exemplifying the emotional resonance.

9. **The Demonstrating Chorus:** As a cohesive entity, this chorus embodies various roles or voices, effectively illustrating Sun Tzu's concepts through collective performance, drawing connections to the principles from the text.

10. **The Contrapuntal Chorus:** In this type, chorus members speak in



parallel to the main action, sometimes echoing or contrasting character lines, adding layers of meaning and enhancing the thematic depth.

11. The Role-Playing Chorus: Adopting the collective persona of retired military generals or strategists, this chorus imparts wisdom gained from experience, contextualizing Sun Tzu's teachings within a historical framework.

12. The Inner-Voice Chorus This chorus gives voice to the internal thoughts and struggles of characters, offering audiences a deeper understanding of their motivations and conflicts, thus bridging internal and external narratives.

Together, these diverse types of chorus enrich "The Art of War," allowing for a multifaceted interpretation of Sun Tzu's strategies while also providing commentary on the nature of conflict and human experience. They transform the play into a resonant exploration of wisdom, dissent, and the complexity of war, engaging the audience on multiple levels.



Chapter 19 Summary: IV. Recommended Reading

The recommended reading list for aspiring playwrights and those interested in the craft of storytelling offers a diverse range of resources spanning practical guides, theoretical insights, anthologies, and personal narratives, all designed to deepen understanding and enhance skills.

Playwriting and Craftsmanship

In exploring the fundamentals of playwriting, notable texts include William Archer's **Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship**, which provides timeless advice despite its old-fashioned perspective. Aristotle's seminal work, **Poetics**, remains a cornerstone of dramatic theory, dissecting the components that make plays effective and enduring. Alan Ayckbourn's **The Crafty Art of Playmaking** delivers practical tips, helping writers navigate the intricacies of scriptwriting.

Storytelling and Plot

For those keen to grasp the essence of storytelling, Christopher Booker's **The Seven Basic Plots** offers an intriguing yet sometimes controversial exploration of narrative archetypes. Joseph Campbell's **The Hero with a Thousand Faces** delves into mythological structures and the universal themes found in heroes' journeys, enriching the understanding of character development and plotline.

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Anthologies and Collections

Collections such as **Playwrights on Playwriting**, edited by Toby Cole, feature contributions from renowned playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Eugène Ionesco, offering a myriad of perspectives on the craft. Similarly, **Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting** captures voices of female playwrights, providing invaluable insights into their unique methodologies and experiences in a traditionally male-dominated field.

Theoretical and Analytical Texts

Theoretical frameworks are explored through Lajos Egri's **The Art of Dramatic Writing**, which emphasizes dialectical reasoning as central to narrative construction. Manfred Pfister's **Theory and Analysis of Drama** provides a comprehensive academic insight, particularly useful for students and scholars.

Guides and Helpful Resources

For practical application, resources like **Actions: The Actors' Thesaurus**, by Marina Caldarone and Maggie Lloyd-Williams, are essential for understanding character actions in performance. Jeffrey Hatcher's **The Art and Craft of Playwriting** combines both conventional techniques and practical advice, while Robert McKee's **Story** is lauded as a foundational text in screenwriting that is equally relevant for playwrights. Jeffrey Sweet's **The Dramatist's Toolkit** rounds out this category, offering essential insights into the playwright's process.

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Explorations of Theatre and Character

Ronald Hayman's **How to Read a Play** presents a clear and practical guide for analyzing scripts, while Christopher Vogler's **The Writer's Journey** applies Campbell's theories to narrative structure, illuminating how mythic figures and arcs can enhance storytelling.

Personal Insights and Autobiographical Works

Autobiographical accounts, such as Arthur Miller's **Timebends**, provide an engaging glimpse into the life of a playwright, revealing personal insights that illuminate the struggles and triumphs of creating meaningful theater. Yoshi Oida's **The Invisible Actor** offers profound insights into the nuances of performance, drawing attention to the interplay between actor and character.

Miscellaneous

Additionally, resources like **The Bloomsbury Theatre Guide** and John Howard Lawson's **Theory and Technique of Playwriting** offer foundational knowledge on various theater genres and traditions. Harriet Walter's **Other People's Shoes** provides an insightful exploration of characterization, a critical aspect of playwriting.

Together, this recommended reading list serves as a comprehensive toolkit for understanding the art of playwriting and storytelling, equipping writers

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with the necessary skills to create impactful narratives that resonate with audiences.

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