Playwriting

With the Playwriting format, all text is single spaced. There are still two paragraph returns (hit **enter** twice) after each element. And, because we’ve added the visual element to the medium, we also add the visual to our description. Part of that visual element includes, naturally, movement, props designed to be seen, and the description of stage setting as well as a description of the lighting. All the other elements of a Radio Drama format are now part of your repertoire.

In this format – notice how you could work within a format. Just save your own copy of this under your own title, and leave this document as your source (in case something happens to the original)

As you look through it, you’ll see that it has all the formats needed by Stage. So, using your copy just replace what I wrote, and place your own dialogue in the dialogue section, your own character’s name in the Character Name position, and so on.

I’ll be posting some other format suggestions over the next few days – but this will give you a start.

You’ll continue to ask the same questions of this format as you did of Radio Drama:

What are the sounds?

Who are the characters?

What do they look like?

What are a few characteristics of the character you’ve created?

You’ll continue, of course, your focus on dialogue; the stage play hinges, in many ways, on what happens in dialogue.

Even where there’s no speech, there is the dialogue of movement. As an example: imagine a person all alone on stage; another person enters. The first character sees the new arrival and stalks off the stage. Elated, the new character dances. A story told in dialogue – this time in the dialogue of movement.

You’ll discover that not only what characters say to each other, but also what they don’t say to each other is vital. This paragraph has been written in the Action/Stage description format. Let’s see what happens when we move to dialogue in this format.

**Instructor**: Now, that we’re using dialogue and exploring stage movement, so imagine me pacing around. Perhaps in a forest grove? A Coastal BC winter; lots of rain – but tree cover so dense that hardly a drop reaches me.

Notice what a few simple words will do – suddenly, here you are in this forest grove – on Salt Spring Island. Listening.

If you sample the format; the free software that I mention, you’ll be able to do this. However, the keystrokes, looking after writing and at the same time remembering to save frequently and back up are only details – the writing comes first. There’s no easy answer to your questions about format except to explore. Begin – and once you begin, suddenly, things that were odd now seem familiar.

**Student:** Any hints about this initial phase?

**Instructor:** This may seem a bit unorthodox – but why not start with pen or pencil and paper? Jot down your ideas, rapidly as they occur. What do you see? What do you hear? Who are your characters? What’s their situation?

**Student:** Okay, I’ve gone away and magically done that. To you it seems I’ve only been gone a second or two. However, because I’m a student I can transcend time and space. So, I went online and read – but how to begin writing the play on the page?

**Instructor:** Look at a Stageplay or two. I’ve included a version of a One-Act play of mine, and formatted it according to one approach of how to format a Stage Play..

End of Introduction

Now, The Sample Play.

ACT 1

Scene 1

***THE CELESTIAL GUARDIAN:***

***By***

***William Gough***

***Sample 'One-Act Play' Based on the Don Austin Story***

*The curtain is open; the stage brightly and flatly lit. A hospital bed is hidden by a hospital-type screen occupying S.L. Stage Right there is a comfortable armchair. The NARRATOR, carrying a large storybook, enters from S.L. This is her stage - the inside of the story she is going to tell. She looks at its geography, moving a bedside table closer to the edge of the hospital-bed screen; adjusting the screen itself.*

*She crosses to S.R., and settles into the chair, making herself comfortable; opening the story book.*

*Enter THE GUARDIAN from the rear of the theater. He is a young man, wearing a uniform type of coat, with epaulets on the shoulders, and a bright sash around it.*

*Medals swing and clank from the coat. A camera dangles from a cord around THE GUARDIAN's neck. This is not an abrupt entrance - it's more that he drifts in.*

*The NARRATOR clicks on her reading lamp. On the lamp-click, THE GUARDIAN takes his first photograph of the audience.*

NARRATOR. Once upon a time there was a man who believed he was guarding the gates of death. He photographed groups of people and told them it was for the records of death.

*THE GUARDIAN works his way along the front row and takes another photo - no close-up work - just a group shot - no individual audience member should feel singled out.*

NARRATOR: He was ejected from stage performances, gala balls and charity benefits. He was singled out by secret service men when he attempted to photograph world leaders.

*THE GUARDIAN takes his third photo, and heads towards the stage.*

NARRATOR: As they dragged him away, he shouted that he was the Guardian for the Gates of Death, but this did nothing to change their minds.

*By this time THE GUARDIAN has arrived on center stage and stands facing the audience, addressing them directly. He is totally aware of the NARRATOR - and accepts her as a natural part of his world - the world of this story.*

GUARDIAN: I marveled at death and stood guard at its various gates.

NARRATOR: He followed people who had purchased wills, and finally bought himself the second-hand uniform of an inspector, of what he wasn't sure, but it had shiny buttons and official-looking insignia.

*THE GUARDIAN kneels to reload his camera; he checks over the materials he has gathered to help him in his quest.*

NARRATOR: People thought his was a strange career choice. He was his father's child, they said. A strange one. And they looked with pity at his house, at his mother, still in widow's black. She'd had many crosses to bear, they said - and now she had one more. He attempted to tell them all this was not a hobby - that it was a necessary calling.

GUARDIAN: (Advancing to Audience, as if they are his neighbors)Look at it this way: we have guards at all our borders and yet here is perhaps the greatest of borders, with not a soul around. So I figured there should be someone there, preferably in uniform, someone polite who, above all else, appears to be operating in an official capacity so that the traveler is impressed with his bearing.

…… **Omitted Text**

*THE GUARDIAN goes behind the screen.*

NARRATOR: But on a night of the midnight star in a winter's calm, he knows that, even in the dark, his shoes will shine. And he knows that, in the light of the moon, all clouds are candy.

And although people mocked him, small animals remained his friends, and his forms were always filled in, and his heart stayed full, overflowing when it was needed.

*The camera flashes behind the curtain. The NARRATOR closes her book, stands up.*

NARRATOR: With notebooks, camera, and forms he trundled through life, and he lived, as may you, happily ever after.

*She clicks off the reading light, and leaves stage.*

FINAL CURTAIN