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Stingray : an exploration into the art and craft of playwriting

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STINGRAY:
AN EXPLORATION INTO THE ART AND CRAFT OF PLAYWRITING

by

SAMANTHA T. LIGUORI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Theatre Studies
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Professor Earl Weaver, MFA

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ABSTRACT

Through exploration and research, I plan on combining my two degree tracks, Theatre Studies and Creative Writing, in order to create an original one-act play for production, utilizing the techniques of both fields.

My education has been lagging in playwriting, specifically. Neither Creative Writing nor Theatre Studies have any courses geared towards playwriting. Students appear to be taught everything but this aspect. I will, therefore, complete in-depth research in playwriting techniques through literature studies and one-on-one consultations with my professors in both departments.

There are many different types of writing structures and play movements. Play scripts can be written in linear, non-linear, and episodic structures. Each structure is measured by the action of a script. The action of a script is developed with each action a character completes that moves the script further along towards a conclusion. Linear structuring of a play is when a majority or all the action of a play occurs in a chronological order. The play, therefore, always will be moving forward in time without any disruptions of said timeline. In a linear play, it does not necessarily mean all the action occurs in this chronological sequence. Comparable to Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie*, the entire recollection of Tom Wingfield's story is told chronologically in linear structure, despite the fact that this story is from Tom's memory, about an event he is no longer part of at that time.

Non-linear structure occurs when the chronological timeline of a play is broken. The play's action constantly moves backwards and forwards through time. This type of play is based on the ideology of the human thought process. As humans, we may not remember the exact

order of how things are remembered; these images and events are distorted somehow by our subconscious in order to remember. Thus, a non-linear play erupts based on the infrequencies of a timeline. *Cloud Nine* by Carol Churchill is a good example of non-linear play structure.

Episodic plays are part of an even more disjointed time structure. There are both many different locations and characters in an episodic play; it is similar to a film script for that matter. Onstage, this was a revolution; how can a person be in one city and then the next shortly after? This was the rule of continuity that episodic structure broke. Bertolt Brecht did this throughout his movement in epic theatre, and traces of this structure can also be found as early back as Medieval plays.

Therein lays the problem. If there are so many different way to write a play, how is it possible to just pick one? How does one even decide? There are many texts on playwriting that all say something different. In the end, the way you format a play script is decided by the structure in which you are writing your script, whether it be linear, non-linear, and episodic structures.

This is an exploration to research possible methods of playwriting in the English language, choose a format, and create a story, ultimately forming a universally acceptable play script for a one-act production.

Through my process, I researched various elements about play structure. I researched various types of formatting options found throughout texts, and the formatting options found in different publications of plays. I also researched the options of different software programs I could use to format my play.

In regards to the show's content itself, I researched the personality disorders of my main character, John, in order to ensure I am staying accurate to the realistic expectations of the disorder. The possible disorders that might influence John included Bi-Polar disorder, Autism, Alzheimer's, or Narcissistic Personality Disorder. These disorders fit the characteristics of John and further research led me to finally adopt Autism as the end result. I researched the historical significance of the car, an all-original, 1969 Stingray Corvette Convertible, in order to allow my characters to speak accurately about their knowledge of the car. I also researched how previous playwrights have accomplished their transitions between the world of the play and a character's alternate reality. This was done in order to provide both a believable and a sly transition so the audience is left unaware until the reveal. In the final stages of this process, I polished the script for inclusion in the Theatre UCF Spring 2012 One-Act Festival (OAF).

As stated above, the process of writing a play can be taken down many different avenues; however, the format of a play script is something that remains constant throughout. Knowing the history from where plays derive and which movements created such is just as essential. W. B. Worthen's *The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama* and *Living Theatre* by Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb provide an adequate brevity into the history of theatre. The books *Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant* by Julie Jensen, *Playwriting: A practical guide* by Noel Greig, *The Art and Craft of Playwriting* by Jeffrey Hatcher, and *The Elements of Playwriting* by Louis E. Catron all provide an introduction to the structured format of the play. These books also contain sections on theory explaining how to create a storyline for a play, how to accomplish believable dialogue, and how to defeat writer's block. Jensen, Catron, and Hatcher all go one step further and take their readers through the processes of publications, copyrights, and productions.

Those sources help create the play, but during the editing phase, it is wise to acknowledge how others may study and analyze the work. David Ball's *Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays*, Rosemary Ingham's *From Page to Stage: How Theatre Designers Make Connections Between Scripts and Images*, and Cal Printer and Scott E. Walter's *Introduction to Play Analysis* aided in ensuring the translation from the script to the stage works together fluidly. By understanding how the play will be analyzed, the potential flaws with the work can be identified before it is put in front of an audience, publisher, or director. A writer needs to know why they made certain choices with both script and character. When a writer can analyze how their script can be perceived, they can create a more solid structure.

It also is useful to utilize available play scripts in order to understand the conventions through example. Works that were useful included: *Proof* by David Auburn, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, *Equus* by Peter Shaffer, *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov, *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler, *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley, and *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. *The Vagina Monologues* follows the format of episodic structure because of its inconsistencies to time and the multiple characters included in its script. *Equus*, *Proof*, and *Death of a Salesman* are examples of non-linear play structure because of the non-specific timeline the characters follow between past and present. *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *Doubt* are all examples of linear structure because a majority of their play's content was written within a specified chronological order.

DEDICATION

This thesis research project is dedicated to my committee members: Professor Earl Weaver, Professor Peter Telep, and Professor James Brown. Without whom this project would not have ever become a reality.

Jim, thank you for giving the quiet freshman a second look.

Telep, thank you for encouraging my writing along instead of tearing it down.

Earl, thank you again for giving me that extra push to make things a reality and for not giving up on me.

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I would like to express how grateful I am to those who made *Stingray* a reality. First, I would like to thank Angela Damato who will be the original director of this production. Without her, *Stingray* would not have seen its debut on the Theatre UCF stage. I would like to thank Christopher Metz who aided me along the way in both subjective and objective aspects of *Stingray's* creation. I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Krista Amico for all the late night discussions, theoretically building *Stingray* whenever I hit writer's block. I appreciate the support of Ross Black, Micheal Atteo, Roger Thatcher, Olivia Murphy, and Ashley Barbee for allowing me to hear my words for the first time. I would like to thank my original cast: Glen Lorandean, Jason Osario, Melissa Land, Will Browning, and Jorge Valentin. I also would like to extend my gratitude to Adam Lydon for his editing expertise with my thesis. Thank you to my committee, again, to whom the dedication is being offered; this project would not have been made possible if not for you. Professor Earl Weaver, had it not been for all the emails and meetings put in place, I never would have made it through this thesis. Thank you to all who have helped me with this process and allowing me this opportunity to create both project and play.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I am a double major in both Theatre Studies and Creative Writing. Through each degree program I found numerous overlaps in both subject matter and material except the obvious one: playwriting. The further I made it into each degree program, I found that both subjects danced around this field, but neither would address it outright. As a double major in both, I found this to be an odd event considering neither degree offered the overlap.

In Theatre classes, like Fundamentals of Acting or Script Analysis, I would read a play and was instructed how to read it as an actor. I was taught how to identify a character's objectives and goals. I also was taught how to interpret the playwright's intentions from the directing point of view in both Script Analysis and Directing I classes. In Creative Writing, I was taught how to read the same play from an analytical literature perspective, like in the course Theory and Tech of Literary Study, where I was required to deconstruct numerous pieces of literature, including plays, using different theories of literature like Feminist theory, Structuralism, and Psychoanalytical Criticism. Sometimes the contrast of ideas was frustrating, but, in the end, I was able to understand both sides of the same text. The one thing I noticed about both degree programs was that neither offered a playwriting course. I could learn every other element of theatre except how to write a play. I was given a wide selection of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and film script writing, but not playscript writing as part of my creative writing major.

In Spring 2011, my Junior year of college, I walked into Professor Earl Weaver's office and asked him one simple question: what do I do? I wanted to delay graduate school a bit and felt I had nothing to show future employers but good grades. His response was "so write a play." The answer was so simple and easy that I sat there dumbfounded and said, "OK." He introduced me to the Honors in the Major Program and how it would allow me to research playwriting techniques and create an original work of art, a one-act play. The resolve sounded perfect, so I moved forward with the project.

The problem that presented itself was that there appeared no formal set of guidelines on how to write a play. I knew what plays were supposed to look like, but I did not know of any rules specifying playwriting format. Initially I did a general Google search on playscript format, and I only received a theoretical background on how to create the story, but not how to format a playscript after its completion. I checked out books from the library that were summarized to contain all aspects of playwriting format, but found these to be of little help. In film scriptwriting classes, I was introduced to the book *The Scriptwriter's Bible* by David Trotter, in which he creates a breakdown of scriptwriting format. He presents both theoretical and structural elements of the scriptwriting format. No matter how hard I tried, I could not seem to locate anything like *The Scriptwriter's Bible* for playwrights. It was not until I researched the guidelines of Samuel French, Inc. and the key term "standard format" combined with "of plays" that I was able to uncover a small but still viable list of sources that provided a breakdown of playscript format similar to what is found in *The Scriptwriter's Bible*.

Another useful tool to formatting I found through both *The Scriptwriter's Bible* and my Script Writing Workshop I course was a formatting software program called Celtx. Celtx is a free, downloadable formatting program that will help, to a certain extent, format correctly. Celtx can help with a number of media formatting scripts, including playwriting. Celtx provided me with tools, but I did not know how to use them.

At the beginning of my Fall 2011 semester, I had a written script in a format that I created based on what I had seen in the past. I had no knowledge of whether or not I was formatting my script correctly, and I knew it could never become anything more until it reached that stage. I wanted my one-act script *Stingray*, not only to be completed but also performed. *Stingray* could never hope to move forward without proper formatting. After the story content of *Stingray* reached its final draft, I found I had still more editing to complete. I had found the material I needed on formatting a playscript properly only to uncover that there was not one formula for formatting a play. There were multiple methods for playwriting formatting. *Stingray* still needed to be formatted properly, but the new problem was sifting through all the formats to find the “correct” format. My answer wound up being all of them; all the formats were correct; it was just a matter of figuring out which one works best for me.

I also wanted to know what to do after my play was completely formatted and ready for submission. I wanted to know how I could get either a publication or a professional theatre to produce my work. Once a script is ready to be seen by the public, I wanted to know how to get it produced for the public to enjoy. My previous research and submission guidelines from Samuel

French, Inc. helped me more clearly understand how to get to the publication and/or production level with my play.

CHAPTER TWO: DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCRIPT FOR *STINGRAY*

Stingray initially started as an idea of just one scene. I had envisioned the “Pizza Saturday” scene months before I ever started writing the play. I enjoyed the abstract nature of it, and I could understand the relationships the characters had with one another. I did not have full and complete characters, but just a snap shot image. After my conversation with Professor Weaver, I decided to develop this image further, and I started writing my play.

The storyline of *Stingray* revolves around a father, John, who has three estranged children: J.R., Margot, and Jim-bo. John interacts with his friend, Nick, who used to live with John as his roommate for 20 years. Nick is gay and John is homophobic, however there are also implications that their relationship may have been homosexual. J.R., Margot, and Jim-bo are all grown children whose ages range from their mid 20s to early 30s. They have isolated John and stopped all forms of communication with him. They tell their stories of the past and John tells his in the present, well sort of. John is mentally unstable, and he takes the expression “living in the past” to a new extreme. It is as if John has stopped existing past a certain age, and he is unable to see the changes and developments around him. Finally, there is John’s antique car, *Stingray*, who, like him, is a relic of a past youth except *Stingray* remains unchanged.

Prior to even starting the first draft of *Stingray*, there was one factor I knew had to be incorporated into the script; it had to be non-linear. Non-Linear structure does not follow a distinct timeline, but rather breaks this rule on purpose. From my initial concept of the “Pizza Saturday” scene, I knew the children were not actually at the table; whether or not it was a flashback or a complete imagination was not yet decided, but I knew this story could only be told

in a non-linear structure. I wanted to investigate the psychological perspectives of the characters and incorporate them into the play structure. For this, I researched how other writers have done it in the past to brainstorm ideas on how I would. I read and re-read *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, *Proof* by David Auburn, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, and *Equus* by Peter Shaffer. Using these references, I would start formulating some version of a script.

Draft one was written in a stream of consciousness style. I discussed with my thesis committee member, Professor James Brown, stage one of writing a play was all about “dreaming it.” John, the father figure of the play, was almost completely fleshed out in draft one. He had his quirks and his behaviors and his relationship with his children was a complicated one. The characters of Nick and Jim-bo were not even included in this initial draft; they were introduced later in my process. When I felt it was finished, I took some time away from it.

When I re-read draft one for the first time I knew I had a lot of questions to answer. I did not know if John had a mental disorder or if he was just a complicated person to get along with. I felt the children, Margot and J.R., lacked in sympathy and compassion with nothing to balance them. I also felt John needed to interact with someone in order to portray more of his characteristics. From these unanswered questions I was able to develop both my draft one characters more fully and add two additional characters: Nick and Jim-bo. Adding Jim-bo as the third child helped balance each of the other children. Jim-bo became the connector between both his siblings and his father. To a lesser effect, Jim-bo also helped establish a glimpse into the loving relationship the children had with one another. Nick was necessary to play off of John. The idea of homosexuality or the questioning of it was a characteristic present in John from draft

one, but there was no current way to see this displayed in the character. Nick brought this unanswered question into play. Nick also served as juxtaposition to John as the sane, collected, norm that offset John's instability.

At this stage I was satisfied with my characters and their relationships. They all were sketched out and appeared to work well together, but they still were not finished yet. I felt the key to completing this was to complete John. I needed to diagnose John in order to determine whether his behaviors were controlled or not. This research became what formed draft three.

After the initial transgression of draft two was completed, I knew I needed to flesh John out more in order to craft both the story and the other characters involved. What I mean by this is that if John had a disorder, are the other characters aware? Do the other characters find out about this disorder? Is John's disorder ever discussed? These were all questions I had not answered in draft one of *Stingray*, so I needed to make a decision.

After reading the traits I described John to have, I decided to write them down and do some preliminary research on disorders that may contain these behaviors. John initially had an obsession with routines and some form of memory loss. I looked to the internet to complete a broad search of various disorders before narrowing it down to something specific. Initially, what I had come up with was Autism, Bi-polar Disorder, Alzheimer's, and Narcissistic Personality Disorder. With this list of possibilities, I decided to narrow down the search a bit more by researching into the specifics of the disorders to see what fit with John and what did not and found I had more questions needing answers. Is John's mental instability genetic? If John's disorder is genetic, would it be seen in his children? Would they all have these behaviors or

would none of them have it? If they had behaviors similar to John's, would that mean they have the same diagnosis? These were all new considerations to acknowledge as the play progressed.

As I did more research into these disorders, I was able to eliminate the other options before finally landing on the one named: Autism. John's routines were so embedded into everything else he did that Autism seemed to fit perfectly in this respect. However, Autism did not answer everything. Autism neither explained John's memory loss nor his derived discourse into another world. Another issue was that Autism is an umbrella term for many different, specific, disorders like Pervasive Development disorder, Asperger's syndrome, and Rett syndrome. After much consideration and debate, I decided to stop my research. I wanted my audience to be able to relate to my characters and their situation. I felt that if I narrowed down John's disorder too much by identifying exactly what it was, then I may be excluding my audience. I wanted *Stingray* to be more of a universal play and felt the only way I could achieve this is by keeping certain aspects of it ambiguous. If I diagnosed him completely, he would lose traits of himself along the way and may even end up not being a sympathetic character.

John's daughter Margot got this far into his diagnosis. She concludes her father was Autistic as she uncovers this in her own research of personality disorders. I let Margot only diagnose this small part of him because it was the only part I wanted to be diagnosed. Dealing with mentally unstable people is a circumstance that many people face; the issue becomes even harder when it is someone close to you. I wanted to make John's disorder ambiguous enough to allow audience members who may have dealt with a mentally unstable loved one in their lifetime

able to relate to the characters, even if they did not have to deal with Autism, specifically. This is how John's disorder derived.

At this stage the characters grew into their own. Jim-bo became the innocent, sweet son. Nick became the sympathetic best friend. John became the character you had to hate to love. Specifically, after John's diagnosis, Margot and J.R. were able to transform into sympathetic characters as well. J.R. was the oldest son, the namesake who ended up following in his father's footsteps, no matter how hard he tried not to. J.R. was factual and straight to the point. Margot was the outwardly cold-hearted daughter who cared. No matter how rude she was on the outside, her compassion for her father always was there. These were traits I kept trying to pull from these characters, but I could not until John was diagnosed.

I was satisfied with these additions, but there still was one character who had barely been fleshed out at all--Stingray. Stingray is the ever-present ghost that haunts all characters of the play as a stoic monument of John. Stingray is John's love and god that takes precedence over all. But what is Stingray?

Stingray is an antique 1969 Chevrolet Corvette Convertible. She is an all-original model kept pristine by John since he bought it brand new in 1969. Stingray is an incredibly valuable car John obsesses over, almost more so than his system and his routine. Stingray is the ultimate elephant in the corner of the room; she is an antique car that will never go away. This is a fact that John clings to for dear life when everyone else in his life has left him. Despite his children's dismissal from their lives, he still calls them every night at nine o'clock on the dot and leaves

them voicemails, something that the children cannot seem to escape. The problem with *Stingray* at this stage was determining how the show ended to figure out the final role she would play.

The ending was the one single factor that changed practically every draft. I knew someone had to die; I just was not sure who. In most drafts it was John; in one draft it was Jim-bo. I had to write out the endings of each new idea before I could decide whether it worked or not. Jim-bo's death would explain a rift between Margot, J.R., and John. Jim-bo's death also could show how hard he tried to meet John's standards and the fact that he never could. Ending the play with Jim-bo's death would not solidify *Stingray's* significance. It was this insight that proved the only death that could occur in the play would be John's.

If John was to die in the play, does his death involve *Stingray*? Does John die in a car accident? Is *Stingray* totaled in this accident? Does John die of unrelated causes? Does John die from his mental disorder? These were all viable options on how to end the play. I wrote most of these endings, asking myself the same questions to try and figure out how John was going to die. Including each alternate ending, I probably reached around eight more drafts of the play before finally settling on *Stingray's* official ending. John dies sitting inside *Stingray*, and it is unclear as to whether or not it was suicide or natural causes.

The next step after this editing process was to hear my play read out loud, so I established a cold reading for the purposes of editing. I personally suggest cold readings, because plays are written to be spoken more so than read. If a play reads well, but is awkwardly spoken, then there is a problem and changes must be made. Dialogue can be a difficult thing to maneuver, and the thing with plays is they are all either dialogue or monologues. This is where a cold reading can

really help. If your characters do not sound true to life, then it is probably because they are not. With dialogue, it is a really simple concept; how would your character say something. Try to take your character to lunch. What this means is if you had lunch with your character, what would they say? What would they talk about? If you can envision this conversation in your head, then just type what the character is replying to and how they would reply to it. Some writers carry tape recorders with them and record random conversations just to pick up the flow of dialogue. Other writers suggest looking in your character's wallet. What would they have that would display their characteristics? Personal glimpses of your character in this manner not only help to develop the character more fully but also aides greatly in mastering their dialogue and their voice.

I knew John's dialogue would be both erratic and routine; he changes the subject when he hears something unfavorable and also asks the same questions over and over again. J.R. is a well-educated man in his earlier 30s. He is highly intelligent and somewhat detached from social settings, so he would use "big words" unintentionally to try and converse. Jim-bo is more simple and innocent; he will ask the questions he already knows the answer to just to make his father happy. Jim-bo just wants to be happy and accepted. Margot is standoffish and sarcastic. She uses these traits to keep a wall between her and her father in order to appear uncaring. Her ability to use quick banter reflects in her speech. Nick is a compassionate person. He feels sympathy for John despite all his flaws and remains as John's last piece of human interaction with the outside world. His love and laborious efforts reflect in his speech. This is how I crafted both my dialogue and consequently my characters.

After combining all of these elements into this process, I now have a completed story. My characters are well-rounded and believable, their relationships are complex and their story is a mystery until the very end. I had my story, but I knew *Stingray* still had one more phase to go through in order to achieve completion--formatting.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCHING FORMAT

There is no concrete guideline for playwriting structure, but rather there are a few different forms. Every little intricacy imbedded into the script varies from publisher to publisher. Alas, that is the resolve: a publisher is responsible for the formatting, so the author must not have to do anything, right? Wrong. Unfortunately for the author, you need to be able to format your work in order to get it accepted by a publisher. For instance, can you imagine reading a play that looks like this:

I can't help my feelings for you Tom, says Mary Jane.

Well, unfortunately, you are going to have to, says Tom.

But Tom, I love you! says Mary Jane.

But I don't love you, says Tom.

Not only does this format not represent playwriting, but it also fails to be recognized as the correct format of novelistic text. Where are the quotations marks? You actually do not need quotation; that is another choice a writer can make, but this is another subject entirely. In the world of words, when discussing playwriting format, it is best to start from the beginning-- opening. The point is you need to know how to format to make a play a play.

The Samuel French, Inc. Format

Samuel French, Inc. is a major publishing company focused specifically on playscripts. It was established in 1830 and is still just as prominent in publishing today. Samuel French offers contests and competitions that allow a new play to be published and circulated.

According to the formatting laws of Samuel French, a play should open with ACT I. ACT I needs to be written on the first line and underlined. The word “ACT” must be written in all caps and followed by the Roman Numeral equivalent one. Directly underneath ACT I comes “Scene 1.” Scene 1 also is underlined but must only contain a capitalized first letter. The number one is simply written as Arabic numeral equivalency number “1.” For the rest of your play, each time a new “ACT” or “Scene” is introduced, you must begin this on a new page. Each “ACT” or “Scene” gets the privilege of its own page. There should be no space between these two, and they should be center formatted. So, it should appear as follows:

ACT I
Scene 1

Now you can continue with the rest of the play. Samuel French advises that before the play can commence, there should be an indicated “Setting” and “At Rise.” Typically, this is the brief narrative one might see when opening a playbook on the first page, before the characters speak. So “Setting” is just that-- the setting of the show. What does this space look like? Is it inside or outside? Is there furniture? Is everything new or old? Is it cluttered or open? “At Rise” is what happens when the play begins. Do the lights switch from a dimly lit set to a bright and vibrant one? Are there any sound effects, like the pounding at a door? What happens in the moments before a character speaks their first line? Are they already onstage reading a newspaper? Setting appears first and should be 1.0 inch indented from the left edge of the paper with a colon concluding the word. There should be a 1.0 inch indent from the colon to the start of the description of the setting. The entire description should be leveled from its 1.0 inch indentation after the colon. The description should be single-spaced. “At Rise” follows the

same format only appearing underneath the setting description, and there should be a double-spaced line separating the two. It would appear as follows:

Setting: Insert description here. If there is need to follow into a second line, the rest of the description will be indented here.

At Rise: This is where any action may occur before the first spoken word.

Now the playwright continues onward to character. Character names, according to this format, should always be capitalized and either centered or indented 3.5 inches from the left edge of the paper with the dialogue falling underneath. (On a side note, indenting 3.5 inches from the left edge of the paper is the same as centering it.) The dialogue should be written starting with a one inch indentation on the left margin. Dialogue must follow as proper English grammatical rules dictate. What that means is capitalize the first letter of words at the beginning of a sentence and end sentences in periods, exclamation points, or question marks. Aside from those basic requirements, you can take as much liberty with dialogue as you want (i.e., creating accents that may not appear grammatically correct but are true to your character). The dialogue itself should be single-spaced between the character's name and the body of the dialogue. There should be double spacing between one character's dialogue and another character's name. Also, if your dialogue trails to another page, you must insert the symbol "(Cont.)" (which is the abbreviated term for the word "continued") after the character's name and on the same line. The following would be your result, if the character names were centered:

KRISTA

I feel like my head is going to explode sometimes! I have all these hamsters running on a million different wheels in my head and

Hypothetical page break.

KRISTA (Cont.)

I just can't keep up with them all!

ASHLEY

Oh, honey.

KRISTA

It is just like driving me crazy!

Then there are stage directions. The Samuel French format does not distinguish between a “parenthetical” and a “stage direction.” In this format, they are one in the same and they are referred to as “stage directions.”

Any other brief direction (one-word) can also go on this line (Character's name line) in parenthesis. Longer directions belong on the following line in parentheses, three indents in. (Samuel French, Inc.)

Taking this method into consideration, the following would appear as such:

ROGER (confused)

Okay...what are you trying to tell me?

CHRIS

(Continues to point to his eye and mimes drinking from a cup in a head tossed back motion to indicate a chugging effect, all the while staring in frustration at ROGER.) You don't get it?

This particular indentation would be the equivalent of hitting the "tab" bar on your keyboard two times. If a character's name is mentioned in the stage directions, it also must be written in all capital letters. The margins of the stage directions, specifically the longer ones, should line up with one another without superseding the other.

The British Broadcasting Corporation Format

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a public service broadcaster located in Westminster, London. The BBC's networks include all major forms of public media like television, the internet, and newspapers. The BBC provides a standard format for all scripts used or submitted to these forms of media. The BBC also created a playscript format in order to standardize all works eligible for submission to any of their company's networks.

According to the BBC, both the "ACT" and "SCENE" should be capitalized. Also, "ACT" and "SCENE" should be written on the top of a new page on the same line. "ACT" and "SCENE" should be indented one inch from the left edge of the paper and "SCENE" should follow "ACT." The numbers indicating the "ACT" must be Roman Numerals and "SCENE" numberings must remain as Arabic Numerals. A 1.0 inch indentation should separate "ACT" from "Scene." Following this design, the following would be the result:

ACT I SCENE 1

Following the establishment of “ACT I” “SCENE 1” should be the “Scene Action,” which is essentially combining Samuel French’s version of “Setting” and “At Rise” into one concept. According to the BBC:

Scene action should only deal with set description or what is happening on the stage and must never stray into superfluous novelistic text related to character thoughts or back-story. (British Broadcasting Corporation)

Scene action, in this format, should be capitalized entirely and formulated from the right margin instead of the left. This should also be single-spaced in its format with double spacing as a means of separation from all other forms and contents. The following is the result:

WE SEE A LIVING ROOM THAT IS SPACIOUS
WITH LIMITED FURNITURE SAVE A
LUXURIOUS COUCH THAT TAKES HOLD OF
CENTER STAGE.

In the BBC format, character names are still capitalized when presented above their dialogue, but character names have a 1.0 inch indentation from the left margin and are followed by a colon before its proceeding dialogue. There is a 1.0 inch indentation of space (hit the tab button one time) before the dialogue begins. The dialogue’s margin lines all align with one another and are written in traditional grammatical structure, only capitalized when needed. Dialogue begins on the same line as the character name and is single-spaced. The end result would appear as such:

KRISTA: I feel like my head is going to explode sometimes! I have all these hamsters running on a million different wheels in my head and I just can't keep up with them all!

ASHLEY: Oh, honey.

KRISTA: It is just like driving me crazy!

Stage directions are the same equivalent to “scene action.” As stated in the opening “scene action” section, this section must be written in capital letters entirely. Scene Action is indented the same way as dialogue because it is included in its body. Parenthetical terms are also capitalized entirely and are placed in rounded parenthesis and appear in the same structure of the dialogue. These are meant to include the specific, brief actions of character, like a “pause” or a “beat.” The following would be the result:

ROGER: (CONFUSED) Okay...what are you trying to tell me?

CHRIS: (Continues to point to his eye and mimes drinking from a cup in a head tossed back motion to indicate a chugging effect, all the while staring in frustration at ROGER.) You don't get it?

The Script Frenzy Format

Script Frenzy is yet another competition for plays. Its format both provides and displays exactly what the competition is looking for in their submissions. Their challenge is for a writer to write a hundred page playscript in one month. The grand prize is self satisfaction and a certificate, but their format guidelines are consistently valid. Why? Script Frenzy follows

closely to the Samuel French format, and its outlying formatting suggestions can be found consistent in published playscripts.

The Act and Scene structure of Script Frenzy closely follows that of Samuel French. “Acts” and “Scenes” should appear in all capital letters, starting on a new page of each respective Act or Scene. Acts can either be written numerically as a Roman numeral or transcribed out. Scenes can either be written in Arabic Numerals or transcribed out as well. There is no space between Act and Scene and, of course, “Act” must come atop “Scene.” This should be centered. The following would be the result:

ACT I
SCENE 1

-OR-

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

Scene breaks occur in a script when there is a change of location or time elapses. Occasionally, though, some scripts have what is called a French scene structure in which a new scene occurs in the script whenever a character enters or leaves the scene (Hatcher 74). Scene direction is the term used on Script Frenzy to dictate the opening narrated action of a scene or act. Scene directions are either indented from the left edge of the paper 3.5 inches and 1.0 inch from the right, or they can be pushed halfway to the right side of the paper, or centered. They must be in parenthesis in this format. These directions would detail both what is seen and the action of the play before the first word or line is spoken by the actor at the start of the play. Scene directions also will appear throughout the script as need or want of them by the

playwright. Less is more in these narrative sections of script. Directors, actors, and designers prefer to create their own actions of the play based on their own interpretations of a play versus the playwright's. Regardless, this would be how a scene direction would appear in this format:

SCENE ONE

(We see a living room that is spacious with limited furniture save a luxurious couch that takes hold of center stage.)

Character names either should be indented 4.0 inches from the left edge of the paper or centered but written in all capital letters. The dialogue should be indented 1.0 inch from the left edge of the paper and written in a grammatically accurate structure. If a character's dialogue continues onward to the next page used the symbol (cont'd) at the bottom of the page that the dialogue ends. Next, repeat the term (cont'd) coupled with the character name and on the same line, at the top of the new page. The following would be your result:

KRISTA

I feel like my head is going to explode sometimes! I have all these hamsters running on a million different wheels in my head and

(Cont'd)

Hypothetical page break.

KRISTA (Cont'd)

I just can't keep up with them all!

ASHLEY

Oh, honey.

KRISTA

It is just like driving me crazy!

Script Frenzy divides the stage directions section into two subcategories: staging directions and character stage directions. It is the same as the divide between stage directions and parentheticals. Staging directions should be indented from the left edge of the paper 2.0 inches and 1.0 inch from the right edge of the paper. They should be placed in parenthesis and describe “what happens on stage during the scene. Entrances, exits, major movements of characters, new characters, fights, light changes” (Script Frenzy) and so on. Character stage directions are indented from the left edge of the paper 3 inches and from the right 1.0 inch. These also must be enclosed in parenthesis and “are needed only when a reader wouldn’t understand what was going on without them” (Script Frenzy). These directions are specific to the character and are only brief actions or adverbs of the action they are doing. If a character’s name is mentioned in any of these directions, it should be written in all capital letters. The following would be the appearance:

ROGER

(Confused)

Okay...what are you trying to tell me?

CHRIS

(Continues to point to his eye and mimes drinking from a cup in a head tossed back motion to indicate a chugging effect, all the while staring in frustration at ROGER.) You don’t get it?

The Yale Drama Series Format

Yale University is one of the eight Ivy League universities in the United States of America. Yale University is one of the oldest universities in the United States and is a well known private institution for its academic and athletic excellence. The Yale Drama Series is a

contest derived from both the Yale University Press and the Yale Repertory Theatre established to present emerging playwright's works (yalepress.yale.edu).

This format suggests that "opening stage directions are centered on the page" (Yale Drama Series). Resulting in the following:

We see a living room that is spacious with limited furniture save a luxurious couch that takes
hold of center stage.

The Yale drama series specifies that dialogue be completed with a top margin of either 0.75 inches to 1.0 inch of indentation and a bottom margin of 1.0 inch to 1.5 inches of indentation. The left and right margins should be set around 1.0 inch. It also should be single-spaced. In regards to character names, "the first letter of each character name is centered, with the name then continuing out toward the right margin. Use tab setting for the alignment of character names rather than the center alignment function" (Yale Drama Series). Resulting in the following:

KRISTA

I feel like my head is going to explode sometimes! I have all these hamsters running on a million different wheels in my head and I just can't keep up with them all!

ASHLEY

Oh, honey.

KRISTA

It is just like driving me crazy!

The Yale Drama series suggests that:

Character stage directions and general stage directions occur within acts or scenes. They stand alone in the manuscript with parentheses and are single-spaced. (Yale Drama Series)

Resulting in the following:

ROGER

(Confused)

Okay...what are you trying to tell me?

CHRIS

(Continues to point to his eye and mimes drinking from a cup in a head tossed back motion to indicate a chugging effect, all the while staring in frustration at ROGER.) You don't get it?

Julie Jensen's Format

Julie Jensen is currently a resident playwright at the Salt Lake Acting Company. She has been noted for receiving the Joseph Jefferson Award for Best New Work, Award for Best New Work, the Arts Achievement Award, the CBS/Dramatist Guild Award, and was twice nominated by the American Theatre Critics Association Award for best new play (Salt Lake City Action Company). She is a published working playwright who created a guide book through the playwriting process from idea to production in an abbreviated context.

Julie Jensen, in *Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant*, suggests that the character name is written in all capital letters and centered. The "dialogue extends to either margin" meaning there

is no greater indentation than the 1.0 inch. Dialogue should be single-spaced and appear as the following:

KRISTA

I feel like my head is going to explode sometimes! I have all these hamsters running on a million different wheels in my head and I just can't keep up with them all!

ASHLEY

Oh, honey.

KRISTA

It is just like driving me crazy!

Look familiar? It is the same formatting for character and dialogue that the Yale Drama Series uses.

Jensen denotes that the term “stage directions” is an umbrella term used to describe “scene setups, descriptions of things, indications of movement, anything that isn't dialogue goes inside parenthesis and is usually italicized. Every line of it is indented and single-spaced” (56). Jensen also advises that a space be place before and after the stage directions to separate them from everything else. The following would be the result:

ROGER
(Confused)

Okay...what are you trying to tell me?

CHRIS
(Continues to point to his eye and mimes drinking from a cup in a head tossed back motion to indicate a chugging effect, all the while staring in frustration at ROGER.) You don't get it?

Jensen does not advise using “acting clues” or what I have referred to as parentheticals; but if they are used, they should be formatted the same way as stage directions in her format.

Louis E. Catron’s Format

Louis E. Catron was a Professor of Theatre at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. He is known for his published books on the subjects of directing and playwriting, consequently also the subjects he taught at the university (Nicholson). In his book *The Elements of Playwriting*, suggests that the start of a play be formatted as the following:

Title of the Play

ACT ONE

Scene One

This particular format is similar to that of Samuel French’s format. The addition is the title of the play. Catron also advises transcribing the numerical representations of the numbers instead of using the Roman numeral or the Arabic equivalent to them. This should be centered and underlined as well.

Catron’s format for a play’s beginning follows that of Samuel French’s format. He believes in “Setting” and “At Rise” denotations. In this case, they have the same representations as French. “Setting” should describe the set and what happens before any action of the play. Again, this would be the establishing shot of the playscript. “At Rise” denotes the actions of the play before the first line is spoken. What characters are onstage? What are they wearing? Are there any sound effects? Have the lights changed? These questions are all appropriate questions

to answer here. The words “Setting” and “At Rise” should be written in all capital letters and underlined. There should be an indentation between the label and the description that is also indicated by a colon. The description’s margins should line up with one another. The end result will look as follows:

SETTING: Insert description here. And if need be to follow into a second line the rest of the description will be indented here.

AT RISE: This is where any action may occur before the first spoken word.

Catron advises that character names be centered and written in all capital letters. They should appear first on top of the dialogue. The dialogue should follow normal grammatical structure and be written with a 1.0 inch indentation from the left edge of the paper. There should be a space between one character’s dialogue and another character’s name. The dialogue should be single-spaced in itself. The following would be your result:

KRISTA

I feel like my head is going to explode sometimes! I have all these hamsters running on a million different wheels in my head and I just can’t keep up with them all!

ASHLEY

Oh, honey.

KRISTA

It is just like driving me crazy!

The Elements of Playwriting dictates that stage directions and parentheticals are separate issues. Stage directions should be indented 3.5 inches from the left margin and written without parenthesis. If a character's name is mentioned here, it should be written in all capital letters. A parenthetical would appear directly under the characters' name with a 1.5 inch indentation and stand alone on its line. It will also appear in parenthesis. These all should be single-spaced. The following would be the result:

(Confused)
Okay...what are you trying to tell me?

ROGER

You don't get it?

CHRIS
Continues to point to his eye and mimes drinking from a cup in a head tossed back motion to indicate a chugging effect, all the while staring in frustration at ROGER.

Pagination

Numbering your pages seems like an easy enough concept, but even this is subject to change based on formatting. You can number your pages a couple of different ways. Observe:

Option 1: Act, Scene, Line: I-1-123-165

This is typically found in volumes of Shakespeare, and it will appear either on the top or bottom of each page. It is found more in the header format and not necessary for the playwright to insert in most cases.

Option 2: Act, Scene, Page: II-3-37

This is Samuel French's pagination. Basically, you number the pages just as you would anything else and include the Act and Scene it falls under. Again, this is something the playwright would do only if specified for submission work, or if they just like the formatting on how it looks.

Option 3: Act, Page: II-26

This is advised by the Yale drama series that as each new Act is introduced, the Act number changes, but the pagination continues onward from page 1, which is standard in all other forms.

Option 4: Arabic Numerals

You just number the pages starting with page 1 onward. These can be placed in one of three areas: the upper right hand corner of the script, the lower right hand corner of the script, or at the bottom centered.

While all these options are viable, there is one guideline that remains constant with everything; start numbering page 1 on Act I, Scene 1. Everything else would be considered a precursor. Page 1, regardless of any format, can only start here, otherwise it would be incorrect. Additionally, pagination should be continuous, meaning do not reset page numberings at a new act or scene, but rather continue the numberings onward.

CHAPTER FOUR: MANUSCRIPT PRESENTATION

There are five sources that discuss the “proper” manuscript presentation and they are as follows:

- Samuel French
- www.scriptfrenzy.com
- The Standard Elements for Stageplays
- *The Elements of Playwriting* by Louis E. Catron
- Yale Drama Series

These provide more of a loose set of guidelines of how a manuscript should look before it is submitted. However, since each contest or publication company is different, it is best to look up their specific guidelines as to what they want to include in a submission. If they do not specify, do not think that it does not exist. There is still formatting to be done. Two things every manuscript unanimously must have are a cover page and a character list. These are non-negotiable; do not submit a manuscript without one.

The Samuel French Format

The Samuel French format states that a cover page should appear as follows:

TITLE

Sub-Title and/or Genre Description

By Your Name

Your Name

Your Address

Phone

Email

Agent's Name

Company and/or Title

Agent's Address

Phone

Email

A copyright would be placed
here if there was one.

The Title should be centered, underlined and bolded, appearing approximately halfway down the page. Everything else would remain in normal text. Contact information must appear at the bottom right corner of the page and copyright information at the bottom left. This is the only format for a cover page.

The next page in the Samuel French manuscript formatting section would be the "Cast of Characters," "Place," and "Time," section. "Cast of Characters" is literally just a list with the names of the characters. The protagonist usually starts out the list because they are seen as the character that leads the play; the term "protagonist" meaning "the leading character, hero, or heroine of a drama or other literary work" (www.dictionary.com). This list also must contain a brief description of the characters like "ages, genders, and any short physical characteristics belong here. If doubling is possible, it should be mentioned here as well" (French). Next is the

“Place” or setting of the play. Is the play inside or outside? Is it in the North or the South? What country is it in? Is it in somebody’s house? This should be a short, brief response. Finally there is “Time.” What time of year is it? What time of day? This will help with costuming and creating a greater environment for the play. Again it is a brief, basic response. An example looks like the following:

Cast of Characters

<u>MARGARET:</u>	20 years old, very affectionate and high energy.
<u>TIFFANY:</u>	21 years old, the birthday girl, both adventurous and prudent.
<u>CHRISTIAN:</u>	24 years old, strong and gruff with suicidal thoughts.

Place

A quaint neighborhood bar in Cypress, California.

Time

Early Spring

These pages are not to be included in the normal numbering pagination, but rather, if they are numbered they must be on a preface number system of their own. Page one still starts on the first page of the actual script.

The Script Frenzy Format

Another way to format your script to be submitted is displayed on www.scriptfrenzy.com. The word “CHARACTERS” should be written as such, in all capital letters. This will appear 1.0 inch to 2.0 inches below the top edge of the page. It will appear centered. Each character is followed by a brief description, again starting with the protagonist. Their character names should be written in all capital letters and ended with either a dash or colon. There should only be one space between either the colon or dash to the description. The description should be single-spaced and does not need to be indented to match all margins up. The following would be the result:

CHARACTERS

MARGARET: 20 years old, very affectionate and high energy.

TIFFANY: 21 years old, the birthday girl, both adventurous and prudent, she loves anything ‘Hello Kitty.’

CHRISTIAN: 24 years old, strong and gruff with suicidal thoughts.

Next would be the setting page. On this page should be the “setting,” “time,” and “synopsis of scenes.” Again, the setting is just a brief description of where the story takes place. The time is also a brief description. These two areas may be formatted differently, but it is the same concept as what was described in the Samuel French version. The synopsis of the scene is an “Act and Scene” breakdown of “where” and “when” each scene is taking place. The titles “setting,” “time,” and “synopsis of scenes” must appear in all capital letters and must be centered. The descriptions that follow will appear underneath and have a 1.0 inch margin

starting from the left. These should be single-spaced with double spacing in between each new label/topic. Combined together as a whole, this is what the setting page would look like:

SETTING

A quaint neighborhood bar in Cypress California.

TIME

Early Spring

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1.....	Inside of bar.....	Night
Scene 2.....	Girl's Bathroom.....	Night
Scene 3.....	Outside of bar.....	Night

ACT II

Scene 1.....	Outside of bar.....	Night
Scene 2.....	Inside of bar.....	Night
Scene 3.....	Outside of bar.....	Night

NOTE: You do not necessarily have to format the "Synopsis of Scenes" page with all the periods, but you must line up your margins evenly as displayed.

The Yale Drama Series Format

The Yale Drama Series suggests the format include the following: Title page, character page, Setting & Time page, Scene Breakdown Page (optional). In regards to the character page, list the characters in the "approximate order of importance with a short description of each next to his or her name." In this case, any of the above character formatting lists would work or you

can create your own. As long as it is clear, legible, and consistent you would be correct in this format. The Scene page breakdown suggests that you create a list of scenes and their time periods if you have a playscript that has a complicating timeline or a lot of location changes. This is suggested if you have more than six scenes to provide clarity to the reader. An appropriate example for this format can be found referring back to the script frenzy website example.

The Louise E. Catron Format

At last, there is Louis E. Catron's version of formatting. Catron requires one page formatted for the "Cast of Characters," "The Time," and "The Place." This page is not included in the numbering of the play and appears as a precursor. Catron also includes a scene breakdown, though he does not label it as such. His descriptions are brief. He capitalizes and underlines the names of his characters, placing a period at the end of each character's name and a space before the descriptions. He has also transcribed out both the Roman numeral numbering and the scene numbering of his scene breakdown. The title of his play appears in all capital letters and is underlined at the very top of his page. All subcategories are written in all capital letters with underlines underneath them and triple spacing in between each. Double spacing is used for the descriptions. His formatting appears as follows:

TITLE OF PLAY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARAGARET. 20 years old, very affectionate and high energy.

TIFFANY. 21 years old, the birthday girl, both adventurous and prudent, she loves anything 'Hello Kitty'.

CHRISTIAN. 24 years old, strong and gruff with suicidal thoughts.

THE TIME

Early Spring.

THE PLACE

A quaint neighborhood bar in Cypress California.

Act One. Scene one. Inside of bar. Night.

Scene two. Girl's Bathroom. Night.

Scene three. Outside of bar. Night.

Act Two. Scene one. Outside of bar. Night.

Scene two. Inside of bar. Night.

Scene three. Outside of bar. Night.

Again, each format can differ depending on the submission company requirements. But this will at least provide a visual outline of what is acceptable and what is not. Most of all, with any form of formatting, be consistent. That is the strongest aspect of formatting no matter which form is being used.

CHAPTER FIVE: USING COMPUTER SOFTWARE FOR FORMATTING

Everyone has their own method of writing. Some people would rather write all their work with an old-fashioned pen and paper; others still favor an old-fashioned typewriter; and more often than not you have those who favor a computer. I prefer to do all my writing on a computer. No method is right or wrong; however, utilizing computer software to assist with formatting has its perks.

There is Microsoft Word, which is my preferred method. Microsoft Word is the industry standard program for writing on a computer. It has tools that allow writers to template playscript writing format. It is flexible so one is able to format more to their liking. What this means is that if a playwright would rather have their characters' names on the right margin instead of centered, they can have that option. The same thing goes for stage directions; if the playwright would rather have them italicized and on the left margin instead of capitalized and indented 3.0 inches, then this is possible as well. Microsoft Word allows the playwright to create their own format for writing, versus most other formatting programs that only allow you to format based on their specifications. I know playwrights who use the software systems Word Perfect, Final Draft, and Dramatica. I prefer the software system Celtx, when editing my scripts. Celtx is easy to navigate and free software that formats playscripts closely following the Samuel French format.

In order to navigate any of these software programs, you need to know what each action of the program means. The Celtx software allows you to format as such:

- Act- this would indicate the title of your act; for example, Act I.

- Scene Heading- this would indicate the title of your scene; for example, scene 1.
- Stage Direction- the umbrella term for scene action and description. What is happening in this scene? What does it look like?
- Character- the name of your character.
- Dialogue- the spoken words of your character.
- Parenthetical- the character stage directions. This also can be referred to as the adverbs of how your character does something.
- Transition- appears as plain text, centered and out of format. This is one tool that is not needed yet often utilized in playscript formatting.
- Text- appears as plain text, left margined and out of format. This is another tool that is not needed yet often utilized in playscript formatting.

Font

There are only four types of industry standard fonts in playscript writing format:

- Times New Roman
- Palatino
- Courier
- Serif Face Type (General)

These fonts are the only acceptable fonts because they are considered the most legible.

These fonts are all clear, clean, and direct. They are used in professional settings for this reason as well.

Again, this depends solely on the contest/submission company to which you are sending your work. Make sure to read the requirements before formatting your work to their standards. You easily could write your play in another font of your choosing, but it may interrupt your formatting if you have to switch it to an acceptable form for submission.

CHAPTER SIX: MY CHOSEN FORMAT

I format two different ways. I use the formatting software Celtx, and I also format my own way on Microsoft Word, which is what I did with my one-act play, *Stingray*. Using the Celtx software is a more universally-accepted format for playscripts. There are less alterations I must do in order submit my plays to varying contests and/or companies. Celtx provides all the fine details of playscript formatting and allows me to make easy changes.

So, why do I format with Microsoft Word at all? I can type faster on Microsoft Word, and whenever I need to change from a character name to dialogue or dialogue to stage directions, I can access it all from my keyboard. When I am writing in a stream of consciousness manner, I do not even stop for spelling errors. I just keep going so I can record my entire train of thought before it runs out. Then I go back and edit my text. I cannot do that on Celtx. I have to switch between character to dialogue, and I tend to lose my train of thought whenever I have to concentrate on clicking the correct icon.

I create my own format by borrowing selective features from other formats. A lot of playwrights do this. Perhaps this is why there is no absolute playwriting format. I center “ACT I” in all capital letters and use the Roman numeral symbol for the number one. I center “Scene One” as well below ACT I, single-spaced and written as it appears in the quotation marks. My stage directions are italicized, start from the left margin, and have a 1.0 inch margin. They do not have parenthesis surrounding them. I distinguish the difference between stage directions and parentheticals. My parentheticals also are italicized and in parenthesis. In *Stingray*, I use these sparingly. My characters’ names are written in all capital letters and are written on a 1.0 inch left

margin. I use colons to separate their names from the dialogue and, in addition, I indent the entirety of the dialogue so it lines up with one another. My characters' names and "ACT" are the only aspects of my playscript that appear in all capital letters. I do write my characters' names in all capital letters in stage directions as well, but not when characters are addressing one another.

There are some exceptions to my defined formatting. One, I double space everything initially. Stage directions and dialogue specifically because I like the room to make notations while I am editing. Once my editing process is over, my script appears how I have described it above. Here is how my work would appear:

Opening of the play:

ACT I

Scene One

Scene One Opening Stage Directions:

We see a living room that is spacious with limited furniture save a luxurious couch that takes hold of center stage.

Stage Directions and Parentheticals:

ROGER: *(Confused)* Okay...what are you trying to tell me?

CHRIS continues to point to his eye and mimes drinking from a cup in a head tossed back motion to indicate a chugging effect, all the while staring in frustration at ROGER.

CHRIS: You don't get it?

Character and Dialogue:

KRISTA: I feel like my head is going to explode sometimes! I have all these hamsters running on a million different wheels in my head and I just can't keep up with them all!

ASHLEY: Oh, honey.

KRISTA: It is just like driving me crazy!

In regards to the manuscript format I have chosen, I like to keep things simple. I format my manuscript to fit that of the Samuel French requirements. If I include a scene synopsis section, I format it like Script Frenzy.com requires. Manuscript formatting is entirely up to your submission host's guidelines, but this is my preferred method of formatting. You are allowed to pick which method of formatting you want while you are working on your script; but when it comes to submission, your ideas must be sacrificed for set regulations in this regard.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WHAT TO DO AFTER A PLAY'S COMPLETION

Copyrights

There are three different options in which to copyright your work: the old-fashioned copyright, the poor man's copyright, and the writer's guild registration. All three are legally sufficient sources and will hold up in court (*Copyright*; Jensen 58; *Writer's Guild of America*).

The old-fashioned copyright ensures you keep the rights of your work and ideas. This copyright is done through the United States government and guarantees your rights. Currently, the copyright website (www.copyright.gov) states that it takes three months to send a work away to their office and have it returned with a copyright seal. In the past it has been known to take anywhere from six to nine months to do the same action. It can also range anywhere from \$35 to \$220; typically for a more basic copyright, it would range from \$35 to \$50. The price ranges vary based on the content of the document. This is neither the most cost-efficient nor the most time-efficient method of ensuring the rights to your own work, but your work would be registered through the United States Government. You can either write to the United States Copyright Office at the Library of Congress, 101 Independence Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 205599 or log onto their website, again, at www.copyright.gov in order to find out more information or begin the process of copyrighting your work.

The poor man's copyright is the most cost-efficient method of ensuring the rights of your work because you only pay for the postage. You simply send a copy of your manuscript to yourself through the United States postal system. You must keep this enveloped sealed. The purpose of this is if anyone tries to steal your work, you can take the envelope to court and open

it then as evidence that this is in fact your own work and nobody else's (Jensen 58). It may also help as a valid transitional period while you wait for your copyrights to process. This process is useful to playwrights because it ensures their work is protected despite their financial situations. Julie Jensen recommends this form of copyright to the "poor man" in her book *Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant*.

The Writer's Guild of America is something I had no previous knowledge of until Professor Telep advised I looked into it. The Writer's Guild is an organization established to help protect the rights of their members in the writing world. The Writer's Guild registration is the most time-efficient way to receive legal rights to your own work. You simply log onto their website and register your work. It costs \$20, but you have instant legal support and valid evidence that you own your work. You will have access to all the legal benefits of being in the Writer's Guild without the membership. If you become a member of the Writer's Guild of America, you would only have to pay \$10 for this service. The registration number received as a result would be placed on the manuscript cover page in the same position as the copyright. You could still apply for a copyright if you so choose. Either way you are insured. The website for the direct link to registration is: <http://www.wgawregistry.org/webrrss/>.

Any of these three options guarantee you legal rights to your work. They would all stand up in court if the issue ever presented itself. It is always good to make sure your rights are protected and nobody else is going to take that away from you. I highly suggest using at least one of these methods when you feel your work is complete. Even if it is not fully finalized yet, it

is always good to at least mail a copy to yourself if you are premiering it to the outside world. It is entirely your decision nonetheless.

Initially, I started using the poor man's copyright. When my script started to be distributed to readers for feedback, I guaranteed myself assurance on draft one. When my script hit its final stage, and I decided there would be no more edits, I registered it through the Writer's Guild. I may copyright it one day, but I choose not to for now. I may still edit it a bit more, and I would rather have the opportunity to do so before I send my script for a finalized copyright.

Publishing and Production

A consideration might be publishing and production, after you have finished your script and it is secure in a form of copyright. It is not so much about choosing the right one, but rather choosing the right one for the playwright. The steps in this process are outlined in both Julie Jensen's *Playwright: Brief and Brilliant* and Angelo Parra's *Playwriting for Dummies*.

Making money off your script can be accomplished in two different ways: royalties and licensing. A royalty is an agreement whereby the playwright earns a percentage of every ticket sold. With a royalty, the playwright owns all the rights to their play and no changes can be made to the script in any manner unless approved by the playwright. A playwright must negotiate a contract with the production company on the percentage of pay they earn for the play. This is not considered at the publication level, but a production. Licensing relates to publication. The playwright earns less money through this avenue for their play, but the perk is the play is more widely-distributed so it would be available to more people. However, the playwright no longer owns explicit first-rights to their play, but rather shares them with the publishing company by

paying a certain agreed upon percentage of the total amount made by the play at production level. For professional theatres it would be 10% and for amateur theatres, it would be 20% of the total income.

Sometimes, when a play has earned a certain amount of attention, a playwright may be offered to create a screenplay. The playwright must sell the rights for development of a film script. They will still own the rights to their theatre script, but the film script belongs to whomever buys it. Within this genre there are two different paths to take: option and selling. An option is an informal agreement in which a producer wants the exclusive rights to the playscript in order to market. These contracts last for about one to two years, and the producer will campaign for the play's production onscreen. However, the playwright has no say or input in their script during the period of this agreement. Occasionally, it has been known that this informal agreement can work out horribly in the long run, so get everything in writing. The other path, to sell your script, is more formal. A playwright has the potential to make thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars, on this one time sale. Within this option there are two things that must be considered: deciding whether or not you will write the screenplay and understanding that you have no input at the production level of this script. More often than not a producer would rather pay an unknown writer to adapt the script than pay the original playwright to do the same. Depending on the size of the company, the producer may have a writer on staff who could do it cheaper and more to their liking. This decision is something that would need to be discussed creating a contract agreement with one another as playwright and producer.

There is also the field of play submission. There are three different ways in which a playwright can submit their work: through play festivals, directly to a theatre, and contests or competitions.

Contests and competitions are a great way to circulate a play. It can also result in a publication, depending on the contest or competition. Submitting your play should be done wisely. Look for competitions that cater specifically to your play. What this means is do not submit a tragedy to a comedic play contest; do your homework. Some resources for locating a legitimate play contest or competition is the Dramatists Sourcebook, Playbill.com, and The Dramatists Guild resource directory.

Submitting your work to play festivals is another good idea. Again, it is best to do your research and make sure you are submitting to a legitimate play festival. Read the parameters of the play festival closely. If you are responsible for organizing and producing your play, then make sure you are aware of that requirement. Talk to people who have done a particular festival in the past and make sure it is the appropriate type of festival for your play. One example of a good play festival is the Orlando Fringe Festival, because it is a well-established play festival with renowned credentials.

Submitting your playscript directly to a theatre for production consideration is tricky. A playwright cannot submit blindly. They must do their homework in order to figure out which theatre may have an interest in undertaking their work. Look at both the current and the past seasons; do they display shows similar to that of your own? Unfortunately, most theatres do not accept unsolicited scripts anymore; this means scripts submitted to them without an invitation. So, as a playwright, you must get an invitation. Once you have located a theatre that fits your

script, you must send them a query letter. According to Angelo Parra, “Today, the most common approach required by theatres involves a query letter or cover letter with a synopsis of the play (the request length varies), your resume, and, often, ten pages of the script” (299); this functions as a standard when it involves query letters. It may sound like a similar outline to the earlier discussed manuscript format because it is; it is constant. However, yet again there are still theatres who will only accept a play if it is submitted by an agent. If you have an agent, you are set. If you do not, then either you need to acquire an agent or find a different theatre.

There is also the option of producing your play yourself. You would be responsible for everything: casting, finding a director, finding technicians, finding designers, finding a location, supplying materials, etc. This is not the best of solutions, but it is there nonetheless.

If self-producing is not something the playwright would like to bother with, they can always try to find a producer. Producers, however, come with contracts, and it is best to have someone who knows how to negotiate these sorts of issues, so you may want to consult with an agent and/or lawyer. Angelo Parra offers a series of suggestions on how to complete both tasks; he suggests that finding a producer is the same as finding an agent. Agents will only represent you if you have experience; but if you need an agent, chances are you do not have a lot of experience. Here is how to attract attention regardless: research the producer/agent, write a query letter to the producer/agent, arrange a showcase production, backers auditions, staged readings, and, of course, network.

Researching the producer/agent helps you eliminate whether or not they will either represent you or your play. Again, if an agent/producer only works on comedic plays, do not submit your tragedy to them. Writing a query letter to the potential agent/producer exemplifying

your knowledge of them and their past productions/representations can also help. If you can spark an interest between yourself and them, they may consider producing/representing you. Keep this query letter brief and highlight areas that would catch their interest enough to read the letter in full. Showcase productions entail a short run of a play in a small theatre where you invite potential producers/agents. This is an expensive method, but it is an option. Backers auditions involve a rehearsed presentation of the play. It is a one shot event that can be done in a studio where you invite producers/agents. It is something that easily can be cancelled, so send RSVPs out to the potential invitees to ensure they will be there. Readings are rehearsed at least once, maybe twice, and you would invite producers/agents to this as well. Readings are the most cost-efficient and can be held anywhere.

Networking is key in this field. You can get recommended by a friend to meet potential producers/agents. You can use the networking connections to find directors and actors for your production. Networking has numerous benefits as long as you good name for yourself with connections.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

When I first started this research project, I can safely say I had no idea what I was getting into. Writing *Stingray* was one thing, but creating and drafting my thesis was another altogether. My thesis made me sit down and analyze my process as a playwright. It also made me research a lot more than I think I would have without it. I had to analyze every single deviation in formatting and really think about the process both I and *Stingray* went through in order to achieve this goal.

Writing about my process for playwriting caused me to realize that I did actually have a process. I use to think all my writing was just stream of consciousness with edits in a non-specific order. I was forced to realize there was a method behind the process. It may have started with stream of consciousness, but as a whole *Stingray* took about six months to perfect.

Formatting became a new issue in itself. Initially, no matter how much I researched, I seemed to come up empty. I tried attacking formatting from different angles and nothing seemed to work until I found the term “standard format” in Samuel French’s guideline. From there I was able to track down not only formatting options but also explanations detailing them. I had preconceived notions that formatting would be rather difficult, but I came to find out that, once started, formatting was a rather easy task. Once I found a system that worked for me, I was able to create it without much difficulty.

For all my hard work put into both the creation of *Stingray* and my thesis, I wanted to make sure that *Stingray* did not become some obscure collection that just sat hidden on a bookshelf. I wanted to be able to do something more worthwhile with *Stingray* besides completing it. This is why I researched things to do after the play is written. I want to look into

publications for the work and other productions for once I am graduated from the University of Central Florida.

I mentioned “other productions” for a reason. I took *Stingray* a step further than just completing the script. I got *Stingray* accepted into the Theatre UCF’s student run One-Act Festival (OAF). I found a director, Angela Damato, who was more than willing to helm my play, and she cast the show. Angela actually cast the show twice; she is not only directing *Stingray* for OAF, but also directing it for her Advanced Directing class final, using a different set of actors for each occasion. My permission was granted for the latter of the two, and I will be attending both performances.

I learned a lot about myself while completing this project. My process as a writer became more solidified during this type of medium. I learned all I wanted to and then some. I have a good idea on how the system works, post drafting, to move my play onto other things. This project also allowed me the ability to work closely with, the best team of professors I could have to make this project a success. After all, *Stingray* will be an officially-produced play in April 2012.

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