



Hello! Thank you so much for tuning in to our very first episode of Beckett's Babies. We are so happy that you joined us! Every episode, we would love to attach a playwriting exercise that we love or find helpful as a resource so that you can go forth and start writing your own play! Below are some of our favorite playwriting exercises from your hosts, Sam Collier and Sarah Cho. Grab a notebook and a pen, let's get started!

SAM'S FAVORITE PLAYWRITING EXERCISE

One of my favorite exercises is to use eavesdropping to gather "found material," and then to turn that into a scene. I first learned this exercise many years ago, and I have since learned versions of it from different playwriting teachers. I often use this exercise when I'm teaching playwriting, because it helps the students to understand that playwriting begins with simple conversation. We all know how to generate dialogue when we are talking to other people in our daily lives. It's only when we sit down to write dialogue that it starts to feel forced and unnatural. So this exercise helps students lower the stakes and play with speech.

It's also a great exercise for teaching us how illogical and surprising conversation really is. When we sit down to write plays, we let one person speak intelligently and rationally while the other politely listens, and then they switch. But if you really listen, you'll notice how rarely people make much sense, how often they interrupt each other, and how much they rely on shorthand and shared knowledge to indicate things they don't actually say out loud.

Go to a public place. Ideally it will be somewhere that you won't be recognized, where you can sit near enough to people to hear them clearly without being noticed.

I recommend using a pen and paper, rather than typing, for two reasons: people are less likely to see what you are writing, and your hand can jump more intuitively to catch up in real time. But that's just my suggestion! You do you!

Start writing down what people say. You might be listening to two people or six people. Any number is fine! You'll want to distinguish between voices, and you can give people names or numbers, or even short descriptors. Or just start each speaker on a new line. It's up to you.

Almost immediately, you will fall behind. That's okay! In fact, that's the whole point! Just finish the word or the phrase and jump ahead to catch up to what they are saying right now. Don't try to hold more than 5-10 seconds of speech in your head at a time, or you'll always be relying on memory, and you'll try to make it make sense. It doesn't have to make sense. It just has to be words. It's better to keep skipping, and you can leave blank lines on the page if you want to mark where you skipped. But this is not necessary.

Sometimes you'll have trouble hearing what people are saying. You can guess, or you can just write down the words you can hear. Either approach is fine.

Do this for half an hour. The extended time is what really makes this worthwhile. Sometimes people leave before you are done, and in that case you can just start again with a new group.

Then take your "found material" home and turn it into a scene. Create characters. Give them names and descriptions. You can change the setting, if you like. Start to shape the text into a scene by finding the most intriguing or surprising threads and following them. See if you can make this strange piece of dialogue make sense, but don't hammer out all the incongruities.

One of the things that makes writing different from other art forms is that we must create our raw material before shaping it. This is often intimidating for new writers, because they feel whatever they create in their first draft has to be good. It doesn't. Really, it doesn't! It just has to be words. Once you have some words, you can shape them and cut them and replace them until the piece sounds the way you want it to. And if you need some words to start with, just go out into the world and start listening.

Happy writing!

SARAH'S FAVORITE PLAYWRITING EXERCISE

I love lists. I love to-do lists. I love creating a list for myself the night before so I know what I need to get done the next day. This is how I organize my life! I live a life of lists. Yay for lists. (Sam, don't judge)

One of my favorite playwriting exercises is inspired by playwright Erik Ehn. I love this exercise because it's much like improv. You listen and react. In this exercise, you're following a list of tasks to help come up with the first line of dialogue and then letting your characters do all the talking. Below are example of task questions. Maybe you can create your own task that you could help get your mind creating.

For each writing task, give yourself 2 MINUTES to write (time yourself!). The rule is you must keep your pen moving, do not stop to think. If you run out of ideas, just keep writing the same word until you finally come up with a new word. The game is... don't ever stop moving your pen!

Ready? Let's go!

1. Make a list of as many lies as you've ever told.
2. Make a list of things you see around you.
3. Make a list of things you don't see around you.
4. Make a list of all of your favorite childhood moments.
5. Make a list of all the things that frighten you.

Is your pen moving? Don't stop moving! Remember to keep your pen moving, repeat if necessary, or make up a new word! The game is to keep writing until your two minutes are up.

6. Make a list of at least five things of never want to see on a stage.

Reread your above lists and circle any words that excite you. Words that you can see in mind's eye. You don't have to know why!

Next, choose 3 of the many things you've circled and write them down.

7. *Inspired* by those words, can you write a statement starting with "I feel..." (feel free to use all 3 of those words or don't).

Use this statement to write the first line of the dialogue between two characters. Keep your pen moving. Don't stop. Write the next line inspired by the previous line. Let the two characters have their conversation. You're just there to listen <3

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