

Basic Structure Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to help solidify the structural elements for a narrative that is primarily linear (though many of these elements will also strengthen a non-linear narrative as well.) The checklist can be used as an outline before writing or prior to engaging in draft work. The checklist is flexible and may change and evolve with subsequent draft work.

I. Dramatic Structure- Structural elements you should always consider regardless of the length of the play.

Protagonist: Theo. Theodore. Namesake.

Antagonist: Wealth and power and the generational mantle.

Major Dramatic Question (MDQ- protagonist's goal phrased as a question):

The Leighton has built themselves up to where they are. However, why do they still feel the weight of society on us?

*If there are more than two characters in your play, what character archetypes do the remaining characters fall under.

Confidant (s): Theo, Yvette

Mentor: Eirene, Boy

Stakes:

What is at stake if your protagonist does not achieve their goal?

Boy – The generational mantle.

Theo – Wealth and power.

Obstacles:

List obstacles does your protagonist need to overcome as they pursue their goal?

The waves and statics of history. The lack of access, regardless of any intention that Black people have. Wealth and power.

Tactics:

List the various tactics your protagonist might use to achieve their goal?

- Delve into their spirit and find out what it means to be “Black.”
- Find their connections in the world that they live in.

Arch:

How is your protagonist different at the end of the play than they were at the beginning? How has this journey (that is “the play”) changed them?

The generational wealthy road doesn’t fog up Theo’s understanding of the routes that they have could take ahead.

Tension Building Devices:

What tension building devices are you using to keep the audience engaged throughout? (high stakes, active dialogue/stichomythia, clock- literal or implied.)

II. The Marsha Norman Paragraph- An outline approach developed by Marsha Norman that shows the narrative arch of a play. Use the information above to shape your paragraph.

Examples:

This play is about Victoria

who wants to be free of her oppressive life

but her familial obligations and expectations stand in her way

It all takes place in a small southern town in the 1920’s

Along the way, Victoria learns that she alone is responsible for her happiness.

You know it’s over when Victoria is able to testify her true love and true self through song.

This play is about a creature

who wants to be able to free/find himself through language

but he is trapped by his current conduction as a scientific subject

It all takes place in an arctic landscape in the near future

Along the way, the Creature learns that the power to free himself lies within his very body and the memories/dreams it incubates.

You know it's over when the creature has found the words to his song and is able to speak his name

*Using the template below. Type your Norman paragraph to show the narrative arch of your play.

This play is about THEO (protagonist or any character in the play)

who wants to know their true powers, but wealth clouds their judgment. (obstacle)

It all takes place in a hotel suite and the beach or present and past.

Along the way, the waves of past generations impact Theo.

You know it's over when _____

III. Ergri's *Premise* (from his book *The Art Of Dramatic Writing*.) More information about the premise can be accessed here: <https://www.writerswrite.com/fiction/egri/>

Often referred to by other names (thesis, theme, central idea, driving force, plan, plot, basic emotion etc.) A play's premise is essentially a sentence that essentially gives you the beginning middle, and end of the entire play. It is usually phrased in a way that centers the journey of the protagonist

Examples:

Romeo and Juliet: "Great love defies even death."

Macbeth: "Ruthless ambition leads to its own destruction."

Ghost (Ibsen): "The sins of the fathers are visited on the children."

Write a one sentence premise for your play. Theo must know whether to get their hands dirty for the betterment of society or play its game.

IV. Some structural questions taken from director Jamil Jude.

Answer complete the following sentences with as many different variations as you can think of:

This is a world in which_____

Gifts given and received by characters provide moments of wonder, discovery and transformation for them. List the *gifts* that characters give and receive throughout the play. What do the gifts mean in relation to the character's needs and desires? How might these gifts transform the giver and receiver?

Resources that explore structure

The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri

Poetics by Aristotle

The Drama of Nommo by Paul Carter Harrison

Backwards and Forwards by David Ball

Three Uses of the Knife by David Mamet

Screenwriting 434 by Lew Hunter

Save the Cat! by Blake Snyder

100 Essays I don't Have Time to Write by Sarah Ruhl

The Writers Journey by Christopher Vogler

The Sanctified Church by Zora Neal Hurston