



The Dramatic Writer's Companion: Tools to Develop Characters, Cause Scenes, and Build Stories

Will Dunne

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Moss Hart once said that you never really learn how to write a play; you only learn how to write *this* play. Crafted with that adage in mind, *The Dramatic Writer's Companion* is designed to help writers explore their own ideas in order to develop the script in front of them. No ordinary guide to plotting, this handbook starts with the principle that character is key. "The character is not something added to the scene or to the story," writes author Will Dunne. "Rather, the character *is* the scene. The character *is* the story."

Having spent decades working with dramatists to refine and expand their existing plays and screenplays, Dunne effortlessly blends condensed dramatic theory with specific action steps—over sixty workshop-tested exercises that can be adapted to virtually any individual writing process and dramatic script. Dunne's in-depth method is both instinctual and intellectual, allowing writers to discover new actions for their characters and new directions for their stories.

Dunne's own experience is a crucial element of this guide. His plays have been selected by the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center for three U.S. National Playwrights Conferences and have earned numerous honors, including a Charles MacArthur Fellowship, four Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards, and two Drama-Logue Playwriting Awards. Thousands of individuals have already benefited from his workshops, and *The Dramatic Writer's Companion* promises to bring his remarkable creative method to an even wider audience.

The Dramatic Writer's Companion: Tools to Develop Characters, Cause Scenes, and Build Stories Details

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Scott says

This is a really helpful book for writers of all mediums. I use it every time I run into a problem with my writing.

Olivia says

Among the thirty or so books on creative writing I've read, this one is the best!

Lena Loneson says

One of my favourite writing-related books. I began using it years ago as a playwright, and discovered it works wonders for my fiction as well.

The book is a collection of exercises to help you flesh out characters, setting, story, themes, and dialogue. They're organized so you can pick out the appropriate exercise for how far along you are in writing: from planning the first draft to putting the finishing touches on a fourth draft.

Each time I try an exercise, I learn more about myself as a writer and about the particular story I'm working on. Highly recommended to drama and fiction writers.

Rase McCray says

Easily the greatest writing textbook I've ever had, and the only one that I refer to nearly constantly--and it's useful for writing all kinds of imaginative works, including both plays and novels.

The book is essentially a series of questions to help you develop your plot, characters, setting, etc. These questions can be both broad and focused, and they are delivered in such perfectly organized capsules that one also learns a lot of craft along the way (all the sections begin with a short discussion of certain craft elements, though that's not the true appeal of the book).

I especially like that this book is one that encourages production. You're being guided through the creation of something, never told *how* to do that creating. As such, the book never gets old and is an especially helpful book for anyone who faces writer's block.

Frankly, I think that anyone who already has learned to competently write sentences and paragraphs could

possibly create an excellent novel or play using *only* this textbook. Yes, they'd certainly still be able to learn more from other craft books, but no other book helps so much with stimulating the imagination.

J.W. Wexford says

This is a great book for the study of writing for theater.

Gwyneth Nicholson says

This book gets a rare five stars from me. I highly recommend this workbook to anyone who writes plays or fiction or teaches playwrighting or fiction writing.

Jeffery Cotton says

Will Dunne's **The Dramatic Writer's Companion: Tools to Develop Characters, Cause Scenes, and Build Stories** is one of several books I've read that target playwrights and screenwriters. In this case I think that's a shame, as the exercises in this book, especially for character development, are useful to anyone who creates fictional worlds.

Like Roy Peter Clark's **Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer**, this book has you apply the exercises to your work in progress, rather than to synthetic prompts.

For these reasons, this is my go-to book for those moments when nothing is working.

The **Dramatic Writer's Companion** stands out because of the way it is organized. Many chapters are only a few pages long, and discuss the development of your story or characters out of a particular need you have. For example, take the chapter "Finding the Character's Voice." As in every chapter, Dunne provides a description at the top to let you know what it's about:

FINDING THE CHARACTER'S VOICE

THE QUICK VERSION: Hone and contrast the unique voices of two characters

BEST TIME FOR THIS: Any time you need to know a character better

These "Best time for this" tags are invaluable. Here are some others:

During early story development or any time you add a new character

After you are well into the story

After you have a working sense of the main character

When a character seems like nothing more than an evildoer

During scene planning

etc...

In fact, these "best time for this" descriptions are so useful, I hope there will be an index of them in a future edition.

For my writer friends who use the Dramatica Theory of Story to build story structure and characterizations, I have found that Dramatica maps easily into these exercises, which provide intense focus on relationship.

Bottom Line

Indispensable.

Robin says

A book of exercises for whatever you're struggling with. It's indexed and well broken down, and there are some exercises in here that I had not heard of previously. Even for ones I already knew and use, it's convenient having everything in one place.

Levent Mollamustafaoglu says

This is a practical exercise book for playwrights and screenwriters. It analyses techniques that can be used to improve the treatment of characters, writing of more effective scenes and building a better story. Will Dunne covers individual techniques to help solve writing issues in each section and provides exercises to go through. It would be less useful for beginners of the trade but would help the aspiring playwright by introducing some practical - but not trivial - techniques that can be applied. Each section contains a number of steps to achieve the desired effect.

Some people might find such an approach very formulaic and would believe that writing plays that work depend on creativity and natural talent, but I believe a structured approach might also help, so in that respect this book would be very useful.

Leen Tool says

It's not a book you read from cover to cover. It's very practical and that's what makes it good. Would recommend it to anyone as a tool to help you improve your already existing play.

Apoorva says

One how-to book I'll be constantly coming back to. Insightful, simple and arranged in chapters that don't tax your attention span.

Chuck O'Connor says

The best book on how to develop a creative writing voice.

Raymond says

A great tool for those of us who write experimentally but at times struggle with classic structure.
