

Theatre People: Dramaturg

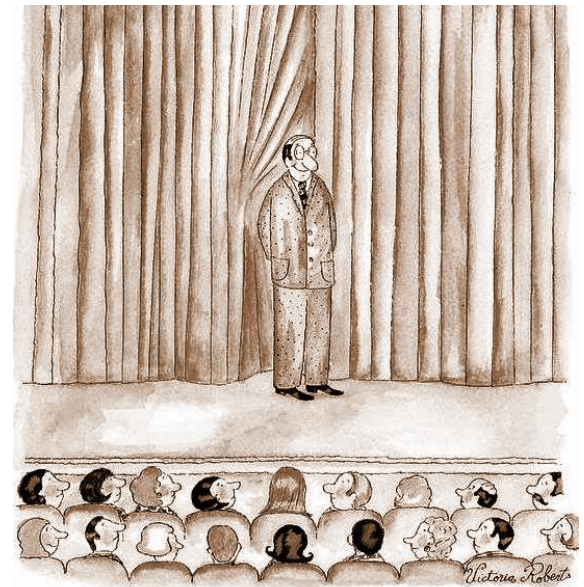
A dramaturg, in short, is an literary editor for plays. You could also think of them as a coach, guiding playwrights forward so that their work can be as honed as possible. A dramaturg primarily works with scripts during the writing process, supporting the playwright while also serving as an outside eye for edits and changes.

Occasionally, dramaturgs will work on a play through the rehearsal process. During this time, they act as an “expert” on the script. They have done in-depth research on the play, including its language, period, politics, and historical context. For instance, on a production of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, a dramaturg would be able to share information with the creative team about the real-life biography of King Henry V, the context in which the play was written, and staging choices made by past productions. This helps the creative team to understand the world of the play as thoroughly as possible.

Unlike many theatre jobs, there are no exact parameters for what a dramaturg does – every process is different!

Activities in a typical day:

- Reading and analysing a new play
- Meeting with the playwright to ask questions and discuss changes
- Doing research to provide background context on a play in rehearsal
- Running a talkback session after a performance
- Facilitating a reading of a new play, with actors reading the script out loud (“workshopping”)
- Writing program notes for a show, giving audience members context for the performance



“Is there a dramaturge in the house?”

Questions that a dramaturg asks:

It’s NOT a dramaturg’s job to demand changes or do any rewrites. Instead, many dramaturgs will move a play forward by asking questions. Answering those questions helps to clarify in a writer’s mind exactly what they’re attempting to accomplish. Common questions include:

- What are the relationships between these characters?
- Why have you chosen to structure the play this way?
- I notice that _____ disappears at this point in the play. Why have you made that decision?
- What is the goal you hope to accomplish in this scene?
- What do you see as the central theme in the play?
- I’m not sure I understand what _____ is trying to communicate in this monologue. What are you hoping that the audience gets from that moment?

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10 skills that a dramaturg uses:

- **Critical Analysis.** Do you finish watching a movie and then immediately want to talk about what worked, what didn't, and how it should have ended? You might be a dramaturg!
- **Creative Thinking.** Even though you'll need to be able to think critically, dramaturgs are also part of the creative process.
- **Diplomacy & Empathy.** Even established playwrights find it vulnerable to share their new work. It's up to you to make a playwright comfortable.
- **Research.** Do you like doing deep-dives on weird subjects? This is the job for you.
- **Flexibility.** Every process is different. Some writers are very sensitive; others want firm direction.
- **Curiosity.** It's your job to react to rough or unclear writing without judgement. Instead, be curious about what the author was trying to do, so that you can help them find a path forward.
- **Love of reading.** More than anything else, a dramaturg does a LOT of reading!
- **Verbal & Written Communication.** Explaining your thoughts clearly and concisely is an important aspect of the job.
- **Collaboration.** Ultimately, dramaturgical work is a team sport.
- **Understanding of theatre history.** The more you know about what has come before, the better you can be at developing stories for the future.

Building Abilities:

There are probably lots of things you are already doing, and things you can start to do, that will serve you in a career as a dramaturg. Some of these are:

- Editing a school newspaper, or working on a yearbook committee.
- Attending theatre and watching movies with a critical eye
- Doing background research for your school play. Offer a "research package" to the director and (with the director's permission) the actors.
- Observing the ways that people in your lives receive advice and criticism. Begin to experiment with how to communicate your ideas so that they will be well received.
- Reading up on theatre history
- Think of a movie you love, and see if you can find an early draft of its screenplay (these are not always available, but many of them can be found online). Read the screenplay, and compare it to the finished movie. Think about what changes were made, and why.

Fun fact from a real-life dramaturg:

"The word can be spelled and pronounced "dramaturge" (rhymes with 'dirge') or dramaturg (rhymes with 'iceberg'). Here's the fun part: no matter how you choose to pronounce it, someone will tell you that you're wrong!" ;)