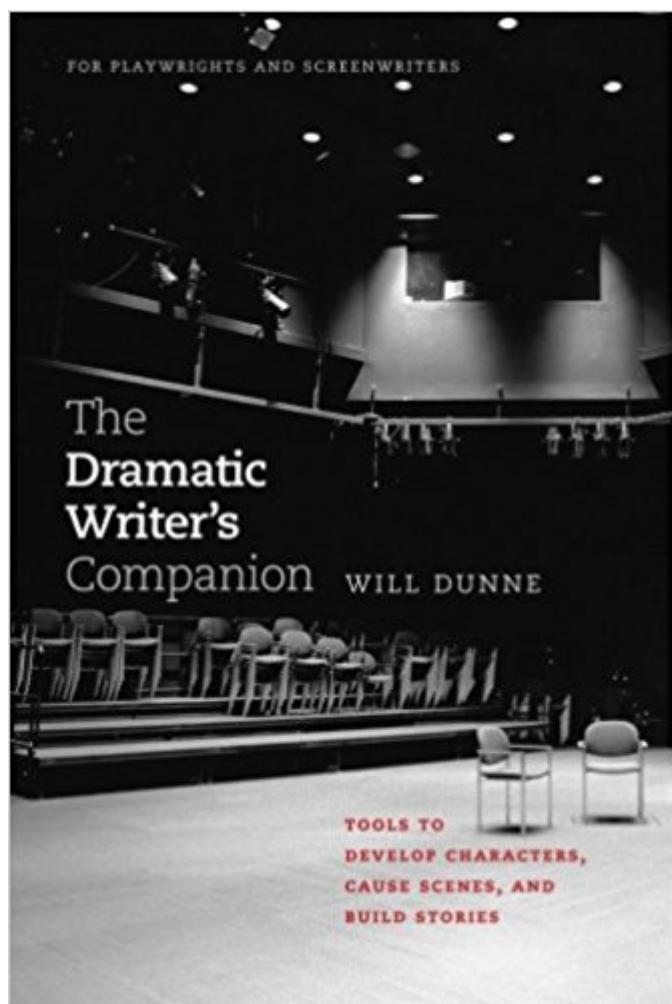


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# The Dramatic Writer's Companion: Tools To Develop Characters, Cause Scenes, And Build Stories (Chicago Guides To Writing, Editing, And Publishing)





## Synopsis

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 a number of 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Dunne has taken everything he knows from the powerful dual standpoints of an award-winning playwright and a master teacher to create the book we’ve been waiting for. It’s all there, from every angle and every perspective—how to bring fascinating, fully-developed characters in conflict out into the light and onto the stage.” (Susan Stauter, artistic director, San Francisco Unified School District) “Dunne mixes an artist’s imagination and intuition with a teacher’s knowledge of the craft of dramatic writing. It is an irresistible combination, producing a book which is simultaneously astute and imaginative. . . . No one can teach anyone to become a dramatic writer. But it is possible to learn how to improve your writing skills. It is possible to be provoked into thinking differently, into adding different colours and dimensions to your ideas, to extend the range of images in your head, to startle your imagination; in short, to be inspired into trying new approaches and methods. The Dramatic Writer’s Companion has the potential to do all of that for a writer.” (May-Brit Akerholt, award-winning dramaturg) “A breath of fresh air. Whether you’re working on your first play or your fortieth, or preparing a first draft or polishing up a finished piece, The Dramatic Writer’s Companion offers challenging, thought-provoking exercises rather than formulaic ‘how-to’ solutions. This is the kind of book that not only makes plays stronger; it makes writers stronger as well.” (Jeni Mahoney, artistic director, Seven Devils Playwrights Conference and playwriting program head, Playwrights Horizons Theater School) “The practical genius of Dunne’s writing lessons proved invaluable to me in the development of the script for my own film, Mean Creek. I have read many books on scriptwriting, most a bunch of intellectual blather about themes and structure, whereas Dunne’s approach to writing is grounded in specific and useful exercises that a writer can actually employ at the moment of creation.” (Jacob Estes, recipient of the 2005 John Cassavetes Award, Film Independent’s 20th Spirit Awards for his film Mean Creek) “Will Dunne lays out all the right questions with great precision and elegance. In the process he coolly demystifies all the dramaturgical demons; they become nothing more than the routine technical challenges faced by any craftsman.” (Dennis J. Reardon, professor emeritus of playwriting, Indiana University) “Dunne meets the writer on his or her own terms, eye to eye. Unique, ambitious, and comprehensive, The Dramatic Writer’s Companion contains practical writing exercises underscored by well-developed dramatic theory.” (Art Borreca, head of Playwrights Workshop and Dramaturgy Program, University of Iowa) “In his new handbook for writers Dunne adheres to

the idea that character development is essential to telling a story. . . . Dunne employs his wealth of experience as the current resident playwright at Chicago Dramatists, a Charles MacArthur Fellowship honoree, a former O'Neill Theatre Center dramaturg and an award-winning author of such plays as *How I Became an Interesting Person*, *Love and Drowning*, and *Hotel Desperado* to give writers a blueprint on how to examine their ideas in depth in order to develop their plays and screenplays. (Judy Samelson Playbill.com)

Will Dunne is currently a resident playwright at Chicago Dramatists, where he develops plays and teaches workshops. He also has led over fifteen hundred workshops through his San Francisco program, served as a dramaturg at the O'Neill, and twice attended the Australian National Playwrights Conference as guest instructor. His plays, which include *How I Became an Interesting Person* and *Hotel Desperado*, have been presented in Russia, Australia, and Croatia as well as in the U.S.

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 that reason, 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 fond of using 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.

The Dramatic Writers Companion saved me this year. I had written a play for Rochester, NY's first fringe festival, but I didn't feel it was the best I could do. It was my first play, though, I didn't really know how to turn it into the play it was supposed to be; a play I felt proud to show. I spent a lot of June and July with the Dramatic Writers Companion. The exercises on synopsis helped me write a concise and compelling synopsis for a play that I hadn't even finished, because I understood what the core story was. Fringe wanted our synopses for their programming months before my play revisions were completed, but it turned out fine. Working out what the play was about in its truest and simplest terms about allowed me to then write the most clear-sighted piece of work I've ever created. Characters developing the themes with more artfulness and purpose than ever before. The result was that my play received excellent responses from the director, actors, and audience. And it has now been picked up by an established theater company for a full production in 2013. Thank you, Will Dunne, for writing this book.

I have been writing an amateur for years. I didn't put pen to paper until I studied up on all the techniques and methods for writing, including a good many books on characterization. Years later, I came across this one, and it is the best I've read. Thorough and well organized, easy to read but also really gets you thinking about the basis of short stories and novels, the characters within them. Highly recommended for anyone wanting to write fiction of all genres.

I used to get stuck in Grad School, stuck in deadlines, or just stuck anytime anywhere and when I took the time to sit down, and do a couple of these writing exercises, it opened up so much character and story to explore. At the very least, it puts the writer behind the steering wheel of momentum. That's not to say I don't use it for several other facets of writing, because it literally generates entire worlds within which your characters and stories can operate.

This book is excellent for screenwriters, it explains a lot of writing techniques that aren't even taught in screenwriting classes. This is a MUST HAVE...and it's cheaper as well!

Excellent book on dramatic structure, with an abundance of exercises for problem solving. A small price to pay for the value received. Totally worth the purchase.

As an aspiring playwright, I find myself constantly revisiting this book to help myself refine my ideas.

It's not so much a how-to guide, but more of a reference. It can be a little dense, but it is well organized and easily navigable when looking for specific things. Well worth the money!

This is a great guide to help you draw out your world, characters and story. However, I don't recommend the Kindle Edition because the layout better suited as a physical book. I would recommend this book any writer.

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