

**THE
INSIDE
GUIDE TO
PLAY
WRITING
FROM
THE
OLD VIC**

GUIDE

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CONTENTS

<u>Introduction by Hannah Khalil</u>	02
<u>Playwriting exercises by Sonia Jalaly</u>	06
<u>Artist profile: Isabel Hague</u>	12
<u>Artist profile: Temi Wilkey</u>	16
<u>What your script should look like</u>	20
<u>Artist profile: Sabrina Mahfouz</u>	24
<u>Artist profile: Vinay Patel</u>	28
<u>Further reading, watching & listening</u>	32
<u>Glossary of terms</u>	34
<u>Opportunities & next steps</u>	36

INTRODUCTION

BY HANNAH KHALIL



PHOTO: RICHARD SAMER



At what point can you call yourself a writer? Is it about how many words you write a day? Or if you've finished writing that play? Or does it have to have been produced? Or is it about if you've earned any money from writing yet? Or the number of plays you've written? Or if you've won a prize?

These are just some of the questions that used to make me feel rubbish about myself and whether or not I could/should write when I started out. My advice now after lots of years of writing is none of these questions matter. All that matters is if you want to write, then you must write; and if you fancy giving it a go but you're unsure — go on, try.

I'm a playwright, my name's Hannah Khalil and I'm going to talk a little bit here about my ideas about writing and why I write and how. One of the few things I am sure about in this world is that every writer is different, and no one has the answer or the formula to how to write a good play. But more on that in a moment. Here are some things that should not stop you writing a play:

1. There's no one who writes the kind of things you would (either in terms of the story, or who it's about, or the language, or the style)
2. Someone tells you you don't have the right qualifications or you're from the wrong background
3. Because you are scared

On the contrary, these are absolutely reasons you should write.

I wrote my first play after a difficult conversation with someone who heard I'd turned down this guy who asked me

on a date. He was nice but I wasn't interested. This someone told me if I kept turning down offers of dates from nice blokes, I'd end up old and alone. I was really angry. But I couldn't find the words or the confidence to argue with her. So, I sat down and wrote a little play. And that helped me a lot. I mention this because writing for me has become what that first play was: a way to try and understand the world and other human beings and why they do the things they do. A way to try and understand how I feel about things that happen to me, and people I love, and come to terms with it. A kind of therapy I suppose. Which makes it sound like my plays are probably really boring, but I hope they're not. And if they're not it's because I really think hard about why something I'm writing is a play — as opposed to a short story or a film or a novel or something else.

As I said above, I don't believe in formulas in writing. I think formulas are for maths. I like maths. But playwriting is absolutely not maths. Well not the kind of plays I want to write or see anyway. So, if anyone tells you they have the answer of how to write the perfect play I'd be very suspicious indeed. Because there is no perfect play, there's only the play you want to write in the way you want to write it, and anyone who wants to help you create your play, like a director for example, should be helping you find out what and how that is rather than imposing what they think you should be writing on you. I've been lucky. This is going to sound mad, but I've had so much rejection and that has been — ultimately — a good thing, though it didn't feel like it at the time.

You see I couldn't afford to do an educational course in playwriting. After my stint in acting, I knew I wanted to write, so I just did it. Evenings, weekends, after work. I wrote lots of bad plays and gradually they became less bad. I met a lot of people who were interested in my background and my writing, but who didn't think I was a writer

for lots of reasons. I never got to the bottom of that — I suspected sometimes it was my age. Or my gender. Or my background. Or that I wasn't writing the kind of things or characters, that they were used to reading. Or that they expected someone who wrote my play to look differently from the way I look.

There's a huge amount of courage needed to be a writer. First you have to be brave to put pen to paper. Then you have to be courageous to show it to anyone. Then you have to grit your teeth to hear it read for the first time and once you are sitting in an audience who have no idea (or care probably) that you are the writer — well, if you get through that you feel like Hercules.

Yet the most important first step (once your play is written) is to show it to people. Plays are not written to sit in drawers. They need actors and a director to breathe life into them. You can submit your plays for the many available playwriting competitions — though this can be a dangerous game. Some charge for entry (I'd advise against entering any that do) and you can end up in a rollercoaster of hope and misery living from deadline to shortlist announcement, as I did for many years.

What I ended up doing was gradually making friends with an ever growing and changing group of actors and creatives, (including a brilliant director) many of whom share my cultural heritage so understood the stories I wanted to tell and the way I wanted to tell them. I'd invite them round for dinner when I had a new play, then ask them to read it out for me and we'd talk about it. In time this wonderful group ended up being involved in fringe productions of my plays, and most of them I still work with now. It was a long process but one that helped me make the plays I wanted to write.

All my plays are very different in style, influenced by many other writers and plays/films/TV shows/books, however, in all of them I've asked myself two main things:

1. What's the central question I want to explore in this play? For example, that first play I mentioned after the 'you should go out with that guy' nonsense, the question there was 'Can humans survive alone?'
2. Why is it a play — what will make it special and particular to theatre?

I always feel if I can do those two things in anything I'm writing I'll be on the way to making it work — for me. And if it works for me it might just work for an audience — that is if it's the right creative team, the right actors, directors and other creatives. Whether in a reading in my sitting room or sat in the audience of a theatre. And it's in that moment when I think 'YES! That's it — even better than I heard it in my head...' that those questions I mentioned at the start subside a little — because in truth they never entirely go away — and I really feel like a writer.



PHOTO: BEN CARPENTER

A writer of Palestinian-Irish heritage, Hannah was the recipient of the Arab British Centre's Award for Culture in 2017.

Her stage plays include the acclaimed *Scenes from 68* Years* — shortlisted for the James Tait Black Award — and *Interference* for National Theatre of Scotland. Her new play *A Museum in Baghdad* will open at the RSC in October 2019.

Hannah's radio plays include *Last of the Pearl Fishers* and *The Deportation Room* for BBC Radio 4.

She has read scripts for The Bush Theatre, Donmar Warehouse, Soho Theatre and Tinderbox Northern Ireland. Hannah is currently under commission to Shakespeare's Globe in London.

PLAYWRITING EXERCISES BY SONIA JALALI



PHOTO: SARAH KEELING



The hardest part of writing a play can be making a start.

There are lots of places a playwright can look for inspiration. Paintings, photographs, newspaper articles, conversations overheard on the bus, dreams, memories, history books, and anecdotes, anything that sparks your imagination and makes you want to find out more can be the source of your play.

A lot of writers spend their time listening to and soaking up everything that goes on around them. Try it next time you're out and about. Listen to people's conversations and the things they talk about, big and small. Notice the way people speak, the rhythm of it, the way they behave when they're angry, when they're nervous, when they fancy someone, when they're sorry. Notice as much as you can and write down the little bits of gold that grab your interest. The more you get to know the way people behave in real life, the more real your characters will become.

In the meantime, while you're hunting for your own ideas to explore, here's an exercise you can use to help find inspiration from a source.

EXERCISE: TURNING A NEWSPAPER INTO A PLAY

1. Take the front page of a newspaper that catches your eye



2. Set a timer for three minutes and write as many questions as you can about anything and everything on that front page. Ask about the who, the what, the why, the where and how of everything. For example, if I took the above front page, I might ask the following questions below:

- Who can buy a house?
- What did the moped mobsters do?
- Where does the term 'girl next door' come from?
- Why was Jeremy Kyle so popular?
- How did the 'Iraq war boy' find his mum?

3. From those questions, we already have five different starting points for five different new plays. A play about the housing crisis, a play about mobsters on mopeds, a play about what it means to be the 'girl next door', a play about reality TV and a play about reuniting families. Look through all the questions you've come up with and choose one that excites you the most
4. Now get researching. Find out everything you can. If something grabs your interest and takes you down another path, that's fine too. The idea is to look for something you are interested in and want to find out more about
5. Collect all your research together in one place — quotes you found interesting, photographs that caught your eye, people you want to write about, etc
6. Now complete this sentence: 'I want to write about...'
7. You have the subject for your play! Now it's time to get creative...

THE BLANK PAGE

A blank page can be scary. Sometimes writers feel pressure to write something 'good' and that pressure is absolutely rubbish for creativity. So, let's get rid of it straight away.

Before a runner runs, they stretch; before a singer performs, they sing scales. This is called warming up and even writers do it sometimes (although a writer's warm up is a lot less physical!).

The next exercise is a warmup that can get you started and get some words down on that scary blank page.

EXERCISE: FREEWRITING

1. Grab a piece of paper and a pen and find a comfortable spot you can write in. You can do this in silence or with some music on in the background. Everyone works differently so get to know what's best for you
2. Set a timer for four minutes on your phone
3. Write 'I want to write about...' at the top of your page and then just keep writing without stopping until the timer runs out

Write quickly and messily, you can make spelling mistakes, don't cross anything out, don't correct anything, don't worry about full sentences or punctuation and whatever you do don't stop writing. If you get stuck just write 'I want to write about I want to write about I want to write about' until something else comes out.

It does not need to be good and it does not need to make sense. This is just for you, so surprise yourself with what comes out and let your brain wander.

4. Now you've made a start! Read through what you've got. Is there anything that surprised you? Is there anything you might want to explore further? Is it just complete chaos on a page? Whether your scribbles are useful or not, the best thing about it is that you took a risk and wrote something. The more often you take that risk, the more chance you have of finding gold

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

Different playwrights have different techniques for how they write plays. When I write a play, I like to learn something. I like to start from a place of uncertainty and then try my best to find some answers by letting the characters struggle with the questions.

To do this I like to start with a narrative question, a difficult question with a yes or no answer that your play is trying to find the answer to.

EXERCISE: NARRATIVE QUESTION

Think about the subject of your play — what you want to write about.

For example, I started with the front page of a newspaper, I zoomed in on an article about homeowners and property buyers, I researched who can buy a house and after all that I decided I wanted to write a play about the housing crisis.

Now I need a narrative question. Remember:

It has to be a difficult question to answer.

For example, if I decided my narrative question was going to be 'Should everyone have a home?' then I already know my answer is yes, I think everyone should have a home. There's nothing difficult about this so I'm not feeling particularly driven to write the play.

But what if I said, 'Would you do anything for a house?' Now I'm thinking about characters that are in a difficult situation. Characters that want a house but have to do something they don't want to do to get it. The question creates conflict, something every good play has in one way or another.

It has to have a yes or no answer.

While researching the housing crisis I might have started to ask myself, 'how can there be homelessness when there is so much money in the world?' But this doesn't have a yes or no answer, so it's not making me, or my characters, or my audience pick a side.

But what if I said, 'Would you give up your lifestyle if it meant someone else could have a house?' This becomes trickier. We have

to decide yes or no, it's much more black and white and so to find the answer the play will have to search around in that murky grey area.

Have a go at coming up with your own narrative question. If it's a tough question to ask yourself then it's worth trying to find the answer to.

CHARACTERS

If your narrative question is tough to find an answer to, then ultimately that's your characters' problem, because they're going to be the ones dealing with the fall out.

But what makes an interesting character?

Flaws — real people are flawed, so your characters should be too. Take Hamlet. If he was just a perfect man who'd lost his father, then the play would be very simple and we would always be on his side. But add in the fact he's selfish and treats Ophelia badly and our feelings towards Hamlet become a lot more complicated.

Wants — the thing your character wants is the thing that drives them throughout the play. The want should be a tangible thing. In Hamlet's case — I want to kill the king.

Needs — this is different to what the character wants and is defined by what the character is lacking — what their flaw is. Hamlet's flaw is that he's selfish so for him to genuinely change and succeed, he doesn't need to kill the king; he needs to learn to be selfless.

Obstacles — the things that get in the way of your characters getting what they want. In Hamlet's case there are lots of obstacles that delay him from killing the king. When he first goes to do it, he finds the king praying, then he mistakenly stabs Polonius instead, then he gets sent to England. All these obstacles create conflict which makes for an interesting play.

Voice — people speak in different ways. It's not just the tone of voice that make people sound different, it's the way they speak as well — the things they say, the words they use, the rhythm, the turns of phrase. You should be able to tell who is speaking from a line itself without having to look at the character's name. Capturing the voice of character on the page is tricky but will help the actor playing the part bring it to life.

Every character in your play should have all these things. Even the small ones. To get you started, here's an exercise that can help you get to know your characters a little better.

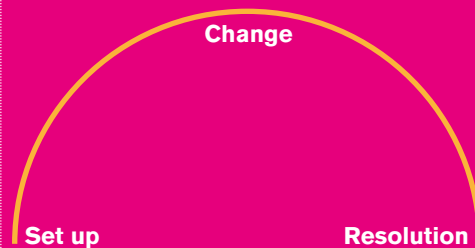
EXERCISE: CHARACTER QUESTIONNAIRE

Answer the following questions as each of your characters, in the first person. Try and be as detailed as you can, the more you write the better you'll get to know them.

1. What is the trait you most dislike in yourself?
2. What is the trait you most dislike in other people?
3. What's your most treasured possession?
4. Which word or phrase do you most overuse?
5. What is your greatest fear?
6. When were you happiest?
7. What does love feel like?
8. If you could edit your past, what would you change?
9. What single thing would improve the quality of your life?
10. How would you like to be remembered?

THE JOURNEY OF A SCENE

A scene is the setting of an event. Something happens. A change occurs. Writers say that if a scene is not changing the course of a play, then it has not earned its place in your play. This change gives you the journey of a scene. Your characters start somewhere, something happens, and they end up somewhere else. As a result, they are changed. This is often called the narrative arc or the story arc.



This shape of a scene is echoed in the shape of a play. The story is set up > changes occur > the characters have to find a resolution. So, once you've cracked the structure of a scene, you've cracked the whole thing.

EXERCISE: ONE WORD DIALOGUE

Take two of your characters and write a scene of six lines, one word per line. Here's an example:

Character A	Jump	Set up
Character B	No	
Character A	Why?	
Character B	Please	Change
Character A	Jump	
Character B	Ok	Resolution

I took the narrative question 'Would you do anything for a house?' as my starting point for this scene. A telling B to jump is the set up.

A changing their tactic and asking 'why?' is the change. And B saying 'ok' and agreeing to jump is the resolution.

It's not going to win an award, but this scene does tell a story, and it does it in only six words. We can read all sorts of things into this scene — A has the power, B doesn't want to jump, A really wants B to jump, etc. None of this is said explicitly. Instead I show the audience what is happening, rather than telling them.

Now it's your turn. Keep in mind your narrative question, find the change and the resolution and remember **show don't tell**.

EXERCISE: WRITE A SCENE

Now it's time to turn your mini scene into a bigger scene. Remember everything you've already found out about your characters from the questionnaire, their wants, their needs, their flaws, etc. and write the scene again, this time in 12 lines, six lines each, with as many words as you want.

TIME TO WRITE A PLAY

You have your research, your narrative questions, your characters and you even have a bit of dialogue. You have all the ingredients for a great play. Make yourself a plan, think about the arc of your story and then get cracking.

And remember, just like with the freewriting exercise, it doesn't have to be good, you're just learning. But you'll never know if you don't give it a go, so take the risk and go can find that gold.

Sonia is a stage and screen writer and practitioner from Manchester.

She has devised, written and performed work with companies including CBBC, Kiln Theatre, Paines Plough, Company Three, Hull Truck Theatre and Battersea Arts Centre. Her debut solo show, *Happy Birthday Without You*, toured to the Greater Manchester Fringe Festival in 2014 (where it won the Best Newcomer Award), Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Kiln Theatre.

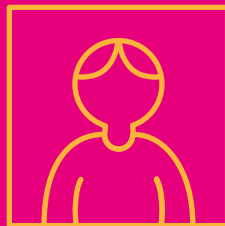
Sonia was selected for the BBC Writersroom Comedy Room in 2018 and has since written on CBBC shows including *Class Dismissed* and *The Amelia Gething Complex*.

Alongside her screenwriting, she is also developing two new works for stage, *Bits*, with her company PaperMash Theatre and the support of the Wellcome Trust, and one woman show, *Oh We Do Like To Be*, with HighTide.

ARTIST PROFILE: ISABEL HAGUE



PHOTO: RACHEL HAGUE



HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH NEW VIEWS?

I heard of New Views through my college when the head of the drama pathway and mentor of New Views, Katy James, first mentioned this project. From this point it was explained that this was a competition set by the National Theatre, which I was stunned by because obviously it is such a well-respected theatre. Then it was mentioned that the winning play would be produced at the National Theatre in London and I was completely inspired and on board.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT WRITING?

I particularly enjoy using writing to take a seemingly insignificant moment in time and magnifying and developing it. I find writing very satisfying. People often ask me if I find my own writing pleasurable to read and I do. The work I create is full of my memories, my unique energy which is created from my own passion and a storyline which I believe is significant. Now I have emerged into the world of playwriting, I find that I listen to the words differently when watching a play because I can truly appreciate the process, passion and personal drive behind them. I feel honoured to be able to address all the topics I believe need to be heard and present them in my own way. With playwriting, there is such a power as you give the listener, or reader, the journey with a design completely by you. People who watched the first play I wrote, *If Not Now, When?*, asked me questions about what happened next and it was such a unique feeling. Writing gives a great power because the writer can decide if you laugh or cry, decide what conversations you have that day and either give you the ending you wanted or hoped to avoid.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO WRITE ABOUT?

Over time I've realised through reading other plays and developing my own work that

I enjoy writing about struggles within families. I find the structure of a family rather inspiring when creating my work because they tend to involve a large amount of depth and secrecy. Families often seem so idealistic; however, every family has complexities and unique struggles.

WHEN YOU WROTE YOUR FIRST PLAY WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Initially I felt very overwhelmed that I needed to 'write a play' because that statement, for me, seemed like an undeniably scary privilege. I wanted people to watch my piece and hear the words like a conversation they could have overheard or remind them of a situation that had once happened to them.

I overcame the issue of feeling my work was false by basing a large amount of my work on real life. I added depth to my writing and found the development of my characters so essential to the credibility of my work. I created character documents, added pictures and wrote monologues to fully evaluate the characters. It is so important to look into how individuals interact with each other and how true characters aren't simply defined by one personality. I also found it difficult to cut down my script to an appropriate length because through time you become attached to your work. It got easier as I learnt cutting work isn't getting rid of pieces; it's more like shaping the pieces.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE SEEING YOUR PLAY PERFORMED BY PROFESSIONAL ACTORS?

Creating a production has so many stages and technically, I'm just one of the early steps. I knew this meant my work would be heavily shaped and that is something I was nervous about. Although I didn't know what to expect every moment throughout the

process was amazing. Watching the talented actors perform my work and being able to connect with people who were just as passionate about the industry as I am can't be put into words. Taking part in New Views was a complete privilege and having the honour of listening to my own words, memories and thoughts spoken by those with so much experience and personal perspective behind each line was mesmerising.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT?

I know it seems cliché, but honestly write about what you care about; what you find funny and what makes you cry. Don't try to emulate others. In a lot of pieces of work, and good pieces of work in my opinion, you should be able to hear a lot of the writer's voice. That way the writing is constantly personalised and driven through passion. Feel proud of what you write because every word is valuable as it shows perspective, and every perspective is unique.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY?

As a young female living in a northern working-class area, I am aware that I don't have the same opportunities available to me as other individuals living in the south. I don't want to seem pessimistic and blame all success of others on their postcode, because everybody is worthy of a career. However, it can't go without mentioning that it is obviously much harder for the leading UK performing projects to hear a voice miles away when there's hundreds next door. Having this opportunity was so refreshing and a real triumph; not only for me, but also for the community I'm proud to live in. I feel honoured to be able to address what I believe is relevant, and through my northern female voice.



PHOTO: MANUEL HARJAN

Isabel Hague is 16 years old and currently training at CAPA (Creative and Performing Arts) College, Wakefield.

Isabel's friends describe her as spontaneous, a leader, witty and an all-or-nothing kind of person.

Isabel won the National Theatre's New Views competition and her play, *If Not Now, When?*, was staged at the National Theatre in July 2019. She is currently working on her second play.

ARTIST PROFILE: TEMI WILKEY



PHOTO: ABBY DUNLAVY



HOW DID YOU GET INTO WRITING?

I always wanted to write. I applied to lots of universities and one of the courses I really wanted to get on to was English and Creative Writing but when I didn't get in, I went and did English and let the creative writing part of myself go. I became an actor after university, and I think I still wanted to write but I wasn't listening to that part of myself.

I found out about the Royal Court Writers Group through Twitter. The Royal Court have a writer's group for people who are 'playwriting big dogs' but they also have an intro group. So, when applications opened, I thought 'let's do it'. They only asked for ten pages for your submission to get into the group; that could be ten pages from a script you'd already written, or it could be ten pages that you'd written just for the application. That was really encouraging and felt manageable. I sent off my ten pages and I got in. It's a ten-week course with weekly sessions. At the end you write a play which you submit, and they give you feedback.

It was really amazing having other writers, or people who are trying to write, around you. I learnt a lot from the course leader but actually so much of what I learnt was from the other people in the group. One of the things I found really useful came from my friend John King — he used to talk about how he writes loads of stuff that he knows won't go into the play. He calls it 'writing into nothing'. It opens you up and you learn more about your play. I found that so useful because I'm a different kind of writer and I'm ruled by structure. Just hearing how others write really helped to release me. Having networks of writers is really important. Every time I speak to a writer, I feel really excited and empowered.

I then met this amazing person called Tom Wright (Head of Artist Development, The Old Vic). Tom did a call out for LGBTQ.+ writers for these rehearsed readings he was producing. Tom encouraged me, helped me re-draft my play and put on a rehearsed reading. From there, the play was programmed by the Bush Theatre.

WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS LIKE?

When I start on a scene, I'll write it in pen and paper first and it'll be terrible. But that's OK. I'll make sure it's not in a nice book, so it can look scruffy and rough, and no one will ever see it. I'll then type that up and as I am typing, I'll make small edits to improve it. I'll then edit the scene in more detail in its own document and then eventually when it's starting to take shape, I'll put all the scenes into one document.

For my first play I researched as I went. A lot of it came from my own experience and my relationship with my family. I was thinking a lot about queer lineage and what it means to have another group of people who you call family. Some of the ideas that gave birth to the play came from a book I read ages ago as research for something else. I'd been looking at what people believed before colonialism in Nigeria, the Yoruba Gods and the cosmology. The play came out of the marrying of those two things.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO WRITE ABOUT?

I'm interested in queer stories, forgotten histories, and feminist stories. But I don't sit down thinking I want to write a particular type of story. It's more like something will strike me; I might see someone and be interested in what they're going through. Or I might be struck by the way someone's phrased something when they speak. It's hard to pinpoint because it's quite organic.

WHAT WAS HELPFUL TO YOU IN YOUR JOURNEY AS A WRITER?

The Royal Court Writers Group was really, really helpful. I don't think I would have written my first play without it because there were nine other people going through the same thing and we could all message each other on WhatsApp and freak out about our deadlines! Also, people being really encouraging. I submitted my play to Theatre503 and someone I bumped into had read my play and told me he thought it was really good. You spend so much time thinking on your own, thinking what you're writing is rubbish, so it's so nice when someone encourages you. It keeps you going.

HOW DO YOU STAY MOTIVATED?

I try to remember why I started writing in the first place. Some writers will stick a sentence about why they are writing this play on their laptop to motivate them. Also, it's important to give yourself breaks. Sometimes I'll do 'quick writes' where I'll write solidly for 45 minutes to an hour and then have a ten-minute break and go back to it. It helps having a mini deadline.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

I think facing rejection has been a challenge, especially because I get enough of that as an actor. Not hearing back from things is hard but you get used to it. When I first started sending out my script I thought, 'Oh no, I've just opened myself up for another type of rejection!' I think it's about recognising that you might not be at the stage in your writing career to get the opportunity that you've applied for and that's OK. Everything is a journey and it's building you towards better things that will come around eventually.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT?

Look out for where you can submit your work. The Bush Theatre, Royal Court and Hampstead Theatre all have regular open submissions. There are also loads of scratch nights and short play nights going on, so look out for those. You can use a short scene from your play rather than the whole thing. People who watch that kind of thing are more likely to chat to you after they watch it and see if they can help you. Literary departments want you to email them and ask to meet up. A literary department's whole job is to look for new writers so contact them and ask for advice or ask to meet up with them. It takes a lot of confidence but it's a useful thing to do. Try and meet producers or get to know producers who can help you fundraise or get a rehearsed reading together.

When I finished the Royal Court Writers Group, they encouraged us not to jump into another writers group. They said that 'the most important thing for a writer to do is write'. No matter how scary that blank page is you just have to start. No matter how grueling it is or how rubbish you think it is, it's important to keep going. And it's really important to know that it's an exciting time to be a playwright. You are stepping into something that's really exciting and if you're good it will give you lots of opportunities.

Often, we see the same kind of people and the same kind of stories on stage but for me the best kind of theatre makes me feel like my life is important. And that everyone's life means something. Remember, your story is worthy of sharing. It's worthy of being elevated to a platform that everyone can see, whether you are working class, or queer, a person of colour, disabled, or trans. Whatever perspective you have on life, people and stories, it's more than worthy of being watched, seen and listened to.

Temi Wilkey is an actor and writer from North London.

She was a member of one of the Royal Court's Introductory Writer's Groups in 2017 and is a current recipient of the High-End Television Levy Writer's Bursary Scheme, developing her first TV pilot under the mentorship of Lucy Prebble.

Her debut play, *The High Table*, will be performed at the Bush Theatre and Birmingham Rep in 2020.



PHOTO: BEN CARPENTER

WHAT YOUR SCRIPT SHOULD LOOK LIKE

There is no definitive way to format your script but the following is an example of a standard format. Play around with the format to best suit the story you want to tell.

The most important thing is that your script is clear and legible to other people.



On your title page make sure to include the title of your play and who it has been written by:

Example Format

by A. Writer

If you are submitting your play for a competition or to a literary department you may also want to include contact information on this page. For example:

Contact Address:

Email:

Phone Number:

Characters

CHARACTER ONE

Here is where you can give your director and actors a short description of each character.

CHARACTER TWO

Think about the key information you need to include here that may not be obvious from the text. That could be the characters age, ethnicity, occupation or relationship to another character.

CHARACTER THREE

Keep it to the basics and don't overload this section with too much information. Leave room for interpretation.

Setting

You can open your play with a description of where your play is set to help the reader visualise what they would see on stage. It's up to you how specific you want to be.

You could leave it entirely up to the reader's imagination or be specific, depending on how naturalistic your story is.

Things to consider might be: the location of the play or first scene, important items of scenery, what year the play is set in, what time of day it is, if anyone is already on stage when the play begins and what they are doing.

ACT 01 Scene 01

You may want to break your play down into scenes and acts. This is useful if the action takes place in more than one location or time period or if you want to include an interval in the middle.

CHARACTER ONE: Make sure you start each line of dialogue with the character's name on the left hand side of the page so we know exactly who says what

CHARACTER TWO: Put each new line of dialogue on a new line

If you are including stage directions make sure to separate them from the dialogue. You could put them in italics to make it clear these lines are not to be spoken. Keep stage directions short and only include key information.

CHARACTER THREE: Think about ways in which your formatting can aid an actor in performance. For example if two characters speak at the same time, you can use a /

CHARACTER ONE: / To indicate that these lines should overlap

CHARACTER TWO: If a character is interrupted when they're speaking you could use a —

CHARACTER ONE: Or if a character is unsure what to say next you could end their line with...

CHARACTER THREE: Don't be afraid to experiment with your layout. If you are unsure if something is clear or not ask someone to read your script to see if it makes sense to them

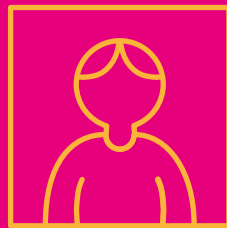
Make sure to highlight when a scene has ended. A common way to do that is with a...blackout.

Remember to include page numbers to help your reader.

ARTIST PROFILE: SABRINA MAHFOUZ



PHOTO: MACMILLAN WOODS



HOW DID YOU GET INTO WRITING?

Short answer is — through reading. From the moment I could read I was rarely without a book and that carried on through my life. Even when I was out raving, I'd have a book for the morning train, tube or bus ride home! I think that whatever form of art you want to create and put out into the world, it's essential to be consuming that form yourself, experiencing it in all its different levels and genres, knowing what you like and what you don't, what you're not seeing that you want to see.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT WRITING?

I enjoy having an outlet for the build-up of thoughts and concerns and anger and fear and hope and joy that accumulate over a day, a year, a life. I feel privileged to be able to give other people that outlet if they don't enjoy writing themselves, that they can feel empowered by telling their stories through my writing which then in turn gets told through other people and so it goes. I like having access to imaginative recovery — in that I can rewrite things which have historically been represented in a way I am furious about, or not been culturally documented at all. That is certainly one of my biggest motivating factors in wanting to keep writing — you do need a few of those strong motivating factors to push you through the terrible pay and atrocious work/life balance if you become a full-time writer.

WHY IS WRITING IMPORTANT?

For me, a huge part of its importance is the rewriting of life stories and events that have been misrepresented, ignored, side-lined, silenced. It is in being able to document cultural movements and moments in creative ways that sometimes can have more impact than if they are only documented academically or journalistically. In these highly divisive times, it also feels important to share experiences and encourage genuine connection between us all

and within that, I personally am all for the so-called 'preaching to the converted'. It can be isolating holding opinions that seem to be derided in mainstream media and if people read or watch work which shows those opinions are held by others which fosters a sense of solidarity, however tenuous and momentary, that is incredibly important to me; writing is not only a form of activism when it is changing minds. It also does not need to be activism to be important. Writing is one of the only tools we have that is still available to us no matter what our backgrounds, even though obstacles to being able to do it, especially professionally or publicly, of course do exist and those who wish to maintain the status quo have long seen the power of writing as both a threat and a tool, so it is not always used in a positive way, even within the creative arts.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO WRITE ABOUT?

I mean, really, anything that falls into the context of what we've been talking about. Liking something isn't a prerequisite for writing about it. I don't like football, for example, but I loved writing about Emma Clark, the first known black British footballer from the 1880s, and women's football from then to the present day. It's easier to say I don't like to write things that feel like a distrust; there's enough of that outside the arts, why bother?

HOW DOES YOUR POETRY INFLUENCE YOUR PLAYWRITING?

It's inextricable I suppose. Most of my plays have started off as a poem in some way or another. The rhythmic, lyrical way I like to write is my version of planning — I let the rhythm lead the way through the plot much of the time and then have to go back to make it a bit more sensible!

WHAT IS YOUR WRITING PROCESS?

Completely dependent on time, money and childcare! If a project has enough of a fee

to allow me to plan, plot, research, ponder — then I will. If it doesn't, then it has to get done in bursts on my phone, on voice notes, on post-it notes, to the soundtrack of *Peppa Pig* — there is no way a working class writer mum who is yet to make a fortune can be precious about process! I generally think of this as a positive, but I'm not going to lie — one day I would love my process to involve impeccable interior design, integrated Sonos speakers and a sea view!

HOW DO YOU STAY MOTIVATED?

By taking on projects I care about. This is a luxury that has come with experience and higher wages. When I started out, it was less of a choice — if they were paying, I was taking. But I realised I'd rather work other jobs and only do the writing I care about, because to do writing I didn't care about was soul-crushing in a way that other jobs weren't because they were just jobs — not that they didn't have those moments too, but it became a balancing act. Financially, it still can be one, but creatively, it's such an exciting time in terms of things getting made that I previously couldn't have imagined would get a look-in, so I am motivated by that and what the future holds, building an industry that will be more open and accessible and wider-reaching.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Mainly money and gaining the confidence to position myself as someone who had something to say which others might want to listen to. Money is a challenge I have yet to overcome, but I have always had to be open to work outside of the arts in order to pay bills — whether admin, advertising or waitressing and this is something I wouldn't expect to ever disappear. So, the 'overcoming' becomes about time management skills — how do you manage to write when you have to spend your time doing something entirely different to get paid? I filled out many funding applications and eventually got some — these

helped. I became pretty militant with an hourly day schedule of what I had to do from morning til night. I had to see my friends less, be less spontaneous, take little time off, be constantly lining up new projects once one just started, juggle around six to ten projects at different stages at any one time. I hope that isn't a permanent scenario, but it's the only way I've been able to make it a financially viable career. Finding the confidence to consider myself a writer, to push myself to put my writing out in the world, came mainly through anger and frustration. The first time I did it I was desperate to write my way through my experience of working in strip clubs for five years and to challenge what I was seeing written about them at that time. Focusing on something outside of myself, whilst also a part of my experience, was really helpful and once I realised how supportive other writers were, it became less and less of an issue.

WHAT HAS BEEN HELPFUL TO YOU IN YOUR JOURNEY AS A WRITER?

Other writers, constantly, and mainly women writers and men and women writers of colour, whether just starting out or super famous, their encouragement, support, advice and help has been absolutely essential to my journey continuing to be that and it's one of the things I love about this job; there is always someone to learn so much from no matter what stage you or they are at in their career.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT? DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS ON HOW TO GET STARTED?

There's the obvious ones — read, write, always. Get in touch with writers you admire and if you have a specific question for them, ask. Find your tribe — they may not all be writers, but they are out there, and they will enable you to do what it is you are supposed to be doing. Events, talks, raves, gigs, festivals, libraries — you never know where you might meet them

but always be open to the fact that they are there and you need them. Join a writer's group — locally, at a theatre, a library. Wherever and whatever the aims of it are, I think they're essential at the start.

Go to see as much free or discounted theatre as possible. Most places have good deals and lots of organisations give out free tickets to young creatives. Read all the scripts — the Bush Theatre and National Theatre have shelves of them, and most libraries at least have a few contemporary scripts in stock — if they don't you can request some. If you are specifically thinking about writing-performing, I'd say don't even bother with anything that you are not completely obsessed with, because the energy, the effort, the time and life it takes from you to do, if it is going to work, it has to be able to sustain all of that, you can't be half-hearted about the subject matter. So be honest with yourself, really, really honest.

Don't be scared of DIY. Almost every theatre writer I know started out doing everything themselves with their friends they met at various workshops and groups if they didn't study it. Turning someone's living room into the theatre for the night, reading scripts out loud, getting feedback, partying afterwards. Building it up as you go. I think it's so much better than getting venue support straight away as you can hone your own style and write what you really want to write without the pressure or concern of what expectations from others might be. It is difficult to manage financially, but payment from venues at that stage wouldn't cover much anyway, so never think something is only validated, that your talent is only validated, once a venue or organisation gives you an opportunity. Eventually of course it helps, but try not to let it be the only thing you aim towards. If you run a few things successfully yourself, you could apply for funding or ask for contributions towards it so it can at least cover your time. Basically, this is all a long-winded way of saying don't wait for anyone to tell you that you are allowed to do it!

Sabrina Mahfouz has recently been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and is the recipient of the 2018 King's Alumni Arts and Culture Award.

She has won a Sky Arts Academy Award for Poetry, a Westminster Prize for New Playwrights and a Fringe First Award for her play *Chef*. Her play *With a Little Bit of Luck* won the 2019 Best Drama Production at the BBC Radio and Music Awards. She also writes for children and her play *Zeraffa Giraffa* won a 2018 Off West End Award.

Sabrina is the editor of *The Things I Would Tell You: British Muslim Women Write*, a 2017 Guardian Book of the Year and the forthcoming *Smashing It: Working Class Artists on Life, Art and Making It Happen*.

She's an essay contributor to the multi award-winning *The Good Immigrant* and is currently writing a biopic of the rapper and producer Wiley for Pulse Films.

ARTIST PROFILE: VINAY PATEL



PHOTO: HELEN MURRAY



HOW DID YOU GET INTO WRITING?

I came to writing for theatre relatively late. I grew up watching telly on the edge of my dad's bed and I just assumed that if I was going to do anything creative it would be in TV and film as it seemed more accessible to me. I grew up in one of the two London boroughs that doesn't have a permanent, professional theatre building. I never really went to see plays except in the later part of school. I went to university to study English but didn't do any theatre. I remember I was about to turn 25 and thought I've got to do something. If I want to be a writer, or be in the arts somewhere, I have to actually put something out in the world. So, I applied to do a Masters at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and I thought, if I get in, I'll do it but if not I'll do something else with my life. Luckily, I got in.

On that course we did television, radio, film and playwriting and that's when I properly discovered theatre. A lot of people had come from uni straight onto that, but I was actually really grateful that I had taken some time out because it meant I knew exactly why I was there, and I really cared about it. Instead of writing a film script at the end of my MA I wrote a play which I really liked. When I left Central, I got a job and had some stability, but I didn't do any writing again until 2012. My old tutor encouraged me to apply for an attachment to a theatre company called HighTide. I was 26 at that point and I wrote a play called *True Brits*. It took me two years to write it. I applied for funding to help write it. I didn't get it the first time I applied, nor the second but the third time I was successful. My work let me take three months off to focus on my play. I realised in writing it that this was the best thing I'd written and that I had to get it put on.

The year before I put the play on, I realised I didn't know any directors and I didn't know any actors really, apart from a couple I knew from Central, so I applied for every scratch night I could find. I think I did ten scratch nights over the course of a year. Every time I wrote a short play, I gave myself a new challenge to try and push my writing. It helped me to figure out what sort of writing I liked but also helped me to push my ability. Through that I met lots of people and that was really helpful when making my first full length piece.

I took *True Brits* up to the Edinburgh Fringe in 2014 with HighTide. It wasn't a mega hit at the Fringe, but enough people saw it that liked it. The Bush Theatre came to see it and took it back to London for the Radar Festival and then the play headlined the VAULT Festival for three weeks.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT WRITING?

When I was a kid writing short stories on the kitchen table it was like an escape into another world. Over time it became a way of having a bit of agency in the world. The idea that you can create your own world I found quite empowering.

With *True Brits*, I didn't realise this at the time, but I got to create something I hadn't seen before but that I really wanted to exist. I remember being at the Edinburgh Fringe and realising there were only two posters with a brown man's face on it. And one of them was my play. That felt really meaningful to me. That play encompasses a lot of my experiences of being a young Asian man around 7/7, the terrorist suicide bombings in London. I remember going to a party and a guy asked me, 'Why do you want to write something about the bombings when Simon Stephens nailed it with his play *Pornography*?'. I didn't have any critical thinking on the theatre at the time, but I was like, it's the most significant event that's happened to British Asians in a long time and there's no British Asian perspective on that. That's

when things changed for me and I realised writing is about what you can put into the world. The first TV project I worked on was called *Murdered by My Father* and it was explicitly a piece of advocacy drama about honour killings. After that came out there was an uptake in calls to charities from people who felt threatened or felt like they were in a situation where something like that might happen to them. I realised writing really does have the ability to change people's lives and that felt really exciting. Now what I really like about writing is asking myself, what will this do for people?

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO WRITE ABOUT?

All writers have their own myth, whether they realise it or not, and I think everything I write is about love and home. I grew up writing lots of sci-fi. I was obsessed with science fiction. After 7/7 I realised the things I wanted to write about became more traditionally dramatic. Everything I wanted to do was right now and in the moment. But I'm sort of in this moment now where everything I'm writing is science fiction again which feels like a nice return to where I was. I like writing science fiction because it's about possibility. Theatre is also about possibility. I look at an empty stage and anything could happen there. I find that really exciting.

WHAT WAS HELPFUL TO YOU IN YOUR JOURNEY AS A WRITER?

The most helpful thing has been finding other writers or other creatives in the theatre. What you want to find are people who understand what you are trying to do but won't tell you how to do it like they would. When I found a couple of people like that my writing came on significantly because it meant I had people I could trust to send my work to when I didn't know how to take it further. They weren't trying to make something their own taste; they were listening to what my intention was and were giving me better notes. It's the community around theatre that's kept me

in it more than anything because it is difficult to make a life just as a playwright unless you are incredibly prolific.

Beyond that I think you need to see as many things as you can in different mediums. When I was first starting out, I made myself start reading comic books to help me think about how narrative works and to expose myself to a different range of artists. I also made myself go to the ballet which was humbling and useful. So, anything that broadens your perspective is good.

Finally — get an internet blocker. I'm allowed on Twitter for 15 minutes every day. Being able to put your arse on the chair and focus is the thing that makes me different. I wasn't the best writer on my Central course, but I worked the hardest and that was a really useful thing for me to learn. You don't have to be a genius; you just have to trust in process and process is just doing a little bit every day. That takes the pressure off and is really doable, but you do have to do it.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

The biggest challenge as a writer is that it's actually a lot of different jobs rolled into one. When you're pitching you have to be a bit of a salesman. When you're writing you have to stop being a social animal and ignore the world for a while. When you're editing your own work, you have to be a different person to the one that wrote it. You also need to know how to be a good person in a rehearsal room and not be precious around your work.

When I was at Central, I was given the main character in a sitcom to work on. It was about a musician who sets up a karaoke bar. I made him a black guy who was really into the Delta Blues heritage and was from Essex. I remember my tutor saying to me that he didn't see him as black. I realised there is an inherent bias around

who is worth telling a story about and who does an audience connect with. So, one of the big challenges for me is when I look at my own work how I make this familiar to someone who is unfamiliar with it and unfamiliar to someone who is familiar with it. That's a weird emotional challenge for me.

Money is a challenge. My advice: don't rush to give up your day job. I loved having a day job because it took the pressure off writing and it gave me the freedom to choose the projects I wanted to do. It's not a mark of validity to be writing full time.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT?

Let yourself be really bad. When I was starting out, I didn't have any confidence, so I thought I had to be really good straight away. But actually, everyone starts off bad. I keep the first draft of every script I have ever written in a drawer and anytime I start feeling cocky and like I know what I'm doing I get them out. First drafts are always awful and if I stopped for that reason, I wouldn't have a job.

Be curious about the world. Push yourself to try new experiences. Try your hand at every medium like theatre, TV, radio, podcasts, etc. I wouldn't have ever thought of writing for theatre if I hadn't given it a go.

When you are approaching work don't categorise it as that's good or that's bad. With everything you see ask yourself, what about this do I like? What about it don't I like? What about this would I steal? I did this with everything I saw, even stuff I really hated because I might like one line or the way they did that moment. Always bring generosity to other people's work.

Vinay's debut play, *True Brits*, opened at the Edinburgh Fringe 2014, before transferring to the Bush Theatre and VAULT Festival. His latest play, *An Adventure*, ran at the Bush Theatre in late 2018. His first piece for television, *Murdered by My Father*, won the Royal Television Society award for Best Single Drama and was nominated for three BAFTAs. Vinay was named a BAFTA Breakthrough Brit for his work.

He has since written for Paines Plough, ITV, Channel 4 and the BFI, as well as contributing to the bestselling collection of essays, *The Good Immigrant*. Most recently, Vinay wrote for series eleven of *Doctor Who* and is working on further projects for TV, theatre and film.



FURTHER READING, WATCHING & LISTENING

If you want to find out more about playwriting check out the following recommendations.

THINGS TO READ

Playwriting: Structure, Character, How and What to Write by Stephen Jeffreys

'I really recommend this book for anyone interested in playwriting. I thought that it'd be really dense and intimidating but it's not at all! Stephen's tone is conversational and it's really readable. I got through it surprisingly quickly, but it's broken up into helpful subheadings so you can read it over a long time in little chunks'
Temi Wilkey, Playwright

On Film-making by Alexander MacKendrick

'What I really liked about this book is that it has a section on writing and a section on directing and how those two things work together. Working in theatre you need to manage your relationship with your director so it's useful to know a little bit about that. It's written in a really accessible way. He's a really gentle and playful tutor' Vinay Patel, Playwright

THINGS TO WATCH

The Bruntwood Prize

writeaplay.co.uk

'There are lots of New Writing prizes in the UK which can reward a lucky few with a full production of their play. Although these are very competitive — and I would encourage all writers to find their own ways to get their work on — these prizes can provide useful deadlines, motivation and sometimes feedback! In particular, the Bruntwood Prize create lots of digital content full of advice and practical support which you access wherever you are'
Tom Wright, Playwright

THINGS TO LISTEN TO

BBC Writersroom Podcast

bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05bbnlq/episodes/downloads

'This podcast is billed as being with the UK's leading TV drama writers, but also features a few playwrights. They're interviewed in the place where they write and somehow that leads to a very honest and open chat about their working habits and some great advice'
Hannah Khalil, Playwright

Makin It with Temi Wilkey

bushtheatre.co.uk/artists/podcast-making-it-with-temi-wilkey/

'Makin It is a weekly podcast featuring emerging playwrights, theatremakers and theatre companies discussing how they got started, how they make work and how they pay their bills. Temi is a brilliant host and her guests offer an honest and insightful look into life as an artist.' Euan Borland, Education Manager

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



ACT

An Act is a way of dividing up a play into different parts. Acts are comprised of different scenes which combined make up an important part of the story. A play could have one, three or five acts. A simple way to think about three acts could be, beginning, middle and end

COMMISSION

A request to write something (i.e. a play) in exchange for money

DIALOGUE

A conversation featuring two or more characters

DRAMATURGY

A person who can help a playwright realise their play by asking the writer questions, offering notes on their script and acting as a sounding board for the writer's ideas. Dramaturgs have a strong understanding of the way stories work. They can act as a substitute for an audience and offer an outside eye

DUOLOGUE

A part of a play between two characters

EVENT

Something that happens in a play, usually of importance

FIRST DRAFT

The first version of your play, from beginning to end. A play usually goes through more than one draft before it is considered finished

FORM

Form is the way you choose to tell your story. Examples of different forms you might choose include monologue, musical or dance. This is the framework which you build your play around. You may choose to combine different forms to create something

LITERARY AGENT

A professional agent who acts as a representative for a writer who deals with theatres, producers, etc, on behalf of a writer

LITERARY DEPARTMENT

A person or group of people who work for a theatre and are responsible for reading scripts and finding plays to put on stage. They usually play some role in nurturing new writers

MONOLOGUE

A speech performed by one performer

NATURALISTIC

When the style of the play emulates real life. It will also have a linear narrative and the set will be as true to life as possible

PLAYWRIGHT

A person who writes plays

SCENE

A part of a play where the action takes place in the same location

SCRATCH NIGHT

A platform for artists to test out an unfinished piece of work in front of an audience

STRUCTURE

The framework of your play. For example, you could choose to structure it in one, three or five acts, or you could choose to structure it as a series of episodes or create a circular structure that brings you back to the beginning. Whatever structure you choose it should help you to tell your story and themes

SUBTEXT

A hidden meaning in the text that is understood by the reader but is not explicitly stated by the characters



NEXT STEPS

Interested in taking your writing further? Whether it's training, open submissions, competitions or online resources, we've got you covered. The following opportunities are completely free. This is not an exhaustive list but a good place to start. Talk to your local theatre to see what opportunities they offer for writers.

TRAINING

Bush Theatre, London — Emerging Writers' Group

bushtheatre.co.uk

Each year, six early career writers are selected to be part of the Bush's Emerging Writers' Group (EWG). The group aims to support writers over a sustained period and help encourage work on a new full-length play.

Live Theatre, Newcastle — Introduction to Playwriting Course

live.org.uk

A free programme aimed at writers (16+) at an early stage in their career. The programme runs for 10 sessions. Participants will learn key aspects of writing a play for the stage, including theatricality, character, dialogue and

plot through a mixture of practical workshops and masterclasses.

Oxford Playhouse — Playhouse Playmaker

oxfordplayhouse.com

A writer attachment programme for new and emerging playwrights. Each year, up to six writers are selected and meet one Saturday a month (10am–6pm) between January and October. These sessions are used to work on writing techniques, with individual mentoring and feedback on their scripts.

Playwrights' Studio, Scotland — Mentoring Programme

playwrightsstudio.co.uk

Every year, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland selects six aspiring or emerging playwrights for an eight-month programme of mentoring. The programme includes a two-hour mentoring session each month for six months, skills workshops, a read through of your play with professional director and actors, and a public sharing of your work.

Royal Court, London — Writers' Groups

royalcourttheatre.com

The Introductory Group is open to writers who are aged 18+ and are based in the UK or Ireland. No experience is necessary. They are generally able to help with travel costs from outside of London. Each year, they run three groups across the year and each group runs for eight weeks with each session lasting 2 hours. At the end of the group, writers are invited to submit a play they have worked over the course of the group, on which they can receive detailed feedback based on the notes from the playwright leading the group, the literary department and Royal Court readers.

Sherman Theatre, Cardiff — Introduction to Playwriting

shermantheatre.co.uk

A new initiative aiming to introduce young people aged 15–18 to writing for the stage, supported by leading Welsh or Wales-based writers and directors.

Soho Theatre, London — Writer's Lab

sohotheatre.com

A nine-month programme designed to support writers to write a new play. Participants meet up once a month and the programme offers workshops led by leading playwrights. This is a paid programme, but bursary places are available.

Tamasha, London — Tamsha Writers

tamasha.org.uk

A writer-led collective aimed at supporting writers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Participants meet weekly and the content of the programme is determined by the collective.

The Old Vic, London — The Old Vic 12

oldvictheatre.com

The Old Vic 12 aims to nurture and develop the next generation of theatre practitioners through offering access and insights into theatre-making, mentoring from industry experts, delivering masterclasses to other emerging artists, and collaborating with each other to create brand new work. Each year the project works with three playwrights and offers the opportunity

to develop a new play over the course of the project with support from the theatre.

OPEN SUBMISSIONS

Bush Theatre, London

bushtheatre.co.uk

Unsolicited scripts are accepted once a year. All are read and considered for production and development at the Bush Theatre.

Hampstead Theatre, London

hampsteadtheatre.com

Hampstead Theatre accepts scripts all year round from writers who are based in the UK. They only accept one play per writer per year and all plays must be full length.

National Theatre, London

nationaltheatre.org.uk

Script submissions are open all year round. The New Work Department aims to respond to all submissions within three months, but they are not able to offer feedback to all submissions.

National Theatre of Scotland – Script Reading Programme

nationaltheatrescotland.com

A script submission opportunity for writers to send their work to the National Theatre of Scotland.

Theatre503, London

theatre503.com

Theatre503 accepts script submissions all year round.

Traverse Theatre – Open Script Submissions

traverse.co.uk

A script submission opportunity that only opens for a short window per year for writers based in the UK or Ireland.

Yard Theatre, London

theyardtheatre.co.uk

The Yard Theatre opens script submissions twice a year. In the first instance they will ask for a short extract from your play and a one-page document about your play.

COMPETITIONS

Bread & Roses, London – Playwrights Circle

breadandroses theatre.co.uk

A monthly opportunity for writers to share up to 10 minutes of a new play, which can be a short play in its entirety or an extract from a longer piece, and receive feedback from one another. It is also an opportunity for the Bread & Roses Theatre team to look out for new short plays for future instalments of their scratch night The Platform.

The Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting

writeaplay.co.uk

The Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting is the UK's biggest national competition for playwriting for great new plays and great writers of any experience. A partnership between the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, and property company Bruntwood, the prize is open to anyone aged 16+ in the UK, Ireland and the British Territories with a story to tell. There are various types of awards for the shortlist to win part of a prize fund totaling £40,000. Each of the top

100 plays receives individual feedback from the Royal Exchange Theatre's creative team.

Papatango New Writing Prize

papatango.co.uk

The Papatango New Writing Prize is an annual playwriting award which guarantees an emerging playwright a full production on a professional stage. Feedback is given to all entries. It is open to all residents of the UK or Ireland and is assessed anonymously.

Playwrights' Studio, Scotland – New Playwrights Awards

playwrightsstudio.co.uk

The yearly New Playwrights Award provides a professional development opportunity for three early career playwrights living in Scotland. It provides writers with time, space and financial support to develop their work by focusing on a particular script. The Award includes a £2,000 cash bursary, dramaturgical sessions, a week-long retreat, skills workshops and a day of script development with a professional director and actors.

StageWrite

stagewrite.org.uk

StageWrite is an annual festival in partnership with The Place Theatre. It is a platform for emerging and published writers, who are UK residents, to see their work in performed script-in-hand by professional actors in front of an audience. It allows the writer to gain perspective and feedback from actors, director and audience members.

Theatre503, London – 503Award

theatre503.com

Theatre503 accepts script submission all year round. They also run regular Rapid Write Response (RWR) nights. It is an opportunity open to writers of all levels of experience. Writers will attend a full-run show in its first weeks and write a 10-minute play inspired by it. The 503 team will select between six to eight scripts to be staged at 503 theatre two weeks later.

Verity Bargate Award

sohotheatre.com

Winners receive a cash prize and their play is produced by Soho Theatre, London. The prize is open to playwrights in the UK or Ireland.

SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

ScriptSpace

space.org.uk

ScriptSpace is a development service for playwrights developing 'early draft' work. Each play submitted will be read by their team of readers and provided with a written feedback report. Selected plays are offered a prepared reading at the Space, giving writers the opportunity to hear their early drafts read aloud by professional actors. The readings are followed by an informal feedback session and networking opportunity.

Talawa

talawa.com

Talawa's free Script Reading Service provides feedback and support to emerging Black writers across the UK.

ONLINE

BBC Writers Room

bbc.co.uk

An online platform for writers with a range of resources and development opportunities, including tips on how to format your script.

Bush Green

bushtheatre.co.uk

An online platform featuring interviews and resources for playwrights.

London Playwrights' Blog

londonplaywrightsblog.com

A blog for emerging playwrights with weekly round-up opportunities and online resources.

New Views

new-views.tv

New Views is the National Theatre's playwriting competition for 14–19 year olds. Schools have to sign up to take part but there are a range of online videos and activities which can be accessed for free.

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The Old Vic Theatre Trust 2000 Charity No. 1072590
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