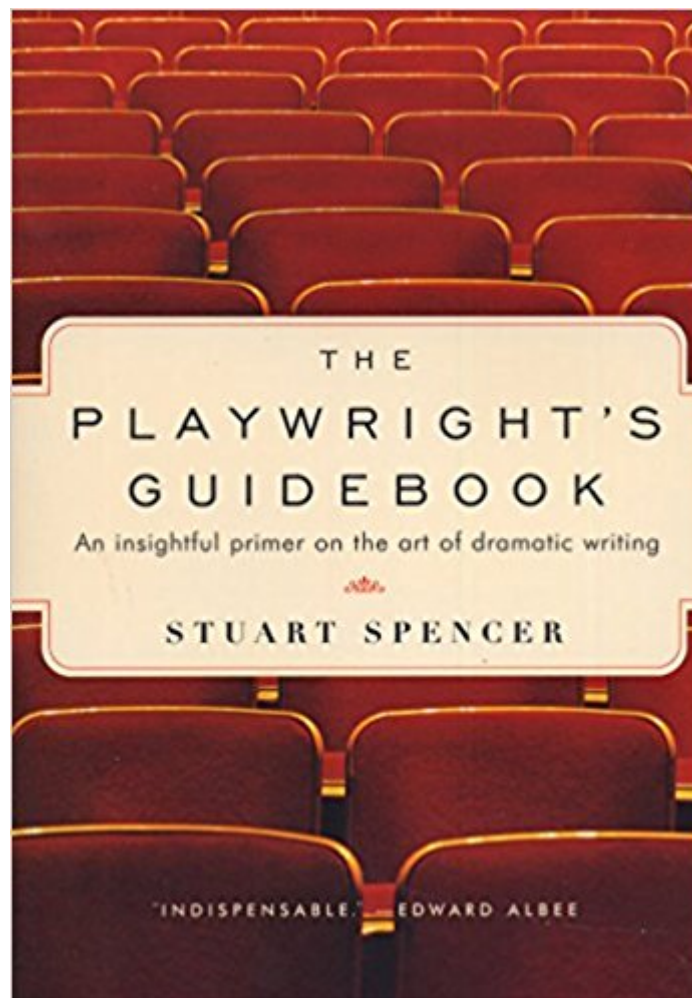




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# The Playwright's Guidebook: An Insightful Primer On The Art Of Dramatic Writing



## Synopsis

An accessible, contemporary guide to the art of dramatic writing During the ten years that Stuart Spencer has taught playwriting, he has struggled to find an effective playwriting handbook for his courses. Although most of the currently popular handbooks have good ideas in them, they all suffer from the same problems: they're poorly organized; are composed mostly of quirky, idiosyncratic advice on how specific playwrights have gone about writing their own work; and are full of abstract theorizing on the nature of art. As a result, they fail to offer any concrete information on how to construct a well-written play or any useful guidelines and exercises. Moreover, few of these books are actually written by working playwrights. Out of frustration, Spencer wrote his own book. The result, *The Playwright's Guidebook*, is a clear, concise, and engaging handbook. Spencer addresses the important principles of structure, includes insightful writing exercises that build upon one another, explores the creative process, and troubleshoots recurrent problems that playwrights actually face.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A practical compendium based on author Stuart Spencer's experience crafting plays (*Resident Alien*; *The Rothko Room*; etc.) and teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, *The Playwright's Guidebook* offers counsel on issues like structure, conflict, character and problem-solving. This contemporary guide fills the gaps left open by many books, supplying organized and realistic advice for would-be playwrights. As Spencer says, "A play is more wrought than written. A playwright

constructs a play as a wheelwright once constructed a wheel: a general shape is laid out, and then hammered, bent, nailed, reshaped, hammered again and again, until finally a functional and artful product has emerged." Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Spencer has written many plays (*Resident Alien* is his most recent) and has taught playwriting at Sarah Lawrence College for the last ten years. Frustrated by not being able to find a playwriting handbook that addressed key issues and also included useful exercises, he decided to better his craft by writing his own how-to. The result is this succinct but insightful manual. In Part 1, Spencer lays out the "rules" of playwriting with the caveat that they are not written in stone but still need to be studied and understood, especially by new writers. Part 2 covers the creative process, describing how to define an idea and use gut instincts to write what you need to say. Part 3 deals with problems and tips on how and when to rewrite (e.g., how to create "cut lines" files). Finally, Part 4 is loaded with advice on what to read and how to write cover letters and contact literary agents. Well structured and easy to read and use, this book will be helpful to aspiring playwrights. Public and academic libraries should consider adding it to their collections. Lisa J. Cihlar, Monroe P.L., WI  
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I had high expectations from both the title and the many good reviews from past purchasers. Sadly, I found this book to be boring and in no way was a "guide book" when starting out to write a play. Both the writing style and the material shared suggest an academic approach, not a how-to guide (which was what I thought I was getting). Frustratingly, a scant half of one page was spent on formatting style for the reader and/or stage director. Despite the author's claim to have written several plays himself (I'm sure he did), there is not even a small section of his own plays or others that shows the essential-to-follow format for presenting dialogue, characters, stage direction, etc. Pages upon pages were spent on Spencer's referencing ancient Greek plays, Shakespeare, and such. The book is one slog of "analysis" about why plays exist and what they do for culture and the arts. If you are looking to learn how to organize your first play this will be the wrong book. I really cannot fathom the myriad four and five-star reviews of this book.

If you're looking to get started as a playwright, Spencer helps you with prompts and gets you going. Used this for my first class and it's a great reference to go back to.

Book arrived in good condition.

This book is better than I could ever have hoped for. It is sort of an equivalent to Syd Field's guide to screenwriting, but is an up-to-date guide for writing stage plays. Stuart Spencer seems to have an in-depth knowledge of how creativity works, a definitely modern approach. It is a pleasant experience reading this book and I hope it will help me to adapt my knowledge of writing so that I will be able to write a stage play.

Yes, as some reviewers have noted, the text about the creative impulses of the mystical writing process tends to be a bit precious for my tastes. That new-ageyishness aside, the practical advice offered more than makes up for the author's gushing love for the gifts of the muses. I, as a writing teacher, especially enjoy the attention he pays to developing an understanding of the fuel of good drama-- need, obstacle, conflict. (I should note that some of his terminology seems a tad off to me-- he uses "action" to mean what actors and directors commonly refer to as "objective" or "intention

This book provides a foundation for writing that is both simple and profound. I have recently begun writing screenplays after twenty years as a playwright, and the lessons about drama that I have learned from Stuart Spencer are once again, as always, in the forefront of my mind as I continue with my creative work. Without a PLAYWRIGHT'S GUIDEBOOK, a writer is at sea, lost and anxious, perhaps in the midst of what one needs but with no way to navigate it. This brilliant and straightforward book explains to the writer what seemed unexplainable, and allows her to click on the light in the all too familiar dark room of trying to find one's way through a play. See the light with the help of Spencer!

Exceptionally clear and concise book. Handles all the elements of playwriting in a very concise manner. Excellent examples. A very supportive and precise introduction to playwriting. Interesting exercises...Do then! A must resource book for anyone wanting to understand the art of playwriting.

WOW! Wish I had read this before writing my last 2 plays. Now I can do some serious re-writing. Book is well organized and if you are the type of writer who feels that rules are stifling, there is still a lot to learn from Mr. Spencer. This is a book that will remain as my go-to reference for years to come.

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