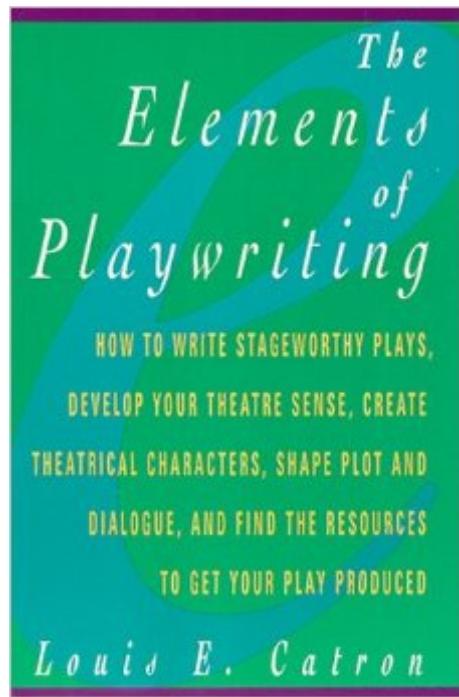


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The Elements Of Playwriting



Synopsis

Louis Catron, the highly regarded teacher, author, and playwright, has created an exceptional book destined to serve aspiring playwrights as Strunk and White's classic *Elements of Style* has served other writers. Addressing both the artistic and the utilitarian with equal regard, the book presents the basic principles of writing stageworthy plays, such as plot, dialogue, and character development, along with practical guidelines on working with actors and directors, getting produced and published, and finding an agent. It explores both how to write plays and what it means to be a playwright - from turning ideas into plays and structuring a play's action to creating dimensional characters and understanding the varying demands of monodramas, one-acts, and full-length plays. Throughout, the author emphasizes creating stageworthy plays and favors concrete advice over theory. In addition to insights on what producers, directors, actors, and audiences look for in plays, he includes numerous examples from classical and modern plays, exercises the budding playwright can use to sharpen and develop skills, directions for typing a script in the proper format, and advice on a subject too often neglected: evaluating and revising the play. At once inspirational and practical, *The Elements of Playwriting* is an essential reference for beginning and experienced playwright alike, and an invaluable resource for anyone involved in the art and craft of theatre.

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Customer Reviews

I am a Midwestern physician by day and fledgling playwright by night. One year ago I decided to

take an idea to paper and wrote my first play. The story was clear in my mind so the writing went easy. Within six weeks I had completed a rough first draft. At this point I ventured over to the local bookstore to see what books they had on playwriting. There were several, but Louis Catron's *The Elements of Playwriting* caught my immediate attention. Standing there, I skimmed the contents then read a few pages. The book was full of pearls gleaned obviously from a lifetime of experience in the theater. I bought the book and ordered a coffee to read more, (isn't that the way it always happens?) Catron goads our left and right brains into action in ten chapters that range from how to get the play started, formatting the text and incorporating Aristotle's six elements of live theater into the work, to suggestions on getting your work published and performed. Various exercises to get the point across are used along the way. The book is a joy to read; a superb "nuts and bolts" treatise for the novice and veteran writer alike. I pick up something new each time I read it. I particularly enjoyed the discussion on how to be a playwright, involving as much with how one "thinks" as what ones "does." In my opinion, Louis Catron's *The Elements of Playwriting* is the best book on the subject out there. It helped me complete my play and make it a more polished work. The book would be perfect as the main textbook in any college playwriting class. Louis Catron's "Elements" certainly "plays in the heartland!"

I completed the first draft of my play "American Brass" back in 1999. It was pretty awful. Then, I found this wonderful book by Prof. Catron. Following the guidelines and inspiration contained in his book I eventually transformed the draft into a stageworthy script. Before reading his up front advice "Don't show anyone your first draft", I had given a reader a look at the play. The reader, an experienced theater person, tried to be helpful with constructive comments, which I came to understand after reading Catron's book meant - I had no plot, my characters were flat and I was writing narratives rather than dialogue. This book provides a clear understandable guide to the structure and dynamics of a successful play and how to write one. Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite.. and before each rewrite review Catron's book for insight and inspiration. There's also practical advice - look to get your play on stage not necessarily on Broadway. So I had a high school do a reading and then a church group and now I have the area community theater interested in a full production. Thank you Prof. Catron

The Elements of Playwriting is a great book for anyone who wants to understand what it takes to write a play. Catron goes over everything a person needs to know including creating characters, building a plot, and constructing dialogue. I really liked the chapter on *What Makes a Play*. Even if

you are not a Playwright, but you are involved in the theatre in another capacity, such as an actor or stage manager - you would still benefit greatly by reading this book. It will give you a great understanding of what a Playwright must accomplish in order to get his play to the stage.

I only have one negative thing to say about Louis E. Catron's "The Elements of Playwriting," so I'll get it out of the way right off. In various spots in the book, he makes critical remarks about both soap operas and the "Perry Mason" TV series that make me wonder if he's ever actually watched them. The writing cautions he connects with the remarks (respectively, always make sure your characters' emotions are motivated, and avoid a "deux ex machina" ending) are absolutely legitimate, but using these as illustrations are simply untrue. In most other books such false reporting would seriously damage the writer's credibility in my view, and indeed it's the one thing that keeps me from awarding a full 5 stars. The one saving grace in Catron's case is that every other piece of advice is illustrated accurately, if not explicitly in the text. He shows quite well how to make your story appeal to directors, actors, and audiences, not only explaining what they look for but illustrating how to achieve it. As with any book on writing, this is meant to be a book of ideas, suggestions, and recommendations to empower us as writers rather than restrain us. Where an accepted "rule" goes against the story we want to tell, we're expected to be true to the story rather than the rule. Every other book on this topic has taken this attitude, but Catron consistently takes the next step and cites plays that illustrate how nearly every rule has been broken by a successful play, and why that play succeeded in spite of breaking that rule. Catron is a completist in other ways as well, taking the reader from the conception of a story all the way to a list of playwright's resources (such as directories of literary agents). Whether your playwriting is a hobby, a sideline, or a prospective career - or even an established one - I highly recommend this book.

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