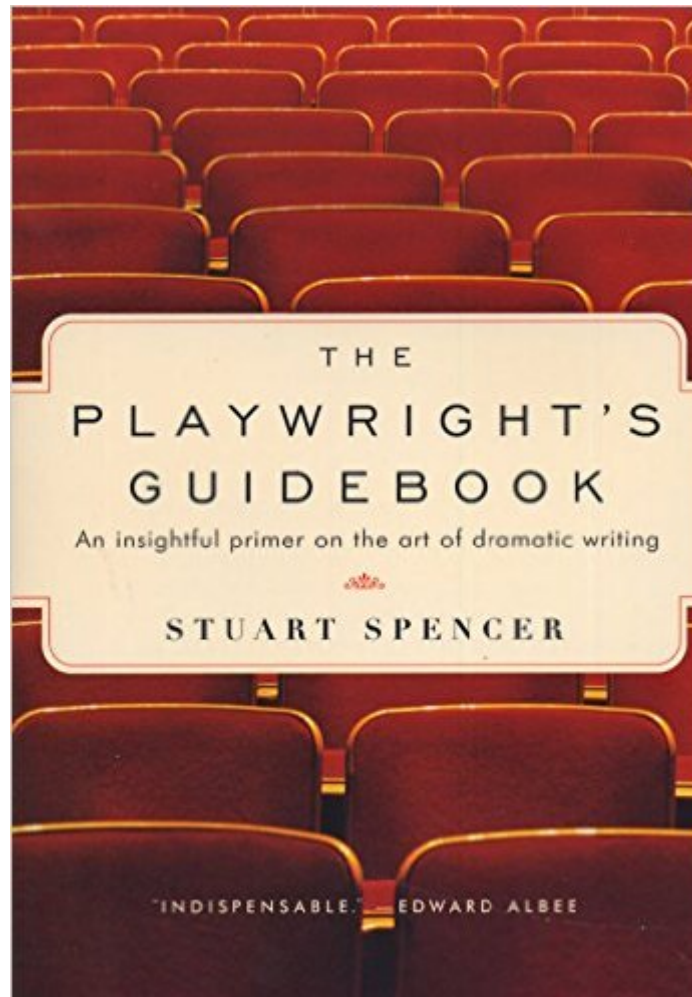


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# The Playwright's Guidebook: An Insightful Primer On The Art Of Dramatic Writing



## 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

Most people won't listen to advice until they're good and ready. I had "The Playwright's Guidebook" in my office for over a year. When I finally read it, either I was good and ready to hear what Mr. Spencer had to say or what he said made a lot of sense. (Basically it was both.) I've read Syd Field and taken McKee's course on Story Structure, yet I found this book to be of greater value. Why? Because Mr. Spencer doesn't lay down directives (as is common with most how-to books). Instead,

he offers suggestions. His observations are level-headed and his approach is open-minded. This is one instructional book that won't tell you that a plot point must land on page such-and-such. Mr. Spencer encourages you to freely follow your creative impulse and get your story on paper. Then he lets you decide whether your story is as effective as it can be. The book discusses sensible ways to get the most out of your play. It's often like a trouble-shooting guide. If you feel something's not working in your piece, chances are, this book will help you figure out exactly where the problem lies. Mr. Spencer is not a drill instructor barking out the sure and only way to commercial bliss. He comes across as an experienced teacher (which he is) giving you the opportunity to find your own way to successful writing. I'd like to add that this is an invaluable asset whether you're writing a play, a film or a novel. That's because "The Playwright's Guidebook" is a comprehensive study of drama, of why it works and why it often fails. No matter where you are in your writing career, you'll most likely benefit from reading this book. If you've been writing a long time, you'll be reacquainted with fundamentals you may have forgotten.

With this book, it's important to be realistic about what you're getting and not just take its teachings as law. The book is limited in that it focuses on a mainstream interpretation of Aristotle and of drama, and feels a little formulaic in how it lays down ideas of structure and character. Having said that, it is insightful and provocative in how it discusses these issues, and at times has something original to say. The section on structure lays out the basics in an expository way that can help anyone struggling to write a play re-think their own work - and when one is stumped in such matters, any new perspective tends to provide a boost. Spencer defines certain terms with respect to how he thinks Aristotle meant them - which is fine - but it's when he seems to doggedly refer to Aristotle's views as if they are laws of how drama must function that I take his words with a grain of salt. Spencer acknowledges that certain plays and forms of theater ignore or change these conventions, and he legitimately seems fine with that, but still his definition of drama seems a little bit limiting. The rest of the book deals with more ambiguous territory. In general I found this a little less helpful (probably because Spencer can't write about it the same way he writes about structure), but certain portions, like the bits on character, the impulse exercises, and some of the more practical advice, were definitely worth reading. I'll be holding onto this book and re-reading parts of it - mostly the chapters on structure - when I'm stuck. Again, I found it most valuable when it changed the way I look at something, which it did often enough to make it a worthwhile purchase. For anyone thinking of buying this book, I would recommend visiting Spencer's site [...

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