Writing a Play

Tutor: It’s easy!

*Student: Is it?*

It’s a doddle.

*Is it?*

A doddle.

*I don’t think it is.*

Why not?

*Not really.*

It is!

*You’re just saying that.*

No I’m not.

*Well, I don’t think I can.*

I know you can.

*Write a play?*

Yes.

*I’m not so sure.*

Well, I am.

*Really?*

Really!

*How would I start?*

Easy.

*Easy?*

Yes, easy.

*Go on then. How would I start?*

Well, you need two things.

*Like?*

Like a subject.

*Something for the play to be about?*

Exactly.

*And the other thing?*

Writing it.

*That’s hard.*

Not really.

*It’s difficult, writing a play.*

A play is just conversation.

*Mmmm...*

Just conversation.

*Conversation about what the play is about?*

Yes.

*Whatever that is.*

Yes.

*But how do you write a conversation?*

Suppose this play is a conversation between two people.

*OK.*

So all you have to do is imagine it.

*But how do you do that?*

Well, just think about two people talking.

*Like we are now?*

Yes. For instance.

*So you imagine what a person would say.*

Yes.

*Mmmm…*

Maybe a particular kind of person.

*A particular kind of person?*

Well, a grumpy old man, perhaps.

*Mmmm…*

Or a smart lady.

*Or a child.*

Or somebody’s mum.

*Or a bus driver.*

Or me.

And me.

Yes!

*And then you think of another person.*

Yes.

*So you’ve got two different voices.*

Two characters. And that makes them come to life.

*Their character?*

Yes. Different characters.

*Maybe one is posh.*

Or tetchy.

*Or soppy.*

Or a bit joky, maybe.

*Maybe.*

You imagine these different people.

*Keep them in your head.*

Then you write in their voice.

*And the character will come to life.*

Which is important.

*Very important.*

The conversation needs to be natural.

*And lively.*

Yes.

*Natural and lively.*

Like real life.

*Well...*

We’re lively, aren’t we?

*I suppose we are.*

Quite lively.

*Yes.*

Which is good.

*Yes.*

So then you need something to write about.

*How do you do that?*

Well, make a note of anything interesting.

*Like?*

Well, I saw a picture of a great white shark.

*And?*

I thought that was an interesting subject.

*I suppose it is.*

So I wrote a play.

*Two people talking about great white sharks?*

Well, not this time.

*Great white sharks talking?*

More or less.

*More or less?*

I wrote what a shark was thinking.

*Just one shark, thinking?*

Yes. And two people said the lines.

*So there were two lines but only one voice?*

Yes.

*But usually you have two voices?*

Like now, for example.

*Like now?*

Yes.

*You mean we’re in a play?*

Yes. We are.

*You’re you and I’m me.*

And we’re having a conversation. A dialogue.

*Dialogue.*

Yes. Dialogue.

*When two people speak, it’s dialogue.*

Exactly.

*And when you write the dialogue down, it’s a script.*

Exactly.

*So if you wrote down our words you’d have some dialogue.*

And if you printed it out you’d have a script.

*But we need something to talk about.*

Do you think so?

*Of course we do.*

Why?

*Well, we need a subject.*

Do we?

*Yes.*

Oh.

*You said so yourself.*

Did I?

*Yes. Just a minute ago.*

Oh yes.

*So we need something to talk about.*

Not really.

*Of course we do!*

Well, we’ve been talking.

*Yes, but …*

We’ve been talking about writing a play.

*I suppose …*

So we can write that dialogue down.

*I suppose we could.*

Then we’d have a play.

*A play about a play!*

Sort of.

*What else could we write about?*

Talk about, you mean.

*Yes.*

Well, sometimes I write a play which tells a story.

*Like?*

I did the story of Goldilocks, once.

*And the three bears?*

Yes.

*Where did you set that one?*

In a courtroom.

*A courtroom?*

Miss Locks was on trial.

*For what?*

Well, for breaking into the three bears’ house.

*Oh yes.*

That’s against the law!

*So is stealing porridge and sleeping in people’s beds.*

Without permission, of course.

*I can see how you did this one.*

Good.

*And Miss Locks’ first name is Goldie, I suppose?*

Yes.

*So Goldie Locks is being cross-examined?*

Yes, by a lawyer.

*The dialogue is between her and a lawyer?*

Exactly.

*I’m beginning to see how you do this now.*

Good.

*It’s quite easy, isn’t it?*

Well …

*You just need dialogue.*

Yes.

*Just chat, really.*

I suppose so!

*What else have you done?*

Other plays?

*What other plays have you written?*

Some about natural history.

*Like?*

Well, I’ve written one about bees.

*Bees?*

Yes.

*But that means you have to know a lot about bees, doesn’t it?*

Well, I do know a bit about bees.

*Enough to write a play?*

I looked some stuff up.

*Where?*

Googled it.

*So you could write a play about absolutely anything?*

I suppose you could.

*You could pick any subject, and Google it.*

I suppose you could.

*Give me another example.*

Of a subject I Googled?

*Yes.*

Man U.

*Man U?*

Yes.

*The football club?*

Yes.

*You wrote a play about Manchester United?*

Five, actually!

*Five plays?*

Five plays telling the history of the club up until 2013.

*The history of Man U?*

The Glory Years, I call them.

*Why did you write about Man U?*

Well I wrote them for someone who was a fan.

*Why five plays?*

How do you mean?

*Why not one play?*

I don’t want my plays to be too long.

*Oh.*

I try to keep them quite short.

*How long is too long?*

That depends on who is going to read them I suppose.

*I suppose it does.*

And mine are for use in school.

*To help people learn to read better?*

Exactly.

*So how long do you make your plays?*

Most of them are less than 1,500 words.

*That sounds like a lot.*

Not really.

*Do you count all the words in every play?*

I don’t have to.

*Oh?*

The computer does it for me.

*The computer does it for you?*

It counts the words up for me.

*Oh.*

As I type them.

*That’s very helpful!*

Yes, it is.

*Helps you to keep track of how long your play is.*

Which is really helpful.

*How long has our dialogue been, do you think?*

Maybe 1,000 words.

*1,000 words!*

Or a few more perhaps. Maybe 1,100. Or thereabouts.

*So we’ve already done more than half a play!*

More like two thirds of a play.

*That’s amazing.*

Easy, isn’t it?

*Mmmm…*

So what would you like to write a play about?

*I don’t know yet.*

You could write the conversation you have first thing in the morning.

*That’s boring!*

Probably not.

*I could, though, couldn’t I?*

I think it would make a nice little play.

*Mmmm…*

They’re only little plays…

*Mmmm…*

Or about the birds you see out of the window.

*I don’t know much about birds.*

Google it!

*I could write about kids playing in the park.*

Yes, that would be a good one to do.

*It could be a dialogue between two old men.*

Two old men sitting on a bench.

*One leaning on a stick.*

Watching the kids.

*The kids could be doing all sorts of stuff.*

Mmmm…

*One old man could be grumpy.*

And the other one could be a little deaf.

*Deaf?*

He’d keep saying “Eh?”

*Or “What?”*

Funny!

*And the grumpy one would have to say everything twice.*

And get more and more grumpy.

*It could be quite a funny play.*

And everyone likes a laugh.

*How many words do you think we’ve spoken up to now?*

About 1,248, I should guess.

*You’ve been counting!*

The computer has.

*So we’ve written a play?*

Most of a play, yes.

*We’ve written it!*

If we type all this out, yes.

*Let’s do it!*

OK. But there’s one more thing we need.

*What’s that?*

A title.

*Let’s call it “Writing a Play”.*

OK. Let’s do that.

*And how many words is it now?*

1,309.

*So that’s quite good.*

Yes.

*Not too long.*

Not too short.

*About right.*

Yes. About right.

*But we’d better stop now.*

It’s quite hard to do that, actually.

*To stop?*

Well, to make up a good ending.

*Can you think of one now?*

Not really!

*I can.*