

1. THE STAGE IS A VISUAL AREA = verbal narrative impulses must be translated into visual dramatic gestures, into the onstage physical life of the characters.
2. CHARACTER IS ACTION. // ACTION IS SOMEONE WANTING SOMETHING.
ACTION = OBJECTIVE. Either someone gets what he/she wants, or else he/she runs into an obstacle to getting it.
3. THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER DEPENDS ON HOW MUCH IS AT STAKE. Stakes are variable. But if a character doesn't care much about something, then the audience can't be expected to much care about it.
4. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A PASSIVE CHARACTER. That is lack of action and therefore no character at all. It means the playwright is probably identifying with the character, unconsciously. But one cannot dramatize an identification, any more than one can dramatize a neurosis or a neurotic, as these are things that do not know what they want.
5. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A COMPLETELY ACTIVE CHARACTER. That reduces the others onstage to being stick figures. Even psychotics and sleepwalkers give and receive actions from imagined others.
6. CHARACTERS SHOULD GIVE AND RECEIVE ACTIONS FROM EACH OTHER.
7. EVERY ACT OR SCENE OR BEAT CONTAINS A MAJOR ACTION AND PERHAPS MANY MINOR ACTIONS.
8. TRANSITIONS ARE THE PUNCTUATION THAT SEPARATE BEATS FROM EACH OTHER.
9. THE PLACE TO SET CHARACTER AND ACTION IS IN THE TEXT ITSELF. Actors and directors and audiences should not be trusted to "interpret" or fill in what the playwright should make explicit in the text, especially in the dialogue. Be careful not to over-write stage directions, as that is no place for dramatic actions.
10. A PLAYWRIGHT CAN LEARN MORE FROM AUDITING AN ACTING CLASS THAN FROM READING BOOKS ABOUT HOW TO STRUCTURE PLAYS.

It is useful to diagram the plot of what one is working on, if only to discover occasional lapses of action in the characters.


William Packard