



Playwrights' Lab

HANDBOOK

MISSION STATEMENT: The Live Arts Playwrights' Lab exists to help local Playwrights at all levels develop and refine their playwriting craft.

I. COMMITMENTS

We are a community of Playwrights, working together to assist each other in the process of creating excellent theatre. As such, we commit ourselves to the following:

1. We provide a forum in which works-in-progress are read, and constructive feedback from a peer group of writers is shared and discussed.
2. We respect the premise that our work can be enriched through feedback from other Playwrights.
3. We provide feedback in the spirit of constructive criticism.
4. We are committed to full participation in the entire Lab process, as outlined below.

II. MEETINGS AND MEMBERS:

1. Meetings are customarily held on the first and third Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m.
 - Meetings may be suspended during July and August at the discretion of the membership.
 - Meeting dates may be adjusted if legal holidays fall on or near the regular meeting dates.
 - We may occasionally call for additional meetings if there is a specific need.
 - We meet at 123 Water Street, on the fourth floor of Live Arts, in the “Library” (Rehearsal B).
2. We may offer occasional instructional workshop sessions in partnership with Live Arts that address specific elements of the playwright’s process, such as character development, structure, dialogue, script preparation, and marketing.
3. All meetings are open to the public.
4. There is no membership fee. Membership is open to Playwrights in the region, at any level of experience and expertise, who seek to hone their writing skills and to develop new plays through the process of revising and refining scripts.
5. We encourage regular and consistent attendance; this builds the trust necessary for effective feedback.

III. LEADERSHIP:

1. Each December, Playwrights’ Lab members will elect a Facilitator, who will recruit an Assistant Facilitator to assist in managing the Lab’s business. The Facilitator’s duties include:
 - Serving as a liaison between the Playwrights’ Lab and Live Arts
 - Chairing meetings and leading critiquing sessions
 - Scheduling meetings and member-requested readings

- Keeping the calendar of meetings and scheduled readings up to date and accessible to the membership
 - Communicating with members to remind them of meetings and to alert them about educational and production opportunities
 - Maintaining the group email list
2. The Assistant Facilitator will act as Facilitator when necessary.
 3. All members of Playwrights' Lab are urged to take their turns serving the group as Facilitator/Assistant Facilitator.

IV. SCRIPTS:

1. All scripts explored in Playwrights' Lab are considered works-in-progress.
2. We seek, explore, and suggest opportunities for the production of our original work wherever such opportunities may exist, but the Lab is not a direct path to full production at Live Arts or anywhere else.
3. Lab members as well as other area Playwrights seeking a more fully developed reading of their work may use the following resources, among others:
 - Apply to the Live Arts Artistic Director for consideration under the Live Arts *New Works on Fire* initiative. *New Works on Fire* offers several development slots over the course of a year, defined as two-to-three-week-long workshops culminating in a public reading of the work-in-progress.
 - Join or otherwise access information about production opportunities through the Dramatists Guild of America (www.dramatistsguild.com)
 - Join or otherwise access information about production opportunities through the Minneapolis Playwrights' center (www.pwcenter.org)

V. COMMUNITY BUILDING :

1. We ask new members to attend at least three meetings before scheduling a reading of their own work. These early meetings help familiarize new members with procedures, other members, and feedback styles.
2. We are encouraged to participate in, and fully support, all theatrical ventures at Live Arts.

VI. PLAY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:

We customarily adhere to the following process, the objective of which is to generate ideas for further development while allowing time for reflection and revision.

1. Scheduling: Playwrights who wish to have a script read at a Lab meeting must reserve a date through the Lab Facilitator.
 - Once a date has been reserved, the playwright is responsible for keeping that commitment, barring emergencies, unless a date trade with another reader or activity can be arranged with the facilitator in advance.

- If you choose to have your work read by members prior to your table reading, it must be submitted by e-mail to the Facilitator with said request by noon on the Friday before the meeting so that it can be redistributed to the members who will make every effort to read it.
2. First Reading Options:
- The playwright alone reads the first draft to fellow playwrights.
- OR
- The playwright seeks actors, preferably outside the Lab membership, for a table reading.
 - i. While Lab members are willing to serve as actors, using outside actors frees us to focus on our response.
 - ii. Actors may be friends or colleagues. The playwright can also work with the Facilitator to find actors, using the “Actor Resource” books maintained by Live Arts
 - iii. With enough warning, the Facilitator may also ask the Live Arts Company & Production Manager, Tracie Skipper, tracie@livearts.org to send out a request for actors in her weekly volunteer email.
 - iv. The facilitator may also ask the Live Arts Company & Production Manager, Tracie Skipper, tracie@livearts.org, to set up a time to go through the Live Arts casting books.
3. Second and Subsequent Readings: Following further revision, Playwrights may seek a second table reading -- more if deemed useful, if the members are agreeable and there is room on the calendar.
- Prior to the second and any further table readings, Playwrights are urged, but not required, to consult with a dramaturg and a director.
 - Playwrights may invite family, friends and colleagues to these readings.
4. Lab members(as well as other area Playwrights) who have a script they believe is ready for further development as a *New Works on Fire* should individually refer to the application information on the *New Works on Fire* page of the Live Arts website (www.livearts.org), and apply independently to Julie Hamberg, Artistic Director.

V. CRITIQUING

1. Procedure: Immediately following all table and staged readings, there will be a discussion among those present (fellow playwrights, actors, guests and audiences), offering critical and constructive feedback.
- The facilitator will lead the critiquing session, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to speak and that comments are succinct and to the point.
 - The first part of the critique should focus on “what we heard” in the reading, then what we like and what works for us in the material. The second part of the critique should focus on what we want more of as well as questions raised by the reading.

- In the last few minutes of the session, the leader may call for final comments, giving everyone present one more chance, limited to only one or two sentences, to voice anything not already said.
- Playwrights may, at their discretion, submit one or two questions to the audience before the reading, in order to focus audience attention on specific aspects of the script.
- Playwrights should refrain from responding to questions or making comments until after all feedback has been expressed. At the end of the session, playwrights may, at their discretion, respond to questions raised in the critique or make any other statements they choose.
- Honesty and Tact: The object of the critique is at all times to make our remarks honest, thorough, sensitive, and constructive.
- Substance: As listeners, we should try to convey what we heard and saw; why we reacted in this or another way; why and how something worked or did not work for us; and what emotional or intellectual responses were triggered by the writing.
- Please don't rewrite for the playwright.