

Emergence Project 2022 Script Guidelines

Short-form plays and **monologues** are eligible for submission. Specific guidelines for each category are detailed below.

SHORT-FORM PLAY

>A short-form playscript is a self-contained, multiple-character script with a beginning, middle, and end, presented in any genre or style, with an intentionally abbreviated running-time.

>Short-form play submissions for **EP2022** are allowed a **maximum run-time of twelve minutes**. It can be difficult to gauge a script's run-time on paper; a handy (but highly variable) rule-of-thumb is "one page of script equals one minute of stage time". This formula is useful as a rough guide, but the best measure is to simply time yourself as you read your piece aloud, using the rhythms and pacing you envision for it.

>Short-form scripts are allowed **no more than five characters**. Do you need more than five characters for your compact, twelve-minutes-or-less piece? Nope. You really don't.

>**Write characters within the age-range of your acting pool**. While it is not expressly forbidden to include adult characters in your script, you are strongly encouraged to avoid it. This allows your young actors the opportunity for a more complete immersion in their role, with less of the quality of "let's-pretend". Do you feel that any of our extremely gifted young performers can convincingly present a 45 year-old recovering alcoholic with two ex-spouses, a crippling mortgage, and an estranged, college-bound daughter? Even if the young actor delivers a flawless portrayal, it has the undesired distancing effect of gimmickry, and not the immediate, visceral impact of identification for your audience. Of course, such a role presented by a young actor could very well be played for laughs, if the tone of the script supports that, but you must be mindful of these considerations as you conceive your piece. And you may just find inspiration as you ponder how to justify shifting the age of your professional assassin character from fifty to fifteen.

> Short-form scripts should observe the so-called “**Three Unities**”:

1. **unity of action**: a play should have one action that it follows, with minimal subplots.
2. **unity of time**: the action in a play should occur over a period of no more than 24 hours.
3. **unity of place**: a play should exist in a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography.

These Unities may feel restrictive, but they are invaluable aids to tightly focused short-form writing. Even if you decide to present something which breaks with one or more of the Unities, you should be doing so with firm intention and full awareness of what you are doing and why. If you are constructing a surrealist fantasia which presents our conception of time as a limp clock oozing into a puddle of neverwhen, or an absurdist clown-show in which time keeps piling up like garbage, then go on and distort the Unity as needed. To *observe* the Unities isn't to rigidly adhere to a literal definition, but rather to understand their significance and to use them with purpose, whether you play them straight or invert them.

> **Set pieces will be limited to a table, four chairs, and four stage-cubes**, used in any combination, or not at all. If your script requires a sinister laboratory teeming with alchemical apparatus and bubbling potions, you had better work up some vivid language to conjure it forth from a blank stage, a table, four chairs, and four cubes.

Props will be minimally allowed, within reason; we want to avoid too much pantomiming in our presentation, and so basic elements will be allowed—Items such as tumblers, tableware, etc., or perhaps candlesticks, or a postal package, or an umbrella...common items. And, yes, we will allow a prop gun or knife if it's well justified. Need a guillotine or an electric chair? Too bad.

> Use these limitations as a spur for your creativity. Restriction is the essence of art. As in sports, the rules define the accomplishment. Nothing could be more arbitrary and pointless than basketball—why not use a ladder if you want the ball in the basket so badly? Because the meaningless restrictions give the game its meaning.

MONOLOGUE

>A monologue is a dramatic or comedic theatrical piece for a solo performer.

>**Monologues for EP2022 are allowed a maximum run-time of six minutes.**

>Think beyond the old “character as narrator telling what happened”. The challenge of writing a monologue is to create a scenario which dramatically justifies a speech from a solo character, and which is based on an active conflict in which the character has some stake. How is such a scenario “dramatically justified”? A few obvious examples: A murderer is delivering a false confession to a cop/priest/victim’s spouse/pet...A rejected suitor is making a final, desperate plea to their beloved/loved’s mother/loved’s successful lover...A victim of bullying snaps and rants at their bully/teacher/cowardly friends. In each of these example scenarios, the character is experiencing and expressing the drama of the moment, as opposed to “telling what happened” in the form of a story—even the murderer scenario, which involves a confession, sidesteps the pitfall of “telling what happened”....did you notice how? It did so by using the angle of a “false confession”. This simple detail allows the character to be working towards a goal in the moment (convincing the listener), and gives the character something to lose. Note as well that each example posed several possible listeners. Consider how much the shape of the monologue is changed by altering the silent, unseen listener. Though this character is an imaginary presence, it is absolutely critical to define who it is in very concrete terms—it will often provide the key to an exciting monologue.

A FEW GENERAL GUIDELINES

> **Script content must stay family friendly.** Absolutely no graphic language/content, violent language/content, or sexual language/content is allowed. All scripts must be appropriate for audiences of all ages, which means NO profanity.

> Humor or characters based on racial, gender, or religious stereotypes that our audience might find offensive or material that promotes prejudice against a race or religion will not be tolerated.

> Playwrights must be willing to edit their scripts if they do not fit the above guidelines.

> If you are stuck on a piece, or find yourself facing some sort of block or writing challenge, you are encouraged to contact John for feedback and assistance. Likewise, if you have an unfinished fragment that you don't know what to do with, you are welcome to submit it for evaluation. It may prove useful as a prompt for another writer, or it may tie in thematically to another writer's piece, providing you with the necessary orientation to complete the work. That kind of word-magic happens all the time, to those bold enough to make the effort.