



The Letter

You're in the middle of a draft and you're stuck. You want to work on character development. You want to work on the relationship between two characters.

Time to sit right down and write yourself a letter.

Letter writing is an excellent exercise. It's one of those exercises that exists outside the world of the play, and yet can directly affect your knowledge and understanding of what's going on inside a character.

The instructions are simple: take a character and write a letter from their perspective. Perhaps the character is writing to one of their parents, or to a loved one, or a best friend trying to explain something they've done. It can have something directly to do with the story, or maybe an event that happened in the past. Perhaps it's a secret that the character is revealing for the first time. You could write a set of letters between two characters that show the development of their relationship. You could write a letter for a character to someone who's not in the play,

someone who left the character, or who's recently died.

The possibilities are endless.

And of course, this should never be an exercise in futility. Get into the process and write a proper letter not just a punctuation-less text. Think about what paper the character might use. Stationary? A napkin? Or are they totally 21st century and only communicate via Ipad?

What does the letter writing process illuminate about this character? Is the letter filled with lies? Is it neatly printed or scrawled? What gets scratched out? Does the character like or dislike the person they're writing to? Is that clear or hidden?

Not only will you learn a lot about the character from the content of the letter, pinpointing the structural aspects will go a long way to help you write dialogue with a specific and unique voice.

- What's the style of the letter?
- Is it poorly written?
- Are there a lot of spelling mistakes?
- What is the character's grammar and vocabulary? Is it proper? Is there a lot of slang?

It's amazing what a little letter can do....