Most plays are divided into acts, with each act having an emotional peak, or climax. Most plays contain **stage directions**, which describe settings, lighting, sound effects, the movements and emotions of actors, and the ways in which dialogue should be spoken.
Tragedy

A drama that ends in catastrophe (usually death) for the main character and often several other important characters.

Tragedies show the downfall of a dignified character (tragic hero) or characters who are involved in historically or socially significant events. The plot is set in motion by a decision the hero makes that is often an error in judgment (tragic flaw). Events are linked in a cause-and-effect relationship and lead to a disastrous conclusion, usually death. Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy.
Comedy

A dramatic work that is light and often humorous in tone, usually ending happily with a peaceful resolution of the main conflict.

Shakespeare’s comedies include A Midsummer Night’s Dream, As You Like It, Measure for Measure, The Taming of the Shrew, and Much Ado About Nothing.
Stage directions

Instructions printed in italics; they serve as a guide to directors, set and lighting designers, performers, and readers.

When stage directions appear within passages of dialogue, parentheses are usually used to set them off from the words spoken by characters.
Soliloquy

A speech in which a character speaks his or her thoughts aloud so that the audience knows what he/she is thinking.

Romeo: O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear—
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o’er her fellows shows.
The measure done, I’ll watch her place of stand
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night.
Aside

A remark (comment or short speech) directed to the audience or another character; it supposedly isn’t heard by other characters on stage.

Asides let the audience know what the character is thinking.

In Act 4, Scene 1, of *Romeo and Juliet*, Paris tells Friar Laurence that his marriage to Juliet will be in two days; the friar expresses his uneasiness in an *aside*.

**Friar Laurence [aside]:** I would I knew not why it should be slowed.—

Look, sir, here comes the lady toward my cell.
Allusion

In literature, an implied or indirect reference to a person, event, or thing; or to part of another text.

In Act 2, Scene 2, of *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet refers to **Jove**—another name for Jupiter, king of the gods in Roman mythology—when she tells Romeo,

“*At lovers’ perjuries, they say Jove laughs.*”
A joke that comes from a play on words. It can use the **multiple meanings** of one word; or two words that **sound alike** but have different meanings.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, when Mercutio is fatally wounded, he says, “Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a **grave** man.”

The pun is on the word **grave**, meaning both “solemn” and “a tomb.”
Rhyme scheme

Pattern of end rhymes in a poem. **Scheme** is labeled by assigning a letter of the alphabet, beginning with A, to each line. Lines that rhyme are given the same letter.

In the *Romeo and Juliet* Act 1, Scene 5, excerpt here, you’ll see this rhyme scheme:

**ABAB** — stanza 1

**CDCD** — stanza 2
A group of two or more lines that form a unit in a poem. A stanza is comparable to a paragraph in prose.

Rhyme isn’t necessary to make a stanza. However, in the *Romeo and Juliet* Act I Prologue, you’ll find four stanzas with the following rhyme scheme:

**ABAB** — stanza 1
**CDCD** — stanza 2
**EFEF** — stanza 3
**GG** — stanza 4
Couplet

A rhymed pair of lines. It can be written in any rhythmic pattern.

Romeo and Juliet Act 2, Scene 3, is written entirely in couplets. In the excerpt above, Friar Laurence uses two couplets to express his shock at Romeo’s request to marry Juliet…today!
Sonnet

Lyric poem with 14 lines; first 12 have ABAB, CDCD, EFEF rhyme scheme; last two have GG (a rhyming couplet).

The *Romeo and Juliet* Act I Prologue is a sonnet; notice the four stanzas with the following rhyme scheme:

- ABAB
- CDCD
- EFEF
- GG
Blank verse is **unrhymed** poetry written in **iambic pentameter**.

**Iambic pentameter**—each line has five pairs of syllables. In most pairs, an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable.

The most versatile of poetic forms, blank verse imitates the natural rhythms of English speech. Much of Shakespeare’s drama is in blank verse.

**Juliet:** 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy. Thou art thyself, though not a Montague. What’s Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
Foil

A character whose personality or attitudes sharply contrast those of another character in the same work. Foils emphasize each other’s character traits.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, **Tybalt** (aggressive) and **Benvolio** (peaceful) are foils. **Paris** is also a foil for **Romeo**, contrasting Juliet’s two suitors.

Who else can you think of? Nurse…Friar Laurence…Mercutio—for whom are they foils?
Foreshadowing

Hints or clues suggesting events that will occur later in a story.

Hints can be spoken words, actions, objects, weather, etc.

Romeo:
I fear, too early; for my mind misgives
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night’s revels and expire the term
Of a despised life, closed in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
Dramatic irony

The reader or audience knows something that a character does not know.

Examples:
- Romeo doesn’t know Juliet is alive when he comes to say goodbye to her in the tomb.
- Neither Paris nor the Capulets realize Juliet is already married when they decide to have Juliet marry Paris in two days.