

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

THEA 291 Dr. Larsen

I. Structure is pattern; the principle of organization apparent in the relationship among the parts of a play.

II. A play is organized as a pattern of events.

A. The structure of a play is partly a result of the unique ratio between story and plot.

1. A play's story is made up of all the play reveals about the character's past and present.
2. A play's plot is made up of those events from the story chosen by the playwright for representation.
3. The ratio of plot to story varies widely from play to play; sometimes the playwright dramatizes only one or a few climactic events, sometimes the story and the plot are nearly coextensive.
4. Learn to distinguish between past action or off-stage action and present, dramatized action. In your reading notes, keep track of information about past or off-stage action discussed or implied in the dialog and stage directions.

B. Learn to recognize the eventfulness of dramatized action. An event is the main happening in an episode in the unfolding plot of the play. We will call these French scenes (A French scene can be determined when a character enters or exits, OR there is a shift in the action in the play).

1. Examine each act or scene of a play and locate the French scenes and the events contained in them.
2. Give each French scene a title and try to characterize the type of activity represented in the event.

EXAMPLE; *The School for Scandal* begins with a scene between Lady Sneerwell and her henchman, Snake. In the scene., Lady Sneerwell reviews with her agent the progress being made in several schemes to slander her acquaintances, and Snake pumps her for information about her motive in the scheme involving Sir Peter Teazle and his family. Snake outlines the relationship of Sir Peter to Charles and Joseph Surface and to Maria, and Lady Sneerwell explains her motive to destroy the relationship between Charles and Maria. The fs could be called "Lady Sneerwell's plans," and the eventfulness of the fs is a product of Snake and Sneerwell trying to coordinate their understanding of the complex Teazle family situation they are manipulating by means of scandalous lies.

C. When each fs has been named and the eventfulness of each fs determined, try to characterize the relationship between french scenes.

1. Examine the subtitles you have created to see if any pattern emerges. Name or describe that pattern.
2. Often the title of the play will name or imply the pattern of the French scenes and events.

- D. Organize the cast of characters in patterns that support or test the validity of patterns of events you have noted. Look for couples, trios (ménage à trois), quartets (or contrasting couples), solitary figures; look for families and for social and political groupings within the cast of characters. The format of characters coordinates with the structure of events.
- E. Locate the most emphatic moment in each of the most important scenes. Which of these is the most emphatic moment in the play? What events lead up to this climax? What events follow it?
- F. Summarize your observations in a paragraph of 100 words or less in answer to the question "What happens in Hamlet?" Your answer should make clear the **pattern of events** in the play.

Assignment

You will be analyzing Act II of Hamlet.

Format

- typed and include a photocopy of Act II with marked French scenes
- cited in MLA style
- state your personal opinion
- support your opinion with facts and text references
- spelling and grammar are a given at this level

Content

B: 1 & 2 above. Do that for the first 5 French scenes in Act II. Number each scene and write the title associated with the number in the essay.

C: 1 (you may have to do B for more than 5 in order to do C, but I only need to see 5)

E: for the 5 scenes in B

F except you will answer: What happens in Act II? Then explain why that act is important in terms of the entire play as conclusion.