

## **Listening Practice Set 2**

**Directions:** Read the script. Give yourself 10 minutes to answer the questions in this practice set.

### **Well-Made Play**

**Narrator** Listen to part of a lecture in a class on theater history. The professor is discussing the theater of nineteenth-century France.

**Professor** The nineteenth century was the time that saw what we call "realism" develop in the European theater. Uh, to understand this, though, we first need to look at an earlier form of drama known as the "well-made play," which,

basically, was a pattern for constructing plays—plays that, um, beginning with some early nineteenth-century comedies in France, proved very successful commercially. The dramatic devices used here weren't actually anything new—they'd been around for centuries. But the formula for a well-made play required that certain of these elements be included, in a particular order, and—most importantly—that everything in the play be logically connected. In fact, some of these playwrights would start by writing the end of a play and work backward toward the beginning, just to make sure each event

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led logically from what had gone before.

OK, so what are the necessary elements of a well-made play?

Well, uh, the first is logical exposition.

Exposition is whatever background information you have to reveal to the audience so they'll understand what's going on. Before this time, exposition might have come from actors simply giving speeches. Uh, someone might walk out on stage and say, "In fair Verona, where we lay our scene," and then tell all about the feuding families of Romeo and Juliet. But for the well-made play, even the exposition

had to be logical ... believable. So, for example, uh, you might have two servants gossiping as they're cleaning the house, and one says, "Oh, what a shame the master's son is still not married." And the other might mention a rumor about a mysterious gentleman who's just moved into town with his beautiful daughter. These comments are part of the play's logical exposition.

The next key element of a well-made play is referred to as "the inciting incident."

After we have the background information, we need a key moment that gets things moving,

that really makes the audience interested in what happens to the characters we just heard about. So, for example, after the two servants reveal all this background information, we meet the young man, just as he first lays eyes on the beautiful young woman and immediately falls in love. This is the inciting incident. It sets off the plot of the play.

Now the plot of a well-made play is usually driven by secrets—uh, things that the audience knows, but the characters often don't know. So for example, the audience learns through a letter or through someone else's conversation who this mysterious

gentleman is and why he left the town many years before. But the young man doesn't know about this ... and the woman doesn't understand the ancient connection between her family and his.

And before the secrets are revealed to the main characters, the plot of the play proceeds as a series of sort of up-and-down moments. For example, the woman first appears not to even notice the young man, and it seems to him like the end of the world. But then he learns that she actually wants to meet him too, so life is wonderful. Then if he tries to talk with her, maybe her father gets furious, for no apparent

reason. So they can't see each other. But just as the young man has almost lost all hope, he finds out ... well, you get the idea—the reversals of fortune continue, increasing the audience's tension and excitement, making them wonder if everything's going to come out OK or not.

Next comes an element known as the obligatory scene.

It's uh, it's a scene, a moment in which all the secrets are revealed and generally things turn out well for the hero and others we care about—a happy ending of some sort. This became so popular that a playwright almost had to include

it in every play, which is why it's called the obligatory scene.

And that's followed by the final dramatic element ...

The denouement or the resolution, when all the loose ends have to be tied up in a logical way. Remember, the obligatory scene gives the audience emotional pleasure, but the denouement offers the audience a logical conclusion. That's the subtle distinction we need to try very hard to keep in mind.

So, as I said, the well-made play—this form of playwriting—became the basis for realism in drama

and for a lot of very popular nineteenth-century plays—and also a pattern we find in the plots of many later plays and even movies that we see today.



**Directions:** Answer the questions.

**1. What is the lecture mainly about?**

- A The importance of creating believable characters in plays
- B The influence of the literature of "realism" on French theater
- C A successful standard formula for writing plays
- D A famous example of a well-made play

**2. According to the professor, why did some playwrights write the end of a play before the beginning?**

- A To produce multiple scripts as quickly as possible
- B To prevent the audience from using logic to guess the ending
- C To avoid writing endings similar to those of other plays
- D To ensure that the plot would develop in a logical manner

**3. Why does the professor mention a conversation between two servants?**

- A To give examples of typical characters in a well-made play
- B To show how background information might be revealed in a well-made play
- C To explain why Romeo and Juliet can be considered a well-made play
- D To explain how playwrights develop the obligatory scene of a well-made play

**4. According to the professor, what dramatic elements are typically included in a well-made play to help move the plot forward? Choose 2 answers.**

- A A series of major changes in the hero's apparent chances of success
- B The introduction of new characters midway through the play
- C Information known to the audience but not to the main characters
- D The movement of major characters from one setting to another

**5. What does the professor imply about the obligatory scene and the denouement?**

- A The difference between them might be unclear to some people.
- B Both are useful techniques for developing realistic characters.
- C The denouement usually occurs within the obligatory scene.
- D The obligatory scene is usually less exciting than the denouement.

**6. Part of the lecture is repeated below. Read it and answer the question.**

Professor This is the inciting incident. It sets off the plot of the play.

**Why does the professor say this:**

Professor It sets off the plot of the play.

- A To help students understand the meaning of a new term
- B To indicate that his point is not related to the main topic of the lecture
- C To emphasize one element of a play over all others
- D To begin to summarize the main points of the lecture