

Prompt 3: START AT THE END

Don't know how to start? Figure out how you are going to end instead.

According to playwright **Lauren Gunderson**,
her biggest piece of advice is the same for every play you may write:

"Know you're ending. Once you know where you're going, you can actually go there with intention. If you are expecting to wander into a profound and clever ending it might take you forever, or never. But if you know where you are heading you can write toward that moment to earn it."

With that in mind. Tackle the following prompt.

First...

Take 20 minutes to do the following:

1. Choose your final moment, image, line, or climax of the play. What's a moment, event, line that seems EXCITING to you? What's the end of your play?
2. Identify the givens: WHO the characters are in this moment, WHERE and WHEN they are.
3. Outline your play backwards:
 1. How did your characters get to that point?
 2. What choice did someone make JUST PRIOR to the climax/end of the play that got them all to that point?
 3. What led that character to that choice or action?
 4. What led up to that moment of choice?
4. Scan through the outline *forwards*. Does the story seem to progress logically? No holes in the plot? Fill in the blanks, always asking yourself to check in with *then what?* And *why?*

Then...

1. Choose either the first moment of the play or a scene/event which seems really interesting to you to write. What sparks you?
2. Set a timer for 30 min.
3. Start writing that exciting scene. *Trust your imagination. DON'T STOP WRITING. Don't spend a lot of time trying to get the words right at this point. Keep writing, no matter what, until half an hour is up!*
4. After half an hour, check in. How far have you gotten in your outline? A scene? Think about which scene might be interesting to write next, or how this one might end. Jot down a note or two.

YOUR GOAL FOR TODAY: 5 PAGES.

If after half an hour you don't have five pages, try continuing until you do.

Special thanks to Marcella Kearns and Milwaukee Chamber Theatre for letting us borrow this prompt.

PRO TIPS:

Lauren Gunderson



The ending is exactly where **Lauren Gunderson** started on her show ***Natural Shocks***, a 65-minute, one-woman tour-de-force play that bursts to life when we meet a woman waiting out an imminent tornado in her basement. She overflows with quirks, stories, and a final secret that puts the reality of guns in America in the audience's lap. The play is part confessional, part stand up, and part reckoning.

Where did the impulse to write this piece come from?

"*Natural Shocks* came very quickly. I knew the ending first, the big reveal, her biggest secret. And I wrote to earn that turn. It was already in my mind to write, but when the massacre at Marjorie Stoneman Douglass school happened I was pushed to create it right then and now. I wanted to write a piece that was surprising not just in its twist, but in its tone and character. The play is funny, fast, sexy, tense. It's confessional, comedic, cathartic. And it centers a woman which is still rare to see these days."

You wrote a one person show. What advice would you give students who want to set out to write their play in a similar style?

"For one person plays, your character must have a reason for talking. Why speak, why now, why here. You still must answer all the dramatic questions and find a compelling reason that only one person is delivering it. You can still be big and bold in one-person shows. So be big! Be bold! Be strange! Write a character with an entire play's worth of wit, wisdom, charm, danger and secrets. They are the only character you've got so make them unforgettable. Switch up tones. Be sarcastic, then coy, then hilarious, then eerie, then brave. A one person show lives and dies on keeping our attention, surprising us, shaking things up."

Lauren Gunderson (#ENOUGH Finalist Selection Committee) has been one of the most produced playwrights in America since 2015 topping the list twice including 2019/20. Her work is published at Playscripts (*I and You*; *Exit Pursued By A Bear*; *The Taming and Toil And Trouble*), Dramatists Play Service (*The Revolutionists*; *The Book of Will*; *Silent Sky*; *Bauer*; *Natural Shocks*; *The Wickhams and Miss Bennet*) and Samuel French (*Emilie*). LaurenGunderson.com