

AACT NewPlayFest 2026

Script Review Process

First Tier Review

Reviewers will receive the first fifteen pages of submitted plays. Whereas the overall purpose of the competition is to find plays that are compelling and dynamic, suitable for community theatres, and ready for production—the purpose at this level is to eliminate plays that are not. In short, a Reviewer will determine if the play has suitable potential. Each fifteen page excerpt is read by two highly qualified Reviewers. If they are in disagreement, it is read one more time by a third.

First Tier Reviewers will be required to give those fifteen pages an earnest read. In other words, no scanning. To determine if a play should continue in the competition, the Reviewer should consider the following:

- Is the subject matter unique or does it provide a unique perspective?
- Does the play capture your attention? Are you eager to read more?
- Are you invested in the characters? Do you care about them?
- Is the exposition smooth?

As is evident, the answer to these questions is a simple yes or no. If the play satisfies a majority of these categories, it will advance.

First Tier Reviewers will *not* provide written commentary to accompany their decisions. An author whose work does not go forward will receive communication only to that effect.

There is no limit to the number of plays that go to the second tier.

Second Tier Review

These Reviewers will be given full-length plays, all of which have passed the first tier. To maintain as much objectivity as possible, three different Reviewers will read each play. Each Reviewer will determine if the play has suitable potential to be produced by an AACT NewPlayFest Producing Theatre. In this tier the plays will be adjudicated in ten categories and, based on the strength of each, be assigned a number value (1-10). The aggregate number will determine each Reviewer's ranking of his or her group of plays. The top ranked plays will go on to a third tier.

To determine if a play should go forward in competition the Reviewers will be asked to assign a number value (1-10) in regards to the following questions:

- The play's subject matter is unique.
- The dialogue is believable—both natural and conversational.
- Exposition is integrated into dialogue and is not heavy-handed.
- The plot is logical and contains enough complexity to hold the interest of an audience.
- There is a good balance between the description of the action and what can be realistically acted out.
- The characters are realistic with fully-realized personalities and emotional content.
- The audience will care about what happens to the characters.
- The events within the play lead to significant changes in the main character(s).
- Transitions from scene to scene are smooth.
- Technical requirements are within the range of what is achievable by a community theatre with modest means.

The questions are fairly straightforward, and need only be assigned a number value. There will be a comment box at the end of the evaluation should the reviewer wish to offer suggestions for “next steps.” Next steps are positive tactics an author might take to improve his or her play.

Third Tier Review

Based on the Second Tier Ranking sheets, up to 24 scripts will be selected for the third tier of judging. Each highly qualified third tier Reviewer will read all the scripts.

Third tier Reviewers will fill out an Evaluation form and Ranking sheet and submit them to the AACT Office. Reviewer comments may be made available to the playwrights upon request and is a valuable part of the process.

Upon completion of reviews, all scripts will be deleted from computers, laptops, or any other electronic devices on which they are stored, and any hard copies of the scripts will be shredded and disposed of properly, in accordance with intellectual property rights assurances.

Fourth Tier Review

In the fourth tier, the winning scripts will be selected. The finalist scripts will be submitted to the AACT NewPlayFest 2026 Producing Theatres. Each Producing Theatre will rank from favorite to least favorite. The results of these rankings will determine the winning entries of AACT NewPlayFest 2026. The winners will each receive a full production.