

Alan Ayckbourn: Playwriting 20 Facts

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Alan Ayckbourn: Playwriting - 20 Facts

1. As of 2025 - and since his professional playwriting debut in 1959 - Alan Ayckbourn has written 91 full-length produced plays.
2. His 91 plays include 11 family plays, 8 musicals, 4 'chance' plays, 3 duologies, 2 trilogies and 1 farce.
3. His first play, *The Square Cat*, opened at Theatre in the Round at the Library Theatre on 30 July 1959.
4. His plays have been translated into approximately 35 languages and are performed around the world.
5. His largest work is *Intimate Exchanges* which - in total - has 16 hours of dialogue, 31 scenes, 16 possible permutations and 10 characters all played by just two actors.
6. His longest play is *The Revengers' Comedies* which runs for approximately four hours and 15 minutes over two parts (not including intervals).
7. His shortest play is *Consuming Passions* which runs for one hour and 20 minutes
8. He considers he has written only one true farce with *Taking Steps*.
9. His award-winning trilogy *The Norman Conquests* was written in less than a week in 1973.
10. Of his 91 plays, only six have been specifically written for end-stage performance - the rest should ideally be performed in-the-round.
11. Only six of his 91 plays have not premiered in Scarborough, North Yorkshire - *Christmas V Mastermind* (Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent), *Mr Whatnot* (Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent), *Jeeves* (Birmingham Hippodrome), *A Small Family Business* (National Theatre), *All Lies* and *Welcome to the Family* (The Old Laundry Theatre, Bowness-on-Windermere).
12. He has written four plays which include an element of chance to determine the action of the play: *Sisterly Feelings*, *It Could Be Any One Of Us*, *Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays* and *Roundelay*. Occasionally *Intimate Exchanges* is incorrectly described as a 'chance' play but there are no random elements in the play, all decisions are made prior to each performance.
13. He has held records for having the most plays running simultaneously in the West End and on Broadway - where a street was temporarily renamed Ayckbourn Alley to mark the achievement.

14. As of 2025, 73 of his 91 full-length plays have been published.

15. He has also written 10 revues / musical entertainments, 7 one act or short plays, 2 plays for performance by young people, 4 plays for pre-school children, 5 adaptations of existing plays, 1 screenplay, 1 novel and 1 work of non-fiction.

16. The majority of the original manuscripts of his plays are held for the nation in the Ayckbourn Archive in the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the University of York.

17. He has written just one screenplay - *Service Not Included* for the BBC in 1974 - but has otherwise dedicated himself entirely to theatre.

18. He wrote approximately nine plays prior to *The Square Cat*, none of which were produced and the majority of which have not survived.

19. He was the first playwright to be knighted since Terence Rattigan - it is occasionally incorrectly claimed Tom Stoppard was the first, however both were knighted in the same year with Ayckbourn in January in the New Year Honours and Stoppard in June in the Birthday Honours.

20. Alan Ayckbourn is the only playwright to have received both the the Laurence Olivier Awards Special Award and the Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre.

These facts have been compiled by Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist Simon Murgatroyd. They are correct at the time of publication.

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