The writing of plays and musicals is a means of livelihood for the authors whose work we cherish and celebrate in amateur drama. Quite apart from it being a legal requirement, it is vital that we continue to work together to ensure that all dramatic productions are duly licensed so as to encourage existing and new playwrights to continue to produce our raison d’être - great plays!

The Drama League of Ireland office is regarded, by amateur groups throughout the country, as the primary point of contact for acquiring performing rights for plays and musicals and indeed is the best place to start to check if your play is licensed by one of the companies that we represent. The DLI is the Irish performance rights agency for plays and musicals licensed by Samuel French Ltd. (London and New York). We are also agents for Plays licensed by Joseph Weinberger Ltd., Cressrelles of London, and a number of other independent playwrights and smaller publishing houses. The agency relates to performances both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The following is a list of frequently asked questions that will be of assistance in choosing a play and applying for performing rights:

**Is there any help available in choosing the “right” play?**

For years the Samuel French catalogue together with its regular supplements was the primary guide when it came to play selection. Things have now moved into the digital age and Samuel French, through its “Select-a-Play” service offer an excellent electronic means of browsing its catalogue. This service is available on their website and the advanced search facility now allows users to search for plays according to period, length, genre, and cast size - according to gender. Josef Weinberger, Cressrelles and the Dramatists Play Service (DPS) also allow you browse through their play catalogues online and all give a play synopsis and cast details.

Last, but by no means least is the DLI library which is located in the Mill Theatre in Dundrum. The library is open to the public daily between 11am and 2.30pm and for a nominal fee members can also acquire scripts and DVDs from the library by post. The DLI library currently has access to over 300,000 scripts and related drama material, both from our own library and that of our partner body, The Drama Association of Wales. This is the largest library of its kind in the world. Our catalogue includes several new independent Irish playwrights whose work is only available through the DLI.

A catalogue of all the plays available in the library, has recently been updated and is available for download on the DLI website.

**Useful websites**

- [www.dli.ie](http://www.dli.ie)
- [www.josef-weinberger.com](http://www.josef-weinberger.com)
- [www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk](http://www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk)
- [www.dramatists.com](http://www.dramatists.com)

**How do we know if the DLI issue licences for a given play?**

The easiest way is to check with us. Valerie in our office will be glad to help in this regard and can be contacted by phone on (01) 2969343 or by email at dli@eircom.net.

We have picked a play – When should we apply for rights?

Not all plays are available for amateur production and some frequently have temporary geographical or other restrictions. Restrictions regularly apply to a number of playwrights work such as Samuel Beckett, Bertholt Brecht, Dario Fo, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, David Mamet, Arthur Miller, John Patrick Shanley and Sam Shepard. In order to avoid disappointment it is always best to check availability of rights prior to commencing rehearsals. Again please contact Valerie in our Dublin office and she will gladly follow up on your query.

**Why are plays restricted or unavailable for amateur performance?**

A new play will not be released for amateur performance until the professional stage life has been fully exploited. Similarly when an existing play is revived professionally, amateur rights are often restricted or withdrawn completely until the professional contract has expired. This is in order to protect the professional production's box office income.

**How long does it take to find out if a play is available or not?**

We will usually be able to tell you immediately. In some cases it may be necessary for us to contact the agencies in London or New York or in some instances we may need to contact the author directly. If this is so, replies can take anything from a few hours to a few days.

**The play is a very old play – Do we still have to pay royalties?**

Copyright law is a complex area and again it is always best to check in advance. As a general rule, however, playwrights who have been deceased for over 70 years are not subject to copyright. Translations or adaptations of their works however may still be subject to copyright law. (e.g. The Seagull by Anton Chekov trans Tom Stoppard).

**What's the difference between an amateur and a professional production?**

The actors in a professional production must either be members of Equity or trained and/or recognised professional actors who work in the business. Amateur actors perform as a leisure activity and earn their living by other means. It is a requirement of some of the agents whom we represent that the maximum theatre capacity for an amateur production should not exceed 300.

**Note:** The DLI only handle amateur rights.

**Does the amateur licence come with conditions?**

Yes. The most important of these is that the unaltered play title and the name of the author must appear clearly on the poster and on all other promotional material. The publicity material must also indicate that it is an amateur production. There have been instances in the recent past where prominent authors have withdrawn all amateur rights because this requirement has not been complied with. Naturally it is not in the interest for amateur groups for this to happen. There may be other conditions, depending on the play and these will be clearly indicated on the licence itself. This is particularly so in the case of musicals.

**When do we have to pay for the performing rights?**

Payment for rights (preferably by cheque) should reach the DLI office at least 14 days before the date of the first performance(s).

**How much do performing rights cost?**

In general full length plays cost €95 per performance and one-act plays cost €45 per performance. A specific play however might have a different fee associated with it (e.g. short sketches) and it is best to check with us in relation to this.
What can happen if we don’t pay for the performing rights?
It is in everybody’s interest that all shows have the necessary performing rights — this protects the future of amateur drama. To ensure that all shows are duly licensed, the DLI, through a team of volunteers throughout the country, regularly monitor local newspapers, roadside signs and other publications with a view to identifying all dramatic performances, both licensed and unlicensed. In cases where plays are identified, for which royalties have not been paid a set of procedures, which have been agreed with the agents whom we represent, are initiated. This could result in an embarrassing situation for a group whereby a planned show would have to be cancelled at the last minute. In other jurisdictions heavy penalties have been imposed on groups who chose not to pay for performing rights.

The DLI is a body whose main function is to represent groups and with this in mind we do not wish to see any group placed in a difficult situation vis-à-vis performing rights. It is, therefore, in everyone’s interest that we all adopt a mature and responsible attitude when it comes to the payment of royalties.

We are only performing a short extract from a play – Do we still need performing rights?
Yes. All productions, regardless of length, must be licensed. In the case of excerpts, however the fee will be reduced depending on the length of the excerpt. Groups are advised to contact us with the details.

Can we get a refund of royalties if our production is cancelled?
Normally Yes. We must, however, be advised as soon as you know that all or some of your performances are being cancelled and the licence must be returned to us for cancellation or amendment. Refunds cannot be granted if a period of weeks has elapsed since the scheduled end of the production as, by that time, the money will already have been paid on to the author.

Do we have to pay royalties if we don't charge for admission?
Yes. Legally a production must be licensed if it is witnessed by the general public, regardless of whether or not a charge is being made to them. Also, performances before audiences reduce the earning potential of a play for which the author must be compensated in the form of royalty fees.

We are raising money for charity. Can we get a royalty waiver or reduction?
Unfortunately, no. Royalties represent authors' income and it isn't fair to ask them to support fundraising in the form of lost royalties.

Our production is private. Do we still have to pay royalties?
A production is only private if it takes place in a person's home and only before their family and friends. Performances given in clubs, halls etc. are public ones.

Isn’t a school production private?
If a play is performed by members of the school before an audience of staff and students it is classified as an educational exercise and no licence is required. However, if any persons from outside the school are admitted (e.g. families and friends) the production becomes a public one.

Can changes be made to scripts when they are being performed?
No changes of any kind may be made without the permission of the author and this is a condition of your licence. This includes changing the sex of characters and cutting out "bad" language or changes to the time and place/setting of the play. Some authors may agree to changes if a persuasive case is made in support of the request, but this is by no means always so.

Can we video-record our production?
Video-recording is a complex issue. The issuing of a performing licence does not include recording rights. Recording rights may be available for some plays, for others we may need to refer you to the authors' agents and in other cases the rights may be not available at all. You should make no plans to record your production until this question has been fully researched and well in advance.

Is there a difference in applying for rights for a play and for a musical?
Most certainly yes. The issuing of rights for a musical is a more complex issue. Unlike a play, set fee structures do not exist for musicals. The fees are generally based on the musical in question, the size of the hall/theatre and the box office receipts. Musicals also require the hire of orchestral material etc. and it is best to discuss all these issues with us by telephone in advance.

For what purpose may we hire perusal material for a musical?
Samuel French operate a perusal service for the full-scale musicals in their catalogue, which is designed specifically to allow amateur groups, schools and colleges to view material for one to three musicals for a short period in order to help them to choose a suitable show for their group to perform. Payment of a small fee for this service is required on return of these materials.

Perusal Material may not be hired once you have a licence to perform a musical, and you may not retain material initially hired for perusal to use for rehearsal purposes. Once you have a licence to perform a show, you must purchase or hire copies of the libretti (scripts) and vocal scores/chorus books as appropriate. You may not hire perusal material for personal or study use, or for material to use in auditions.

How far in advance do we need to apply for an amateur performing licence for a musical?
We always recommend that you enquire as far in advance as possible in order to avoid disappointment if any unexpected restrictions may apply to the show that you wish to perform, or if anything special needs to be checked. A quick initial telephone call or email well in advance is always a good idea.

What restrictions might apply to a musical?
The most common restriction occurs when a musical is partially or totally withdrawn from amateur performance, usually because of a major professional production of the show in Ireland. We are given instructions to withdraw or restrict musicals in such cases by the principal agents for the musicals, and we are obliged to comply fully with their instructions. If a show is only partially restricted, we may need to refer your individual application to the agents for the show, in which case you need to allow plenty of time to obtain an answer.

We also try to avoid clashes of amateur bookings of the same musical in close geographical proximity at around the same date, which would probably result in a loss of audience and ticket sales to both groups. However, it must be noted that this is entirely the discretion of Samuel French, and usually only applies to productions of very high-profile musicals in large theatres, and not at all to school or college productions.

Best of luck with the Show!