**ACT I**:

(The Exposition)

**Act I** .**i.** Why are the guards so nervous and jumpy at the opening of the play?

How does the ghost react when the cock crows?

What political event do Horatio and the guards link to the strange appearance of Old Hamlet's ghost?

**Act I. ii.** What sort of clothing does Hamlet wear to the Queen's wedding? Why does that bother Gertrude and Claudius?

**Act I. iii.** Why does Laertes not want Ophelia to date Hamlet?

List any one bit of advice Polonius gives to Hamlet.

**Act I. iv.** What does Hamlet think of Claudius' participation in traditional Danish drinking games?

What character makes the famous statement, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark"?

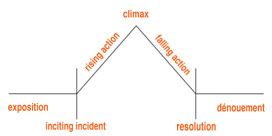
What secret does the Ghost reveal to Hamlet concerning his death?

What does the ghost ask Hamlet to do? To whom is Hamlet supposed to be merciful?

When the ghost commands Marcellus and Horatio to "swear" to secrecy, where does his voice come from? Why is this disturbing given Renaissance stage conventions?

**Freytag's Pyramid**

**Gustav Freytag** was a Nineteenth Century German novelist who saw common patterns in the plots of stories and novels and developed a diagram to analyze them. He diagrammed a story's plot using a pyramid like the one shown here:



1. Exposition: setting the scene. The writer introduces the characters and setting, providing description and background.

2. Inciting Incident: something happens to begin the action. A single event usually signals the beginning of the main conflict. The inciting incident is sometimes called 'the complication'.

3. Rising Action: the story builds and gets more exciting.

4. Climax: the moment of greatest tension in a story. This is often the most exciting event. It is the event that the rising action builds up to and that the falling action follows.

5. Falling Action: events happen as a result of the climax and we know that the story will soon end.

6. Resolution: the character solves the main problem/conflict or someone solves it for him or her.

7.Dénouement:*(a French term, pronounced: day-noo-moh)* the ending. At this point, any remaining secrets, questions or mysteries which remain after the resolution are solved by the characters or explained by the author. Sometimes the author leaves us to think about the THEME or future possibilities for the characters.

You can think of the dénouement as the opposite of the exposition: instead of getting ready to tell us the story by introducing the setting and characters, the author is getting ready to end it with a final explanation of what actually happened and how the characters think or feel about it. This can be the most difficult part of the plot to identify, as it is often very closely tied to the resolution.

**ACT II**:

(The Rising Action)

Why does Polonius send Reynaldo to Paris?

What does this mission reveal about Polonius' family relationships?

What ploy does Hamlet use to misdirect others from any unusual behavior he might evince during his plot to kill the king?

What off-stage action does Polonius reveal concerning Hamlet's behavior in Act II, Scene ii?

Why does Hamlet want to show Uncle Claudius the particular play he selects for the actors?

Who does Claudius send to spy on Prince Hamlet and monitor his insanity?

What does Hamlet (correctly) suspect about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's arrival?

Why does Hamlet say that Denmark is a prison?

What does Hamlet mean when he says he is "but mad north-northwest?"

Why is Hamlet so disturbed by watching the actors weep on stage as they play Queen Hecuba and King Priam?

What plan or test does Hamlet come up with for seeing if his Uncle is guilty?

**Literary Devices**:

**Allusion**: A reference to a well-known person, place, event, literary work, or work of art.  Writers often make allusions to tales from the Bible, classical Greek and Roman mythology, Shakespearean plays, historical or political events, and other materials with which they would expect their readers to be familiar.

**Conceit**: A far-fetched simile or metaphor, a literary conceit occurs when the speaker compares two highly dissimilar things.

**Metaphor**: comparison of two unlike things using the verb "to be" and not using *like* or *as* in a [simile](http://www.gaston.k12.nc.us/schools/highland/class/weaver/literary_terms.htm#simile#simile). *His voice is thunder.*

**Literary Elements**

**Archetypes**: A pattern or model that serves as the basis for different, but related, versions of a character, plot, or a theme.  In literature, certain characters, images, plots, and themes keep recurring.

*Real life* *Example*:

**Frame within a frame:** a story within a story.

*Real life* *Example*:

**Tragic hero:** may be a victim of outside forces, but usually the character's downfall is at least partly caused by a character flaw or error in judgment which is called his or her tragic flaw.

*Real life* *Example*:

**Soliloquy:** one speaks to oneself. In [drama,](http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/Pages/LTDrama.html) soliloquy is the convention whereby characters speak their thoughts aloud while alone, thus communicating to the audience their mental state, intentions, and motives (as in Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy).

*Real life* *Example*:

**ACT III**:

(The Climax)

**ACT III, i.** When Hamlet asks, "To be, or not to be," what is he asking himself? Rephrase that question in modern terms.

Why does Hamlet pause and not kill Claudius in the chapel, even though Hamlet is armed, Claudius is alone, and the opportunity is perfect? Why is it ironic that Hamlet does not kill King Claudius at that point in the play?

**III. ii.** Describe how Hamlet treats Ophelia during his conversation at the theatre watching the play.

When the Player-Queen on stage cries out, "Oh, confound the rest!/ Such love must needs be treason in my breast. / In second husband let me accurst! / None wed the second, but who killed the first," her words reflect on one of the members of the audience. Which character should feel uncomfortable hearing these lines? (***Hint***: It's not Claudius.)

When Gertrude critiques the play, she analyzes the Player-Queens acting performance, and sheconcludes**,** "Methinks the lady doth protest too much." What is the irony in Gertrude's assessment?

What does Claudius do when the actor portraying Gonzago pours the fluid into the player-king's ear?

What does Hamlet mean when he says he shall "speak daggers to her" instead?

**III. iv.** Why does Hamlet stab through the curtains or arras in Gertrude's room?

How does Polonius end up getting killed? What is ironic about Hamlet's statement just before the blow that strikes down Polonius?

What or who stops Hamlet from doing violence to Gertrude when he forgets his father's commandment?

What evidence do you see in the text that Gertrude does not know how King Hamlet met his death? Is there any textual evidence she was "in" on the murder of the elder King Hamlet?

***To Be or Not to Be***

**The content of the soliloquy**

Hamlet's thoughts are presented in a naturalistic sequence - he allows his disgust to flow freely and one thing leads to another but the outline of his meditation is as follows:

A wish for death as an escape from a corrupt world

A comparison of Hamlet and Claudius, leading to

A condemnation of Gertrude's behavior.

**ACT IV**:

(The Falling Action)

**ACT IV, scene ii:** What does Hamlet do with Polonius' body?

How does Claudius manage to recruit Laertes to his cause?

**IV. iii**. What does the letter Claudius writes to the King of England ask the King to do to the bearer?

Who will bear that letter?

When Hamlet alters the content of Claudius' letter, what changes does he make?

**IV. iv-vi.** Why does Laertes return from abroad?

What does he want to find out?

What is Laertes like in his temperament and personality?

What drives Ophelia crazy?

When Claudius challenges the sincerity of Laertes' grief, where does Laertes say he would be willing to cut Hamlet's throat, (i.e, in what sort of building?)

How is that a contrast with Hamlet's earlier actions when he first spotted an opportunity to kill Claudius?

**IV.vii.** What news does Gertrude bring of concerning Ophelia's death?

How did she die?

Why does Hamlet first believe in the "honesty" of the Ghost and then manifest profound doubts about its honesty?

What is the significance of that indecision regarding Hamlet's character and the major conflict in the play?

The Context of the Soliloquy

Act 4, scene 4, lines 32-66

The “Mouse Trap” has succeeded beyond Hamlet's expectations. Claudius considers how, with the aid of his compliant henchmen, he can eliminate the danger to himself: he knows that Hamlet knows - knows too much for the safety of both.

Hamlet declines the opportunity to kill Claudius at prayer, reproaches his mother, kills Polonius and is sent to England where he will be safe, but not in the sense usually intended by this word. (The safety Claudius seeks is his own.) Before embarkation (presumably on the way to his vessel) Hamlet watches the Norwegian army crossing Danish territory en route to do battle with the Polish forces.

The speech falls into two parts:

A general discourse on man's capacity for decision and action;

A comparison of Fortinbras's capacity for action and sense of honor with Hamlet's deficiency in these respects.

**ACT V**:

(The Denouement)

**ACT V**: What theological and legal issue are the two clowns or bumpkins discussing in the graveyard as they dig?

Why is the doctor who examines Ophelia's body hesitant to allow her burial in holy ground?

Why is Hamlet sickened to learn whose skull the gravediggers hold?

Who does Laertes blame for Ophelia's death, and how does he respond?

What scand**a**l occurs during Ophelia's funeral that disrupts the services?

**V. ii.** When Horatio tells Hamlet, "Never believe it; / I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:/ Here’s yet some liquor left" in the final act, what is he suggesting he will do? Why does Hamlet stop Horatio from doing that?

In *Hamlet*, what is the final sound at the end of the play after the main characters have left the stage?

How does Hamlet get poisoned?

How does Laertes?

How does Gertrude?

How does Claudius die?

What mission or last request does Hamlet give Horatio as Hamlet lies dying?

What ruler shows up in the final act to discover all the dead bodies?

**IN SUMMARY**



