Best Practices in Writing Role Plays
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These “best practices” were identified as we wrote role plays for students in conflict analysis and resolution courses. Many would apply to role plays written for other disciplines.

- **Identify specific learning goals and draft the roles, scenario, and process accordingly**
  (Learning goals might include: Knowledge about the case and specific concepts; skills and abilities in analysis, interaction, observation, and reflection)

- **Start with a model or a real situation and then innovate to achieve goals**

- **Avoid “fake” or implausible scenarios when the goal is situation-sensitive knowledge**
  (Note: imaginary settings or groups can work, if the focus is on dynamics.)

- **Assess what you need to write the roles, scenario, and instructions**
  (holistic knowledge of a situation, imagination, personal participation, a model)

- **Minimize the distance between students and roles**
  (Let students conduct research on the roles, alter the roles, use their own names; write gender neutral roles or assign by gender; choose a scenario familiar to students.)

- **Provide detailed information about the roles and scenarios and keep it simple**
  (Students will always ask for more information, but too much detail reduces spontaneity.)

- **Keep the scenario open enough for dialogue to be emergent rather than scripted**

- **Pay special attention to writing beginnings, transition points, and endings**
(Role players need to know how and why they are in the scenario, where to head, and what counts as being finished.)

- **Anticipate the potential for stereotyping or caricatures**  
  (Students may have difficulty imagining themselves in certain roles; guard against scenarios that lead them to act out unreflective cultural or personal scripts.)

- **Include media when appropriate**  
  (photos of the context, a video message from a potential participant, audio)

- **“Back pocket” several complicating factors to be used if the action stalls**  
  (a message from an outside source, a participant who walks out, an unanticipated event)

- **Envision how the role play will unfold; anticipate students’ questions**  
  (Sharing the role play with others before running it helps!)

- **Capture the role play for assessment, reflection, and re-writing**