SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

**Act I, Scene i:**  
The play begins on the outer ramparts of Elsinore castle. It is late and Francisco, a guard, is on duty waiting for Bernardo to relieve him from his watch. Francisco is nervous because the previous two nights he and Bernardo have seen a figure who appears to be the ghost of the recently deceased king wandering around.

Bernardo approaches, accompanied by Horatio (Hamlet's only friend and confident). Even though Horatio dismisses the idea of a ghost, the guards start to retell the previous nights' encounters. As the guards begin, the ghost appears before them- much to Horatio's surprise.

The guards urge Horatio to speak with the ghost. Because Horatio is a student, they feel he should be able to communicate with the ghost, and their previous attempts to talk with it have failed. Horatio's attempts also fail. The scene ends with Horatio stating that he will go and inform his friend Hamlet of these incredible events.[Text: Act I, Scene i](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act1sc1.htm)

**Act I, Scene ii:**  
This scene opens in contrast to the first scene. The first scene takes place on the dark, cold isolated ramparts; this scene begins in a brightly lit court, with the new king, Claudius, celebrating his recent wedding to his new wife, Gertrude.

Everyone in the court appears happy and joyful, except one character who is sitting off to the side. He is dressed in black, the colour of mourning, and does not like what he sees. The lone figure is Hamlet, the main character of the play. He is wearing black because it has been only two months since his father, Hamlet senior the ghost on the battlements, died and he still is mourning his father's death.

To further upset Hamlet, Claudius' new bride is Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. Hamlet is upset because his mother married Claudius so soon after becoming a widow. To add to all the injustices Hamlet is feeling at this time, Claudius is also related to Hamlet. Hamlet's uncle is now his step-father and Gertrude's brother-in-law is now her husband.

Claudius conducts several pieces of business during the beginning of this scene. He first tries to take measures to prevent a war with Norway, then discusses Laertes' request to leave court and go back to school. Claudius agrees with Polonius, Laertes' father, that Laertes' plan of going back to school is a good one. He gives Laertes permission to go.

This familial scene brings Claudius' mind to Hamlet. He recognizes Hamlet is upset and he tries to make amends and urges Hamlet to stay in Denmark, instead of returning to school. After his mother echoes Claudius' request, Hamlet agrees to stay.

Hamlet is left on stage after everyone else leaves. He speaks a soliloquy expressing his anger at the present circumstances in his life and discusses his depression as a result of these events. The scene ends with Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo entering and talking with Hamlet about the ghost they have seen. Hamlet agrees to join them this coming night to see the ghost for himself.

**Note:** a soliloquy is a thought a character expresses out loud. These thoughts deal with the true feelings of a character and give insight into what a character is thinking about and how his mind works. This first soliloquy is one of several spoken by Hamlet throughout the play. Each one gives us further insight into what Hamlet is feeling at the time.

[Text: Act I, Scene ii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act1sc2.htm)

**Act I, Scene iii:**  
This scene opens with Laertes saying his goodbyes to his sister Ophelia, before he leaves for school. We find out from their discussion that Hamlet has been seeing Ophelia and is very serious about their relationship. He has been alone with Ophelia on many occasions and has professed his love for her during these times. He has also given her gifts during these visits.

Leartes, who knows about his sister's suitor, tries to warn Ophelia that because Hamlet is destined to become King, he can never be serious in his relationship with her. Hamlet may seem virtuous and noble at this time, he warns, but he will leave her to fulfill his duties to the kingdom when the time comes.

She promises to be careful in this relationship and reasserts that Hamlet has never taken advantage of her, nor has he ever been anything but a gentleman in their relationship. The conversation ends with Ophelia lecturing her brother that he should practice what he preaches and not fall into any casual relationships foolishly, and not to worry about her.

At this point, Polonius enters and gives his son one more lecture before he leaves on how to conduct himself when he goes back to school. The fatherly advice includes thoughts on not borrowing or lending money, because it can cause more problems than it is worth. He also tells his son not to say things that might make others think he is foolish, to hold his tongue and to be careful of getting into quarrels, but once in one give a good show for yourself. Finally, before Leartes leaves, Polonius tells him to be 'true to himself.' In other words, if you do the right things for the right reasons you can never do any wrong to others.

The scene ends with Polonius discussing with Ophelia her relationship with Hamlet. He, like Laertes, does not trust Hamlet's intentions, because Hamlet is young and young men have no honour; they have only one thing on their minds- sex. Although Ophelia has no reason to distrust Hamlet's intentions, she obeys her father's wishes and agrees she will not see Hamlet any more.[Text: Act I, Scene iii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act1sc3.htm)

**Act I, Scene iv:**  
It is the night following Horatio's first encounter with the ghost and it finds him, the guards and Hamlet on the platform waiting for the ghost. There is a celebration going on in the castle and Hamlet explains to Horatio that it is customary for the king to hold a celebration where cannons are *shot off* in honour of the King's health. This celebration is something Hamlet does not agree with; it is too excessive and other countries look upon the Danes as foolish because of it.

The ghost appears and Hamlet, realizing that the ghost does look like his dead father, approaches it and asks that it speak to him. At this point, Hamlet doesn't know whether or not the ghost is there for good or evil purposes. The ghost beckons Hamlet. When Hamlet considers leaving with the ghost, Horatio and Marcellus try to dissuade him. They are concerned for his safety. If the ghost is there for evil purposes, it might lead Hamlet to his death. Hamlet forces his way past them and follows the ghost. The scene ends with Horatio and Marcellus following Hamlet to try and protect him.[Text: Act I, Scene iv](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act1sc4.htm)

**Act I, Scene v:**  
On another part of the platform, the ghost tells Hamlet that he is indeed Hamlet's father and that he was murdered. The ghost asks Hamlet to revenge his 'most foul, strange, and unnatural murder' and Hamlet heartily agrees.

Hamlet is shocked when the ghost goes on to tell him that he was murdered by his own brother, Claudius. Unlike the story Claudius told the court, that a serpent stung and killed the old king, the ghost tells Hamlet that during his afternoon nap in the orchard Claudius crept in and poured poison in the king's ear.

The ghost goes on to tell Hamlet about how Hamlet's own mother was adulterous with Claudius, before the ghost's death. He also has Hamlet promise him that he will leave her deeds to be judged and punished by God, and that Hamlet should not take revenge on her himself. The dawn comes, forcing the ghost to return to the hellish underworld he must inhabit, because of the wrongful deeds he did prior to his own death.

Hamlet is very angry about the events the ghost told him of, and swears that he will remember the ghost and what the ghost asked of him. He also swears that he will forget all trivial matters and that his life will be focused on one event, avenging his father's murder.

Horatio and Marcellus find him and Hamlet has them swear that they will reveal to no one the events surrounding the ghost. The ghost calls up from below for them to swear when they seem hesitant to do so. Before the scene ends, Hamlet warns his friends that he will put on an 'antic disposition' for everyone to see. In other words, he will pretend to be crazy until he can avenge his father's death.[Text: Act I, Scene v](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act1sc5.htm)

**Act II, Scene i:**  
As we find out later in the scene, apparently Hamlet has been following the plan he told Horatio about, putting on an 'antic disposition.'

The scene opens with Polonius sending Reynaldo to Wittenberg to give Laertes money. Although Reynaldo's quest at first appears straightforward, Polonius also gives Reynaldo the added duty of spying on Laertes. Because Polonius is concerned for his family name, he wants to find out all about Laertes' actions and goings-on.

Even though Reynaldo intended to make some discreet inquires into Laertes' actions, he is shocked when Polonius tells him to do whatever he can, short of dishonouring Laertes, to find out what Laertes is up to, including making up stories about incidents that didn't happen. Even though Reynaldo doesn't agree with Polonius' way of gathering information, he gives in to Polonius' request.

Ophelia enters as Reynaldo leaves and her father, seeing that she is distressed, asks her what is troubling her. Ophelia relates a strange encounter she has just had with Hamlet. He came to see her in complete disarray. His clothes were a mess and his appearance was pale and sickly. She goes on to say that Hamlet grabbed her hand and studied her at arms length. He didn't say anything, but after a perusal of her face he shook his head three times and gave out a wail that was piteous and profound. He then dropped her arm and, without taking his eyes off Ophelia, walked out of the room.

Polonius, thinking that Hamlet is still madly in love with Ophelia, believes his request for Ophelia to stop seeing Hamlet is the cause of his recent apparent madness. He tells Ophelia that they must report this incident to the King. They leave, after Polonius chastises himself for making what appears to be a wrong judgement regarding Hamlet's true feelings for Ophelia.[Text: Act II, Scene i](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act2sc1.htm)

**Act II, Scene ii:**  
The action takes place two months after Hamlet has met with the ghost. The scene opens with Claudius and Gertrude talking to two of Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It seems that Hamlet has been acting strangely for the past couple of months, and no one is able to find out why. Although Gertrude guesses it is because of the death of his father and her overhasty marriage, Claudius is not so sure this is the reason. Because Claudius and Gertrude are unable to find out the reason for Hamlet's madness they send for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with the hopes that they will be able to find out the truth. Both gentlemen agree to spy on Hamlet to find out the cause of his madness after Gertrude tells them they will gain the king's money, thanks and recognition.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave to find Hamlet. Polonius enters at the same time as the messengers sent to Norway return with news regarding Fortinbras. Polonius tells the King and Queen that he has found out the cause of Hamlet's madness, and will tell them after they hear the news from the messengers.

Voltimand and Cornelius enter and report to the king that they met with Fortinbras' uncle and have found a way to stop Fortinbras' plan to attack Denmark. The uncle, after finding out the true goal of Fortinbras' army, rebukes Fortinbras for his deeds and tells him to forget this plan. Fortinbras obeys his uncle's wishes and with his uncle's help decides to use his army to attack the "Pollacks." The king looks over a paper that has Fortinbras' plans for crossing safely through Denmark on his way to fight the Pollacks, and turns his attention to Polonius.

Polonius tells the King and Queen about his suspicion that Hamlet's madness is caused by Ophelia's rejecting Hamlet's affections. Although the queen believes Polonius' speech is too long-winded, and chastises him for his roundabout ways, he brushes her off and continues with his theories. As proof of his suspicions, he reads a letter Hamlet wrote to Ophelia that expresses his love and feelings for her. Seeing that the king and queen don't agree with his assumptions as whole heartedly as he does, Polonius tries to prove his theory by approaching Hamlet himself. He ushers the King and Queen out as Hamlet approaches.

Although Polonius tries his best to pin down Hamlet's thoughts, he fails. Hamlet not only manages to evade Polonius' questions, but he seizes the opportunity and slanders Polonius and his foolish, meddling ways, without Polonius' realization. Polonius leaves after realizing that there is a lot of meaning in Hamlet's ranting.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter and Hamlet greets them affectionately. Hamlet is pleasant and cheerful to them until he finds out that they are there to spy on him and report to the King the reason for Hamlet's madness. Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are hesitant to admit they were sent for, they cannot deny it further when Hamlet convinces them that he knows they were sent for.

The focus of the conversation changes to acting and the theatre when Rosencrantz informs Hamlet that players (entertainers) are on their way to the castle to perform a play for the King. They discuss the use of child actors in the theatre and Hamlet takes another opportunity to insult Polonius when he comes in to tell Hamlet about the players. When Hamlet makes a remark about a 'fair daughter' in a play, Polonius believes he is hinting at Ophelia. They are interrupted by the entrance of the players.

Hamlet greets the players warmly and asks the leader to recite a passage he once heard the player speak. Hamlet remembered the recital because the player spoke it in such an honest and passionate way. The player recites a passage concerning the death of Priam, during the Trojan war. After the speech, Hamlet asks Polonius to take excellent care of the players and to find them quarters. Hamlet talks with the First Player about inserting some lines that Hamlet will make up into the play they are presenting tomorrow. The player agrees to Hamlet's request and leaves. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave and Hamlet is alone on stage to give his second soliloquy.

Hamlet is angry with himself for procrastinating and failing to take revenge for his father's death. He is upset because he is unable to show the passion in real life that the player can show on stage. He can't believe that an actor can show anger and even cry for a fictitious event when he can't, despite all his reasons to show these emotions. He tries to incite his passion by stating events that would make him angry, but realizes all he is doing is talking about what he should do. Realizing that he isn't further helping himself with these speeches, he makes a plan that will give him the proof he needs to show Claudius' guilt in Hamlet's father's death.

Because there is still doubt about whether or not the ghost was Hamlet's father asking Hamlet to avenge his death, or an evil spirit trying to get Hamlet into trouble, Hamlet decides to get proof of Claudius' guilt before proceeding further. Hamlet believes he can obtain his proof by watching Claudius' reaction to a murder acted out by the players similar to that of Hamlet's father's murder.[Text: Act II, Scene ii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act2sc2.htm)

**Act III, Scene i:**  
This scene opens with Claudius, the King, asking Rosencrantz and Guildenstern if they have discovered the cause of Hamlet's madness. After admitting they did not find the cause, but were treated well by Hamlet, they inform the King and Queen that Hamlet is happy that there is going to be a play presented tomorrow and he hopes that Claudius and Gertrude will attend. Pleased that there is something that amuses Hamlet, they both decide to attend the play and they urge Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to try and stimulate his interest further.

Claudius asks Gertrude to leave so that he and Polonius can observe a clandestine meeting they set up between Hamlet and Ophelia. They tell Ophelia to pretend she is praying and they go and hide. Hamlet enters and gives a soliloquy on his thoughts about himself committing suicide. He sees Ophelia, and when she tries to return some gifts that he had given her, he claims he never gave her any. They have a discussion wherein Hamlet denies ever loving Ophelia and berating her and women in general for their trickery and pretentiousness.

When Hamlet leaves, Claudius and Polonius enter. Claudius is convinced that Hamlet's madness does not stem from his love for Ophelia, but that it is something else that is afflicting his soul. Claudius realizes that Hamlet's actions are a danger to those around him. He decides to send Hamlet to England, hoping a change of atmosphere will settle his heart. The scene ends with Claudius stating that Hamlet should be watched.[Text: Act III, Scene i](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act3sc1.htm)

**Act III, Scene ii:**  
Hamlet gives some last minute instructions to the players and they proceed to get ready to perform the play. Hamlet confides in Horatio that he has a plan to test his uncle's guilt. He tells Horatio that he has asked the players to reenact the murder of Hamlet's father. By seeing Claudius' reaction to the murder, Hamlet will know for sure whether or not the ghost was telling the truth. Horatio agrees to watch the king's reaction.

The play,*The Mousetrap*, is introduced and gets underway. When the murder scene is enacted, Claudius calls for lights and storms out. Hamlet and Horatio discuss the king's reactions and both are convinced that Claudius killed the old king.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, tell Hamlet the king is very upset and then they ask him why he has been so upset lately. Hamlet, tired of their meddling, confronts them and demands to know why they are trying all these games to get information from him. He tells them that he is too smart to be caught in their traps. Polonius enters and tells Hamlet that the Queen wishes to speak with him.[Text: Act III, Scene ii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act3sc2.htm)

**Act III, Scene iii:**  
This scene gives insight into Claudius' thoughts and gives the audience proof regarding Hamlet's and the ghost's assertions that Claudius killed Hamlet's father.

The king, frightened, prepares to send Hamlet to England, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to accompany him. Polonius enters and tells the King that Gertrude is going to talk to Hamlet and try and come to an understanding regarding his madness, while he (Polonius) hides and listens to the conversation. Polonius leaves and Claudius is left on stage.

In Claudius' soliloquy, he admits to killing his brother and starts to realize the difficulties he is in. He tries to atone for his sins by praying, but he finds that although he can say the words to ask for forgiveness, he doesn't believe what he is saying. Unbeknownst to Claudius, Hamlet enters while Claudius is at prayer. Although this seems like the perfect opportunity for Hamlet, a chance to kill Claudius after proving Claudius' guilt in the murder, Hamlet refuses to go ahead with the deed. He is afraid that because Claudius is praying, Claudius' sins will be forgiven. Because Hamlet doesn't want Claudius to have a chance to go to heaven, or to purgatory where Hamlet's father now resides, he leaves.

**NOTE:** It is ironic that when Hamlet has an opportunity to kill Claudius and get away with killing him, he hesitates because he doesn't want there to be a chance that Claudius wouldn't suffer in the afterlife. What Hamlet didn't know was that Claudius couldn't pray and if he had killed Claudius, he would have had his revenge. Another thing to note, if Hamlet kills Claudius now, the deaths that occur later in the play would not have happened.

[Text: Act III, Scene iii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act3sc3.htm)

**Act III, Scene iv:**  
Polonius hides behind a curtain as Hamlet enters into his mother's chamber. When the Queen is confronted by an angry and erratic Hamlet, she panics and screams for help. When Polonius hears her scream, he thinks Hamlet is trying to kill her and he yells out. Hamlet, who suspects that Claudius is hiding behind the curtain, draws his sword and stabs at the sound.

The Queen, horrified at what Hamlet has done, tries to chastise him, but Hamlet says his deed is nowhere as bad as killing a king and marrying the old king's wife. Hamlet goes on to explain to the Queen all that he believes she has done wrong, including wronging her old husband's memory. He tries to show her the differences between the old king and Claudius, attributing only good qualities to his father and negative qualities to Claudius.

Hamlet gets excited when confronted with Gertrude's misplaced love; he doesn't understand how she can forget her husband so easily. The ghost enters. The Queen thinks Hamlet is mad (crazy), because she cannot see the ghost Hamlet sees. The ghost reminds Hamlet that Hamlet is to leave the judgement of Gertrude to God and not to harm her. Hamlet tries to convince Gertrude that the ghost is real, but fails.

Hamlet tells Gertrude to forgo any romantic encounters with Claudius, to save herself, and tries to get her to help with the plans he is making for revenge on Claudius. He asks her to tell Claudius that she believes that Hamlet is of sound mind, that he is only pretending to be mad. He also warns her not to try and play the type of game he is playing. Hamlet, dragging Polonius' body behind him, leaves a very shaken Gertrude after reminding her that he must leave for England.[Text: Act III, Scene iv](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act3sc4.htm)

**Act IV, Scene i:**  
Gertrude explains to Claudius that she believes Hamlet is truly mad and that as proof, he has killed Polonius and taken away the body. Claudius, after being thankful that he wasn't the one killed, asks where Hamlet went. She cannot tell him, and Claudius tries to comfort her by telling her that they will soon be rid of him, because of his trip. Claudius calls for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. After telling them that Hamlet has killed Polonius, he asks them to go and find Hamlet, get Polonius' body and to put Polonius' body in the chapel.

The scene ends with Claudius informing Gertrude that they must inform the court of what has happened and the reasons why they are sending Hamlet away. He is afraid that if he doesn't present Hamlet as being the only guilty person, people might start to think Claudius had something to do with the murder.[Text: Act IV, Scene i](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act4sc1.htm)

**Act IV, Scene ii:**  
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come across Hamlet, who has, by this time, safely hidden Polonius' body. Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern demand that Hamlet tell them where the body is he refuses. They then tell Hamlet the King wishes to see him; they leave with him.[Text: Act IV, Scene ii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act4sc2.htm)

**Act IV, Scene iii:**  
Claudius informs some of his Lords of his plan to send Hamlet away. He tells them that a dangerous man cannot run loose, and that Hamlet will be given the opportunity to think about his crimes; Hamlet will not be punished. Hamlet, according to Claudius, is trying to protect his secret of killing the old king. If he sends Hamlet away and Hamlet meets with an "accident," then he can maintain his innocence by claiming he previously had the opportunity to have Hamlet killed, but he chose to send him away instead.

When Hamlet is brought before Claudius, he at first doesn't tell the king where the body is. Hamlet waits for his own opportunity to inform the king of Polonius' whereabouts. The king sends some attendants to retrieve the body.

Claudius informs Hamlet that Hamlet must be sent away immediately, because of Polonius' murder. When Hamlet is taken away, and Claudius is left on stage alone, we are told that Claudius is preparing a trap for Hamlet. Claudius is sending a note to the king of England informing him that Hamlet is to be executed immediately after his arrival. Claudius is looking out for his own self-interest.

[Text: Act IV, Scene iii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act4sc3.htm)

**Act IV, Scene iv:**  
Fortinbras' army is on the outskirts of Denmark. Fortinbras sends his captain in to tell Claudius how his campaign went.

Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet up with the captain, who informs them the army that they see is Fortinbras'. The Captain discusses the futility of the battle that they fought, where thousands of men died, over a barren patch of land. The captain leaves and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern precede Hamlet to the ship; they are taking Hamlet to England.

Hamlet is left alone on stage. In this soliloquy, he compares his inaction to date with Fortinbras' action. Once again his view of himself is negative. He criticizes himself for the things he has still left unaccomplished.

**NOTE:** There is a parallel between this soliloquy and the one in Act II, Scene ii. Hamlet is comparing his inadequacies and indecisions with other characters who appear to be more direct and willing to take the initiative, and who have better control over their emotions. The reader is to be reminded of the comparison between The First Player's show of emotion and Hamlet's inability to show that type of emotion. Although Hamlet has many valid reasons to pursue his revenge against Claudius, he has held off. Fortinbras has no real reason to attack Poland, but he will because it provides him with a task which reflects his personality.

[Text: Act IV, Scene iv](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act4sc4.htm)

**Act IV, Scene v:**  
Gertrude encounters a "mad" Ophelia in this scene. Unlike Hamlet's feigned madness, Ophelia really is insane. Throughout this scene she sings about death and behaves erratically.

Claudius enters and Ophelia's songs hint at grief regarding her father's death. Claudius is amazed at Ophelia's condition and asks how long she has been like this. When Ophelia leaves, he asks Horatio to follow her and to protect her from doing herself harm.

While Claudius laments all the misfortunes that have befallen Ophelia recently, a noise is heard outside the castle. Laertes comes back to Elsinore after he hears about his father's death. Laertes believes that Claudius had something to do with the death of Polonius.

Although Laertes is upset over the events that have recently occurred and is seeking revenge against Claudius for his father's death, Claudius manages to talk him out wanting to harm him. Claudius uses his courage and cunning to disarm Laertes and convinces him that all Laertes' misfortunes are caused by Hamlet. [Text: Act IV, Scene v](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act4sc5.htm)

**Act IV, Scene vi:**  
Horatio meets with sailors who have messages from Hamlet. They give Horatio a letter which recounts Hamlet's adventures on his sea voyage. It seems that pirates attacked the ship that Hamlet was on and through misadventure, Hamlet was captured and taken prisoner. Everyone else on the ship escaped unharmed and continued on to England. The note also tells Horatio that Hamlet has an incredible story to tell him when he arrives back tomorrow, a story that will make Horatio "dumb." [Text: Act IV, Scene vi](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act4sc6.htm)

**Act IV, Scene vii:**  
Claudius convinces Laertes that he is innocent in Laertes' father's death and that Hamlet is to blame.

A messenger enters with Hamlet's letter and Claudius is amazed to find that Hamlet is still alive. Claudius reads the letter to Laertes. Hamlet is writing to inform the King that he has returned to Denmark and that he wishes to meet with Claudius tomorrow.

Claudius, concerned about Hamlet's untimely return, advises Laertes to have a dueling match with Hamlet. In this match, Claudius plans to have Laertes kill Hamlet. They plan to cover the tip of Laertes's sword with poison. Once Hamlet is struck with the sword, he will die. Hamlet's death will end Claudius' worries about anyone finding out about his involvement in his brother's death. To further ensure Hamlet's demise, Claudius intends to present Hamlet, if he scores the first "hit," with a poisoned goblet of wine. This way, Hamlet will be killed even if he wins the match.

The conspirators are interrupted by Gertrude, who informs them that Ophelia is dead. Apparently, the branch that Ophelia was sitting on broke and she fell into a stream. No one was able to save her and she drowned.

NOTE: There is concern over the way Ophelia dies. Was her death accidental, or did she commit suicide? The importance of this issue is discussed during the "grave digging scene" in Act V, Scene i. To commit suicide was a sin against the Church.

[Text: Act IV, Scene vii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act4sc7.htm)

**Act V, Scene i:**  
Two grave diggers are preparing Ophelia's grave. They discuss the inappropriateness of Ophelia being buried in a Catholic cemetery after she killed herself. It was against Church doctrine for suicides to be buried in this way. They discuss that it is only because of her connections that the rules are being broken.

Hamlet and Horatio enter. Hamlet is surprised by the gravedigger's jokes while performing their tasks. Hamlet makes comments on the fact that no matter who you are and how you lived your life, you end up dead. A humourous scene emerges when Hamlet engages one of the grave diggers in conversation. Although Hamlet has had the upper hand in making play on words, he is overshadowed by the gravedigger's comments. Hamlet encounters the skull of a person he once knew and is disgusted by the fact that he knows someone who is buried in this grave.

Hamlet finds out that Ophelia is going to be buried in this grave after the funeral procession enters. We discover Hamlet still loves Ophelia, even though he has been mean to her and he previously told her that he never loved her. When Hamlet sees Laertes jump into the grave, crying with grief, Hamlet jumps in after and protests that he was the only one who ever truly loved her and that Laertes has no right to be displaying such emotions. Laertes and Hamlet start fighting in the grave and have to be separated. Hamlet leaves, with Horatio sent to look after him and the scene ends with Claudius reminding Laertes about their previous conversation regarding what to do about Hamlet.[Text: Act V, Scene i](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act5sc1.htm)

**Act V, Scene ii:**  
Hamlet discusses the events of his trip to England with Horatio. The first night aboard, he couldn't sleep so he crept into Rosencrantz' and Guildenstern's room and read the note the King gave them. In the note there was a directive for the King of England to kill Hamlet when he arrived in court. Hamlet rewrote the note to say that the king must kill the bearers of the note, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Osric enters and informs Hamlet that the King has wagered that Hamlet could best Laertes in a fencing match and that the king will even wager on Hamlet. After some discussion, Hamlet agrees to the match. Hamlet is informed that the King and Queen would like him to come to attend them in the hall. The queen sends Hamlet a message that she would like him to show some courtesy (to apologize) to Laertes before they engage in the match. Horatio is concerned that Hamlet doesn't have a chance of winning, but Hamlet informs him that since this affair (with the ghost and his madness) started he has been practicing. Hamlet admits to misgivings about the fight, but he ignores them.

The court enters and Hamlet explains to Laertes that although he killed Laertes' father, he did not mean to. Hamlet explains further that it was a madness which came over him that caused him to do this deed. Laertes accepts Hamlet's apology, but states that his honour demands that Hamlet duel with him to defend his honour to the court. Hamlet agrees and they get ready to fight.

The winner of the fight is the first opponent to score three 'hits' on the other person. Laertes and Claudius are using this match to secretly murder Hamlet. Laertes' sword tip is poisoned and Claudius plans to have Hamlet drink a toast out of a poisoned goblet, if it seems Hamlet might win the fight. If Hamlet scores the first hit, he will offer a toast to celebrate it. Hamlet will be poisoned when he drinks the wine.

The match begins and Hamlet scores the first hit. Claudius offers a toast to Hamlet, drinks some wine, then offers the goblet to Hamlet. Because Hamlet isn't tired yet he postpones the drink and continues fighting. Hamlet scores a second hit and before Hamlet is offered the toast again, Gertrude grabs the goblet and drinks the poisoned wine, while toasting Hamlet's fortune. Hamlet once again refuses a drink at this time and continues the match. Laertes does manage to wound Hamlet, but in the scuffle they exchange swords and Hamlet wounds Laertes with the poisoned sword.

The match is disrupted when the Queen falls. Although Claudius tries to convince everyone that Gertrude fainted because of the blood, Gertrude informs everyone that she was poisoned by Claudius' wine. Gertrude dies. Laertes falls and before he dies, he informs Hamlet that the sword tip was poisoned. He further explains that it was Claudius' idea to poison the sword and that Hamlet is going to die as well. Hamlet, in a rage, stabs the king with the sword with the poisoned tip, then pours poisoned wine down the king's throat. Claudius dies. Laertes apologizes for his actions and asks for Hamlet's forgiveness. Laertes dies. A shot is heard without and Hamlet is informed that Fortinbras is crossing Denmark, coming back from his conquest over Poland. Hamlet gives his approval to Fortibras to become king of Denmark after Hamlet's death. Hamlet dies.

Fortinbras and his Ambassadors enter and discover the deaths of Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet. Fortinbras informs Horatio that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been killed in England. Horatio informs Fortinbras that he knows about all the misdeeds that have been going on in Denmark, and that the cause of them all was Claudius, not Hamlet. Hamlet is carried honourably from stage.[Text: Act V, Scene ii](http://utminers.utep.edu/ajkline/act5sc2.htm)

The play ends.