

# [Polonius is folish essay](https://assignbuster.com/polonius-is-folish-essay/)

Polonius: A Fool in Shakespeares HamletHamlet is the most popular of Shakespeares plays for theater audiences andreaders. It has been acted live in countries throughout the world and has been translatedinto every language. Polonius is one of the major characters in Hamlet, his role in the playis of great interest to scholars. Parts of Hamlet present Polonius as a fool, whose love ofhis own voice leads to his constant babbling. Scholars have been analyzing the character ofPolonius for centuries, and his role in Hamlet will continue to be analyzed for centuries tocome. Scholars believe that Shakespeare created Polonius as a fool because of his foolishdialogue throughout the play. Polonius granted Laertes permission to go back to school in France. While sayinggood-bye in his chambers, Polonius tells his son: Beware Of entrance to a quarrel, but, being in, Beart that th opposed may beware of thee. Give every man they ear, but fewthy voice. Take each mans censure, but reserve they judgment. Costly thy habit as thypurse can buy, But not expressed in fancy (rich, not gaudy) For the apparel oft proclaimsthe man, And they in France of the best rank and station (Are) of a most select andgenerous chief in that. Neither a borrower or a lender (be,) For (loan) oft loses both itselfand friend, And borrowing (dulls the) edge of husbandry. This above all: to thine own selfbe true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.

(1. 3. 71-87) The advice that Polonius gives to Laertes is simple and sounds foolish beingtold to a person of Laertes age. Martin Orkin comments on the nature of Poloniusspeech: 2 Shakespeares first audience would recognize in Polonius predilection for suchcommonplace expressions of worldly wisdom a mind that runs along conventional tracks, sticking only to what is practically useful in terms of worldly self-advancement (Orkin179). Polonius gives Laertes simple advice, to keep his thoughts to himself and to neverlend or borrow money. While this advice is simple, when looked at in full context hisadvice to his son is all about self-advancement. Polonius will go to all extremes to protecthis reputation. Grebanier states on the foolishness of Polonius speech: Such guidancewill do for those who wish to make the world their prey, but it is dignified by no humanity.

Who can live humanly without ever borrowing or lending? Is one to turn his back on hisbest friend in an hour of need? (Grebanier 285). Scholars believe that the advice Poloniusgives to his son is simple, an when looked at in full context, is foolish and selfish. AfterLaertes returns to Paris, Polonius send his servant Reynaldo to Paris to spy on Laertes andquestion his acquaintances. Polonius says to Reynaldo: At closes in the consequence-ay, marry- He closes thus: I know the gentleman. I saw him yesterday, or th other day(Or then, or then, with such or such), and as you say, There was he gaming, there(oertook) ins rouse, There falling out at tennis, or perchance I saw him enter such ahouse of sale- Videlicet, a brothel- or so forth. See you now Your bait of falsehood takethis carp of truth; And thus do we of wisdom and of reach, With windlasses and withassays of bias, By indirections find directions out. (2. 1. 61-75) 3 By spying on Laertes, Polonius is showing the audience and the reader, that he does now trust him. After givingLaertes a speech on how to behave, Polonius still feels that he has to spy on his son. JoanHartwig comments on Polonius plan to spy on his son: A machiavellian schemer whotakes his plotting to absurd proportions, Polonius pursues indirection for its own sake.

His efforts to discover Laertes reputation in Paris assume that Laertes will not follow hisearlier advice; thus, the later words become a comic reduction of his previous sermon tohis son (Hartwig 218). Another reason for Polonius foolishness is that Polonius isconvinced, and tries convincing others, that the reason for Hamlets madness is his lovefor Ophelia. He tells Ophelia: Come, go with me. I will go seek the king. This is the veryecstasy love, Whose violent property fordoes itself And leads the will to desperateundertakings As oft as any passions under heaven That does afflict out natures. I am sorry.

What, have you given him any hard words of late? (2. 1. 113-119) After hearing ofHamlets madness, he immediately reaches a conclusion and believes, throughout the play, that he is correct. He does not consider other possibilities and foolishly jumps to theconclusion that Hamlet is mad for Ophelias love. R. S. White believes that Poloniusshould have considered other options for Hamlets madness: But when saying that it issimply Ophelias rejection that has made Hamlet mad, he is ignorant of the predisposedmental state of the young man caused by his mothers remarriage, the recent encounterwith the ghost and the whole repressive machinery of Denmarks social 4 and politicallife (White 67). Polonius foolishly believes that he knows what underlies Hamletsmadness, while Hamlet, and the audience, knows that he is wrong. Polonius continues todemonstrate his foolishness by babbling and losing his train of argumentation whenspeaking to the King and Queen. Polonius is convinced that Hamlet is mad in love forOphelia and says: My liege, and madam, to expostulate What majesty should be, whatduty is, Why day is day, night night, and time is time Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time. Therefore, (since) brevity is the soul of wit, And tediousness the limbs andoutward flourishes, I will be brief. Your noble son is mad. Mad call I it, for, to definetrue madness, What is t but to be nothing else but mad? But let that go. (2. 2. 93-102) Hesays that he will be brief, but continues to babble. The Queen responds to his statement bysaying More matter with less art (2. 2. 103). The Queen acknowledges Poloniusconstant babbling and wants him to get quickly to the point. Grebanier comments on thecharacter of Polonius: Nothing is left of is ability and shrewdness but a few tags, a fewcatch-phrases, to which, even when they do express some grains of truth, he pays scantheed in his own demeanor. It is he, for example, who utters the celebrated: brevity is thesoul of wit (2. 2. 90) -a profound truth; but no character in Shakespeare is so longwinded as Polonius (Grebanier 283). Polonius continues to complicate a simple statementand is viewed as a babbling fool by scholars. Throughout the play, Hamlet continues toinsult Polonius and make him look foolish to the audience. Hamlet tells Polonius: Youare a fishmonger (2. 2. 190). 5 According to Leo Kirschbaum: A fishmonger is a barrel, one who employs a prostitute for his business. Hamlet is obliquely telling the old councilorthat he is using his own daughter for evil ends (Kirschbaum 86). After Hamlet insultsPolonius and Ophelia, Polonius still refuses to give up this theory that Hamlet is madly inlove. Martin Dodsworth comments on the reaction of Polonius after Hamlet insults him: Polonius accepts the bad treatment meeted out to him as that of a man who is out of hismind: How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter. He is far gone (Dodsworth100). The Shakespearean audience viewed Hamlet as the protagonist of the play, andsome scholars believe that Polonius served as his perfect foil. Bert States comments, Polonius is not only the perfect foil for Hamlets wit (since irony is the mortal enemy ofthe order prone mind), but a shadow of Hamlet as well. Indeed, Polonius literally shadowsHamlet, or tails him and in shadowing him falls into a thematic parody of his own habits(States 116). Thus, Polonius role in the play as Hamlets foil, would be the role of thefool. The last time Polonius appears in Hamlet is wen he hides behind a curtain inGertrudes room, to hear Hamlets conversation with his mother. Hamlet frightensGertrude and she cries for help. Immediately after, Polonius foolishly echoes her cry and isstabbed by Hamlet, thinking it is Claudius. Hamlet, realizing he has killed Polonius says: Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell. I took thee for my better. (3. 4. 38-39)Elizabeth Oakes comments on this scene, Although Polonius is not in motley, Hamletcalls him a fool often enough, although nowhere more significantly than in the closet scene6 after the murder (Oakes 106). Hamlet ruthlessly calls Polonius a fool, and his opinion, as the plays protagonist, would greatly influence an Elizabethan audiences view ofPolonius. When Gertrude tells Claudius of Polonius death, Claudius responds by saying: O heavy deed! It had been so with us, had we been there. (4. 1. 13-14) Claudius knowsthat Polonius has been killed in his place. Oakes comments on Polonius role a the playsfool: He is suited for this role because of his incarnation of the fool, the one traditionallychosen as a substitute for the king in ritual (Oakes 106). Scholars view Polonius as acharacter mocked throughout the play and the nature of his death, as the Kings substitute, lead scholars to view him as a fool. In conclusion, Shakespeare created Polonius as a veryunique and complex character. Scholars argue and will continue to argue over the reasonsfor Polonius foolishness. Throughout the play Polonius tends to act foolish thinking thathe knows the reason for Hamlets madness, while the audience knows that he is wrong.

Shakespeare created Polonius as a controversial character and only he will ever know whyPolonius was created so foolish. BibliographyWorks Cited Grebanier, Bernard. The Heart of Hamlet. New York: Thomas Y. CromwellCo, 1960. Hartwig, Joan. Parodic Polonius. Texas Studies in Literature and Language: vol. 13, 1971. Kirschbaum, Leo. Character and Characterization in Shakespeare. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1962. Oakes, Elizabeth. Polonius, the Man behind the Arras: A JungianStudy. New Essays on Hamlet. New York: AMS Press, 1994. Orkin, Martin. Hamletand the Security of the South African State. Critical Essays on Shakespeares Hamlet.

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