

**Key Scenes**

**Act 1 Scene 2 - Setting the scene**
As the court celebrates the marriage of Hamlet's mother (Gertrude) to his uncle (Claudius), Hamlet finds out that his father's ghost is haunting the castle. He is determined to confront it.

**Act 1 Scene 5 - Hamlet meets the Ghost**
The ghost of Old Hamlet reveals to his son that he was murdered by Claudius and demands that young Hamlet seeks revenge. Hamlet decides to feign madness in an attempt to find proof of his uncle's guilt.

**Act 2 Scene 2 - Claudius becomes suspicious**
Polonius, chief adviser to the new king, tells Claudius that Hamlet's madness is due to unrequited love for Ophelia, Polonius's daughter, but Claudius is not convinced and plots with Polonius to spy on Hamlet. Hamlet's childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildernstern, have been summoned to the castle by the king and queen to keep close watch on him. A troupe of actors also arrives at Elsinore to entertain the court and are persuaded to include some lines written by Hamlet.

**Act 3 Scene 1 - Hamlet's turmoil**
Claudius and Polonius eavesdrop when Hamlet meets Ophelia. Hamlet speaks the famous soliloquy ('To be or not to be') and rejects Ophelia, whom he had previously professed love to, believing that she is in league with his uncle and Polonius.

**Act 3 Scene 2 - The play**
In front of the king and the whole court, the players perform a scene which closely follows the Ghost's account of his murder by Claudius. When Claudius cuts the performance short, Hamlet takes this a proof of his guilt. He is now determined to revenge his father's death immediately.

**Act 3 Scene 3 - Claudius's plotting**
Claudius arranges Hamlet's banishment to England with Rosencrantz and Guildernstern. He confesses his crime in prayer. Hamlet finds Claudius on his knees praying but cannot bring himself to kill him there.

**Act 3 Scene 4 - The closet scene - Hamlet kills Polonius**
Unable to kill his uncle, Hamlet challenges his mother about her relationship with Claudius and admits he has been feigning madness. Hearing a noise, he believes that Claudius is eavesdropping, draws a sword and kills Polonius.

**Act 4 Scene 2 - Hamlet is banished**
Claudius arranges Hamlet's immediate tranportation to England and sends a letter to the English king demanding that he arranges Hamlet's immediate death.

**Act 4 Scene 6 - Two bereaved sons return**
Polonius's son Laertes has returned to Denmark, determined to revenge his father's murder and blaming Claudius. Hamlet escapes his banishment and also returns. Already distraught, Laertes also learns that his sister Ophelia, driven mad by Hamlt's rejection and her father's murder, has drowned.

**Act 5 Scene 2 - The tragic climax**
Unaware that Claudius has conspired to have Laertes murder Hamlet during a staged duel and for it to appear accidental, Hamlet accepts Laertes's challenge in good faith. As they fight, Gertrude drinks the poisoned wine that Claudius had intended for Hamlet and dies. Laertes manages to wound Hamlet slightly with the poisoned tip of his sword. In the heat of the fight, the swords are switched. Laertes is in turn wounded by Hamlet, using the poisoned weapon, and dies. Hamlet dies in Horatio's arms. Fortinbras arrives at the head of a Norwegian army.