Act 1 Summary

The drama opens with Dr Faustus – the protagonist busy in his studies. He is talking to himself (Soliloquy). Being well-learnt he is attracted by logic or analytics. He is quite dissatisfied with the medical advancement as according to him medicine cannot help him make humans immortal or bring dead back to life.

Thus he gets interested in the study of magic that makes a great appeal to him. He thinks that magic will not only make him wealthy but also give him power and glory.

Soon Wagner – Faustus’ servant enters. He requests Wagner to bring his two friends Valdes and Cornelius. Soon good and evil angels enter. The Evil encourages him to study magic and also become as powerful on Earth as God in the sky.

The two angels exit and Faustus in left alone to decide (Soliloquy). Valdes and Cornelius appear. Faustus discusses his plan to study and practice magic and feels affirmative.

Cornelius says that Faustus is fully qualified and equipped to study magic. Being eager, Faustus decides to begin the same night without troubling about the outcomes of his act.

In his aspiration to be as God, he choose the not – God. This is the essential irony or the sin and the central irony of the play.

The two scholars get worried about Dr. Faustus as the latter visits university rarely. To inquire about him, the scholars meet his servant and ask about Faustus. The servant – Wagner is a humorous person and argues in an amusing way.

The scholars then decide to tell President of University about Dr Faustus. It is the time of night. Dr Faustus is seen in a dark grove. He is ready to conjure – I.e. cause a ghost to appear by the way of magic.

Faustus draws a circle in which he writes the name of Jehovah (name of God) “forward & backward anagrammatised” with the abridged names of holy saints and also the signs of stars and planets.  
Mephistopheles appears. Faustus asks him to go back and return in the guise of an old Franciscan Friar. Mephistopheles immediately departs and Faustus is pleased with him. He wants Mephistopheles promise him to serve during his whole life.

Mephistopheles tells Faustus that he will have to take permission from Lucifer – his master. He also tells Faustus that Lucifer was once an angel loved by God. However he was expelled from Heaven because of his aspiring pride and insolence. Faustus is terrified.

Mephistopheles memorises the joys of Heaven and thus mourns over its loss. Faustus asks Mephistopheles to go to Lucifer and tell him that Faustus wants to surrender hi soul on the condition that Lucifer will spare him for 24 years.

The scene shifts. Wagner is seen trying to befool the clown who is unemployed. Wagner wants the Clone to serve him but the latter is in no mood to do that.

To frighten him, Wagner speaks two magic words and also threatens to call two devils. The clone is frightened and thus submits to Wagner promising to serve him.

Act 2 Summary

Scene 1

In this act, Faustus is alone and busy in his studies. He has an acute mental uncertainty. He realises that he is now damned and it is useless to think of God and Heaven.

However, he desires to return to God and also build a Church. Soon Good and evil angels appear. The former urge him to think of heaven and the latter promises him wealth and honour.

Mephistopheles appears and tells Faustus that Lucifer has agreed to buy his soul. Further, he asks Faustus to sign a bond with his blood. Faustus stabs his arm and begins to write. His blood congeals and he writes no more. He sees an inscription on his arm which is “Man run away”.

Faustus asks Mephistopheles about Hell and the latter tells says that it is a place where one is tortured. Hearing this Faustus dismisses the idea of Hell and asks for wife to Mephistopheles who offers him devil disguised woman. Dr Faustus rejects her and says “A plague on her”.

Mephistopheles gives Faustus a book of magic using which Faustus would be able to control not only humans but other elements as well. The book contains all the knowledge that Faustus desires to acquire.

Scene 2

Faustus is once again shown us experiencing a mental conflict. When he thinks of heaven, he repents his contract. Soon a quarrel begins between Faustus and Mephistopheles which ends with a reconciliation between the two.

In the beginning, Faustus is in the mood of repentance because of good angels of God. However being curious he asks Mephistopheles about the nature of universe and also asks him who created the world.

Being enemy of God, Mephistopheles does not like to admit the truth and warns Faustus from asking such questions as they are against the kingdom of Hell.

However the good angels of God whisper in his ears that God made the universe. They again urge Faustus to repent however the evil angels warn him. That devil will tear him apart if he breaks the contract.

Being in distress, Faustus calls upon Christ to save his soul. Immediately he finds himself confronted with Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephistopheles who tell him that by appealing to Christ he is acting on contrary to his promise.

Faustus begs the devils to pardon him and vows never think of heaven again or think of God and praying him.

Lucifer summons the **Seven Deadly Sins**to entertain Faustus. The sins are **Pride, Covetousness**(greed)**, Wrath**(anger)**, Envy, Gluttony**(over-intelligence)**, Sloth**(laziness) and **Lechery**(lust).

Faustus is given a book using which he would be able to turn himself into any shape he likes. A parade of Seven Deadly Sins start (a survival of Old Morality Plays). Deadly Sins provide entertainment not only to Faustus but to the audience as well.

Act 3

Scene 3.1. The Chorus describes how [Faustus](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#faustus) went to the top of Mount Olympus, and in a chariot drawn by dragons, studied the stars and the celestial structure. He then rode a dragon's back to study cosmography, the shapes of coasts and kingdoms, and is now flying to Rome, where the feast honoring St. Peter is about to be celebrated.

Scene 3.2. [Mephostophilis](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list" \l "mephostophilis) and Faustus arrive in Rome, Faustus describing the places he's been. They wait in the Pope's own private chamber for him, as Mephostophilis describes Rome's wonders. When Faustus wants to see them, Mephostophilis restrains him, so that they can torment the Pope and his subordinates.

[The Pope](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#the-pope) enters with cardinals, Bishops, and [Raymond](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#raymond), King of Hungary, and [Bruno](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#bruno), a man in chains. Bruno is a man whom the Emperor of Germany tried to make Pope, and he is now vanquished. The Pope makes Bruno bow as his foot stool and abuses him verbally. The Pope sends cardinals to proclaim the statutes naming Bruno's fate. Faustus, who watches with Mephostophilis, unseen, orders Mephostophilis to follow the cardinals to the consistory and magically put them to sleep. He plans to restore Bruno's liberty and return him to Germany. The Pope informs Bruno that the Emperor and he are to be excommunicated, in order that the Pontiff's supremacy might be made clear.

Faustus and Mephostophilis re-enter, magically disguised as the cardinals who are now sleeping, under Mephostophilis' spell. They declare the sentence of the Synod (council of Bishops). They take Bruno away, supposedly to be burned at the stake. The Pope blesses them, which Mephostophilis loves ("So, so, was never devil blessed thus before" [3.3.197]), and they take Burno away.

Scene 3.3. Faustus and Mephostophilis look forward to the confusion when the cardinals awake and return to the Pope. They make themselves invisible, and the antics continue.

All goes according to plan. The unfortunate cardinals return, and confusion breaks out when it becomes clear that they don't know where Bruno is. As the Pope is sitting for his meal, Faustus speaks blasphemies (an invisible man talking) and snatches the Pope's food and wine. A Bishop suggests that the villain might be a ghost come from Purgatory. Faustus starts to hit the Pope, who exits with his train. Friars return, with bell, book, and candle to perform rites that will rid the room of the evil presence. Faustus and Mephostophilis beat up all the friars, throw fireworks, and leave.

The Chorus returns to tell us that Faustus returns home, where his vast knowledge of astronomy and his abilities earn him wide renown. He becomes a favorite of Emperor Carolus the Fifth ([Charles](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#charles) V, 1515-56), and his feats in that court we will presently see.

Scene 3.4. Robin the Clown, here working as an ostler (a person who takes care of horses) promises his friend [Rafe](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list" \l "rafe) that with his magic book, he can perform pleasure-giving feats. They steal a silver cup from a [Vintner](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#vintner); when the Vintner arrives Robin summons Mephostophilis to deal with him. The devil puts squibs (sizzling fireworks) in the backs of Robin and Rafe, and they run around like loons. Rafe returns the cup to the Vintner, who seems unable to see Mephostophilis.

Mephostophilis is furious at having been summoned all the way from Constantinople to perform tricks, and he tells Robin and Rafe that he will turn one into an ape and the other into a dog. He leaves. Robin and Rafe, as yet untransformed, seem thrilled at the idea of getting to be animals.

Act 4

Scene 4.1. [Martino](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#martino) and [Frederick](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#frederick), two nobles at the court of the German Emperor, converse about recent events. [Bruno](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#bruno), the Emperor's choice for pope, is back, having ridden home on a demon's back. They are excited about the imminent performance of [Faustus](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#faustus) the conjuror for the pleasure of the court. They try to rouse their sleeping lush of a friend, [Benvolio](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list" \l "benvolio), to come see the show, but he refuses to come. He'll watch from the window.

Scene 4.2. [Charles](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#charles), the German Emperor; Bruno, [Saxony](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#saxony), Faustus, [Mephostophilis](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list" \l "mephostophilis), Frederick, Martino, and Attendants are in the court. Benvolio's at the window. The Emperor welcomes Faustus, thanking him for delivering Bruno, and Faustus fawns on the Emperor, promising wonders. Benvolio voices his skepticism, saying that if Faustus can conjure spirits, Benvolio is just as likely to become a stag, like the mythical character Acteon . Faustus conjures Alexander the Great, the Persian Emperor Darius, and Alexander's paramour, delighting the Emperor, who has to be restrained by Faustus from embracing Alexander. Faustus also makes antlers grow on the head of Benvolio. He threatens to summon hunting dogs (paralleling the death of Acteon), but Benvolio appeals to the Emperor for help, and the Emperor asks Faustus to restore Benvolio's human shape. Benvolio plots revenge. The Emperor commends Faustus and promises him high office.

Scene 4.3. Enter Benvolio, Martino, Frederick, and Soldiers. Martino tries to stop Benvolio from making a move against Faustus. Benvolio won't be persuaded, and his friends resolve to stand with him. Frederick leaves to place the soldiers for ambush, and returns to warn them that Faustus is coming. The three friends attack, and Benvolio cuts off Faustus' head. They plan to desecrate the head, and put horns on it . . . but Faustus' body rises. Because he made his deal with the devil and was promised twenty-four more years of life, he cannot be killed. He summons his devils, at first commanding them to fly with them up to heaven before dragging them down to hell. Then he changes his mind, because he wants men to see what happens to his enemies. He tells the devils to drag the three friends through different parts of the wilderness. The devils drag off the trio. The ambush soldiers arrive, but Faustus defeats them by commanding the trees and summoning an army of devils.

Scene 4.4. Benvolio, Martino, and Frederick find each other in the woods. They all have horns on their heads. They decide that attacking Faustus is futile, and so they retreat to Benvolio's castle, to live hidden from the world until the horns go away; if the horns remain, they'll stay at the castle forever.

Act 5

Scene 5.1. The stage directions: "Thunder and lightning. Enter devils with covered dishes. MEPHOSTOPHILIS leads them into FAUSTUS' study. Then enter WAGNER."

[Wagner](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#wagner) tells the audience that he thinks [Faustus](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#faustus) prepares for death. He has made his will, leaving all to Wagner. But even as death approaches, Faustus spends his days feasting and drinking with the other students.

Wagner exits, and Faustus, [Mephostophilis](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list" \l "mephostophilis), and three Scholars enter. At their request, he conjures the sight of Helen of Troy. Ravished, the Scholars leave, thanking Faustus. [An Old Man](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#an-old-man) enters, warning Faustus to repent, saying there is still time. Faustus seems shaken and moved, knowing that his hour approaches quickly. He seems to think that he is doomed. Mephostophilis gives him a dagger. Faustus tells the man that his words have brought comfort, and asks him to leave, so that Faustus can contemplate his sins.

Faustus seems ready to repent, but Mephostophilis threatens him with physical violence. Faustus begs pardon, and orders Mephostophilis to go torment the old man. Mephostophilis tells Faustus that he cannot touch the Old Man's soul, but he can harm the Old Man's body. Faustus asks Mephostophilis to bring Helen of Troy to him, to be his love, and Mephostophilis readily agrees.

The devil brings forth the shape of Helen, and leaves. Faustus gives the most famous speech of the play:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,

And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.

Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies.

Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.

Here will I dwell for heaven is in those lips,

And all is dross that is not Helena. (5.1.97-103)

The Old Man re-enters, watching, as Faustus speaks of how he'll relive the myths of Greece, with Helen as his love and himself playing Paris of Troy. He leaves with her.

The Old Man watches, and knows Faustus is lost. The devils enter, to torture him, but he is completely unshaken. They cannot harm what matters, and he faces them without fear.

Scene 5.2. Thunder. Enter [Lucifer](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#lucifer), [Belzebub](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list" \l "belzebub), and [Mephostophilis](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list" \l "mephostophilis). Tonight is the night when [Faustus](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#faustus) will give up his soul, and the unholy three seem to be looking forward to it.

Faustus and [Wagner](https://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/character-list#wagner) enter. Faustus asks Wagner how he likes the will, which (as we learned in 5.1) leaves all to Wagner, and Wagner expresses gratitude.

The three scholars enter. They notice that Faustus looks ill. When they suggest bringing a doctor, Faustus tells them he is damned forever. Tonight he is to lose his soul. The scholars advise him to repent, but Faustus thinks it's too late. He regrets having ever seen a book. The scholars and Wagner do not sense the presence of the devils. Faustus tells them that he cannot even raise his arms up to God, for the devils push his arms down.

The First Scholar asks why Faustus did not speak of this before, so that they might pray for him, and he answers that the devils threatened him with bodily harm. Faustus tells them to leave him, to escape harm when the devils come. The Third Scholar considers staying with him, but his colleagues convince him not to invite danger. They go to the next room to pray for Faustus. The Scholars exit.

Mephostophilis taunts Faustus. Faustus blames Mephostophilis for his damnation, and the devil proudly takes credit for it. Mephostophilis exits, leaving with the line, "Fools that will laugh on earth, must weep in hell" (5.2.106).

The Good and Evil Angels arrive. The Good Angel laments that Faustus has now lost the eternal joys of heaven. Now, it is too late: "And now, poor soul, must thy good angel leave thee: / The jaws of hell are open to receive thee" (5.2.124-5). The Good Angel exits.

The gates of Hell open. The Evil Angel taunts Faustus, naming the horrible tortures seen there. Faustus is terrified by the sight, but the Evil Angel reminds him gleefully that soon he will feel, rather than just see. The Evil Angel exits.

The Clock strikes eleven. Faustus begins his final monologue. He pleads beautifully, and futilely, for time to stop its forward rush. He realizes time cannot stop, and delivers these memorable lines: "Oh, I'll leap up to my God: who pulls me down? / See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament. / One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ!" (5.2.156-8). He has a vision of an angry God. He pleads with different aspects of nature to help him, but they can't.

The clock strikes for half past the hour. He pleads that God will shorten his time in hell to a thousand, or even a hundred thousand years. But he knows that hell is eternal. He wishes that Pythagoras' theory of transmigration of souls (reincarnation) were true. He wishes that he could be an animal, whose souls are not immortal. He curses his parents, then curses himself, and finally curses Lucifer. The clock strikes midnight. With thunder and lightning scarring the skies, he cries aloud for his soul to dissolve into the air, or drops of water, so that the devils cannot find it. The devils enter. As Faustus begs God and the devil for mercy, the devils drag him away.

Scene 5.3. Enter the three Scholars. They've been much disturbed by all of the terrible noise they heard between midnight and one. They find Faustus' body, torn to pieces.

Epilogue. The Chorus emphasizes that Faustus is gone, his once-great potential wasted. The Chorus warns the audience to remember his fall, and the lessons it offers.