First meeting with the witches. They foretell of a meeting with Macbeth after the coming battle.

Duncan, the king of Scotland, waits to hear news of an attack at Fife by the Norwegian army assisted by the traitorous Thane of Cawdor. The king’s generals, Macbeth, Banquo and Ross, repulse the attack. Duncan condemns Cawdor to death and confers his title on Macbeth.

The witches meet again. Macbeth and Banquo come upon them. They foretell that Macbeth will be made Thane of Cawdor and then king of Scotland. Banquo’s children will also be kings. Ross and Angus arrive and tell Macbeth that the king has named him Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is influenced by the witches’ prophecies.

Duncan receives news of the death of the Thane of Cawdor, and when Macbeth and Banquo arrive thank them for their roles in the battle. The king names his son, Malcolm, as Prince of Cumberland and heir to the throne. Macbeth sees this as a hurdle to his assumption of power.

At Macbeth’s castle, his wife reads a letter from him telling her of his new title and the prophecy of the witches. A messenger arrives to tell her that the king is on his way to stay at their castle. She sees this as an opportunity to destroy the king and put Macbeth in his place. On Macbeth’s return she greets him with the assurance that she knows what must be done and that he can leave the mechanics to her.

The king arrives at Macbeth’s castle. He is welcomed and put in the care of Macbeth.

Macbeth worries about the deed that has to be done upon the king, who Macbeth sees as a good man. He decides to go no further with the plan, but Lady Macbeth convinces him otherwise. She decides to murder him that night and place the blame on the king’s attendants.

Banquo and his son, Fleance, are worried by the prophecies and anticipation of the future. Macbeth is also concerned about what he is going to do.

Lady Macbeth has drugged the king’s grooms and placed their daggers so Macbeth can implicate them by smearing them with the king’s blood. Macbeth comes in having killed the king. He is distressed and has brought the daggers with him. She tries to force him to return to the king’s chamber and smear the grooms with blood, but he refuses. She has to do it herself. She then pushes him off to get into their nightgowns and to wash off the blood that covers them both. Macbeth is shattered by the deed.

Macbeth is woken by Macduff and Lennox. They tell of the uproar in the heavens during the night. Macduff finds the king dead and reports it to Macbeth, who tells them he has killed them for killing the king. The king’s sons, Malcolm and Donalbin, decide that it would be safer to flee from Scotland, especially with the violence that the murder has stirred up.
II iv Ross and an old man discuss the weather last night. Macduff informs them that the king was slain by his attendants and Macbeth has killed them. He tells of the flight of Malcolm and Donalbain and that they must be suspect for their father’s murder. Macbeth has been named as king and has gone to Scone for his investment.

III i Banquo is disturbed by his apparent failure to have his prophecy fulfilled whereas Macbeth’s has taken place. Macbeth, now king, arrives. Banquo tells him of his plan to go riding with Fleance. Macbeth decides that in order for him to retain sovereignty, Banquo and his heirs must die. Also Malcolm and Donalbain are stirring up trouble in England and Ireland. He briefs the murderers on Banquo and Fleance’s death.

III ii Macbeth explains to Lady Macbeth that while Banquo lives, they are in danger and that he has arranged for their deaths.

III iii The murderers botch the murder and while Banquo is killed, Fleance escapes.

III iv The murderers inform Macbeth that Banquo is dead while he is dining. Banquo’s ghost sits in Macbeth’s place, visible only to Macbeth. He talks to the ghost and the assembled company is assuaged by his wife, who makes excuses for his “illness”. She tries to control his fear, but doesn’t succeed. The ghost disappears. But Macbeth has shown that he is not capable of ruling and the banquet breaks up in consternation. Macbeth and his queen try to determine what can be done in the future. Macbeth can only see blood.

III v Hecate, the queen of witches, berates the three for trifling with Macbeth, whilst she was allowed no part of it. They arrange to meet at the pit of Acheron, where they will meet Macbeth.

III vi Lennox and another noble relate how Macduff has encouraged Edward, king of England, to rouse Northumberland and Siward to free the Scots from the hand of Macbeth. Suspicion of the king’s and Banquo’s murders has now fallen onto Macbeth.

IV i The three witches, and then Hecate, brew a cauldron. Macbeth arrives and asks for answers. They use the cauldron and an apparition (an armed head) appears which warns Macbeth to beware Macduff, the Thane of Fife. A second apparition (a bloody child) tells Macbeth that no man born of woman shall harm him. The third apparition (a crowned child carrying a tree) assures Macbeth that he will never be vanquished until Birnam wood comes to Dunsinane castle. Macbeth now feels safe. The witches show him eight kings including Banquo. Lennox arrives, having seen none of the antics of the witches, and tells Macbeth that word has come from England that Macduff has fled. Macbeth decides to destroy Macduff’s castle.

IV ii Lady Macduff bemoans that her husband has left her and the castle unprotected. Ross tries to comfort her, while she and her son discuss traitors. A
messenger tries to warn them of approaching danger. They are both set upon and killed by Macbeth's men.

IV iii In England, Malcolm and Macduff build on each other's hatred of Macbeth. Ross arrives and tells Macduff, reluctantly, that his wife, children and his entire household have been murdered. Macduff blames himself for deserting them and resolves to return with Malcolm to avenge their deaths. Edward, king of England, has promised the support of Siward and ten thousand men.

V i At Dunsinane castle, a doctor and lady in waiting discuss Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking. Lady Macbeth is reliving her past, and she implicates Macbeth and herself in the crimes they have committed.

V ii Near Dunsinane, the disenchanted Scots, Menteith, Caithness, Angus, and Lennox await the English army led by Malcolm. Macbeth has fortified the castle and when Malcolm, Macduff and Siward arrive they decide to march toward Birnam wood.

V iii In the castle, Macbeth refuses any more information from his scouts until Birnam wood comes to the castle. He knows that Malcolm was born of woman so he doesn't fear him. A messenger tells him of the size of the army approaching but he refuses to fear them and arms himself. His doctor is despairing of the mind-sickness of Lady Macbeth.

V iv Malcolm, in Birnam wood, orders every soldier to camouflage himself by chopping down a branch, so as to confuse Macbeth of the size of his army.

V v Macbeth shows his bravado in the face of the opposing army, but is rocked by the death of his wife. A messenger tells him of the approach of Birnam wood. Macbeth dons his armour.

V vi Malcolm encourages Macduff to lead the attack.

V vii Macbeth is still confident of victory. Siward, the English general's son, confronts him and is killed. Malcolm and Siward (senior) enter the castle assisted by some of Macbeth's own men. Macbeth and Macduff engage in combat. Macduff taunts Macbeth, but Macbeth tells him he cannot be killed by him because he (Macduff) was born of woman. Macduff tells him that he was taken from his mother's body, rather than being born. Macbeth fights on, knowing he is defeated, until he is overcome. Macduff takes Macbeth's head to Malcolm and hails him as King of Scotland.