



'0-60 Seconds iNTELEVISION Commercial Producers'
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STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

Guidelines & Job Description – What I need to do after I get some experience?

These procedures were designed to give the person responsible in this area some indication to what needs to be achieved after a lengthy exposure and work experience. The person(s) selected for this particular position will be allowed time to adjust and train him/herself while working with the producer. Not in-depth experience or qualification is required at this stage. Please come along and share your experience with the rest of us. Thank you.

PRE-PRODUCTION - SCREENPLAY & WRITER

It would be impossible to overemphasize the significance of the screenplay for a film - there isn't such thing as the screenplay being too important. As a saying goes: "If it ain't on the page, it ain't on the stage". Compare the process of filmmaking with the process of constructing a building and you'll find the similarities. Just as a building needs a strong and sturdy foundation (base), a film needs a strong and sturdy base as well - which is the screenplay, the script. If the screenplay is bad, then everything else collapses as well.

However, there are two different types of filmmakers, thus bring two different kinds of viewpoints. The first type is independent filmmakers, and they're the kind that really see the importance in the script, whereas studio filmmakers don't. Independent filmmakers are able to take risks that studio filmmakers can't. In order for their films to be a guaranteed success, studios remake previously successfully films or hit TV shows. Their focus might not so much be on the screenplay, but on special effects. For example, in *Speed II: Cruise Control*, the script was not written with the thought of an appealing plot or attractive actors; it was written so that it could accommodate the \$83,000-per-second five-minute stunt (this stunt is known as the most expensive single-stunt in history) that director Jan De Bont wanted. Independent filmmakers, on the other hand, are able to give their audience something original and fresh, and they don't so much rely on special effects to make their films a success, even with a modest budget. Actually, there have been more independent filmmakers than studio filmmakers to win academy awards in the past years. That's because independent films are really written with the heart set out for a good script, whereas studio films are just selling their big-star actors and special effects.

In Hollywood, there are top-notch scriptwriters who are hired as "script doctors" by studio executives. Obviously, as you can see from the name, these scriptwriters are given huge amount of money to correct/rewrite any parts of the script that might be in trouble. They are also hired as a protection to the executives themselves, because just in case the movie is a big flop, the executive can say, "but I hired William Goldman!" Sometimes it isn't just the studio executive that wants to hire top screenwriters as script doctors, it's the actors (well known and famous actors, of course) who demand this as part of their contract.

Generally, the process of filmmaking proceed according to the following order: Treatment: A sketch (description) of the whole story and the characters, written in an essay-style format.

First Draft: The first draft is usually longer than the final draft, and it's written in what's called a standard form

Second Draft: The second draft is basically a modified version of the first draft, including all the

important changes in the relationship of the characters, plot, or storyline.

Polish: This is to "polish" up specific dialogues, actions, and settings etc, not a complete rewrite.

Usually, a script written in standard form runs roughly around one page per minute of screen time. Which means, the script for a 100-minute long film would be around a hundred pages long. However, once you begin to edit it, you'll find yourself wanting to trim and tighten different scenes, or even cutting some scenes. That is why the final running time of the film will be shorter than the final script.

A Good Screenplay

The most important thing in a completed screenplay is that it is able to hold the interest of its' intended audience. If it is not appealing and it can't hold your interest, then it is not considered as a good screenplay. Another way to see if a particular screenplay is good or not, is to see if it can express the movie before it is shot. That means, a good screenplay should allow the reader to be able to really hear and experience the movie by just reading the script.

The Writers Guild

A majority of experienced and skilled film and television writers belong to the Writers Guild of America (WGA), an organization that began in 1942. Producers sign a contract with the WGA and are able to work with a writer belonging to the guild. However, there are disadvantages for independent film producers. Signing with the guild means that you must pay the writer a guild minimum charge for each writing progression, which basically means that you have to pay them for the story, draft, revisions and polishing. A script can go through a number of revisions before it can be ready, and that means we're talking about a large sum of money - sometimes an amount that independent producers can't afford. Another thing that the WGA does is to determine the final writing credits. It is very important to follow exactly what's determined by the guild, and if a producer fails to follow exactly, serious consequences would occur. The producer or production company may be fined (a large sum of money, of course).

Screenwriting Software

Some screenwriters prefer using a typewriter, or even paper and pencil, to write their scripts. But, nowadays, there are software designed to help screenwriters with their scripts, such as the formation of the scripts and the organization of the characters in the script etc. There are many kinds of software, everything from the most traditional kind - converting a basic word document into a standard screenplay format - to more sophisticated programs that formats your screenplay as you write along. With these software, writers are able to write with ease.

Selecting a Writer

The most important thing to look for in a writer, apart from genre, is whether the writer is able to tell a good story or not to the audience. If that person is not able to, then he/she is not a good writer, period. Besides being able to tell a good story, you should look for a writer with the writing style you have in mind. What I mean is, say, if you wanted to produce a comedy, you'd want to look for a writer who's humorous and able to crack a few good jokes. It is common (and necessary) for a producer to select screenwriters by watching films. They watch films that show the genre of films that they're after, and after that they take a look at the screenplay, where they can really see the potential writer's works. Once a producer has selected a few potential writers for his film, he should contact the writers' agents. If he finds that his desired writers are unavailable or too expensive for his budget, their agents will naturally recommend other suitable clients of his for you.

These Standard Operating Procedures [SOP] were designed only to be a guide and help to you.



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