

# The Marketplace for Film, Television, and Other Audiovisual Writers

## TOTAL EARNINGS AND EMPLOYMENT

Total earnings for writers continued the recent slow and steady increase. The total number of writers employed, in contrast, continued its recent decline. In other words, fewer writers made more money for the second year in a row.

Total earnings for writers under WGAw contracts totaled \$831.4 million in 2003, an increase of 2.0% over the 2002 total of \$815.2 million. Since 1983, total earnings have increased every year except 1988, 1991, and 2001. Earnings reportable for dues have increased five-fold since 1982.

The number of writers employed in 2003 dropped 1.0% to 4,298, from the 2002 figure of 4,341. While employment is off the peak levels of the last seven years, the current level is 12.1% higher than 10 years ago and 50.7% higher than 20 years ago.

## MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

These figures illustrate the increasing competitiveness of the Hollywood writing trade.

## TOTAL EARNINGS UNDER WGAw CONTRACTS

YEAR	<i>(Millions of \$)</i>	
	TOTAL EARNINGS	PERCENT CHANGE
1998	731.4	---
1999	750.8	+2.7%
2000	791.9	+5.5%
2001	785.2	-0.9%
2002	815.2	+3.8%
2003	831.4	+2.0%

Source: WGAw records. Note: Prior year figures are updated to include late-reported information.

New members entering the Guild can amount to almost 10% of the workforce. The measurable churn among those writers who are employed can amount to almost 20% of the workforce per year. The WGAw had 7,628 current members in good standing in April 2004, up from 7,391 in 2003, which was atypically low due to the timing of a dues enforcement effort, resulting in a number of members entering “in arrears” status for a period of time.

## NUMBER OF WGAw MEMBERS EMPLOYED

YEAR	TOTAL EMPLOYED	PERCENT CHANGE	MEMBERS REPORTING	PERCENT CHANGE	PERCENT EMPLOYED
1998	4,635	---	8,799	---	53%
1999	4,595	-0.9%	9,024	+2.6%	51%
2000	4,644	+1.1%	9,165	+1.6%	51%
2001	4,549	-2.1%	8,954	-2.3%	51%
2002	4,341	-4.6%	8,510	-5.0%	51%
2003	4,298	-1.0%	8,274	-2.8%	52%

Source: WGAw records. Note: Prior year figures are updated to include late-reported information.

**EARNINGS & EMPLOYMENT BY WORK AREA**

Both television and screen employment have declined in recent years. The screen employment decline has been more sustained, but the television decline has been greater. There were 3,217 writers employed in television in 2003. This amounts to a 1.7% decline from the 2002 level. Screen employment was 1,799 writers in 2003. This amounts to a 0.9% decrease over the 2002 level of 1,815 writers.

Earnings in television totaled \$400.8 million in 2003, a 0.6% decline from the \$403.3 figure in 2002, which was the all-time high. Television earnings have tripled over the last 20 years. Screen earnings totaled \$428.6 million in 2003, a 4.5% increase over the 2002 figure of \$410.1 million. Screen earnings have increased sevenfold over 20 years. In the early 1980s, screen earnings were a fraction of television earnings. By 1994, screen earnings surpassed television earnings in total and the two work areas have generated generally the same amount of earnings over the last decade.

There appear to be different factors at work in the declines in television and film

**NUMBER OF GUILD MEMBERS BY MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY**

YEAR	<i>"Active" Status</i>		POST-CURRENT
	ASSOCIATE	CURRENT	
1998	350	7,883	213
1999	396	8,141	247
2000	391	8,409	706
2001	371	8,349	868
2002	336	7,723	1,127
2003	400	7,391	1,323
2004	452	7,628	1,385

Source: WGAw Records, April each year. Since 2002, the Guild Constitution has permitted members to remain in the Post-Current category indefinitely by paying an annual service fee.

employment, respectively. In television, the number of WGA-covered television series in production has declined, reducing the number of writers employed on series staffs. The emergence of reality series is a factor, as many of these series are not WGA-covered. Those that are covered by a WGA contract typically employ fewer writers than the fully scripted series they replace. In addition, the decline of the sitcom in favor of hour-long dramas and reality series is a

**NUMBER OF WRITERS EMPLOYED BY AREA OF WORK**

YEAR	TV		SCREEN		OTHER	
	NUMBER EMPLOYED	PERCENT CHANGE	NUMBER EMPLOYED	PERCENT CHANGE	NUMBER EMPLOYED	PERCENT CHANGE
1998	3415	---	1,916	---	77	---
1999	3367	-1.4%	1,866	-2.6%	78	+1.3%
2000	3650	+8.4%	1,851	-0.8%	93	+19.2%
2001	3553	-2.7%	1,887	+1.9%	89	-4.3%
2002	3272	-7.9%	1,815	-3.8%	69	-22.5%
2003	3217	-1.7%	1,799	-0.9%	61	-11.6%

Source: WGAw Records. Note: Prior year figures are updated to include late-reported information. Pay-TV and Animation figures have been consolidated into Television to ensure accurate reporting. The work area figures add up to more than the Total Employment figure due to members working in more than one work area during a year.

factor in the television employment decline. The half-hour form employs two show staffs for an hour of television rather than one for hour-long genres.

### EARNINGS TRENDS

With earnings up and employment down, the average writer is earning more. The greatest increases are at the bottom and top of the pay range, with writers in the middle most likely to find their salary constant. The average writer, using the median, earned \$93,482 in 2003, an increase of 2.1% over the 2002 figure of \$91,520. This figure has increased each of the last five years, rising 12.9% in total

over that time. The top 25% of the working membership earned more than \$226,787 in 2003, essentially the same mark as in 2002.

Growth was greater at the low and high ends of the scale. The lowest-paid 25% of the working membership earned less than \$32,652. That figure grew 4.5% over the 2002 level of \$31,250. The figure grew in each of the last five years, except for 2001, with a total growth over the period of 14.5%. The top 5% of the working membership earned more than \$663,400 in reportable earnings, an increase of 4.2% over 2002, and an increase of 25.2% more than five years earlier.

### TOTAL EARNINGS UNDER WGAw CONTRACTS BY WORK AREA

YEAR	TV		SCREEN		OTHER	
	MILLIONS OF \$	PERCENT CHANGE	MILLIONS OF \$	PERCENT CHANGE	MILLIONS OF \$	PERCENT CHANGE
1998	\$362.0	---	\$367.6	---	\$1.8	---
1999	\$377.4	+4.3%	\$371.4	+1.0%	\$2.0	+11.1%
2000	\$398.7	+5.6%	\$390.6	+5.2%	\$2.6	+30.0%
2001	\$396.0	-0.7%	\$386.7	-1.0%	\$2.5	-3.9%
2002	\$403.3	+1.8%	\$410.1	+6.1%	\$1.8	-28.0%
2003	\$400.8	-0.6%	\$428.6	+4.5%	\$2.0	+11.1%

Source: WGAw Records. Note: Prior year figures are updated to include late-reported information. Pay-TV and Animation figures have been consolidated into Television to ensure accurate reporting.

### EARNINGS TRENDS AT DIFFERENT EARNINGS LEVELS (ALL WORK AREAS)

YEAR	<i>Lowest-Paid 25% of the working members earned less than</i>		<i>Half of the working membership earned less than</i>		<i>Highest-Paid 25% of the working members earned more than</i>		<i>Highest-Paid 5% of the working writers earned more than</i>	
	25TH PERCENTILE	PERCENT CHANGE	MEDIAN	PERCENT CHANGE	75TH PERCENTILE	PERCENT CHANGE	95TH PERCENTILE	PERCENT CHANGE
1998	\$28,519	---	\$82,780	---	\$199,000	---	\$530,000	---
1999	\$30,000	+5.2%	\$87,000	+5.1%	\$201,756	+1.4%	\$525,000	-0.9%
2000	\$31,250	+4.2%	\$88,211	+1.4%	\$208,801	+3.5%	\$562,500	+7.1%
2001	\$28,226	-9.7%	\$89,250	+1.2%	\$217,250	+4.1%	\$567,626	+0.9%
2002	\$31,250	+10.7%	\$91,520	+2.5%	\$226,725	+4.4%	\$636,464	+12.1%
2003	\$32,652	+4.5%	\$93,482	+2.1%	\$226,787	NC	\$663,400	+4.2%

Source: WGAw Records. Note: Prior year amounts are updated to include late-reported information.