NO FREE WORK!
WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA

WORKING WITH WRITERS

Guidelines for Producers to Support Productive Relationships with Writers and Avoid Free Work Pitfalls

Writers and producers work in partnership during pitching, development, hiring and writing employment. Producers should follow these best practices to promote a productive partnership that respects the time and contribution of both parties as well as the writer's agreement with the signatory studio.

During Pitching / Hiring

1. Please use the Project Page to give writers the information they need to make an informed decision on whether to engage on the project. Tell writers if you are bringing other pitches/ writers into the same studio.

2. Don't ask writers to leave behind written material, including pitch notes, outlines, or a pitch deck. All pre-contract development should be handled verbally. If an employer asks a writer to leave behind a written pitch document, the employer might then owe MBA payment for a treatment (screen), story or format (TV).

3. Don't record or use an AI transcription tool to record a writer's pitch or meeting.

4. Don't feed a writer's material into any AI program.

5. Writers know they must audition for a job but please be mindful of the number of meetings a writer takes and pitch revisions requested before bringing them to the studio/financier or network/streamer. Identify a target date for going in to the studio.

6. If you are passing on the writer let them know as soon as possible.

During Employment

1. Meet with the writer at the start of the project—after the studio closes the deal or (in a pilot) the network initiates commencement—to discuss the number of steps in the deal and agree on a feedback process including how producer notes will be addressed during paid steps. If a screenwriter has a one-step deal, the work must be delivered to the studio when the writer has completed the draft; there is no opportunity for producer or studio notes before delivery. If more work is needed, an optional step must be triggered or the studio must add a paid revision to the writer's deal. If the deal contains multiple steps, discuss how feedback from producers, actors, or directors will be collectively addressed in subsequent paid steps.

2. If a TV writer is on an “if/come” deal, discuss timeline and whether additional development is needed before taking the project out to a buyer. The studio must add paid steps (e.g. a format, bible, or story, including a “story area document”) to the writer’s deal if written work (including changes to or further development of “pitch” pages) is requested before the writer is commenced on the pilot.
3. A writer’s deal must be closed and they must be officially commenced by the studio to begin working on the draft.
4. No AI generated material (including notes) should be given to a writer without disclosing to both the writer and the studio that the materials were AI generated.
5. Do not request an outline or treatment (screen) or a format, bible, or pilot story (TV) unless it is a paid step of the writer’s deal.
6. Do not request interim pages while a writer is mid-draft.
7. There are no extra-contractual steps or producer passes in the MBA. Only the employer can authorize additional work. Please pool all producer and employer notes for the writer to address after the commencement of the next paid step of the screenwriter’s deal or in connection with the steps of the pilot deal. This does not preclude creative conversations with the writer.
8. If the project is close to production an all-services or weekly deal may be appropriate for handling final revisions to the script and incorporating feedback from talent.
9. Under the MBA a writer must deliver their draft directly to the studio/employer as outlined in their deal. Therefore, the producer cannot turn in the draft.
10. Once a writer has officially delivered material, please provide a timeline for receiving studio/producer notes and please provide sufficient time for the writer to address notes in order to keep to deadlines required by the studio, network or streamer.

For questions, please contact the Contracts Department.