

Creative Industries Trafford

Writing and Pitching for Television **Wednesday 29 October**



With Baby Cow's Head of Development Ric Michael and former BBC Commissioning Editor Peter Ridsdale-Scott.

This one-day workshop, for aspiring writers and writing partnerships, offered a hot-house session on pitching work for television production. The day included invaluable tips and tools to help develop writing specifically for television.

Developing Ideas

There's no such thing as a bad idea, just an idea that may need some development. Questions you should ask yourself to encourage the growth of your idea are:

1. What is the story you are trying to tell? Is it an interesting and visual story?
2. Does it have a place on television to go (think 'channels')?
3. Who is going to want to watch it?
4. What makes it unique?
5. Does the idea interest 'you'?
6. Are you trying to second guess what someone else might want?
7. Is it feasible as a programme idea?
8. Are there potential slots for this style of programme?
9. What elements of the story do you need to research (i.e. character, person)?
10. Consider who you are making the programme for – let this guide you.
11. Keep a notebook, update your ideas – you can NEVER be too organised.
12. Is your idea big enough for a whole programme?
13. What elements do you need to make it work (i.e. cast, location, etc)? Be ambitious, but realistic.
14. Is the idea original?
15. Put the work into research, presentation and think about what makes your drama/comedy/etc better than anything else a producer or commissioner may see (think about filming a read-through or presenting on DVD).
16. When researching check your facts again and again (especially if using the Internet).
17. Be prepared for your story to evolve and develop.
18. Be self-critical, but BE POSITIVE.
19. Use your experience and influences to give the programme your identity.
20. Be bold – step out of your comfort zone.
21. Think creatively – beyond the obvious.
22. Consider diversity – don't alienate anyone.
23. Get help where you need it – forums, websites, groups, friends, etc.
24. Keep a diary.
25. Think VISUALLY – how would your idea work on-screen (i.e. an idea about online gambling is unlikely to be visually-engaging).

Let's Get Script Writing

A pitch for television should take into consideration and fulfil the elements outlined below:

Logline – one sentence that describes your story with a hook.

Elevator Pitch – How would you pitch your story in 15 seconds or three sentences.

Outline – One side of A4 (or 400 words). Use one font only – Arial or Courier are popular.

Step Outline – To layout episodes scene-by-scene and illustrate what happens.

Synopsis – 2 ½ pages with more detail. The overall story.

Story Arc – Overall what happens – the key points of the story.

Character Arc – Overall points of your character.

Plot Arc – Plot points: how it unfolds, how it builds and how you move on.

Episode Arc – Plot development and development of character.

Backstory – Look at where the characters come from and how they develop.

What Channel?

Each channel has its own style, tone and voice – make sure your story fits in with all of these elements before pitching – consider an alternative channel if it doesn't fit. Consider what time slot your programme would fit into.

A broad overview of the key channels:

Channel 4 – Comedy

Original, bold, distinctive comedy with a real sense of authorship. Think 'Peep Show', 'Green wing', 'star Stories', 'Fonejacker', etc. Not afraid to take chances on unknown talent and new faces. Channel 4 does not currently accept scripts from the public. They prefer ideas to be pitched when you have a production company working with you and can present your idea as a package.

ITV

ITV1 - Britain's most popular commercial channel. ITV 2 – An exciting mix of talent, celebrity gossip and factual shows. ITV 3 – Delve into the archives with classic drama from the ITV vaults. ITV 4 – Challenging drama, cult films and premium sports events.

FIVE

Five asks that you familiarise yourself with the controller's requirements. Visit the 'Controller' pages of the website for specific detail. Once you have ascertained that your idea fits in with these requirements, send through a two-page proposal (via email) and they aim to respond within two weeks.

BBC

the development priorities for the channels within the BBC include:

BBC One – audience sitcoms, sketch shows, comedy drama.

BBC Two – audience sitcom, new sketch / gang show.

BBC Three – audience sitcom, comedy drama.

BBC Four – new bold comedy, new personalities.

Getting Your Foot in The Door

That all-important 'foot in the door' can be achieved by research and preparing your pitch

to perfection.

- Consider how you present yourself and the elements of pitching (see above).
- Try to meet with people, in the television industry, face-to-face and prepare to sell your idea quickly.
- Research events and social occasions where key people may be and make sure you're open to opportunity.
- Check what format production companies prefer to receive scripts.
- Don't hassle! Let them tell you what they want.
- Be careful about how you respond to criticism – good and bad!
- Make sure your work has page numbers, your name and contact details, check spellings and continuity (I.e. check a character's name is the same throughout, etc).
- Check TV listings and take particular notice of which types of programmes appear in which time slots.

Pitching

When considering the pitch, also think about:

- What is your message
- Don't mention other shows
- Be succinct
- Be prepared to answer questions
- What is the hook in your story
- What makes it unique
- What would make them want to use it / make it
- What do you want from the person you're pitching to
- Be yourself

Other resources

Be wary of spending all of your time gathering information and making connections. You can damage your creative process and your writing skills by being drawn into the world of constantly looking for information. Knowledge beats information every time and if you see an opportunity on a website – write something for it or move on!

BBC Writers' Room www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

A great resource. With honest and professional feedback. Enter competitions, attend events and get to see what the BBC is taking forward and what isn't going anywhere.

4Talent www.channel4.com/4talent

Excellent competitions and genuinely promotes new talent.

The Script Factory www.scriptfactory.co.uk

Great practical elements.

North West Vision and Media www.northwestvision.co.uk

Access points for the regional screen agency. Opportunities and training through mailing lists.

Arts Council England – North West www.artscouncil.org.uk/regions/homepage

Opportunities and links to writing networks and festivals.

4 Laughs www.channel4.com/4laughs

[Competitions and links site – great for new talent.](#)

British Council Literature Area www.britishcouncil.org/arts-literature.htm

Cultural Industries Development Service www.cids.co.uk

Britshorts www.britshorts.com

Stellar Network www.stellanetwork.com

Independent Radio Productions www.irdp.co.uk

Writers' New www.writernet.co.uk

The Writers' Guild www.writersguild.org

UK Film Council www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk

Writing For Performance www.robinkelly.btinternet.co.uk/index.htm

Mandy.com www.mandy.com (Jobs in industry production – a who's who)

Own It www.own-it.org (Intellectual Property Rights)

Cornerhouse www.cornerhouse.org (Good writers' events and opportunities)

Tailcast www.tailcast.com (Social networking for writers and artists)

For more information about events and news from
Creative Industries Trafford visit us at:
www.creativeindustriestrafford.org