**Production Roles: Focus on the Writer**

Lesson Objectives

In this lesson, the student will:

* continue investigation of the various production roles
* read the IB guidelines for each production role
* focus on the specific challenges of the role of the writer

The Writer Is Not the Author

In the rest of this module, you will be spending a great deal of time learning about one of the most influential contributions of the [**French New Wave**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3): the [**auteur theory**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3). Unfortunately, the notion the[**director**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) is responsible for the overall artistic integrity of the film leaves [**screenwriters**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) in a pretty poor and disrespected place (unless, of course, the director writes his or her own [**screenplays**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3)). The irony here is the word "auteur" is the French word for "author," but screenwriting is probably the only writing endeavor where the writer is not considered an author.

Chances are, if you are an avid reader of novels, you also know the names of your favorite novelists. If you read the editorial section of your regional newspaper, you know the names of the reporters you admire. Although most people do not make going to the theater to see a play a regular habit, the ones who do can easily rattle off the names of dozens of playwrights. However, most people could not even name a single screenwriter, even people who go to the movies every week.

Jump Cut

Try it. Make a list of your 10 favorite movies. Name two of the[**actors**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) in each one. Name the directors. Now name the screenwriters. Odds are you found this exercise got gradually more difficult, actors being easiest to name, then directors, then screenwriters. If you could name even one screenwriter, you are in an elite group.

Why playwrights, novelists, and journalists are “authors” and not screenwriters is a tricky question to answer.

Some of the reasons relate to the media in which the writer's words appear. In a novel and a newspaper article, the words are all there are, so it makes sense to credit authorship there. Who else would get to claim the title? On a film, there is so much more that goes into it than just the words on the page, so this is a reason authorship gets murky, and is often just passed on over to the director, the one who oversees it all.


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If you were to approach this question from the vantage point of Theory of Knowledge (ToK), you might recognize some of the reasons involve[**sociocultural**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) institutions. A stage play, for instance, also involves actors and directors and designers, much like a film does, yet playwrights have much greater stature than screenwriters. Why is that? Often, playwrights are protected by very powerful guilds or unions. In the United States, for example, the Dramatists Guild insists the playwright's name appear on all promotional material and programs, above the name of the play and everyone else involved. The Guild even stipulates the size proportions of the playwright's name. This might seem like a petty thing, but it makes a difference. People do not see a production of *Death of a Salesman*. They see a production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. In comparison, look how deep in the **[credits](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3)**screenwriters appear on a film. Check out any movie poster. Find the screenwriter. Just make sure you have a magnifying glass.

Furthermore, although many prominent directors and actors perform on stage, there is one aspect that remains constant: the playwright and his or her words. The interpretations change, the stagings differ, but the words remain. They are what the play is. Although films do get remade from time to time, it does not happen often enough for directors and actors to think they would like to try their hand at this particular film script. It just does not happen.


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Finally, when a new stage play is in development, the playwright is intimately involved in the rehearsal process. He or she is there to determine which speeches work, which scenes run too long, and which characters need a more prominent role, and then can make adjustments accordingly. In contrast, screenwriters are rarely allowed on set nowadays. **[Development](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3)**means something very different in the film world, and, in writer's circles, is considered profane. Once the screenplay is handed over, it becomes someone else's baby. And this baby is then "raised," or re-written, by a handful of [**script doctors**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), all of whom have a different take on "what the film is about." The director then transforms the script yet again, and finally the actors themselves often improvise the lines and say whatever they feel like anyway, because they are [**stars**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3). Film is a collaborative art form, but it can often be a frustrating collaboration for a writer who pours himself or herself into his or her work, and then gets little credit.

Contrast to IB Film

Luckily, your writing work in this class will not suffer the same fate. This is why it is important to recognize the way you work on your [**Production Portfolio**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) project differs sharply from how screenwriters work in the real world. The bulk of the screenwriter's work will occur during the pre-production phase, but you, unlike your professional counterparts, get to (and must!) stay involved right up until the end. In this sense, you get to approach the task of writing very much like a playwright does. For example, during production, you should go to the set every filming session, so you can hear how the actors are handling (or abusing) your words. You can make adjustments in the moment. You might notice something about the set that allows you to conclude you could eliminate a whole clunky speech with a well-filmed gesture or look from the actor.

The Writer's Craft


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Your job, if you end up being the screenwriter for your crew (or, if you are working solo) is to create the blueprint for the film. Very much like an architect creates a drawing for a building, you create the plan for how the finished film will sound and look. Even though you record neither images nor sounds, if you do your job properly, you will create a vivid representation of a film in your reader's mind.

Specifically, your challenge is to write the dialogue for the actors and describe what happens in each scene. You write everything that an[**audience**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) will see and hear. You decide what the story is and in what sequence it needs to be told for maximum dramatic impact. Furthermore, you need to put all this in the proper format, which makes it easy for the other members of the crew and cast to use.

There are a great many books on the craft of screenwriting, all of which can help you become a better writer. Two well-established gurus of the art are Syd Field and Robert McKee. You learned about Field in the early modules last year, when you studied [**three-act structure**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), which Field is usually credited with developing. McKee's book *Story*, is required reading for any serious screenwriter.

One aspect of McKee's theory to take especially to heart is the notion that every scene you write needs to turn on a charged value of some kind. He discusses values that exist in opposition to each other, and that work in pairs. For example, ambition and apathy is an opposed pair, as are greed/altruism and love/hate. The charge comes into play when we ascribe a moral value to them. We might, for instance, see love as positive and hate as negative. What McKee suggests, then, is all scenes need to turn the charge if they are going to be dramatically effective, from positive to negative, or vice versa.

Characters begin a scene totally secure in their love for each other. The scene ends with doubt and insecurity. Drama. Conflict. Consider what the opposite would be. Characters begin a scene totally secure and end that way, too. No drama. No conflict. Pointless scene. According to McKee, every scene needs to move a charged value from one side to the other. As values keep changing, the story progresses. Just as scenes turn on charged values, so do sequences and entire films. (If this idea sounds interesting to you, and you want to take the next step with your writing, definitely check out all of McKee's book.)

Begin by deciding what the overarching values of your film are. At the beginning, the protagonist is X. At the end he is the opposite of X. If you have not already guessed, the biggest charged values of all are life and death. However, your film need not go this big. Your film might turn on something more subtle, like disrespect/admiration. Once you have the one the entire film turns on, then break it down further, into sub-values of the larger opposed pair. What are ways disrespect can be shown, for instance? You might decide it is a sign of disrespect to lie to someone. So, you would have a charged value pair of honesty/deceit. Then come up with a scene that starts with one side and turns it to the other. Repeat this process for your other scenes. Now, you have a way of working, and of busting through writer's block should you encounter it. Writing a screenplay can be like putting together a puzzle. Just keep those values turning, and your scenes will fit.

Assessment Advice

One thing to keep in mind is you will be writing a no less than four minute and no longer than five minute film. Four to five minutes. Four to five properly formatted pages of 12-pt. Courier font. You will not have time to fumble around with pointless scenes. If you do not have a good answer for what the point of your scene is, then it is point***less***. Cut it.

Films depend on [**conflict**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3). Although the conflict in a film can be external (man vs. the world, man vs. man) or internal (man vs. himself), it always needs to be externalized. Even inner conflict needs to appear in a visual way. This makes screenwriting a challenge. There are no ways to cheat and just write a paragraph about what a character feels or thinks. You have to get it out in the external world, in action and[**dialogue**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3).

You have already [**pitched**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) an idea and had it [**greenlighted**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), last year. So, now the hard work begins. There are no shortcuts. You just have to write.

A Writer Prepares

If you have not already done so, download the **[CeltX](http://www.celtx.com/%22%20%5Co%20%22CeltX%20-%20will%20open%20in%20a%20new%20window%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)** pre-production software, which you should have done during Module 6 last year. If it has been a while, make sure you reacquaint yourself with how it works. Also, consider as a warm-up heading over to [**Simply Scripts**](http://www.simplyscripts.com/) and looking at a few scripts from the professionals. Just remember you are writing a script for a short, not a feature film.


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It would also be a good idea to look at the IB Film Guide in the [**Production Office**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_prod.htm) and re-read the markband descriptors for the Production Portfolio task, especially if you will be selecting writer as your assessed production role. Remember, you have to choose one role— [**screenwriter**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), **[director](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3)**,[**editor**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), [**cinematographer**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), or [**sound designer**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3)—even though you may actually be doing all five. Notice how heavily [**film language**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%203/week39/39_04.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) features in the markband descriptors.

* Do the scenes you have created (or will create) really employ the full extent of what screenwriting can do?
* Are you creating the same kind of scenes again and again?
* Are you showing instead of telling?

Coming Soon

Next week, you will be delivering the first draft of the script for your short film. You already know the format, since it was part of Module 6, last year. Some aspects will be reviewed next week, but you could certainly feel free, if you have the time, to get cranking on it this week. Our muses can sometimes be fickle, and if you find inspiration strikes you in the moment, it is best to not let it slip away. Happy writing!