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## Letter from the Editor

The 2014 PAGE Awards competition is well underway! This might be the year you take home a prize and launch your career, the way so many other PAGE winners have. Enter your script by March 15, before entry fees go up. And consider ordering [Judge's Feedback](#) with your entry — PAGE Judges give some of the best development notes in the business.

In this spring edition of the **LOGLINE** e-Zine, we have some extremely strong articles to help you improve your craft and stay up-to-date on the state of the film and television industry.

First, 2013 PAGE Grand Prize winner Brooke Roberts Eikmeier reveals how her basic training experience in the Army helped her as a screenwriter. PAGE Judge Anna Siri outlines the four elements every short film script should contain. John Truby, our resident expert on the workings of genre, explains exactly why *12 Years a Slave* won Oscars. The world's leading authority on script format, Dave Trottier, demonstrates techniques for handling tricky types of scenes. Industry insider Marvin V. Acuna applies the famed "four stages of mastery" to screenwriting. Lastly, we share with you the latest "hot leads" from InkTip!

Happy reading,



## Latest News from the PAGE Awards

- ◇ Michael McCoy, author of the 2013 PAGE Award-winning historical film *Under the Rising Sun*, has been signed by lit manager Stephanie Rogers. She is now working with producer Dan Paulson to bring Michael's Bronze Prize-winning biopic to the screen. Stephanie has also signed John Suetmeier and John Kelley, authors of the 2013 Gold Prize-winning sci-fi script *Sterling*.
- ◇ The action-horror spec *Red Ice*, by 2005 Gold Prize winner Keith Ray Putman, has been picked up by Envision Media Arts (*The Freezer*, *Chained*). Keith also wrote the new haunted house movie *Malicious*, which is now in development at Sycamore Pictures (*The Way Way Back*). He is represented by Chris Sablan at Original Artists.
- ◇ 2008 Gold Prize winner VJ Boyd, who has worked as a staff writer on the hit FX series *Justified* for the past three seasons, has now been promoted to the position of co-producer on the show. VJ is represented by Jeremy Platt at Generate.
- ◇ The 2013 Gold Prize-winning family film *Grizzly's Bluff*, by Wolf Carter Black, has been optioned by producer Elizabeth Fowler at Clear Pictures (*Making Changes*, *Devil's Knot*).
- ◇ The 2013 Silver Prize-winning rom-com *The Morning After*, by Rebekah Reaves, has been optioned by producer Eric Fischer. Andy Cadiff (*Chasing Liberty*, *Home Improvement*) is now attached to direct.
- ◇ Scott Parisien's 2013 PAGE Bronze Prize-winning thriller/horror script *Incision* has been optioned by Loesch Productions, with Darin Scott (*Something Wicked*, *Dark House*) attached to direct. After the PAGE industry press release went out, Scott was in the happy position of having to choose between several different offers. He says, "I have to say that this is the best contest I have placed in or won. The reaction to the press release was huge. I had 21 script requests and three offers of option. Quite exciting, so thanks!"

**2014 PAGE Awards Late Entry Deadline: March 15<sup>th</sup>**

## What Army Basic Training Taught Me About Script Writing

by Brooke Roberts Eikmeier

I'd always wanted to serve my country. I had a vague idea there would be a lot of running and yelling and sweating involved in the beginning, and I knew at some point I'd have to climb over tall things and shoot loud weapons, but I'd been promised that in the end the

Brooke Roberts Eikmeier served in the Army from 2009-2013. She won the 2013 PAGE Grand Prize for her TV Drama pilot *Leavenworth* and currently has two pilots in the works at ABC Family. Brooke is represented by WME and Circle of Confusion.

Army would teach me Arabic, give me a Top Secret security clearance and set me loose on terrorist surveillance. For someone who had spent years as an assistant in writers rooms for shows like *Family Guy*, dutifully typing hundreds of hilarious metaphors for taking a dump, the

opportunity to take a few years out and focus on something that might actually save lives was irresistible.

I'm convinced now that unless you've been a soldier or a prisoner, your understanding of freedom is strictly theoretical. At basic training, they make sure you know exactly what you're fighting for by showing you what it's like to live **without** it. It did not matter, for example, if you had pneumonia (I did), chiggers in your face (I did), or if you were in your early thirties and a female (I was). You still had to get up and perform at 4 a.m. and do and eat and say and (at least pretend to) think exactly the way they wanted you to, just like all those 18-year-old males. The freedom to do what I wanted no longer existed.

For me, that was the hardest part. I had a lot of trouble accepting that I couldn't call the shots in my own life anymore – that I had no power. At first I completely “turtled up” and started to count the days until this hell would be over. That turn inward was my biggest mistake, not only for someone who wanted to be a soldier, but also for someone who wanted to be a writer. I was being tested, and I was failing.

We were allowed to keep diaries and I kept mine in a drawer I had been told was “personal.” One day during a surprise inspection, my diary was taken. The entire cadre of drill sergeants read it – every single ounce of frustration and anger I'd poured onto the page at the end of exhausting days of physical pain and being screamed at. I'd been particularly unkind to one man whom I saw as the epitome of the angry, irrational drill sergeant, screaming and berating everyone at the drop of a hat. I sided with his ex-wife on her decision to dump him and likened his facial features to a Muppet's. I knew I would have to pay – after all, my days were nothing but “paying” for imaginary infractions, and this was a real one. But I did not know how.

It was both surreally amusing and utterly terrifying to finally be called on the carpet over the barracks P.A. system: “*Drill Sergeant Muppet requests the immediate presence of Private First Class Roberts...*” Asking myself if he had really said “Muppet” (he had), I was fully

expecting to stand at parade rest and repeat the only three acceptable sentences, “Yes, Drill Sergeant,” “No, Drill Sergeant” and “No excuse, Drill Sergeant,” followed by a solid hour or more of sweating. I was steeled and prepped.

The drill sergeant told me that he had taken my diary home, that he had read it, that he had wanted to burn it at first, that he hated me and every thought that had ever came out of my head. He had devised for days, he told me, the various ways in which he would make me regret the day I was born. But then, he said, he read it again. And again. “*I changed my mind. I decided to just talk to you.*”

There were three things he wanted me to be clear on. One, the end of his marriage was amicable and he and his ex-wife had a lot of love for each other. Two, being a drill sergeant was an act. There was a carefully researched and proven method to his madness. He actually cared about all of us, and it was important to him that we learned the lessons he was trying to teach. They would save our lives. And three, he thought that my writing was really good. He gave my diary back to me. “*Keep at it,*” he said. In being so completely self-obsessed with my own experience, I had horrifically miscalculated the depth and character of this man. It was my fault that I did not look deeper. I'd missed it because I was looking in, not out.

We moved on to war gaming and I learned why we had no personal freedom, why we needed to be fully aware and empathetic with the people around us. We had to perform as part of a whole in order to keep each other from getting killed. If I could be a valuable piece of the machinery that made sure the mission succeeded, great. If I was going to be a sticky piece more concerned with myself than the mission, I should get the hell out of the way. The stakes were too high. Not only for me, but for the others who were counting on me. Once I finally got it – what it meant to be a team, what it meant to be selfless – from that point forward it was about honing my skills and helping others hone theirs to become the best collaborative machine we could possibly be. I began to love and trust each of them. It became **fun**.

Later, when I came back to Hollywood and got the unbelievably special chance to write and produce a TV show from my own concept, those lessons came back to me. Here, too, I was only one part of a whole that requires the efforts of many to succeed. I had come up with an idea that other people loved, but my team would have to do as much work as I did to make that idea a reality. My job, after the initial spec, was to react to what others needed to make the production a success. When their reconnaissance and knowledge of the terrain superseded mine, I respected them and adjusted fire when asked. As a result, I've gotten a lot of comments on my professionalism and the speed and efficiency with which I get my work done.

At the end of the day, the mission for any creative team is to finish the best possible version of the project **together**. Ironically, I am now grateful that the shots aren't only mine to call. I feel lucky to be part of an extraordinary machine.

And, of course, it helps that no one is making me do endless push-ups anymore, either.

## Less is More – Crafting the Short Film Script

by Anna Siri

There's an old cliché that every waiter in Hollywood has a headshot and a screenplay in his back pocket. These days, you can add "short film" to that overstuffed pocket. The short film has gone from being a fun but pricey way to flex your filmmaking muscles to the go-to business card of any would-be writer or director. You can blame camera phones for that. Anyone with a vision and an iPhone can now come up with a short film over breakfast and have it on YouTube by lunch, and that's great. Except when it's not. It's kind of like having too many choices at the coffee shop – just because you can add five shots of espresso, two kinds of milk, and three types of syrup doesn't mean you should.

Anna Siri is a writer, producer, professional ghostwriter and script doctor. Her short films include *Caution Sign*, a Best Screenplay winner at the Dark Carnival Film Festival. Other recent credits include horror feature *Meadowoods* and co-producing the comic book *Jason Coffee's Warhawks*. Anna is a graduate of Northwestern University and the UCLA Professional Program in Screenwriting. This is her first year judging the PAGE Awards competition.

A short film is more than just a slice of story – it's an ideal

opportunity to take one idea and one major emotion and present them onscreen in a way that is unique, compelling and self-contained. You can push the boundaries in short films in ways that just aren't possible in a feature. The best short films, like the best jokes, make it look easy. But if there's one takeaway from my own short-film writing experiences, it's this: Nothing about short film is easy.

Don't let the word "short" fool you. There's a tendency to think that just because you only need to write ten pages, or fifteen, or twenty, somehow it's going to be a piece of cake. Trust me, it's not. I was lucky enough to work with a great group of filmmakers for *Caution Sign* (2009), and though it was only ten minutes long, we spent months fine-tuning the script, studying character and story arc from every angle, and losing our minds in all sorts of fun ways.

Nearly all narrative shorts share four basic structural elements: a world, a character with a problem or desire, an action, and a consequence. The only major difference between structuring a feature and structuring a short film is how quickly you need to get the point across. The general beats are the same. Of course, there's always room for alternative structure and experimental films, but for the moment let's focus on classical narrative.

One of my favorite short-film setups is in *Oktapodi* (2007), an animated short about an octopus trying to save his lady love from becoming calamari. Everything you need to know about the characters, their world and the dire stakes of the conflict they face is right there in the first 30 seconds. The filmmakers connect the audience with the story world in a matter of moments.

A lot of writers like to start with the characters and build the world and the conflict around them, but there's no hard and fast rule. Personally, I'm a plot girl. For some reason, the situation always builds itself in my head first,

and the characters come later. However, when crafting your protagonist, remember that it's all about **want** – what the character wants and how the audience can relate to that want. We all feel love, hate, envy, frustration, and so on. Especially in a short film where space is scarce, the protagonist's want needs to be summed up quickly.

*Miracle Fish* (2009) has a protagonist I've always remembered – a little boy on his birthday, lonely and bullied, who just wishes to be left alone. The story that follows gives him what he wants in the most chilling fashion possible, but that desire is something that grabbed me immediately – it's something we can all relate to quickly and effectively.

Action! For plot junkies like me, this is the best part of the short film. You have the setting, you have the character, so what is your protagonist going to do to get what he or she wants? How far is your character willing to go to solve his or her problem? The answer is usually **too far**. If fictional characters behaved rationally and never stepped out of their comfort zones to follow their dreams, we'd all find better ways to spend our time than watching their stories. You want your character to be desperate on some level – to go so far that going back isn't an option.

There are a million examples of how **want** translates to **action** in short films, but one of the best is *Paperman* (2012), where a young man's desire to catch the attention of a pretty girl with a few dozen paper airplanes gets out of control and puts his orderly world at risk. It's a simple, beautiful story arc, but the desperation the hero feels is unmistakable, even though the film is silent.

Though the audience doesn't always realize it, what they want at the end of a movie is **satisfaction**. Unlike a feature film, where there are usually a few scenes of resolution after the climax of the story, a short film can end the moment the consequence answers the conflict in a satisfying way. As a result, some of the best shorts have twisted or abrupt endings that just cut off. We don't need to see more because whatever the story was trying to tell us through the character's journey is done. It boils down to the basic idea that actions have consequences - the want has been satisfied, the puzzle solved, the goal achieved.

Why does story structure matter? Why not just film 10 minutes of conversation between friends or colleagues, do 10 minutes of standup comedy, or shoot 10 minutes of waves on a beach? Why bother with a script at all?

If you just want to shoot something, go for it! But if your goal is to create a short film script that will be a great fundraising tool, win a contest, or lure a director who can help you film a great festival piece, take the time and care with your short that you would give a feature script.

[Caution Sign](#) (2009) – Anna Siri and Carney Ride Prods

[Oktapodi](#) (2007) – Gobelins L'Ecole de L'Image

[Miracle Fish](#) (2009) – Luke Doolan

[Paperman](#) (2012) – Walt Disney Animation Studios

## Writing the Memoir: *12 Years a Slave*

by John Truby

*Spoiler alert: this breakdown divulges information about the plot of the film.*

John Ridley, the Oscar-winning writer of *12 Years a Slave*, had tremendous advantages and disadvantages in adapting Solomon Northup's true story to film. Northup, a free black man living in New York in the early 1840s, was kidnapped and survived unspeakable abuse as a slave in the South. Given that this is a powerful film and a Best Picture winner, you may be surprised to hear that embedded within this true story are some of the most severe handicaps a story can have.

First, the hero is a victim, with no psychological or moral flaws of his own. Northup is a decent and intelligent (though gullible) man who is the object of the worst depravity by others. This means the main character has no complexity and is incapable of character change. So while the audience can enjoy his success in reaching his goal, they are deprived of the greater pleasure of seeing him overcome his deep weaknesses.

Second, the hero is totally passive, a slave, so he can take almost no action-steps to reach his goal. Third, his opponents have all the choices, which means they both drive the action and are the most complex and interesting characters. Fourth, the preceding three disadvantages essentially kill the plot. It's all the same beat: a man is hammered mercilessly until finally he is freed. And because of the title, the outcome is obvious.

These sorts of severe disadvantages would have doomed the script to mediocrity were it not for a couple of tremendous benefits the writer had to work with: the overall story had a naturally dramatic arc and the actual events were incredibly horrific. This is first and foremost a memoir/true story, but memoir rarely exists on its own. So Ridley wisely teased out the horror and masterpiece/advanced fiction elements suggested by the real events.

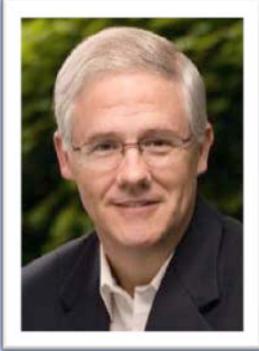
The desire line in any advanced fiction is to find a deeper reality by involving time, perspective (POV) and system. Here, Ridley plays with time by using a flashback structure. Instead of telling the tale chronologically, Ridley begins with Northup already buried in the horrors of slavery. This gives the story a shocking start, and creates a frame through which the hero and the audience can look back and try to understand how he got there.

Ridley also uses techniques from the horror form to tell his tale. The outstanding structural element of horror is that it puts more pressure on the hero than any other genre. Horror is limited by the fact that it has the lowest possible desire line, which is simply to survive. That's why horror stories often lack plot. But it overcomes that drawback by putting the hero under intense pressure from the beginning of the story and never letting up.

Here that pressure comes from a realistic depiction of the events of slavery. Northup awakens to find himself chained and beaten. Then he is inspected like an animal and sold to a master, during which he witnesses a mother separated from her children. Ridley sequences the events of slavery so that they become progressively more horrific. This sequencing technique doesn't overcome the lack of plot in the story, since the events are all generally the same beat. But the horror genre trades plot for experience. As the hero feels this pressure and horror, so does the audience.

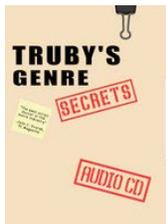
The other major story area Ridley plays with is the character web, which is the set of structural oppositions among the characters. First, Ridley sets up a comparison between slaves, placing Northup in contrast to Patsey. As bad off as Northup is in this world, Patsey has it even worse. She is caught in a double trap between white husband and wife, sucked into a vicious cycle of rape, torture and backbreaking labor with no chance of release. Also contrasted are the two slave masters who own Northup during his captivity. The first has some decency within him but when he is faced with the biggest moral decision of the film, he fails. The other slave master, Epps, is a man so drunk with the absolute power he holds over his slaves that he is both a tyrant and a man who feels morally justified in what he does. The ability of a corrupt system like slavery to twist a human mind into this degree of rational depravity is astounding.

*12 Years a Slave* isn't just about the enslavement of one man, horrific though that is. Every character in this story is trapped in the larger destructive system, including the white slave owners, which is why the system was only eradicated through the deaths of 625,000 men in the Civil War. This is the only film in American history I know of to deal directly and systematically with the great moral corruption on which the American house was built. These slave masters and slave sellers are recognizable human beings, and today's Americans cannot escape the connection.



John Truby is regarded as the serious writer's story coach and has taught his 22-Step Great Screenwriting and Genre courses to sold-out audiences in Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Sydney, Rome, Toronto and other far-flung locales. Over the past 20 years, more than 30,000 students have taken Truby's 22-Step class and rave about the insights and direction it has given them. He is also the author of *The Anatomy of Story*. *Booklist* declares, "Truby's tome is invaluable to any writer looking to put an idea to paper." To learn more about John Truby's classes, screenwriting software, and story consultation services, please visit [www.truby.com](http://www.truby.com) today.

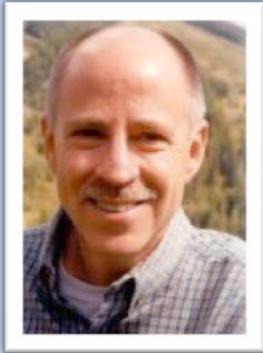
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- The 10 Keys for Adapting a Story
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Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. [The Screenwriter's Bible](#), Dave's primer for both aspiring and professional scribes, is perhaps the most comprehensive industry guide on the market. To learn more about Dave Trottier's books, classes and mentoring services, visit: [www.keepwriting.com](http://www.keepwriting.com)

## Two Tricky Formatting Issues Explained

by Dave Trottier

### DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?

#### READER'S QUESTION:

If a hearing-impaired character has dialogue in the form of sign language, what is the proper format for writing it?

#### DAVE'S ANSWER:

If the character uses sign language, then that is action and not dialogue. The question is how do you convey the meaning of that sign language to the audience? In most situations like this, another character in the scene interprets the sign language and that interpretation is written out as dialogue. Or the person signing speaks as she signs.

What if the character cannot speak? Another option is to use subtitles just as you would for a foreign language. If a character signs throughout a scene, just write:

(NOTE: In this scene, Joe communicates with American Sign Language with English subtitles.)

And then write the subtitles out as dialogue.

If Joe signs only once or twice in a speech, again handle it like a foreign language:

JOE  
(signing; subtitled)  
Do you understand me?

### SERIOUS ABOUT THE SERIES

#### READER'S QUESTION:

When and how do I use the SERIES OF SHOTS? Also, how is it different from the MONTAGE?

#### DAVE'S ANSWER:

The SERIES OF SHOTS generally focuses on the beats of a narrative of some kind; the MONTAGE generally focuses on a concept (such as falling in love, passage of time, training for the fight, etc.).

To understand what I mean by the "beats of a narrative," let me give you an example.

SERIES OF SHOTS - JOHN GETS EVEN

- A) John lifts a .38 Special from his desk drawer.
- B) He strides nervously down the sidewalk, hand in pocket.
- C) He arrives at an apartment building.
- D) Mary answers the door. John aims his gun and pulls the trigger. A stream of water hits Mary in the face.

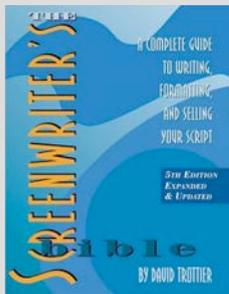
Notice that there are jumps in time between each shot, and that each shot represents a beat of a little mini-story. Because they are so similar in nature, the SERIES OF SHOTS and the MONTAGE are often used interchangeably.

By the way, the example above is from the new 6<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Screenwriter's Bible*, available in March.

Keep writing!

### Dave Trottier's

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## Master Your Craft

by Marvin V. Acuna

Ever hear of the four stages of mastery? They go like this.

**Stage 1 is called “Unconscious Incompetence.”**

Let’s use driving a car as an example. If you’re in Stage 1 of driving, then you see other people driving and you may ride in cars that others drive, but you personally have no idea what the driving process entails.

In short, you don’t know what you don’t know.

**Stage 2 is called “Conscious Incompetence.”**

If you’re in Stage 2 of driving, then you have become aware of how much you need to learn in order to become a safe, functioning driver. But you’ve either taken minimal action to learn or no action at all.

**Stage 3 is called “Conscious Competence.”**

If you’re in Stage 3 of driving, then you’re actually driving, but you will probably find yourself thinking through every single step in the driving process as you’re on the road. At this stage, everything is difficult and takes a great deal of effort and concentration.

**Stage 4 is called “Unconscious Competence.”**

If you’re in Stage 4 of driving (where most drivers are after 3-6 months) then you no longer need to remind yourself to hit your turn signals, check your mirrors, or concentrate in order to shift gears. This is the stage where you can zone out on your drive home and still reach your destination safely.

At this stage, the driving “grooves” have worn themselves so deeply into your brain that you don’t really need to think about what you’re doing anymore.

Now, as screenwriters, you may think that you are ultimately trying to reach Stage 4. But consider what a half-blessing, half-curse it would be to excel at something, but not know how or why you’re so good at it!

Actress Maggie Smith tells a great story about finding a sulking Sir Laurence Olivier in his dressing room after a particularly magnificent stage performance of “Othello.”

“Why so glum, Larry?” she asked. “You were great tonight.”

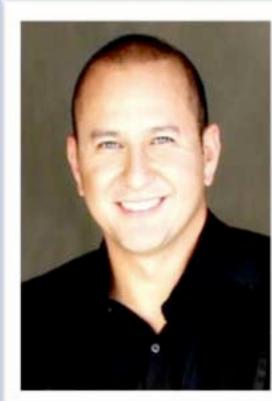
“I know!” Olivier roared, “but I don’t know how I did it!”

And this is why I believe in a 5th stage of mastery that we might call “Unconscious/Conscious Competence.”

In Stage 5, you are not only able to perform an action or skill masterfully, but you can break it down, improvise and improve upon your badassery.

Cool, right?

This is the stage that all screenwriters should aspire to with their writing. It is reaching this extra level of awareness and clarity that will make you exceptional and separate you from all the “good” writers out there.



Marvin V. Acuna is an accomplished film and television producer. He recently produced the features *Chez Upshaw*, starring Kevin Pollak and Illeana Douglas, and *Lovelace*, with Amanda Seyfried, Peter Saarsgard and James Franco.

Previously, he executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (starring John Malkovich) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), among other films.

To get Hollywood’s “Most Valuable e-Newsletter” for FREE, sign up for The Screenwriter’s Success Newsletter. Just click below!!

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## Sell Your Script

Hot Leads from [InkTip.com](http://www.inktip.com)

### IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER!

Please submit your work only if it seems like a **perfect fit** for these companies' needs. If you aren't sure your script meets their criteria, please check with [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com) before submitting it. **Do not contact the production company directly.** Thanks!

### HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT:

1. Go to <http://www.inktippro.com/leads/>
2. Enter your email address
3. Copy/paste the corresponding code

## AKA BK Entertainment

[code: dgtm0a1v17]

We are looking for completed, feature-length, Lebanese-American romantic comedy scripts with a female lead. We're interested in the following elements: funny (good-natured) Middle-Eastern stereotypes, a touching love story, family meets family, and/or a Lebanese girl who falls in love with an American man. Tone should be similar to that of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* but with a Lebanese family. Story must follow a Lebanese lead actress and have scenes taking place in both Lebanon and America.

Budget yet to be determined. WGA or non-WGA okay.

Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com). Thanks!

## Clear Pictures Entertainment

[code: tmvstq77qt]

We are looking for completed, feature-length buddy comedy scripts in the vein of *The Heat* or *Identity Thief*.

Budget yet to be determined. WGA or non-WGA okay.

Our credits include *Devil's Knot*, among others.

Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com). Thanks!

## Gimme a Break

[code: d0h03fbw58]

We are looking for completed contemporary MOW drama scripts that are family-friendly and deal with family issues like adoption, surrogacy, financial woes, etc. Please note, we are **ONLY** looking for MOW drama scripts; please do **NOT** pitch feature scripts as we are not looking for material that could be "easily adapted to fit." Also, please do not pitch any rom-coms; family drama MOWs **ONLY**.

Budget will not exceed \$2 million. Non-WGA only, please.

Our credits include *Meddling Mom*, which was shot from a script we found on InkTip.

Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email [jerrol@inktip.com](mailto:jerrol@inktip.com). Thanks!



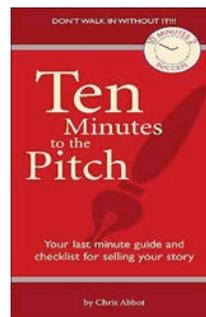
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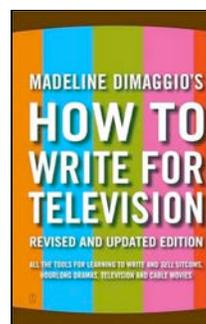


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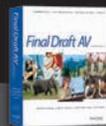
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