



Info Guide

I've got a great idea for a film

I'VE GOT A GREAT IDEA FOR A FILM

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www.screenaustralia.gov.au/filmmaking/Getting_Started.aspx

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I'VE GOT A GREAT IDEA...

Translating your idea into a screenplay is often the lengthiest part of the filmmaking process. This guide provides an overview of how to proceed in turning your idea into a screenplay, whether you are writing the screenplay yourself or looking for a professional writer; and what to do once you have completed a first draft.

Generally, there are three ways you can get an idea written:

- write the script yourself
- find a screenwriter who is willing to write a script based on your idea (and a producer and director who are interested in collaborating with you)
- form your own writing team (this generally includes a producer, director and script editor).

WRITE THE SCRIPT YOURSELF

There are various ways to learn the craft of scriptwriting; numerous books have been written on the subject and many universities, colleges and private institutions run courses. Some courses have competitive entry and require prior knowledge, so it's always a good idea to research the subject and hone your writing skills in advance.

Screenwriting publications

Many books, journals and websites deal with the craft of screenwriting, and screenplays are often available through media libraries and websites. To find out which titles are on offer you can search catalogues in libraries, bookshops and on the Internet. For example, enter a combination of the following search words: **screen writing, script writing, screenplay, film, cinebooks, book, shop** in your preferred search engine.

Libraries

If you wish to find a comprehensive list of publications on screenwriting, use the searchable online database of a media library, then arrange to borrow from your local library through an interlibrary loan.

Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS): www.aftrs.edu.au

Their library has an excellent bibliography of scriptwriting books, as well as a number of Quicklists for books and Internet sites that address pitching, treatments, storytelling, sitcoms and genre.

On the AFTRS website click on:

Library > Databases and Resources > Subject Guides > Screenwriting Bibliography (which downloads as a PDF).

Quicklists are also listed on the Subject Guides page.

RMIT'S AFI Research Collection: www.collectionsaustralia.net/org/1710/about

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) holds the Australian Film Institute (AFI) Research Collection. A non-lending, specialist film and television industry resource that is open to the public, the online catalogue returns listings of reputable screenwriting publications and film and television scripts.

Faculty of the VCA and Music (University of Melbourne): <http://vca-mcm.unimelb.edu.au/>

Holds listings of reputable screenwriting publications in its online catalogues: <http://cat.lib.unimelb.edu.au>.

Australian Libraries Gateway (ALG): <http://www.nla.gov.au/apps/libraries>

To find all the Australian libraries with performing arts collections, select Search collections by Subject > Performing arts > Motion pictures, radio and television. Select the link to the library whose online catalogues you wish to search and enter keywords such as **film + script + writing**. This process will provide you with titles and the locations where they are kept. You can now ask your local library to order the title through an interlibrary loan.

Screenwriting websites

To find screenwriting websites go to your preferred search engine and enter the words **screen writing** or **script writing**. Some screenwriting websites publish free advice, writing tips and examples of correctly formatted screenplays; others want you to buy their books and enrol in their classes, and some require subscription fees. The Australian Writers' Guild (AWG): www.awg.com.au urges its members to exercise caution with regard to fee-based services. To get an idea of what is a fair fee to pay for advice, subscription and management of script sales, you can seek appropriate legal advice from an industry lawyer at www.findlaw.com.au; the AWG (members-only) free legal service www.awg.com.au; or Arts Law at www.artslaw.com.au. Below is a short list of websites on screenwriting.

Dummies.com: www.dummies.com

Sells Screenwriting for Dummies and includes free access to screenwriting articles including: *Developing an Artistic Sensibility for Screenwriting*, *Creating the Backstory for Your Screenplay*, *Crafting Your Character's Dialogue in Your Screenplay*, and *Preparing to Pitch Your Screenplay to a Studio*.

ScriptCrawler: www.scriptcrawler.net

Online script database. Search for scripts and read online.

Script Central: www.scriptcentral.com.au/home/

Script Central is a group of Australia's leading scriptwriters, script editors and script consultants, who provide a range of expert script services to writers (of all levels), producers, directors and those interested in taking their screenplays to a higher level of development.

The Script Factory: www.scriptfactory.co.uk

This UK-based organisation works to support screenwriters by finding and developing new screenwriting talent. It also supports people who work with screenwriters, and it conducts international training courses and workshops.

SellAScript.com: www.sellascript.com

This US-based website offers advice on writing a screenplay from scratch – completing the first draft, analysis and advice on polishing the screenplay – through to selling it in the marketplace. This comprehensive website offers many free services to writers.

Screenwriting courses

Undertaking a course in screenwriting is a way to facilitate the successful translation of your idea into a film. Screenwriting courses have limited overheads in comparison with most other production-based courses, so many universities, film schools, private colleges, screen organisations, TAFE, Community Adult Education Centres and WEA colleges offer scriptwriting subjects.

As courses change from semester to semester it is worth doing a search to get the most current advice on what's on offer. To make sure your net search is thorough we recommend using various combinations of the following search words: **course**, **school**, **film**, **video**, **media**, **writing**, **screenwriting**, your city (eg Melbourne) and your state (eg Victoria).

AFTRS OPEN, the short course program of the Australian Film Television and Radio School, runs short screenwriting courses year round: www.aftrs.edu.au/short-courses

Useful training and education websites

Adult Learning Australia (ALA): <https://ala.asn.au>

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the national peak body for the Adult and Community Education field/s. They are a not-for-profit entity with both organisational and individual members in all States and Territories who reflect the diversity of adult and community education.

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF): www.aqf.edu.au

Provides information on certificates, diplomas, degrees and Master qualifications in schools, vocational education and training.

Commonwealth Government Educational Portal: <http://education.gov.au/>

The entry point to information on all aspects of education in Australia.

Film schools and universities

In Australia there are a number of production-based film schools as well as universities that offer full-time courses in screenwriting. Some of these institutions offer courses in all three disciplines of film, television and interactive media.

To find film schools or university courses make sure your net search is thorough, we recommend using various combinations of the following search words: **school, university, course, film, video, media, writing, screenwriting, scriptwriting**, your city (eg Melbourne) and your state (eg Victoria).

The Australian Film Television and Radio School, Australia's national screen arts and broadcast school, has a Graduate Diploma in Screenwriting: www.aftrs.edu.au/areas-of-specialisation/screenwriting as well as a Foundation Diploma which includes screenwriting www.aftrs.edu.au/award-courses/undergraduate

Filmmaking.net offers a list of film schools searchable by country at: www.filmmaking.net/filmschools

TAFE colleges, Adult and Community Education (ACE) Centres & WEA

TAFE colleges

TAFE colleges have campuses throughout Australia, and offer correspondence courses to regional and rural students:

Canberra Institute of Technology: <http://cit.edu.au/>

TAFE NT: www.cdu.edu.au (See Vocational Education and Training section)

TAFE NSW: www.tafensw.edu.au

TAFE Queensland: <http://tafeqld.edu.au/>

TAFE South Australia: www.tafesa.edu.au

TAFE Tasmania: www.tastafe.tas.edu.au

TAFE Western Australia: www.centraltafe.wa.edu.au

TAFE Victoria: www.education.vic.gov.au

Adult and Community Education (ACE) Centres

For a comprehensive directory of ACE courses offered in Australia, visit:

Adult Learning Australia (ALA): WEA

WEA offers creative writing classes, which can help strengthen story, character, dialogue and general writing skills:

WEA Sydney: www.weasydney.com.au

WEA South Australia: www.wea-sa.com.au

WEA Hunter: www.weahunter.edu.au

WEA Illawarra: www.weaillawarra.com.au

SDA: Screen & media industry development organisations

The national network of screen development organisations, Screen Development Australia (SDA), plays a key role in providing early- to mid-career filmmakers with affordable access to production opportunities; industry networks to broadcasters, production houses and distributors; production equipment; exhibition and other cultural programs; subsidy programs; professional development including seminars and workshops on screenwriting, directing and producing; and nationally accredited training in screen and media. Below is a list of the screen development organisations:

Film and Television Institute, Perth: www.fti.asn.au

Media Resource Centre, Adelaide: www.mrc.org.au

Metro Screen, Sydney: <http://metroscreen.org.au/>

Open Channel, Melbourne: www.openchannel.org.au

Wide Angle Tasmania, Hobart: www.wideangle.org.au

Writers' centres and residencies

Writers' centres run courses and workshops, and list details of upcoming seminars, events and competitions in their newsletters. Some provide mentorships and sell writing handbooks. To access links to regional writers' groups visit the websites of the state centres listed below:

ACT Writers Centre: www.actwriters.org.au

NSW Writers' Centre: www.nswwc.org.au

NT Writers' Centre: <http://ntwriters.com.au/>

Queensland Writers Centre: www.qwc.asn.au

SA Writers' Centre: www.facebook.com/sawriterscentre

Tasmanian Writers' Centre: www.tasmanianwriters.org

Writers Victoria: <http://writersvictoria.org.au>

writingWA: www.writingwa.org

Writers' residencies are conducted by:

Queensland Writers Centre: www.qwc.asn.au

Varuna (NSW): www.varuna.com.au

Northern Rivers Writers' Centre (NSW): www.nrwc.org.au

Screen NSW Aurora script workshop (NSW): www.screen.nsw.gov.au

FIND A WRITER OR FORM A TEAM

Credits databases

To find out the names of screenwriters whose scripts you admire, you can use an online database and enter the title of the production to find out the name of the writer. You can then enter the writer's name in the search engine to find all the credits associated with that particular writer.

Searchable online databases that are useful include:

Screen Australia: www.screenaustralia.gov.au/films

Includes Australian and co-produced features and television drama telemovies from 1970, television drama mini-series and documentaries from 1980, and television drama series and short films from 1988.

australianscreen online: <http://aso.gov.au/>

You can view clips from Australian feature films, documentaries, TV programs, shorts, home movies, newsreels, advertisements, other historical footage, and sponsored films produced over the last 100 years, with curators' notes and other information about each title. The site currently contains 2,204 clips from over 1,000 film and television titles, and is constantly being added to.

National Film and Sound Archive: <http://colsearch.nfsa.gov.au>

Search the collection of the National Film and Sound Archive, which spans 100 years of Australia's audiovisual heritage, from silent feature films such as *The Sentimental Bloke* to modern classics like *Strictly Ballroom*, *Shine* and *Lantana*.

Internet Movie Database (IMDb): www.imdb.com

A US-based search engine and database that includes a listing of most Australian and international titles of films, documentaries, telemovies and television series.

Directories

After using an online database (above) to find out the name of a writer, you will need an industry directory to find out how to contact them.

The primary Australian film industry directories are The Production Book (www.productionbook.com.au) and The Encore Directory (www.encoredirectory.com.au). Both directories are subscription-based and available online and in hard copy.

The Black Book: www.theblackbook.com.au

The portal to Indigenous arts and media in Australia. Has 2,700 descriptive listings of Indigenous organisations and individuals working across 95 professions in the arts, media and cultural industries. Plus listings of 2,000 creative works by Indigenous people – publications, music, film and television productions – from the late 1890s until now, including details of the artist, publisher, release date, distributor contacts and synopsis.

Film and Television Association Northern Territory (FATANT) Freelance crew database: <http://fatant.asn.au>

Film Victoria Industry Directory: www.filmmelbournedirectory.com

Internet Movie Database Pro (IMDbPro): <http://pro.imdb.com>

An international, subscription-based directory for industry professionals that lists contact details. Credits can be obtained from www.imdb.com free of charge.

ScreenWest Production Directory: www.screenwest.wa.gov.au/waproductiondirectory/Pages/default.aspx

Screen agencies, guilds and associations

The Australian Writers' Guild (AWG), the Australian Directors Guild (ADG) and the Screen Producers Association of Australia (SPAA) run events, conferences and seminars where industry members meet and share ideas.

Australian Writers' Guild (AWG): www.awg.com.au

The AWG is the professional association for performance writers. Their services to members include expert legal, contractual and industrial advice, negotiation of standard agreements with producers, online publication of standard contracts, agreements and minimum rates, lobbying for the protection of copyright, Australian content and funding, as well as workshops, seminars, conferences and other events that promote and support writers. They also provide online advice, a script registration service and a script assessment service.

Australian Directors Guild (ADG): www.adg.org.au

The ADG is an industry association that represents the interests of over 700 directors and producers of feature films, TV programs, documentaries and animation. The ADG holds an annual conference, please check their website for details.

Screen Producers Australia (SPA): <http://screenproducersaustralia.org.au/>

SPA is the industry body that represents Australian independent film and television producers on all issues affecting the business and creative aspects of screen production and promotes a thriving independent screen production industry in Australia. Generally, SPA's Screen Forever conference is held in November each year.

Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA): www.alliance.org.au

MEAA is the union covering those working in the media, arts and entertainment industries.

The Australian Society of Authors (ASA): <https://asauthors.org/>

ASA promotes and protects the interests of professional prose writers and illustrators in Australia.

Bulletin boards and newsletters

An extensive network of people in the industry who want to work with others is accessible via online bulletin boards, newsletters and websites.

Below is a select list of bulletin boards, magazines and newsletters:

Australian Film Television and Radio School

- AFTRS Red Alert news bulletin tailored to different states www.aftrs.edu.au/e-bulletin
- AFTRS OPEN Short Course Update for NSW short courses www.aftrs.edu.au/short-courses

Encore Magazine: <http://mumbrella.com.au/category/encore-news>

Contains in-depth features on industry sectors, analysis of what's happening in the news, people and company profiles, on location reports and funding approvals.

Filmnet: <http://filmnet.yuku.com>

Publishes a message board. The subject headings include forums, events, trading, courses, jobs, directory of film and TV services and miscellaneous.

Film Victoria: <http://film.vic.gov.au/>

Publishes news and events and an email bulletin.

Inside Film (IF) Magazine: www.if.com.au

Charges a subscription fee for its print and online publication; however, filmmakers can register online for the free email newsletter.

Metro Screen eNews: subscribe at www.metroscreen.org.au

A free weekly eNews covering jobs, call for entries, festivals and events, buying and selling gear, as well as all things Metro Screen.

Screen Australia News: subscribe at www.screenaustralia.gov.au/news_and_events/subscribe.aspx

A free monthly email newsletter offering feature stories and providing information on major events in the film industry, Screen Australia news, production reports, upcoming festivals, seminars and conferences, recent funding approvals etc.

Arts Hub: www.artshub.com.au/email-bulletins/

Charges a subscription fee which gives you access to its weekly jobs list, as well as its industry newsletter.

SCRIPT LAYOUT

Asian, European, American and Australian script layouts all vary slightly, so you need to use a script layout specific to the region in which you intend to sell your script. Features, television series and serials, telemovies, documentaries, animation, TVCs and television format shows such as game shows, use different types of script layout.

Use the following websites, library databases and search engines to access examples:

Screen Australia: www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/ffd1fc7d-1bc1-48a5-92e1-4b6db107fcde/SuggScriptLayout.pdf

Offers a downloadable *Suggested Script Layout* as well as *What is a Synopsis? An Outline? A Treatment?*

www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/d4e1476e-33e5-4aad-b9d9-9696819b4b98/WhatisaSynopsis.pdf

Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) library database: <http://library.aftrs.edu.au/>

Offers a list of publications that contain script layouts. Find them by entering **screenplay format** into the search engine.

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences: www.oscars.org/awards/nicholl/resources.html

Has a downloadable guide to US screenplay format.

Final Draft: www.finaldraft.com

A US scriptwriting software package that can be tailored to Australian script layout. Final Draft tutorials are available on CD-ROM. Final Draft AV, a separate scriptwriting software package, enables multi-column script formatting for documentary, TVCs, multi-media scripts etc.

Screenplay.com: www.screenplay.com.au

The Australian distributor of a variety of professional screenwriting software packages.

ScreenStyle.com: www.screenstyle.com

Publishes a comprehensive set of links to screenwriting software packages.

Story Insight: www.storyinsight.com/profession/business/layout.html

Publishes script layout advice plus practical tips for writing scripts for TV.

For additional examples use your favourite search engine and enter various combinations of the words **screenwriting** or **screenplay** or **script + layout + format + country** (eg Australia).

SCREENPLAY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

To find out the latest news on screenplay funding initiatives use your preferred search engine and enter **film + funding + Australia** into the search engine; subscribe to newsletters published by **Screen & media industry development organisations** (page 5) or subscribe to newsletters published by the **Federal and State Government agencies** (see below).

Federal Government agency

Screen Australia: www.screenaustralia.gov.au

The Australian Government's agency for supporting film, television and interactive digital media projects and the people who make them. Screen Australia offers various types of funding. Guidelines and application forms can be downloaded from the website.

Read all guidelines and any additional material carefully so that you have a clear idea of what funding is available for your project, and which funding programs you may be eligible to apply for. Before you submit your script for funding, see **Getting feedback on your first draft** (page 11).

State Government agencies

Film Victoria: <http://film.vic.gov.au>

The Victorian State Government agency that promotes and supports excellence in screen-based content creation in Victoria. Film Victoria runs a New Features Writers Program as well as various Feature Film Script Development programs.

Screen NSW: www.screen.nsw.gov.au/

Screen NSW stimulates creative and business opportunities in the NSW screen industry, including the provision of financial and other assistance for film and television script and project development. Programs include the Aurora Script Workshop.

Screen Territory: www.nretas.nt.gov.au/arts-and-museums/ntfo

The Northern Territory's screen development agency supports the growth and development of the screen industry in the Territory. Screen Territory offers a range of funding through grant programs including those targeting the development of scripts.

Screen Queensland: www.screenqueensland.com.au/

Screen Queensland offers a range of funding programs including those targeting the development of film and television projects.

ScreenACT: www.screenact.com.au

ScreenACT supports the professional development of local industry practitioners and seeks to boost production in the ACT. ScreenACT periodically undertakes funding activities that can include script development. Please check their website for updates.

ScreenWest: www.screenwest.wa.gov.au

ScreenWest is Western Australia's screen funding and development agency, committed to working in partnership with the screen industry to develop, support and promote film, television and digital media production in Western Australia. ScreenWest funds the development and production of quality innovative screen productions in Western Australia, primarily, but not exclusively, in the areas of: drama production, Indigenous production, factual production – especially documentaries, and innovative digital production (it is assumed animation is included in each of these areas).

Screen Tasmania: www.screen.tas.gov.au

Screen Tasmania is responsible for supporting and developing the state's film, television and digital media industries by increasing the amount of independent screen production occurring in Tasmania. Screen Tasmania provides loans, grants and equity investments in the development and production of Tasmanian screen projects including short films, drama, documentaries, feature films, TV series and digital media.

South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC): www.safilm.com.au

The SAFC's Script and Project Development Funding program supports the development of outstanding, original and creative Australian film and television projects suitable for financing and with a demonstrable economic benefit to South Australia.

Scholarships, grants and mentorships

There is a range of scriptwriting scholarships and grants on offer. To find out about new initiatives and to make sure you have current information, do regular online searches using your favourite search engine. Mentorships and fellowships are offered from time to time by **State Government agencies** (above), **Screen & media industry development organisations** (page 5), **Writers' centres and residencies** (page 6), the Australian Writers' Guild and international organisations. Please check their websites and subscribe to their newsletters for details.

Disney | ABC Television Writing Fellowship:

www.abctalentdevelopment.com/programs/programs_writings_fellowship.html

To participate, applicants must hold United States employment eligibility valid for the duration of the Fellowship Program.

Competitions

Screenwriting competitions offer winners cash prizes and the opportunity to get their scripts produced. There are many screenwriting competitions. To get an idea of how many, enter: **screen writing competitions** into your favourite search engine.

AUSTRALIAN COMPETITIONS

For news of Australian competitions check key industry journals such as Encore and IF – Inside Film, see **Bulletin boards and newsletters** (page 8), **Writers' centres and residencies** (page 6) and newsletters published by **Screen & media industry development organisations** (page 5). Writers' centres run courses and workshops and list details of upcoming seminars, events and competitions.

Australian Writers' Guild: www.awg.com.au

The Australian Writers' Guild AWGIE Awards are the annual awards for excellence in screen, television, stage and radio writing and are the only peer judged screenwriting awards in Australia. The AWGIES includes the Monte Miller Award for unproduced scripts written by an associate member. The AWG also runs a number of annual and biennial initiatives and competitions for screenwriters.

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Nicholl Fellowship: **www.oscars.org/awards/nicholl/index.html**

An international competition open to screenwriters who have not earned more than US\$5,000 writing for film or television. Entries must have been written originally in English. Adaptations and translated scripts are not eligible. Up to five US\$35,000 fellowships are awarded each year.

Scriptapalooza Annual Screenplay Competition: www.scriptapalooza.com

Open to any writer 18 years and older, the Scriptapalooza screenplay competition is judged by 80 production companies and offers a US\$10,000 prize. Entries can be submitted by email.

GETTING FEEDBACK ON YOUR FIRST DRAFT

Script assessments

The Australian Writers' Guild (AWG): www.awg.com.au

Offers an independent and confidential assessment of a script. This can provide a realistic industry opinion of the feasibility of the project. Written by experienced professional screenwriters, AWG script assessments provide you with criticism and feedback to guide you through the next draft. The turnaround on the Assessment Service is up to four weeks.

Metro Screen (Screen & media industry development organisations, page 5)

Has a professional service that enables members to access Script Editors and Producers for script assessments. For a schedule of rates please refer to **www.metroscreen.org.au**.

Script edits

You can engage a professional script editor to assess your script. Screenwriters often also work as editors. The AWG Script Editors' Minimum Rate is A\$2,650–A\$3,150 per week, which is generally how long it takes to read and assess a 90-page screenplay. You can locate a professional editor by contacting an agent representing screenwriters (see **Directories**, page 7) and ask their advice on who would be the best script editor to suit your project. You can also approach editors directly (see **Directories**, page 7).

Script readings

Submitting your screenplay to a script reading may provide valuable audience and industry feedback.

For other opportunities check with **State Government agencies** (page 9) and **Screen & media industry development organisations** (page 5).

PITCHING YOUR SCREENPLAY

“Pitching is the art of communicating (verbally or in writing) the essence of your screenplay or project, usually to an agent, a studio executive, or a producer.” (Kathie Fong Yoneda, *The Script-Selling Game*, 2002, <http://shop.mwp.com/>)

Pitches can range in length from 15 seconds (the Elevator Pitch) to 20 minutes (the Big Pitch); on paper they can range from a one-page to a six-page pitch. If you’re not sure what pitching is, or want to learn more about it, you can find sections on pitching in **Screenwriting publications** (page 3), **Libraries** (page 3), **Screenwriting websites** (page 4), and attend **Screenwriting courses** (page 4).

Please also read **To send or not to send unsolicited scripts** (page 15) and **Query letters** (page 16).

Definitions of pitching

Following are examples of free pitching advice sourced from the web:

“... pitching your story is a combination of:

- 1) having a great story in the first place,
- 2) being able to condense it down to a few seductive phrases which convey that greatness, and
- 3) presenting yourself as someone who is talented, dedicated, yet easy to work with.

There are a lot of books, consultants, and workshops in the marketplace that offer different approaches to pitching. Most of it is good advice and it would be good for you to have all those weapons in your arsenal, all those tools in your kit. Read the books, go to the workshops, work with the consultants who strike a chord with you. Gather as much information as you can, work diligently at the craft of the pitch, find a style that best represents you, your artistry, and the particular story you are pitching and then:

Go for it with passion and dedication!

Be politely unstoppable!!

And gods willing, the poets will sing about you and your stories!!!”

(*7 Pitching Tips from Ancient Myth to Modern Media* by Pamela Jane Smith, viewed October 2009 at: www.inktip.com/tips-pjsmith.php.)

“Pitching a script is an art form, and although it can be stressful, it’s something every writer has to perfect before approaching executives or agents. So what is pitching exactly? A pitch is an animated summation of a script with emphasis on the main characters, the conflict, and the genre. When pitching a script, you use this summation to persuade industry professionals to option the work...” (*Preparing to Pitch Your Screenplay to a Studio*, adapted from: *Screenwriting For Dummies*, viewed October 2009 at: www.dummies.com/how-to/content/preparing-to-pitch-your-screenplay-to-a-studio.html.)

“When you pitch, you’ve got to remember that you’re pitching *story*, and while character and action may be the glue that holds everything together, it all starts within the context of story.” (Field, S, viewed May 2009 at: <http://sydfield.com/articles/the-art-of-pitching/>.)

Publications and websites on pitching

The AFTRS library publishes a Pitching Quicklist. To download the Screenwriting Bibliography, which is a comprehensive list of screenwriting publications and includes a list of pitching publications go to www.aftrs.edu.au/library and click on: Subject Guides > Screenwriting (which downloads as a PDF). Once you have selected the title you can arrange for an interlibrary loan. See **Libraries** (page 3).

To find websites that offer advice on pitching, go to your preferred search engine and enter combinations of: **pitching, pitching to studios, film, movie, screen writing and competition.**

Pitching competitions

Pitching competitions are occasionally run by **Screen & media industry development organisations** (page 5) and **Writers’ centres and residencies** (page 6), so check with your local organisations. Below are some of the regular pitching competitions.

Metro Screen Network Pitching Sessions: www.metroscreen.org.au

Chosen pitchers vie for a slice of the A\$15,000 annual in kind subsidy given to the Network Group at Metro Screen. Opportunity to get your project off the ground or to sit in the audience and see the process first hand.

Screen Producers Australia (SPA): <http://screenproducersaustralia.org.au/>

Screen Producers Australia holds the annual Screen Forever Conference, where multiple pitching opportunities are open to attendees. This provides real benefits for both the delegates who pitch and those in the audience who are able to learn from the pitching process and from the judges.

Seven Ready Steady Pitch

Privately pitch your project to a network executive. This is a 'no mucking around' arena of networking opportunity and face-to face time where you can share an idea and receive feedback on either your pitch or project. The objective of this event is to provide a non-competitive forum where producers/writers can pitch the freshest ideas and receive feedback from industry professionals. Pitches are five minutes with five minutes feedback from the executives. Bookings are on a first-come first-serve basis and you must be a registered delegate of the Screen Forever Conference.

Pitch to the Pro's Competition

The event gives producers and writers the opportunity to pitch any genre of project to an audience that includes international business executives, broadcasters and key local industry decision makers. The winner of the Competition receives an airfare for one to the Cannes Film Festival or a TV market and a A\$1,500 cash prize plus free registration to the next Screen Forever Conference.

Kids Market

The Kids Market is designed to allow children's producers and emerging producers to meet with local and international Children's Television Executives in one-on-one meetings. The 20 minute meetings are pre-booked and provide an opportunity to discuss business and build relationships with industry executives in licensing, merchandising, distribution, DVD and consumer products, toy companies, DVD and consumer products executives.

Open Channel: www.openchannel.org.au

The Short & Sharp Pitching Competition is open to Open Channel members. Entrants submit a one-page treatment for a short film, and finalists are selected to pitch to a panel of industry professionals. The pitches are judged on the quality, clarity and realisability of the project. This free event is open to the public and entry level filmmakers are encouraged to be part of the audience, as observing others pitch their ideas teaches invaluable lessons about what makes a successful pitch.

SELLING YOUR SCREENPLAY

Websites and publications on selling screenplays

There are many websites that act as screenplay brokers. Find them (as well as publications on this topic) by entering **selling + film** or **movie + scripts** or **screenplays** into your favourite search engine. See also **Libraries** (page 3) and **Screenwriting publications** (page 3).

These websites are devoted to selling screenplays:

Ink Tip: www.inktip.com

SellAScript.com: www.sellascript.com

The Australian Writers' Guild (AWG) urges its members to exercise caution with regard to websites that charge brokers' fees. To get an idea of what is a fair fee to pay for advice, subscription and management of script sales, Screen Australia advises you seek appropriate legal advice (see **Legal links**, page 14).

If you feel your script is ready to go into the marketplace (see **Getting feedback on your first draft**, page 11), you may want to consider seeking representation by an agent. Stephanie Palmer, Director of Creative Affairs for MGM Pictures, advises that MGM will only read scripts that are submitted via agent representation:

"... I do believe that the gems out there find their way to good representation and ultimately find their way into the studio system ... The main way [agents] get clients is through referrals from their current clients or other people they trust in the business. This is a relationship business ... if they have seen some of the writer's work, either at a reading, or if they've won a contest, or some other way of distinguishing themselves, it can spark an agent's interest. Any way

writers can make themselves stand above the rest of their peers, or get noticed, is a great way to start.” (*How MGM Chooses A Script: An Interview With Stephanie Palmer Director of Creative Affairs for MGM Pictures*, viewed October 2009 at: www.scriptologist.com/Magazine/Interviews/interviews.html)

Lists of Australian literary and creative agents can be found in industry **Directories** (page 7). The Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE) www.wgaeast.org offers free downloads of US literary agencies lists, as well as guides on *How to approach an agent* and *How to work with an agent*. WGAE suggests that “Anyone seeking an agent should... find out whether your type of material matches the agency’s expertise. Each agency specializes in representing certain types of material. Some agencies have specialized divisions. You should briefly [very briefly!] detail your background and describe your material. The agency will let you know whether or not it is interested and to whom it should be sent.” (Viewed April 2012 at: www.wgaeast.org/index.php?id=59)

See also: **To send or not to send unsolicited scripts** (page 15), **Getting feedback on your first draft** (page 11) and **I need a ‘little’ legal advice** (below).

I NEED A ‘LITTLE’ LEGAL ADVICE

Legal links

The Australian Writers’ Guild advises all screenwriters that before signing an agreement or contract they should have it examined by an industry lawyer. They also advise that no legal contract or agreement will ensure a successful working relationship unless there is goodwill between the signatories.

The Arts Law Centre of Australia: www.artslaw.com.au

Arts Law is the national community legal centre for the arts which gives preliminary advice and information to artists and arts organisations across all art forms on a wide range of arts-related legal and business matters including contracts, copyright, business names and structures, defamation, insurance and employment. Arts Law’s lawyers provide free preliminary legal advice by telephone. In most instances subscribers are entitled to a face-to-face or telephone consultation with a volunteer lawyer from private practice to review their documents. Face-to-face consultations are held in Adelaide, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. A telephone consultation can be arranged for subscribers outside these centres. Arts Law publishes a wide range of information sheets, guides, checklists, sample contracts with explanatory notes and seminar papers and booklets, as well as newsletters and bulletins. The sample contracts for filmmakers are an extremely useful resource.

The Australian Copyright Council: www.copyright.org.au

An independent non-profit organisation that provides online information on copyright in Australia. It also provides training, conducts research and publishes practical guides and other books. For information relevant to film and multimedia, go to: www.copyright.org.au/find-an-answer.

FindLaw Australia: www.findlaw.com.au

A searchable online database of Australian lawyers with links to Entertainment, Intellectual Property and Communications law specialists throughout Australia.

Comprehensive lists of entertainment lawyers can be found in the Encore Directory and The Production Book, see **Directories** (page 7).

Free legal advice is offered by The Australian Writers’ Guild www.awg.com.au, and the Screen Producers Australia <http://screenproducersaustralia.org.au/> to their members. See **Screen agencies, guilds and associations** (page 7).

Protecting your work

There is no system of registration for copyright protection in Australia. Copyright protection does not depend upon publication, a copyright notice, or any other procedure – the protection is free and automatic. Protection starts automatically from the moment the work is written down or recorded in some way. While copyright protection is automatic, it is generally recommended that you put a copyright notice on your script or treatment. For example:

- © Your name or company name, date of creation or first publication of work
- A Strictly Confidential Presentation
- All Rights Reserved.

See **Script registration** (page 16) and **Script layout** (page 8) for samples of how the front page of your script should look.

Copyright searches

If you are adapting a novel, short story or play, you must first clear this usage with the relevant copyright owner. To do this you must do a copyright search to find out who owns the rights, then negotiate with them to use the work. Finding out who owns the rights can be a complex and frustrating process, and to help, you may need to employ an entertainment lawyer or access one of the free arts-based legal advice organisations, see **Legal links** (page 14).

The Australian Copyright Council: www.copyright.org.au

Publishes an information sheet: *Owners of copyright: how to find:*
www.copyright.org.au/publications/infosheets.htm

United States Copyright Office: www.copyright.gov

Offers information sheets and links. An online searchable database of registered books, screenplays, music, art, periodicals etc: **www.copyright.gov/records**. To discover whether a particular work has fallen into the public domain, the US Copyright Office can conduct a search of their records for a fee; alternatively, if you are in the US, you can conduct your own search for free.

The Australia–US Free Trade Agreement brought changes to copyright law in Australia, especially in relation to the releasing of works into the public domain, so please refer to the Australian Copyright Council to read the most recent advice at: **www.copyright.org.au**.

Title searches

A film's title is not protected by copyright, but liability under other areas of law may arise if the title of your script is not unique:

“The legal test both in Australia and internationally is whether your title would confuse anyone in the marketplace.” (Lyndon Sayer-Jones, 1992, *Law brief, the Australian film and television industry in the nineties: a film lawyer's guide for non-lawyers.*)

If you want to do your own research, you can start by using an online database to check if your title has been used before.

Try these searchable film databases:

Screen Australia: www.screenaustralia.gov.au/films

The database includes information about Australian and co-produced features and TV drama telemovies from 1970, TV drama mini-series and documentaries from 1980 and TV drama series and short films from 1988.

National Film and Sound Archive: <http://colsearch.nfsa.gov.au>

The National Film and Sound Archive maintains a collection spanning over 100 years of Australia's audiovisual heritage.

The Classification Operations Branch: www.classification.gov.au

The Classification Operations Branch maintains a comprehensive classification database for public access.

The Internet Movie Database (IMDb): www.imdb.com

A comprehensive international film database that includes Australian titles.

United States Copyright Office: www.copyright.gov

Offers searchable online databases.

To send or not to send unsolicited scripts

An unsolicited script is one the recipient has not asked to see. In Australia most producers have a slate of their own projects. Many will not be interested in reading unsolicited scripts; those that are will have limited time to read them. The best approach is to first send producers a **query letter** (see page 16). Sending query letters to several producers simultaneously is fine. Allow four weeks for a response, after which a follow-up note or phone call is acceptable. If you do not receive any response after that, it's best not to pursue this producer any further. If asked to send your script in, allow the time specified by the producer before following up. One follow-up note or call is all that is recommended.

US studios do not accept unsolicited scripts in order to avoid any accusation that they have misappropriated a script:

“We have an absolutely strict policy not to accept any unsolicited scripts because every major studio has been sued for stealing ideas in the past. Unfortunately, because of that, it’s not worth the financial risk of all those lawsuits to be able to find those diamonds out there. Once scripts are represented and submitted, there is a level of protection for the writer and the studio.” (*How MGM Chooses A Script: An Interview With Stephanie Palmer, Director of Creative Affairs for MGM Pictures*, viewed October 2009 at: www.scriptologist.com/Magazine/Interviews/interviews.html.)

Before sending your script into the marketplace, consider a script assessment and remember to keep a copy of your script for your own records. See **Getting feedback on your first draft** (page 11), **Script registration** (below), and read **Protecting your work** (page 14). You should also read **Find a writer or form a team** (page 6).

Query letters

Query letters are based on the ‘Elevator Pitch’ (see **Pitching your screenplay**, page 12) and may be sent unsolicited to agents, producers and studios. Pamela Wallace and Kathie Fong Yoneda advise that a query letter needs to be succinct, engaging and entice the reader to want to know more. It should be no longer than one page and comprise:

- one sentence on you and relevant film credits
- a three-sentence pitch starting with a log-line (a one-sentence description of your story), going on to the basics of genre, time period and place, and end with the challenge that the main character will face
- one sentence on other information, such as attached personnel.

Make sure you have practised your pitch thoroughly, and remember, this will be the only time you can pitch to the selected producer – make sure it is a polished product.

Script registration

Australian Writers’ Guild (AWG): www.awg.com.au

Provides its members with a Script Registration Service to establish the completion date and identity of the literary property. The aim of the registration is to prove priority of ownership; and that priority cannot necessarily be proved if the material is sent to a reader or producer before it is registered. Registration does not confer any further protection that is not already available to the author at law. However, it does provide evidence of the author’s prior claim to authorship of the material and of the date of its completion. The AWG will accept synopses, outlines and treatments as well as scripts for registration.

Writers Copyright Association UK: www.wcauk.com

The Writers Copyright Association is a worldwide organisation that offers script/screenplay registration.

Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE): www.wgaeast.org

WGAE has an Online Script Registration Service that protects members and non-members of the Guild by establishing the completion date and the identity of their literary property. The goal of the Registration Service is to protect a claim of priority of ownership, and the Guild recommends registration of material before showing it to a producer or agent, many of whom won’t look at a script unless it has been registered. The Registration Service will protect a script, screenplay, or simply a great idea, for 10 years.

Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW): www.wga.org

Script registration is available to members and non-members alike, for five years. Materials may be submitted for registration in person, by mail, or online.

Sample agreements and contracts

Arts Law: www.artslaw.com.au

Offers downloadable agreements and contracts for a small fee.

Australian Writers’ Guild: www.awg.com.au

Offers a comprehensive range of agreements and contracts that are free to members.

Metro Screen: www.metroscreen.org.au

Has a number of downloadable forms: production schedule; releases for actors, writers, photographic material, as well as music and composition; location agreement; crew contract.

Raindance Film Festival: www.raindance.co.uk/site/raindance-film-festival-screenwriting-books

Offers a publication called *Raindance Producers' Lab: write and sell the hot screenplay*. This includes a CD of files with sample short-form actor's contract, director, option, producer and writer agreements.

Screen Australia sample production paperwork: www.screenaustralia.gov.au/paperwork

Includes a range of templates of documents typically used by production managers, plus sample accounting documents such as cost reports and payslips.

SellAScript.com: www.sellascript.com

Offers free downloads of sample agreements and letters. The site warns writers that these downloads are a sample of typical agreements and that professional legal advice needs to be sought when entering into a formal agreement.

The Writers Guild of Canada: www.wgc.ca/search_agreements/index.html

Offers an extensive range of free downloads of sample agreements, notices and contracts.

AUSTRALIAN CONTACTS

ACT Writers Centre

Ph: (02) 6262 9191
Fax: (02) 6262 9192
Email: admin@actwriters.org.au
Web: www.actwriters.org.au

Arts Hub

Ph: (03) 9605 3800
Fax: (03) 9923 6852
Email: info@artshub.com.au
Web: www.artshub.com.au

Arts Law Centre of Australia

Ph: (02) 9356 2566
Toll Free: 1800 221 457
Email: artslaw@artslaw.com.au
Web: www.artslaw.com.au

Australian Copyright Council

Ph: (02) 8815 9777
Fax: (02) 8815 9799
Email: info@copyright.org.au
Web: www.copyright.org.au

Australian Directors Guild (ADG)

Ph: (02) 9555 7045
Fax: (02) 9555 7086
Email: admin@adg.org.au
Web: www.adg.org.au

Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS)

Ph: (02) 9805 6611
Toll Free: 1300 13 14 61
Fax: (02) 9887 1030
Email: web form
Web: www.aftrs.edu.au
Jerzy Toeplitz Library
Ph: (02) 9805 6440
library@aftrs.edu.au
Web: www.aftrs.edu.au/library

Australian Society of Authors (ASA)

Ph: (02) 9211 1004
Fax: (02) 9211 0125
Email: asa@asauthors.org
Web: <https://asauthors.org/>

Australian Writers' Guild (AWG)

Ph: (02) 9319 0339
Fax: (02) 9319 0141
Email: admin@awg.com.au
Web: www.awg.com.au

Cinemarket

Fax: (02) 9388 2838
Email: info@cinemarket.com.au
Web: www.cinemarket.com.au

The Classification Operations Branch

Ph: (02) 9289 7100
Email: web form
Web: www.classification.gov.au

Encore Directory

Ph: (02) 9422 2666 / 1300 360 126
Email: customerservice@cirrusmedia.com.au
Web: www.encoredirectory.com.au

Faculty of the VCA and Music

The University of Melbourne
Ph: 13 63 52
Email: please refer to website for enquiry form
Web: www.vcam.unimelb.edu.au

Film and Television Institute (FTI)

Ph: (08) 9431 6700
Fax: (08) 9335 1283
Email: fti@fti.asn.au
Web: www.fti.asn.au

Film Victoria

Ph: (03) 9660 3200
Fax: (03) 9660 3201
Email: contact@film.vic.gov.au
Web: <http://film.vic.gov.au>

IF – Inside Film Magazine

Ph: (02) 9660 2113
Fax: (02) 9660 4419
Email: various listed on website
Web: www.if.com.au

Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA)

Toll Free: 1300 656 513
Fax: 1300 730 543
Email: web form
Web: www.alliance.org.au

Media Resource Centre (MRC)

Ph: (08) 8410 0979
Fax: (08) 8410 1787
Email: info@mrc.org.au
Web: www.mrc.org.au

Metro Screen

Ph: (02) 9356 1818
Fax: (02) 9361 5320
Email: metro@metroscreen.org.au
Web: www.metroscreen.org.au

Mumbrella

Email: various listed on website
Web: <http://mumbrella.com.au/>

National Film and Sound Archive

Ph: (02) 6248 2000
Toll Free: 1800 067 274 (within Australia)
Email: enquiries@nfsa.gov.au
Web: www.nfsa.gov.au

Northern Rivers Writers' Centre

Ph: (02) 6685 5115
Email: info@nrwc.org.au
Web: www.nrwc.org.au

NSW Writers' Centre

Ph: (02) 9555 9757
Fax: (02) 9818 1327
Email: info@nswwc.org.au
Web: www.nswwriterscentre.org.au

NT Writers' Centre

Ph: (08) 8941 2651
Email: manager@ntwriters.com.au
Web: www.ntwriters.com.au

Open Channel

Ph: (03) 8327 2016
Fax: (03) 8672 3335
Email: info@openchannel.org.au
Web: www.openchannel.org.au

The Production Book

c/- The Intermedia Group
Ph: (02) 9571 1100
Fax: (02) 9660 4419
Email: info@productionbook.com.au
Web: www.productionbook.com.au

QPIX

Ph: (07) 3848 8000
Fax: (07) 3848 8055
Email: qpix@qpix.org.au
Web: www.qpix.org.au

Queensland Writers Centre

Ph: (07) 3842 9922
Email: qldwriters@qwc.asn.au
Web: www.qwc.asn.au

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)

AFI Research Collection
Ph: (03) 9925 2829
Fax: (03) 9925 9730
Email: afiresearch@rmit.edu.au
Web: www.collectionsaustralia.net/org/1710/about

ScreenACT

Ph: (02) 6247 4199
Fax: (02) 6257 4421
Email: info@screenact.com.au
Web: www.screenact.com.au

Screen Australia

Sydney
Ph: (02) 8113 5800
Toll Free: 1800 213 099
Fax: (02) 8113 5888
Melbourne
Ph: (03) 8682 1900
Toll Free: 1800 213 681
Fax: (03) 9696 1476
Email: info@screenaustralia.gov.au
Web: www.screenaustralia.gov.au

Screen NSW

Ph: (02) 9995 0555
Email: info@screen.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.screen.nsw.gov.au

Screen Producers Australia (SPA)

Ph: (02) 9360 8988
Fax: (02) 9360 8977
Web: <http://screenproducersaustralia.org.au/>
www.screenproducers.org.au/industry/

Screen Queensland

Ph: (07) 3248 0500
Email: screenqld@screenqld.com.au
Web: www.screenqueensland.com.au

Screen Tasmania

Ph: (03) 6165 5070
Email: info@development.tas.gov.au
Web: www.screen.tas.gov.au

Screen Territory

Ph: (08) 8951 5141
Fax: (08) 8952 0446
Email: screen.territory@nt.gov.au
Web: www.screenterritory.nt.gov.au

ScreenWest

Toll Free: 1800 463 043
Ph: (08) 6552 7700
Fax: (08) 6552 7777
Email: info@screenwest.wa.gov.au
Web: www.screenwest.wa.gov.au

Script Central

Ph: (02) 9527 9450
Fax: (02) 9527 2329
Email: info@scriptcentral.com.au
Web: www.scriptcentral.com.au

South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC)

Ph: (08) 8394 2000
Email: web form
Web: www.safilm.com.au

South Australian Writers' Centre Inc

Ph: (08) 8223 7662
Email: admin@sawriters.on.net
Web: <http://sawriters.org.au/>

Tasmanian Writers' Centre

Ph: (03) 6224 0029
Fax: (03) 6223 3354
Email: admin@tasmanianwriters.org
Web: www.tasmanianwriters.org

Tropfest

Ph: (02) 8011 0290
Email: mail@tropfest.com.au
Web: <http://tropfest.com/au/>

Varuna – The Writers' House

Ph: (02) 4782 5674
Email: varuna@varuna.com.au
Web: www.varuna.com.au

**WEA
Hunter**

Ph: (02) 4925 4200
Fax: (02) 4929 6845
Email: enrolments@weahunter.com.au
Web: www.weahunter.com.au

Illawarra

Ph: (02) 4226 1622
Fax: (02) 4226 1156
Email: info@weaillawarra.com.au
Web: www.weaillawarra.com.au

South Australia

Ph: (08) 8223 1979
Fax: (08) 8232 3690
Email: enrolments@wea-sa.com.au
Web: www.wea-sa.com.au

Sydney

Ph: (02) 9264 2781
Email: web form
Web: www.weasydney.nsw.edu.au

Wide Angle Tasmania

Ph: (03) 6223 8344
Email: info@wideangle.org.au
Web: www.wideangle.org.au

Writers Victoria

Ph: (03) 9094 7855
Fax: (03) 9650 8010
Email: web form
Web: <http://writersvictoria.org.au>

writingWA

Ph: (08) 9228 9908
Email: info@writingwa.org
Web: www.writingwa.org/