



## **BEST SCREENPLAY/DEBUT SCREENWRITER: GUIDANCE FOR VOTERS**

The British Independent Film Award for Best Screenplay rewards exceptional achievement in Screenwriting for feature films. The Best Debut Screenwriter award recognises exceptional achievement and promise in a screenwriter for their first screenplay.

These awards are for fully credited screenwriters only. Co-writers (where there is a screenwriter credited) and story by credits are not eligible. Entrants must submit a 10 page screenplay sample, which is made available for voters to review.

### **WHAT IS SCREENWRITING FOR FILM?**

Screenwriting is the art of writing a story in script form for a visual medium, and employs cinematic storytelling and plotting, scene-setting, character development and dialogue skills to create a screenplay - a specially formatted blueprint for the film - which enables readers to visualise the action on screen. A screenwriter may work on a screenplay for several years and will go through collaborative stages with key members of the film's team before the final screenplay is delivered. Key aspects of screenwriting involve:

- **Concept & Research:** A screenwriter may originate the themes and ideas of the screenplay, or it may be based on an existing or true story. They will conduct research and gather background material to support the screenplay's development and ensure authenticity and/or sensitivity to the subject matter.
- **Plot, Character and Dialogue development:** they will develop characters and ideas into a fully realised story, designing the narrative and creating the reality of the characters, what they say and how they speak.
- **Action and Screenplay formatting:** A screenplay is formatted to include visual cues, so the world within a scene can be visually interpreted by the reader. As well as full script, this format includes action cues and other descriptive elements such as environment and time of day information.
- **Adaptations:** They may be bringing someone else's literary vision to the screen, editing or adapting the original material whilst retaining the dynamic drive of the story.
- **Summaries and Pitches:** a screenwriter will need to be able to create concise summaries of their ideas for team discussions or, depending on when they join the project, pitches.
- **Collaboration:** A screenwriter will often collaborate with other key creatives on elements of the screenplay before production, and may also work in partnership with another screenwriter on the project. If the partnership is equal they will usually be credited as co-writers with no lead screenwriter credited. You may also see a lead screenwriter and additional co-writer or story by credits.
- **Feedback, Rewrites and Edits:** Based on producer or script editor feedback, a screenwriter will usually be required to rewrite a screenplay until an agreed final version is produced, they may also work on script edits during production



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When evaluating screenwriting, voters could consider the following criteria:

- **World-Building & Storytelling:** Does the screenplay follow a clear narrative structure which carries through the plot effectively and makes sense? Is the narrative engaging? Consider the structure - is this basic or multi-layered, does it include innovative or unexpected twists and turns? Is it overly complex or rely too much on exposition through dialogue? Does the screenplay seamlessly immerse you in the film's world? If the screenplay is a literary adaptation, does it effectively bring the story, universe and characters of the original material to screen? Does it reinterpret the source in an exciting or unusual way?
- **Creative Thinking & Voice:** Is there originality or particular creativity in the screenplay? Does it avoid clichéd narratives, characters and dialogue or feel generic or formulaic? Is there an imaginative or unique vision in storytelling, characters or dialogue on display? Is it consistent in style?
- **Authenticity:** Does the screenplay work within the context of the film's setting? If it's a period piece, does the way the characters behave and interact feel authentic to the setting? If not, is this intentional and does it work?
- **Character Detail:** Are the characters believable? Do they feel well-rounded, with individual personalities? Is there balance across them or are they inconsistently written - are some more evolved or do some have more polished dialogue than others? Looking beyond an actor's capabilities, does the dialogue flow naturally? When the characters speak, does it feel natural and believable and flow well?
- **Subtlety and Restraint:** Does the screenplay feel overworked or weighed down by extraneous detail or a focus on one area? Does the script feel overwritten or have too much explanatory dialogue? Are there elements that jar against the rest of the screenplay or script? Is this intentional? Does it work? Was the production budget level of the film considered at screenplay stage? Was it ambitious or creative considering the available budget?
- **Debut Screenwriters:** If this is a screenwriter's first work, be mindful that this is their first experience writing for feature film when judging - consider early promise, emerging ideas, concepts and a developing voice in their work.

## TEAMWORK AND INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Screenwriting can be a collaborative creative process, and many factors affect how a screenplay is ultimately realised on screen. Good screenwriters are skilled at creating screenplays that effectively communicate their vision to the production team, whilst also considering the ability to achieve that vision within budget. Sometimes there may have been several screenwriters working on different versions of the screenplay, but usually the credits they're given reflect the level of work involved.