Big Break®
SCREENWRITING
CONTEST

Guide to Entering

(and Winning) The Final Draft

Big Break Screenwriting Contest!

Welcome to our Guide to Entering (and Winning) the Final Draft Big Break Screenwriting Contest!

Before we begin,
The best way to keep informed about the contest is to visit www.finaldraft.com and sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Best of luck and happy writing!

The team @ Final Draft

bigbreakcontest.com

Deadlines
$40 - Early Bird Deadline – Mar. 13, 2017
$50 - Regular Deadline – Jun. 26, 2017
$65 - Extended Deadline – Jul. 14, 2017

The Final Draft Big Break Judging Process

Congratulations on taking an important step in your screenwriting career. By entering a well-respected contest, you are bravely submitting your work for industry review. But what happens once you click "submit"? Does your script disappear into the ether?

No, your script goes on a very specific journey, and we'll tell you all about it.

First, the entry is reviewed to make sure all the elements are included, such as a title, a useable file and a logline. We also confirm that you did not include any identifying information like name or address anywhere on your entry.

Why do we need you to provide a logline with your entry? Well, because we want to make sure that the readers in the first round carefully read and reviewed your script. We check your logline against the summary we ask the readers to provide with their judging scorecards.

How about the title page? Why does that matter? Readers are human and if they know a writer personally, or know of him or her, it may in some way predispose them for or against the script. We want to make sure that every script gets a fair read. Gender, geography, or writer experience should play no part in the judging.

Once the script is verified as a valid entry, it is transferred to our custom online judging system. Within the system the contest administrator can view the genre of the script and the logline, then assign that script to the best possible reader. We are careful not to assign gory horror scripts to readers who prefer romantic comedies, and vice versa. Yes, this takes a lot of time, but we want your script to have the best possible chance of making it to the next round.

Once your script has made it past the first reader, who is checking for core competency, story structure and overall writing skill, the script is sent along to a second reader, who will determine if that script reaches the quarter-finals.

The quarter-finalists represent around 5% of total entries, or close to 500 writers. These screenplays have received two sets of high scores from two qualified industry readers, and they are ready to go on to the subsequent rounds of judging.

The 500 quarter-finalist scripts are then sent on to another three readers, whose scores are combined to determine the top 10 in each feature genre and TV category.

Once the top 10 scripts are announced, the readers of the final rounds all gather for a very long and heated conference, during which we decide which scripts are in the top 3, and which are the winners in each genre and category. These decisions are made after much discussion, study of everyone's assessments from Round 1 on, and hours of debate. The scripts chosen as the winners have been through a long vetting process and those that emerge as winners are certified by the industry as well worth their time to read.

What Feature Genre should I select?

Pick the genre that best fits your script. You may enter the same script in a second category for additional consideration, but you will need to submit a separate, complete entry for that script and entry fee.

The seven main feature genres for entries are:

- **Action/Adventure** - Films that feature lots of action sequences and/or include elements of adventure (e.g., exotic locales, military operations, etc.).
- **Comedy/Rom-Com** - Romantic comedies, mainstream, edgy or raunchy comedy, satire, parodies, etc.
- **Diversity** - We are proud to anounce the feature film Diversity category open to writers from diverse communities.
- **Drama** - More serious, realistic scripts that tell emotionally resonant stories and explore powerful themes.
- **Family/Animated** - Scripts aimed at the children/family market; this material can be enjoyed by the whole family and often includes animated features.
- **Period/Historical/War** - Biopics, scripts based largely in the past, war epics, and scripts featuring historical characters.
- **Sci-Fi/Fantasy** - Space travel, disaster and post-apocalyptic stories, scripts set in alternate worlds or universes, stories with magical elements.
- **Thriller/Horror** - Scripts that employ suspense, fear and/or tension as main story elements, spy and crime thrillers, psychological thrillers, mysteries, ghost, zombie and monster stories.

What TV Category should I select?

For TV scripts, we accept entries in:

- **Diversity Pilot** – We are proud to announce the TV Diversity category! Accepting original TV pilots from writers of diverse communities.
- **Half-Hour Pilot** – original TV pilots running roughly 30 minutes. These are typically comedies, but not always.
- **Hour-Long Pilot** – original TV pilots running roughly 60 minutes. These are typically dramas, but there are exceptions to this rule as well.

A pilot is a show that you have conceived from scratch that is your own original work. The readers and judges look for qualities such as craft and execution, originality, dialogue, characterization and structure.

Why we don't want scripts to be 150 (or more) pages

Many entrants contact us requesting special dispensations for entries that exceed 150 pages. The 150-page rule is not so much created by us, but by the industry.

These days most scripts in circulation are 90 to 100 pages. Unlike 10 years ago, a 120-page script is now considered long. When confronted with a script of that length, an industry reader will want to feel that every single page and scene is warranted.

When scripts start getting into 130, 140 pages or more, readers (and ultimately agents, managers and producers) will question the writer's grasp of modern spec script etiquette. We set the bar at a very generous 150 pages, to allow for the possibility that some scripts just defy the odds, but we respectfully ask that you keep all entries at or below that number.

What do contest readers/judges consider when reading a script?

While readers' tastes and sensibilities vary, for the most part we are looking for a good story well told. Is the script a great read? Is there some clever "hook" that makes the premise stand out in some way?

There are many components of a screenplay (premise, structure, themes, etc.) that can contribute or detract. When rare talent shines through in any area – perhaps the dialogue is brilliant, or the characters unforgettable – we take notice, even if other elements need work.

However, talent is not the only criteria for success. There's a saying in Hollywood, "Concept is king," but that's not necessarily the case in a screenwriting contest. It's not enough to have a great idea; that idea has to be skillfully executed on the page.

What's more, the scripts that advance display a professional level of craft when it comes to format, writing style and overall presentation. A few typos aren't going to kill you, but put your best foot forward and polish the script as much as possible before you enter it into the competition.

What are judges looking for in a feature script?

A movie script must have a strong three-act structure and a central conflict, often involving the opposition of an antagonist to actions taken by the protagonist in pursuit of his or her goals. A chain of connected plot events called the rising action should escalate the dramatic tension until a climactic Act III scenario resolves the central conflict in an unexpected but satisfying way.

Judges want to see other elements of cinematic storytelling function within that framework: clever but naturalistic dialogue, imperfect characters who learn lessons the audience should consider, compelling themes, and a story told

with striking cinematic imagery. These and other aspects of the craft (such as pacing and tone) can help or hinder the script depending on the degree of artistry involved.

Of course, they call this the movie BUSINESS for a reason — someone has to pay to produce your script, and everyone who devotes their time, energy and/or money to that process has a right to expect a return on their investment. With that in mind, we ask ourselves if there is an eager audience for this material. Is it a good bet at the box office? This is where a "high concept," instantly engaging and accessible premise can really help.

What are judges looking for original TV pilots?

With television, much of the same criteria apply as in features, but the medium has specific structural requirements (more acts) and plot events must sustain interest between act breaks. The script must be in the proper format for a one-hour drama, sitcom or single-camera comedy. It's even more important in TV that characters have charisma and multifaceted personalities that will interact in interesting ways. Are they people audiences want to watch on a weekly basis? Whether its genre is comedy, drama or a combination of both, the show should feature a mix of characters who could command an episode on their own.

The overarching questions pertain to the potential longevity of the series. Can this premise support a whole season of stories? Do the events of the pilot set promising plotlines in motion that the reader would be eager to see play out? It should be the kind of series we can imagine slotting into the schedule on a network, cable channel or Internet alternative. The show should seem like a fresh new iteration on a proven formula.

Your Script Checklist

Before sending off your script to be judged, make sure it's ready for primetime. Mark off each item on the following checklist to avoid common mistakes that can give a screenplay an unprofessional appearance. These may seem like little things, but getting the details right can be an important contributor to your success.

✓ Proofread your script!
> Many scripts are received with embarrassing errors that reflect poorly on the writer. While an error here and there is not going to turn a reader off from a script with a great story, excessive mistakes come off as unprofessional and certainly distract from the read. Give the script a good, thorough proofreading or enlist someone you trust to do so. If you are unsure of your proofreading skills, it's often worth the expense to hire a professional!

✓ Make sure your formatting meets industry standards.
> Proper formatting is as important to the presentation of your script as grammar and spelling. Professional readers expect you to know the rules and follow them carefully. Use a professional screenplay formatting program, like **Final Draft**, for best results and keep a formatting guide like Dave Trottier's *The*

Screenwriters Bible handy for those troublesome instances where special handling is required. Correct formatting makes your script easier to read and tells the reader you have taken the time to learn the rules of your craft.

✓ **Remove your title page.**
As we mentioned earlier, scripts are judged in a blind read, so be sure to remove all personal identifying information from the title page or delete it all together. (Make sure your name doesn't appear in the headers or footers, either.) Click here to learn how to remove the title page using Final Draft software.

✓ **Be sure you are submitting the correct draft.**
A surprising number of entrants ask to replace their script with the correct draft because they mistakenly entered the wrong file. Be sure you are entering the most recent draft, because we cannot exchange files once the script has been uploaded to our system.

✓ **Clear revisions.**
In the haste to upload before a deadline, writers often forget to clear the revisions in the **Final Draft** revision mode. Before you submit, make sure there are no unsightly red marks or asterisks marring your script! Script notes or other margin comments should also be removed.

✓ **Remove blank pages at the end of the script.**
Not only is this not a good look, it artificially inflates the page count. Why make your script seem longer than it is?

✓ **Don't forget to include your script's logline when you submit your entry.**
This useful article will help you in creating an effective logline.

GOOD LUCK!

For more information visit:
www.finaldraft.com

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