

FROM SUBMISSION TO \$ALE Sixty Hot Tips For Screenwriters

By Leslie Kallen

To all the great people who write scripts, here is a list of tips that I've shared with hundreds of writers, both here in Los Angeles, and throughout the U.S. I hope some of these tips will help you on the most interesting, challenging, and albeit, frustrating journey you'll ever take. Writers like you have courage to "do it", and I salute you.

1. Don't send unsolicited scripts to agents or other industry professionals
2. When people consider your work, their motivation to get it made and get you paid is more important than their credits.
3. When submitting, get a contact name for your submission, and mention "per our conversation", in your letter.
4. Don't follow-up call to see if your script arrived. If you follow-up call, it should be no sooner than 2 ½ weeks after your submission. Generally things are not lost, but follow a logging-in procedure.
5. Always have a clean, simple title page; avoid WGA Registration, copyright, date, draft, etc.
6. Title pages should have a centered title, in CAPS, the word "by" under title, and authors name.
7. Ask an agent if you may submit a rewrite, but don't interpret this to mean they'll represent you.
8. Communicate by mail with everyone you can. Letter writing is still a great tool.
9. Make out of state work for you. For example, sensibilities untarnished by Hollywood stereotypes are good for the work.
10. Don't over surf the web sites in lieu of human interaction.
11. When comparisons are communication tools, compare your work to hits, not good films that tanked at the box office.
12. Be able to describe your script in a brief log-line, including the genre.
13. Avoid all Camera Angles in your work. Make it read clearly. You are writing for readers, not directing.
14. Avoid characters feelings in narrative. Let it come through in story and dialogue.
15. Words like "remember", "realize", "thought" and "felt" are 'feeling' words. Save them for your novel.
16. Never have over 117 pages in your script; 107-112 is ideal.
17. Read a lot of scripts. You can find them on-line, or buy hard copies (as that's what buyers read) at Hollywood Book and Poster, Script City, Samuel French, or view them at the Academy Library. (All places mentioned are in L.A.)
18. Figure out a long- range plan to accomplish product output. For example, Ron Bass gets up at 3:00 AM to write.
19. Write them and finish them! How many scripts will you complete by the end of this year?
20. Don't guess trends; write your own story.
21. Be true to yourself in your writing.
22. Change "facts" if you're writing the 'personal story'.
23. Write a fictitious account of what really happened. Dramatic truth supercedes real truth.
24. Do one thing everyday do affirm your commitment to writing. Keep setting new goals.
25. Good screenwriters observe the interplay between people.
26. What are you writing about? Discovering your theme after you've finished gives you more insight for the next important step, which is the rewrite process.
27. What does your query letter say about you?

28. Your goal as a new screenwriter is to get your work read, as much as it is to get representation.
29. Read coverage/synopses of other peoples' scripts.
30. Work with other writers and do coverage on each other's work.
31. Use card stock covers, punched with two holes and two #5 brads (fasteners). Don't use term paper style covers or folders. Color card stock is okay. Title on cover is okay.
32. Don't wait on responses to what you've submitted. Put your energy into another project.
33. Ask people you talk to for leads or other names.
34. Make rejection work for you. Look at it as being in the race, not as failing.
35. Avoid hostility about how the industry works, including the "unwritten rules". Laugh about it.
36. Query should be on 8 1/2 by 11 stationery.
37. Don't send scripts by registered mail, Fed-Ex, U.P.S. etc. Regular U.S. mail is recommended choice.
38. Generally, calls are returned after 5:45 Pacific Time. Don't call someone more than once a week. You're already on their "call sheet".
39. Script consultants are reputable and can improve your work if you can afford them. However, always have your script professionally typed and formatted. The more professionally presented, the better your chances are of getting it read.
40. Agents earn 10% commission. Some do xeroxing, some may ask you to make your own copies. Get an agents list from the WGA, West, (323-951-4000).
41. Lawyers work with agents in deal-making. They are paid 5% of the deal, by the writer.
42. Agents make multiple submissions. Think about you "in the race" not about you going against another client in the agency.
43. Agents work for free unless they close a deal. They do not work by the hour.
44. Managers for writers are becoming increasingly popular. Because the laws are in flux, they can receive 15% or more in commission.
45. As screenwriters cache and currency increase, writers need a bigger team and hence, will pay more commissions, just like actors and musicians.
46. Have a sense of humor; it's the best tool in the business.
47. Read the trades, magazines, and on-line articles with a grain of salt. They include CREATIVE SCREENWRITING, SCRIPT, SCREENTALK JOURNAL, HOLLYWOOD SCRIPTWRITER, VARIETY, and HOLLYWOOD REPORTER; and ScreenTalk Online, Wordplay, Scriptscene, Hollywood Literary Sales, plus many, many more.
48. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your screenplays. Do the first 10 pages grab the reader and suck him/her in? Do you have a catchy "inciting incident"? Are your Acts structured well?
49. Don't ask to have your script returned. Don't include a SASE. The copy you send is the cost of doing business.
50. When placing calls, leave specific messages.
51. Paranoia about theft is wasted energy.
52. Avoid parentheticals under character's names in the dialogue. Let actors act and directors direct.
53. Screenwriting is not that lonely; in fact it's collaborative. Don't be married to your words. To paraphrase Faulkner, you must be prepared to give up your darlings. Be ready to cut your favorite lines of dialogue, and scenes.
54. Find an ideal time to write your pages. Is it morning or night?
55. Know your goal when you contact someone. Is it to get read, get representation, say hello, or get a lead.
56. Write about what you know and what you're passionate about. Strive for the "plus factor".
57. Originality is a pair of fresh eyes; a new take on an old plot.

58. Move your reader by crafting a great story. They'll remember your work even if they don't purchase it.
59. Have fun! If you know you want to write, that's what matters most.
60. An agent "contact" is good whether you're a client or not.

And remember, one thing is for sure; it will never happen if you don't try!

Leslie Kallen of Leslie Kallen Literary Agency is well known for her "sure eye for writing talent." She represents screenwriters and fiction and nonfiction authors in association with The Literary Group International. Her screenwriting clients work in features and long-form television. Several of her clients are working on assignments for major production companies in Hollywood and, internationally, for German and Canadian companies. Her authors are working with publishers such as St. Martin's and Simon and Schuster. Because of her excellent screenwriting seminars, Kallen is known throughout the US for inspiring and educating writers. At her agency, she is always looking for a good story well told.

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