

The Role of the Writer in Short-Form Television Production

By

Dylan De Jongh

170208

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Anzel Larkins

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Writing for a short television show is different to writing a film. Firstly, it's a much more collaborative process and secondly, there's a hierarchy involved in creating scripts for the show. This essay will examine the hierarchy involved in writing for television and how this affects the role of the writer. It will also examine the different ways writers' rooms are organised and who calls the shots.

The writing team for a television series has a hierarchy. Generally, each writer on the team will have a job title that suits what they do. A writer breaking into the industry will begin as a Staff Writer and hopefully work their way up to being an Executive Producer. Most writers in the industry work their way up a ladder where they become better wordsmiths and also learn the trade that is television.

A staff writer is the entry level position for television writing. The majority of a staff writer's duties take place in the writer's room. Here the staff writer pitches ideas and works with other writers to flesh out characters, create plots and assist in the brainstorming process. A staff writer may be asked to sit in on first rehearsals with the cast where they will take notes and edit scenes that don't play out well. A staff writer's name isn't listed in an episode's end credits and they generally don't write any episodes in a season.

The next position on the ladder to the top is a Story Editor. This position isn't much of a step up from staff writer. Although there is a certain level of validation that comes with this position. The duties of a story editor are to pitch ideas in the writers' room and write at least one episode of the season. A story editor is someone who has proven their talent and as such their name is listed in the end credits.

Next up is an Executive Story Editor. This position is considered mid-level and is essentially the same as the previous two. The writer has proven their worth at this stage and is afforded more say in the writer's room. Generally, story editors will manage the writers below them and communicate with the higher ups. They may also be responsible for recruiting new writers to the show and firing others.

Once you earn a promotion from being an executive story editor you'll become a Co-Producer. The main responsibility of the co-producer is still writing but the title offers some interesting opportunities. Being listed as a co-producer on a successful show can open many doorways to new jobs on other shows or to a promotion. Being a co-producer means that a writer is not only great at coming up with stories but also has

a knack for the business end of running a tv show. A co-producer also needs to know the ins and outs of the production process.

After being a co-producer, you'll hopefully graduate to become a Producer. The producer has a lot more say in all aspects of the show. The Producer manages production, finances and a large part of the writing. The big bonus of being a producer is that your name is listed in the beginning of the show and says, "Produced by".

Next up is the Supervising Producer. The supervising producer has all the responsibilities of the co-producer but are more skilled in fulfilling their position. A supervising producer is considered "upper level" in television. They participate in writing sessions and influence the story. They also handle the business end of the show but as an extra responsibility they're expected to network. This means that the supervising producer needs to have a variety of contacts in the industry that can assist the show. Being good with people is a must for this position.

The Co-Executive Producer has all of the other writers reporting to them. They will rewrite drafts of episodes and edit stories to suit the show. They can also write scripts for the show. Most shows often have more than one co-executive producer but generally there is one of them who assumes command when the showrunner is absent.

The Executive Producer is the person who created the show and handles every aspect of the show's production. However, there are ways to work up to this position. Such as when the original executive producer steps down and you step up to take his place. But for those special cases where a total novice creates a show they will work closely with a pro show runner.

The writer's room is where a sitcom's writers congregate to come up with plots and characters for the show's season. Writers rooms are all different in that each one has their own unique process for coming up with content for the show. An example would be the writers from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. All of the main writers for *Monty Python* are accomplished "funny men" in real life and pooled their talents together in equal shares to create episodes. This contrasts the setup of the writing staff for *In Living Color*. Jim Carrey was the main creative force in terms of writing for the show where as Keenen Ivory Wayans spent a lot of time pitching jokes and scenarios for

the show along with other writers. These are just two simple examples of how the dynamic of the writer's room can vary from show to show.

Another example is the Simpsons, who over the years have had many, many writers on their show. The main driving force for the show have been Matt Groening, James L. Brooks Al Jean and Sam Simon. There have been episodes penned by other writers but episodes and actual script writing were left to the more senior members of the team. The inexperienced and young writers on the show were mainly tasked with pitching jokes all day every day to create content for each episode.

This essay has examined the hierarchy of writers and how each position affects the responsibilities of the writers on the show. It has also examined how different one writers' room can be from another.

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