

WRITING THE TV DRAMA SERIES

**HOW TO SUCCEED AS A PROFESSIONAL
WRITER IN TV**

3RD EDITION



MICHAEL WIESE PRODUCTIONS

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FROM JOHN WELLS

Executive Producer: *ER, The West Wing, Southland*

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WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT TV DRAMA SERIES?

Three Qualities of Episodic TV Series

Episodic Characterization

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Anthologies

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Myth 1: TV is small movies.

Myth 2: TV is cheap.

Myth 3: You can't do that on TV.

Myth 4: All TV series are the same.

Myth 5: Television is a wasteland.

The Rules of Series TV

- **An hour show has to fit an hour.**
- **Series deadlines are for real.**
- **Drama series have an act structure.**
- **Each series fits a franchise.**

Ready, Set, Go!

Summary Points

What's New?

SPOTLIGHT ON DRAMEDY

GUEST SPEAKER: DAVID ISAACS (*M*A*S*H, Cheers, Frasier, Mad Men*)

CHAPTER TWO

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Chart: Traditional Two-Year Development and Production of a New Show

Year One

April: Create Your Proposal

- (1) **Write a TV Format**
- (2) **Write a Pilot**
- (3) **Write a “Backdoor Pilot”**
- (4) **Create a Presentation Reel**
- (5) **Attach a “Package”**

(6) Get a Web Following

May: The Production Company

June: The Studio

July and August: The Network

Chart: New Series Development at One Network

September to November: The Pilot Script

December and January: The Greenlight

February to April: Pilot Season

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June: Staffing

July and August: Write Like Crazy

Chart: Sample Character Arcs for a Season

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What's New?

Summary Points

GUEST SPEAKER: CHARLES COLLIER

President, AMC Cable TV

CHAPTER THREE

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GUEST SPEAKER: STEVEN BOCHCO (*Hill Street Blues, L.A. Law, NYPD Blue*)

SPOTLIGHT ON WRITING PROCEDURALS

GUEST SPEAKER: ANN DONAHUE (*CSI: NY, CSI: Miami*)

GUEST SPEAKERS: MICHELLE & ROBERT KING (*The Good Wife*)

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Summary Points

GUEST SPEAKER: DAVID SIMON (*Homicide, The Wire, Treme*)

SPOTLIGHT ON WRITING YOUR PILOT SCRIPT

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Make a Plan

GUEST SPEAKER: GEORGIA JEFFRIES (*Cagney & Lacey, China Beach*)

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IT'S WHO YOU KNOW: WORKING ON STAFF

The Staff from Hell

Mistake 1: Don't separate from the staff.

Mistake 2: Don't mix personal and work issues.

Mistake 3: Don't have other plans.

Mistake 4: Don't work at home instead.

Mistake 5: Don't be precious about your script.

Mistake 6: Don't "dis" the culture of the staff.

Mistake 7: Don't work on a series that's wrong for you.

The Good Staff

A Slice of Life

The Staff Ladder

1. Freelance Writer
2. Staff Writer
3. Story Editor / Executive Story Editor
4. Producer
5. Supervising Producer
6. Creative Consultant
7. Executive Producer / Showrunner

Summary Points

SPOTLIGHT ON "UNSCRIPTED/REALITY" SHOWS

GUEST SPEAKER: SCOTT A. STONE (*The Mole, The Joe Schmo Show, Top Design*)

CHAPTER SIX

HOW TO BREAK IN

The rules:

- Write what you love.
- Don't spec the series you plan to pitch.
- Ask the right questions about a series.
- Have the right tools.
- Have representation.
- Be in Los Angeles.

The secret of success

Summary Points

What's New?

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GUEST SPEAKER: DAVID GOETSCH (*The Big Bang Theory*, *3rd Rock from the Sun*)

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Right Now

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR