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## So You Want To Write a TV Show?

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### Article

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**RED BANK, New Jersey** (Achieve3000, November 16, 2020). Like a thunderbolt, it hits you: an idea for a new TV show.

You jot it down. You think about it while you're eating, while you're walking, even while you're sleeping. You talk it through with your BFF—now your creative partner—building out a concept for a crazy cartoon...a superhero fantasy...or a teen rom-com. You dream up heroes, villains, and plotlines.

Flash forward. Your idea has been "green-lighted" for production. Now you're in the "writers' room" where the real magic begins. It's time to develop compelling characters and believable dialogue that bring your vision to life.

So how do writers turn an idea into an actual TV show that leaves viewers laughing, crying, thinking...and coming back for more? According to veteran TV writers, it requires a mix of talent, skill, discipline, and the ability to play well with others.

#### Writing Team Assemble

As a most basic job description, TV writers develop ideas for shows and write scripts for episodes, TV commercials, and other projects. One person may have the original idea for a new comedy or drama series and write the first episode, or pilot. But after that, it typically becomes an intensely collaborative process. A team of writers is usually assembled to meet and bounce ideas off one another in the writers' room.

Once a first draft of an episode is written, the writing team analyzes the script page by page and line by line, offering constructive criticism and fresh ideas. Based on that feedback, another draft is written...and another...as many revisions as necessary until the team feels the script is solid. The actors may even join the process for a table reading and offer their input. Their ideas may then be integrated into *another* revision before the final script is approved.

All this is done while meeting tight deadlines to keep the show on schedule. In short, TV writers often work long hours under intense pressure. But if they're part of a good team, the work can be exciting, fun, and rewarding.

#### Starting Out

A love of writing is essential for TV writers. Those aspiring to this career must be devoted to developing their writing skills—just like athletes or musicians are devoted to improving their abilities. After high school, young writers may continue their development by studying English, drama, or journalism, seeking every opportunity to write, rewrite, and revise. It's also important to read, read, read (not to mention watch, watch, watch), especially in the genres they're most interested in.



Photo credit: Geber86/iStock/Getty Images Plus

*TV writers work together to develop ideas for shows and write scripts for episodes, TV commercials, and other projects.*

Beginning TV writers often start out as assistants, but by helping out in writers' rooms, they get to observe the production process from the inside. At some point, they may be asked to help write a scene or two. Little by little, they gain experience and responsibility.

### **More Than Creativity**

Writing ability and experience are only part of developing a career as a TV writer, though. There are plenty of other qualities that improve the chances of success. Discipline and determination are necessary to meet deadlines and persevere in the face of criticism—developing a "thick skin" can come in handy. Good writing teams thrive on collaboration, so being a good teammate capable of putting group goals before personal ambitions is also important.

Yet even for writers with all those attributes, the job can be challenging. Working in TV land is highly competitive, and hit shows are few and far between. But for those who love the thrill of seeing and hearing their words and ideas shared far and wide? And working with quick-witted colleagues who enjoy collaboration and pushing each other to improve? If that kind of creativity sparks your ambition, there just might be a job as a TV writer shimmering in your future.

### **Think about and discuss these questions:**

- What evidence can you find to support the idea that a career as a TV writer is exciting but also demanding?
- What questions would you ask in an interview with a TV writer?

### **Dictionary**

**aspiring** (*adjective*) trying to reach a goal

**collaborative** (*adjective*) achieved by working together with others

**persevere** (*verb*) to keep trying, in spite of difficulty

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## Activity

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### PART 1

#### Question 1

The best alternate headline for this Article would be \_\_\_\_\_.

- (A) Teams Work in Pressure Cooker to Keep TV Shows Flowing
- (B) Write. Collaborate. Repeat: How Writers Create TV Moments
- (C) Leave Your Skin at the Door: Writing Through Criticism
- (D) Power of Observation Proves Key to Landing a Writing Job

#### Question 2

Which passage from the Article best supports the idea that TV writers must be open-minded?

- (A) Once a first draft of an episode is written, the writing team analyzes the script page by page and line by line, offering constructive criticism and fresh ideas. Based on that feedback, another draft is written...and another...as many revisions as necessary until the team feels the script is solid.
- (B) A love of writing is essential for TV writers. Those aspiring to this career must be devoted to developing their writing skills—just like athletes or musicians are devoted to improving their abilities.
- (C) All this is done while meeting tight deadlines to keep the show on schedule. In short, TV writers often work long hours under intense pressure...
- (D) One person may have the original idea for a new comedy or drama series and write the first episode...

#### Question 3

Which is the closest **antonym** for the word *persevere*?

- (A) falter
- (B) undermine
- (C) maintain
- (D) endure

#### Question 4

Which question is **not** answered by the Article?

- (A) What types of TV productions do writers develop ideas and write scripts for?
- (B) What is the process for taking a TV episode from a first draft to a final script?
- (C) How can young writers develop their writing skills to write for TV?
- (D) How do beginning TV writers find jobs as assistants in writers' rooms?

Question 5

Read this passage from the Article:

**Discipline and determination are necessary to meet deadlines and persevere in the face of criticism... Good writing teams thrive on collaboration, so being a good teammate capable of putting group goals before personal ambitions is also important....**

**Yet even for writers with all those *attributes*, the job can be challenging.**

In this passage, the word *attributes* means \_\_\_\_\_.

- (A) qualities or features
- (B) ideas or plans
- (C) issues or problems
- (D) degrees or honors

Question 6

Suppose Avery wants to find out about becoming a production assistant on a TV show. She would find **most** of her information \_\_\_\_\_.

- (A) on a television actor's bibliography of work
- (B) on a television actor's official fan website
- (C) on a television company's job database
- (D) on a television company's guide to new shows

Question 7

Which of these is a statement of opinion?

- (A) Collaboration in TV writing involves analyzing a script page by page and offering feedback.
- (B) Collaboration is the most important skill writers need to develop if they want to write for TV.
- (C) TV writers develop ideas and write scripts for episodes, TV commercials, and other projects.
- (D) Young writers may continue their development by studying English, drama, or journalism.

Question 8

The Article states:

**Writing ability and experience are only part of developing a career as a TV writer, though.... Discipline and determination are necessary to meet deadlines and persevere in the face of criticism—developing a "thick skin" can come in handy. Good writing teams thrive on collaboration, so being a good teammate capable of putting group goals before personal ambitions is also important.**

Why did the author include this passage?

- Ⓐ To explain why good writing teams work best in an intensely collaborative environment
- Ⓑ To suggest that writing for TV is highly competitive and only the ambitious succeed
- Ⓒ To prove that hit TV shows are few and far between and writers should have a backup plan
- Ⓓ To illustrate the different skills a writer must possess to successfully work in TV