

## Michael Hauge's First Steps to Screenwriting

I am often asked -- by someone just starting out, or by a novelist or playwright who is contemplating switching disciplines - about the best way to begin pursuing a screenwriting career. So here are my 10 steps to begin writing for movies or television. These initial activities won't force you to mortgage your house, they'll teach you a lot about both the art and craft of writing movies, and they will give you a good idea if this is truly your calling. Continue reading ...

1. Read, *Writing Screenplays That Sell*. It's generally regarded as one of the essential books for learning the basic elements of story, structure, character, style and marketing, and it covers the entire process, from concept to sale. (In fairness, there are a number of other terrific books and DVDs for new screenwriters. But this is my article, so I'm just gonna plug my own &hellip; .)
2. See AT LEAST two movies a week, and watch the good ones a second time, taking notes to see how they follow the principles you're reading about.
3. Go to [www.dailyscript.com](http://www.dailyscript.com) and begin downloading and reading screenplays for recent, successful movies. Read at least two scripts a week, with at least one of those in the genre of the story you want to write. Start with the screenplays for your favorite movies, and then include scripts for movies you haven't seen before (renting the movie afterward to see how it matches what you've read), and scripts for recent movies that failed at the box office, to see where those went wrong.
4. Read whatever articles you can about both the business and craft of writing. Besides [Scriptmag.com](http://Scriptmag.com) and [ScreenplayMastery.com](http://ScreenplayMastery.com), be sure to go to [www.thewritersstore.com](http://www.thewritersstore.com), [www.wordplayer.com](http://www.wordplayer.com), and [www.creativescreenwriting.com](http://www.creativescreenwriting.com). A little surfing will lead you to lots more sources of good information.
5. Subscribe to the *Writers Store* e-zine.
6. Pay attention to the film industry, particularly the box-office performance of recent Hollywood films, and the current films or TV shows now in development at the studios and networks. Two outstanding web sites for getting this information are [www.donedealpro.com](http://www.donedealpro.com), and [www.boxofficemojo.com](http://www.boxofficemojo.com). You should also read the trade papers occasionally (*Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*).
7. Now that you're flooding yourself with information, begin writing down all the possible story ideas you can (or have already) come up with.
8. After you have at least 10 ideas for movies you think you'd have fun writing, pick the two or three you think have the greatest commercial potential, and write a brief outline of each.
9. If, at this point, you're still enjoying the whole process, watch my video with Chris Vogler, *The Hero's 2 Journeys*. This will give you a lot more skill at structuring your story and developing your characters.
10. Write the first draft of your screenplay.

By the time you complete the first draft, you'll know if this career path is for you -- or at least if you're passionate enough about it to continue through several rewrites, until it's ready to get feedback from friends, contacts, your writers group, or a script consultant. Then you'll be ready to start pitching it and marketing it to script competitions, at pitch fests, and to agents, production companies and financiers.

If you do choose to go forward, pick up another book or two on the craft, begin looking for a lecture, conference or screenwriting seminar that matches your own screenwriting goals, and begin pursuing script competitions.

Of course, it's possible to hire a coach to guide you through this whole process from the beginning; I often work with clients from the very beginning stages of their story concepts. But if you're not ready for that commitment of time and money yet, begin by going through these first 10 steps on your own.

One last word of advice: If you only have ONE idea you want to see made into a movie, but you know going into this that you don't want to pursue screenwriting as a career, then just acquire the rights to the story and market it in treatment form to production companies, with yourself attached as a producer. Screenwriting is not a one-shot endeavor -- it's a career that requires passion, education and commitment. -----

Michael Hauge is a story consultant, author and lecturer who works with filmmakers and executives on their screenplays, film projects, and development skills. He has coached writers, producers, stars and directors on projects for Will Smith, Julia Roberts, Jennifer Lopez, Kirsten Dunst, Charlize Theron, and Morgan Freeman, as well as for every major studio and network.

Michael is the best selling author of *Selling Your Story in 60 Seconds: The Guaranteed Way to Get Your Screenplay or Novel Read*, as well as *Writing Screenplays That Sell*, which is now in its 33rd printing for HarperCollins, and is a definitive reference book for the film and television industries. A number of Michael's seminars, including *The Hero's 2 Journeys* with Christopher Vogler, are available on DVD and CD at bookstores nationwide, and through his website below.

He can be reached through his website at [www.ScreenplayMastery.com](http://www.ScreenplayMastery.com). A version of this article was published previously on [www.ScreenplayMastery.com](http://www.ScreenplayMastery.com).