

## ELMS TIPS ON FREE SCREENWRITING RESOURCES

If I was to start my career over, I would NOT go to NYU Film school. I had lots of fun there, but it was WAY overpriced for the value delivered. I love my buddies I went to school with, but I would have made other valuable relationships elsewhere for free.

In fact, there's SO MANY resources to learn the craft these days, from great premium stuff to solid free options, that the bigger challenge is deciding what's worth exploring.

So here are my suggestions on the freebies:

- **YOU.** First and foremost, the biggest tip is to be ready to ignore my suggestions. Unless you happen to LOVE something, just effing ignore it. Part of finding your storytelling voice is finding your “learning voice.” What ignites your vision? What gets you excited about writing? Tuning out distractions will help you focus on the best of the best stuff - for YOU.
- **SCRIPTS.** Find PDFs of your favorite scripts online. Search: “name of your fav script PDF” Read them. Re-watch the films. Notice the page craft and the direction choices. Notice the special sauce for each film. Why are they great to you? Read the reviews. How did this film impact the genre? Your level of film literacy about the movies you love will provide context for your screenwriting choices. How do you know when your script is good enough? Because you can articulate, in detail, why this script is like your favorite movies in that genre, and yet why it's got a fresh, timely spin. And when influential other people agree with your reasons that your script is great, you're creating heat.
- **TIMELY.** Read the BlackList scripts (search: "blacklist scripts pdf") These are what some (not all, but SOME) of the industry gatekeepers consider the best writing happening today. They're the “most liked” scripts in town, according to a poll. Do you agree? Articulate to friends & colleagues on why or why not. When you read these scripts, notice the page craft choices. Also, ask yourself “Why now? What's timely about this?” If you hate the script (stop reading it!) but also determine for yourself why the timing might have made this script hot. When you write your own scripts, allow them to come from deep in your

creative wheelhouse, and be as **TIMELY** as possible. Imagine sitting around a campfire with friends sharing stories. How do you know what story to tell next? Your answer to that is the same impulse that should drive your decision on what script to write next. The film business is simply a massive campfire and we want to hear your story next. If it's very timely, the chances go up that you'll find champions in the industry for it. All that said, sometimes you will **NOT** be able to put your finger on a script's timeliness. If so, what else do you think made it so popular?

- **OSMOSIS.** Woody Allen said a great way to learn things is through social osmosis. So hang with film people. If you don't yet have serious film-friends yet, then find them online ASAP. Discussions about your love for movies is essential because it's fun, gets you fired up, plus it develops critical thinking and articulation -- which is the foundation of your writing skills. Talk/debate about everything you notice: performances, shots, themes, genre expectations, pacing, marketing choices, and most importantly: define your individual opinion on greatness. And then use your "personal sense of greatness" as a tuning fork to evaluate your own creative choices.
- **POSSE.** Join a screenplay writers group. <http://Screenwriters.MeetUp.com/> If you like the people there - great. Stay. If they bother you, find another one. But if you end up going through 2, 3, 4 groups, than the problem is you, my friend. Figure out what you're projecting on them and own it. Now, once you're in a group you like: get involved. Read your peers' scripts. See their movies. Help make their new movies. And when you're ready for feedback, be specific about what you want. Do you just want a pat on the back? Are you open to major suggestions like switching genres? Do you want ideas for a better ending? Are you feeling done and just want them to spot typos? Ask for **EXACTLY** what you want. Set clear boundaries on what you don't want. Inviting feedback that pushes you a bit out of your comfort zone helps you grow faster. But some feedbackers will (accidentally) bulldoze you. Don't let them! Thank them for trying to help, but move on. It's totally okay to disagree and still be friendly.

- **FESTS.** Volunteer to work at local film festivals. You'll meet fellow film lovers and cool filmmakers. It's super fun. You'll make contacts that could be with you for life. THIS is what I would have done instead paying a fortune to NYU in order to build my early-career social network. It's where the rubber hits the road as scripts finally make it to the screen. And, did I mention it's FREE?
- **READER.** Consider becoming a script reader where you'll actually GET PAID to read scripts and write notes, known as "coverage." Offer your reading services on <https://www.Fiverr.com/> or Craig's List LA or NY. Or you can even read new scripts from ME and the other professionals in my personal writers group. Just email me and say you're interested. I'll hook you up. The more scripts you read, the better you'll know what works and why. BUT be careful of getting jaded. After reading a skillion scripts that bore you to tears, it can make you bitter. Stop before that happens. Also, be sure to fully appreciate when you find those scripts that are a rare gem for you. Might be one in fifty. But when you find it, keep tabs on the writer and if it's appropriate, develop that relationship. It's kindred spirits that drive this business.
- **SCRIPTNOTES.** This podcast ROCKS. It's a weekly show by A-list writers John August and Craig Mazin. They talk shop from every angle you can imagine: career advice, page craft, biz news, WGA happenings and more. It's like having two super-cool cousins at the top of their screenwriting game that you can learn from every week. And although they won't return your phone calls (welcome to Hollywood!) they're awesome about responding on Twitter: @JohnAugust @CLMmazin <http://JohnAugust.com/Podcast>
- **SCRIPTSHADOW.** This is Carson Reeves' site. He's on the frontlines of the fairly secretive spec script market. He offers up news, reviews and community moderation -- from his site and from a nifty newsletter. He's fascinated with

what scripts sell and why and has strong craft ideas on how you can increase your chances of doing it too. He wrote a solid e-book about how he sees the craft - def worth checking out. Plus he's a good guy. <http://Scriptshadow.net/>

- **BLAKE.** Blake Snyder's "Save The Cat." This material changed my life as a screenwriter. I had already written a handful of feature length scripts and made two of them as indie films, but was mostly working by raw intuition. What I did not have, that I badly needed, was a conscious repeatable screenwriting process. And without that, I wasted a ton of time and effort in the way I wrote -- and one script / film even got scrapped all together, because I didn't have a durable approach to the nuances of designing structure. After reading his first book, I took his seminar, while Blake was still alive. And that's when Hollywood screenplay structure became "clear as day" for me. I totally fell in love with it. Now, based mostly on Blake's approach, I have a simple, clear, step-by-step writing process, that's crazy efficient, totally dependable and easily repeatable. I've finished two scripts per year (on average) since 2008. His system made me a well-oiled screenwriting machine. Furthermore, a few years ago I won a screenplay contest and was offered a free trip back to the STC seminar, which was taught by Blake's successor, Jose. And it was in THAT seminar that my co-writer and I broke the story for the script we later sold to Hollywood. So I'm a massive fan of all three of his books and I invite you to also check out their cool online forum of fellow "cats."  
[www.savethecat.com](http://www.savethecat.com)

So that's plenty to keep you going for a long, long time.

But remember, the **MOST IMPORTANT THING** is to discover YOUR favorite ways to learn. You're not feeling Blake right now? Then blow off that cat. Be open to trying new stuff to challenge yourself, but when you don't LOVE it, keep moving. You'll find something better. I promise. Even if other people RAVE about something. It's useless the genuine excitement comes from within you. Follow THAT.

And don't look back. (Unless it's 20 years later and people ask you to look back.)

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