



Guidelines for Best Practice in Working with Writers on BBC Continuing Drama Series (Casualty, EastEnders, Holby City, River City, Doctors)

1. **Commissioning of New Writers:** In the interests of giving new writers a reasonable opportunity to succeed on a series, Production will make allowances for the fact that a new writer may need more support than is usual during the writing process and, where the schedule allows, more time will be given to complete the episode. When commissioning a writer for their first episode, Production will ensure that they are not asked to write an episode that diverges considerably from the norms for the show and that thus makes it more difficult to write (for instance, an episode with several new characters who are yet to appear on screen; or with unusually tight scheduling issues; or an episode that has a shortened delivery schedule or is subject to a re-brief). In the event that this is unavoidable and the writer is unable to deliver their episode satisfactorily, then strong consideration will be given to commissioning a further episode from the writer.
2. **Contact:** Writers will be guaranteed a clear editorial contact throughout the script process that covers for any staff leave or absence. Generally the script editor will be the contact for each commission and, in addition, the series script editor or script producer will be available for any other issues.
3. Those working with writers in an editorial capacity should have an understanding, where relevant, of these guidelines when working with writers contracted to write for the show, including the payment stages for the writer's work.
4. Whenever possible, a new writer will be paired with an experienced script editor.
5. **Scheduling:** Adequate time must be allowed for the completion of each stage of work/draft and this time will not automatically be assumed to include weekends/public holidays.
6. Where practicable, Production will make allowance for writers' time constraints, such as holidays, and writers will be advised whom to contact to discuss and agree any such issues. Whenever a writer accepts a script commission there must be a commitment to be available to write, discuss script/story with the editorial team and/or accept and implement notes. Writers should declare all holidays when accepting a commission and should give prior notice of any extended periods of unavailability likely to interfere with the writing schedule; they also agree to take into consideration the availability of other writers. Writers may take creative breaks, providing sufficient notice is given to Production.
7. All writers in the same commissioning block will be given a minimum of two weeks to write their first draft (with the exception of 'Doctors', where all writers will be given a minimum of one week in line with current practice).
8. **Scheduling changes:** In the event of changes to commissioning meeting dates, script delivery dates, or to episode storylines (and so to the brief for the writer's work), writers will be consulted and a new schedule put in place as soon as practicably possible, with a reasonable extension to delivery dates to make allowance for the changes. It is acknowledged that in unavoidable situations (eg artists' illness) a rapid turnaround may be required.
9. **Acknowledgement:** All contracted work (outlines/scene-by-scenes/script drafts/revisions) will be acknowledged on receipt via email on the same working day.

10. Notes: Writers will be given a clear schedule for the delivery of notes from the script editor, via email, upon delivery of each draft of the script.

11. If there is a subsequent delay in the giving of notes, the writer will be informed as soon as is practicable, and the writer's future deadlines will be extended accordingly (as in point 8. above).

12. Ideally, script notes will be passed on in face-to-face meetings, however, where this is not practicable, or if it is mutually acceptable to both writer and script editor (where the script editor is presumed to be the main point of contact, although it may also be the producer), notes may also be passed on via phone and, on occasion, by email.

13. Best endeavours will be made to ensure that, unless unavoidable, each stage of work/draft shall merit a single, comprehensive set of editorial notes – incorporating, where possible and if applicable, research, advisers' notes and producers' notes – so as to avoid notes being drip-fed to the writer on separate occasions.

14. Writers will be given a reasonable time-frame to implement any notes, with reference to point 5 above. Script editors and producers will be mindful of the extent and nature of the notes, and the subsequent work required to turn the script around, when deciding these time-frames.

15. Script alterations: Unless previously agreed with the writer, script editors will not overwrite anything in the script, but will provide adequate notes allowing for the writer to make any changes. Writers and script editors should be aware of clause 17.4 of the BBC Script Agreement for Television and Online, which states: "In the case of a Script for a Long Running Series the BBC shall be entitled to make major and structural alterations as well as minor ones to the Script provided that the BBC shall subject to the availability of the Writer make every effort to inform and reach agreement with the Writer regarding such alterations and whenever practicable alterations other than minor alterations shall be made by the Writer."

16. Rebriefs: Production will be clear about what work constitutes a rebrief and, where a rebrief is required, the writer/writer's agent will be informed of the likely extent of the work involved (to be checked against the actual size of the rebrief as demonstrated in the final production script) and a fee negotiated in good faith. Rebrief fees will be paid at a minimum of 10% of script fee (for small rebriefs). Writers will be entitled to a rebrief fee if the rebrief occurs as a result of new editorial requirements. Rebriefs will generally be triggered by the script producer.

17. Additional work: As in point 8. above, reasonable time will be allowed for any work outside of the usual/agreed writing schedule (such as the writing of audition scenes or additional scenes for filming), and extra payment will be agreed with the writer/agent once the extent of the work is clear.

18. Problems During the Writing Process: In the event that Production has serious concerns as to the writer's ability to deliver an acceptable script and/or properly fulfil the requirements of a writer on a given show, then Production will clearly communicate the nature of its concerns, as early as possible during the note-giving process and before the writer commences the next draft. As much support and time as is practicable will then be given to the writer throughout the drafting process to address any concerns and aid them in delivering an acceptable script.

19. Non-acceptance: If, having followed the steps in point 18. above, Production decides that it is ultimately unable to accept the writer's script, an explanation will be given to the writer as to where their work fell short of what was required. Writers will be told as soon as practicable, and in as sympathetic a manner as possible, when scripts are to be taken away from them, and prior to any other writer being engaged to rewrite/ continue the script. The percentage rewrite involved will be indicated to them within a reasonable period of time.

20. Acceptance: Scripts are deemed to be accepted on publication of the rehearsal script (or production script in the case of 'River City') and the writer will at all times be given the opportunity to see the final shooting script.

21. Future commissions:

- 1) Once a writer has joined a writing team, and provided that they remain available, they will be informed about future commissions in as timely a manner as possible and/or as soon as episodes are allocated.
- 2) In the event of Production having previously raised serious concerns with the writer and/or having taken a script away from them, Production will still give due and proper consideration to commissioning a further episode from the writer, as the BBC is committed to retaining writers capable of succeeding on its shows. Due and proper consideration here shall include reference to the writer's work on past episodes (where relevant) and any specific circumstances, whether personal or production-related, that may have adversely affected the writer's performance on their latest commission.
- 3) In the event that a decision is taken not to recommission a writer, then the writer shall be informed no later than the date of transmission of the writer's latest episode, and clear and informed reasons for the decision will be given and communicated to the writer/agent by the person best able to represent those reasons.

22. New characters: When new characters are cast, the writer will be given every opportunity, at whatever stage of the writing process, to properly incorporate and develop the new character(s) in their episode. Whenever possible, the writer will be able to view early scenes/the screen test to help with this.

23. Writers' fees will be negotiated before the writer commences work on a series and once each episode has been commissioned the writer/agent will be sent the appropriate contractual paperwork promptly. Production will give timely instructions to the payments team upon completion of each stage that triggers a payment, and script editors will be instructed when they start their employment as to whether they are expected to inform Production when writers' scripts are delivered and accepted.

24. Contractual Dates/Payment Stages: At the point of commission, the writer's agent/writer will be given as full a list as possible of dates that are relevant to the contract and to all payment stages connected thereto (including dates for first draft delivery, script publication, first day of principal photography, transmission, and repeat if applicable). Dates not specified at the point of commission will be communicated as quickly as possible once known.

25. Extra-ordinary Meetings: In the event that the writer is asked to attend a meeting that is not part of the usual cycle of meetings for writers on the programme (commissioning, story meetings, notes sessions, conferences etc.), then reasonable notice will be given, and Production will endeavour to comply with point 6. above. A brief written agenda will also be provided to the writer, so that the writer can be suitably prepared.

26. Trial Scripts: In the event that a writer is invited to participate in a trial script/episode, the writer will be provided with a clear point of editorial contact throughout the trial. The writer will be provided with clear information relating to the episode (including storylines, characters, previous storylines), and then given adequate time to write a first draft script on a schedule to be mutually agreed. Upon delivery of first draft, the writer will then be provided with a set of notes and the writer will be given an opportunity to make revisions (with the exception of 'Doctors', where Production may decide, in exceptional circumstances, that no such opportunity will be given, in which case it will clearly communicate the reasons for its decision to the writer). A decision on whether to offer the writer a formal commission will be made within 4 weeks of completion of the trial script process, although no guarantees need be made as to the timing of any such commission.

27. General dealings and behaviour – The shows exist on the basis of a mutual respect between writers and the production team. All parties recognise that it is essential to preserve this respect and will be aware and take care to observe this respect in all communications.

28. One to One meetings – At the request of the writer, Production will offer the opportunity to have an annual face to face meeting to discuss any feedback, issues or concerns that the writer may have. This does not supersede the writer’s ability to request a meeting with the producer throughout the year.

This document is supported by The Personal Managers Association and The Writers Guild of Great Britain. It is to be supplied to all writers and production staff working with writers on the BBC’s Continuing Drama series. In the event that the BBC considers itself unable in exceptional circumstances to adhere to these best practice guidelines on any of the above named series, it shall promptly notify the PMA and WGGB of the reasons for its non-adherence and agree a timetable for their restoration.



Personal
Managers'
Association

