

drehbuch
VERBAND
austria

Screen Credits Manual

Manual on the Correct Crediting of the
Work Done by Screenwriters for Austria's
Film and Television Industry

In Collaboration with the



””

A director considers himself a co-writer. After all, he moved a whole storyline indoors instead of shooting exterior scenes, cut three minutes from the script, and changed the order of the scenes in two places.

The writer's eyes widen in shock when, at the press screening, she sees the director has added himself to the “Written by” card.

Does this sound familiar?

””

An actress struggles with the dialogue. She replaces some phrases with her own words, while a punchline she ad-libbed finds its way into the final draft of the script.

She feels this entitles her to a credit alongside the writer, who has been working on the screenplay for three years.

Does this sound familiar?

””

A producer tells several writers she is looking for “a light summer series—preferably set by a lake in the mountains.”

The writer—whose ideas define the entire series, from the theme to the setting to the characters—is astonished when he discovers that the producer has awarded herself a “Created by” in the opening credits.

Does this sound familiar?



**All of these are
credit theft.**

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Preface

The way in which the writer is credited in the opening and closing credits, in press releases, and on databases – the “credit” – is a frequent source of conflict, with writers turning to their respective guilds and associations for help. These conflicts often arise with the director or with other writers who come on board later to revise the script.

This is not a matter of the vanity of those who write the script, but rather a plea for understanding that the credit is **an integral part of the remuneration** for the screenwriting work. Just like the fee or the royalties.

Anyone who steals a credit is doing nothing else than stealing the writer's fee.

The cross-check confirms: No writer would ever think of claiming a right to “casting” just because they dropped a name into the casting discussion. They don't become a set designer just because they came up with a nice location. No one is made co-director as a reward for a brilliant staging suggestion. And suggesting to change the order of two scenes during the rough cut does not lead to a co-credit for editing.

Credit theft leads to disputes, demotivation, and casts a shadow over the marketing of a film. It obscures the truth that, for most films and TV scripts, there is friendly agreement about the correct credits. Of course, not all directors push to get credited as co-writers—at the same time, there are cases where the director did actually co-write the script.

About This Manual

The Drehbuchverband Austria/Austrian Screenwriters' Association¹ has launched the “Drehbuch 2021”² initiative to improve the working environment for writers economically, legally, and practically. It was born out of the question: How do we, as filmmakers from all disciplines, want to collaborate and work together on equal terms?

This manual is dedicated in its entirety to the issue of credits.

Special Thanks

This manual was written by the Austrian Screenwriters' Association and follows a structure that differs from regulations issued by other organizations. Nevertheless, we would like to **thank several guilds and associations** whose credit manuals served as inspiration for our paper: Dramatikerförbundet Sweden³, Danske Dramatikere⁴, Deutscher Drehbuchverband⁵, Federation of Screenwriters of Europe⁶. The English translation was cross-checked with the credit manuals issued by the WGA⁷.

Despite regional differences, this manual should ultimately result in the **same credits**. This is particularly important due to the multitude of co-productions in Europe – in the case of Austria, often with German partners.

1 <https://www.drehbuchverband.at/>

2 https://www.drehbuchverband.at/media/drehbuch_2021_massnahmenkatalog-2.pdf

3 https://www.dramatiker.se/uploads/2023/09/Manuskreditering_slutversion.pdf

4 <https://dramatiker.dk/2021/08/30/danske-dramatikeres-krediteringsregler/>

5 <https://drehbuchverband.de/articles/artikel-10-praxisleitfaden>

6 <https://federationscreenwriters.eu/credit-provisions-for-writing-audiovisual-series/>

7 <https://www.wga.org/contracts/credits>

The Importance of Writing Credits

Credits are not a matter of vanity. It's not about the writer watching the film with their grandparents and then proudly pointing to their name in the credits. Credits are to writers what flight hours are to a pilot: proof of **experience** and **competence**. They recognize that almost no other film profession demands such a personal financial risk, with writers often working for months or years in vain and for free, when a project ultimately falls apart.

For a long time, credits looked different in every country. But that is changing due to the **globalization of the industry**, which is seeing more and more multinational co-productions and large-scale international productions. While it used to be quite normal for directors, editors, and composers to work abroad, writers were mostly denied this opportunity. However, fueled by the TV series boom of the Noughties and 2010s, the **job market for writers has expanded**, too.

In practice, this poses a problem when credits are awarded in German-speaking countries that do not exist in other countries, and vice versa, or do not convey the same meaning.

A common standard is needed for evaluating the experience of writers; internationally comparable credits are precisely that: a standard. Free from individual sentiment and personal judgment, comprehensible and fair. This manual wants to provide such a standard.

Who Determines the Credits?

To be credited as an author of a film is not a courtesy on the part of the producer, but a **right** enshrined in copyright law.

The film and television industry in the USA has detailed **rules for screen credits** which are increasingly being used internationally.

However, **production conditions do not translate as easily**. For example, series in the USA are often developed according to the showrunner principle and in larger writing teams (also known as writers rooms); the copyright law is different, there is no strong public broadcaster nor the tradition of auteur cinema.

Since fewer people work on a script in **Europe** than in the US, you will find **some US credits** are **left out** in this manual.

Initiated by the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe, numerous screenwriters' guilds and associations in Europe have adopted rules for writing credits that are based on those in Hollywood, while taking European givens into consideration.

For the film and television industry in Austria, this is being done by us, the Drehbuchverband Austria/Austrian Screenwriters' Association.

Types of Credits

SCREENPLAY CREDITS

Writing credits include all credits that acknowledge a writer's contribution to a piece of work.

In **feature films**, these are:

- Written by
- Story by
- Screenplay by
- A Film by ...⁸

In **series/serials/limited series**, these are:

- Written by
- Created by
- Created for Television by
- (Teleplay by)
- (Telestory by)

OTHER WRITING CREDITS

Some television credits are awarded to writers who work on the project in a writing capacity, but without their work being directly attributable to the written word:

- Head Writer
- Writer in the Writers Room

These types of credits are typically awarded for work done in the → Writers Room.

⁸ This credit combines "Written and Directed by".

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

Some credits **aren't writing credits** because no copyright-relevant work was done on the film, but are credits that are still **only given to writers**:

- Idea by
The use of this credit is discouraged. If it occurs, it replaces → Created by and may only be assigned according to its rules.

This also includes credits for roles in production (these are **job titles** that do not usually appear in the opening and closing credits):

- Showrunner (often identical with Head Writer)

Often done by writers:

- Dramaturgy/script consultation
This credit is only awarded to people
 - who consult dramaturgically and have no other credit within the project, or
 - whose work as a script consultant is completely independent of their other activities in connection with the film and is carried out on the basis of an independent commission.

Job Title ≠ Credit ≠ Royalties ≠ Fee

Oftentimes, no distinction is made in the discussion between job titles and writing credits, which can lead to dispute. In order to understand the writing credit system, it's important to emphasize this distinction.

For example:

A Writer (=job title) writes a *screenplay* (=credit), is paid a *fee* (=contract), and receives *royalties* (=copyright license).

Job Title

A *showrunner* (=job title) does not automatically receive *Written by*-credits on all the episodes of their show. Why? Because the *Written by*-credit is reserved for **writers who write the scripts**. If the showrunner is involved in writing the scripts—as is often the case—they naturally receive a *Written by*-credit for their work. There are a couple of **jobs that only writers can do**, but these do not lead to *Written by*-credits if said writers do not also write (or co-write):

- Showrunner
- Head Writer

For this reason, the contract of a showrunner or head writer usually includes a producer credit.

Royalties

Royalties are paid by those who license the finished work—i.e., the film or TV series episode—for example, a broadcaster for broadcasting). So this concerns the **use of the work**. In Austria,

royalties are calculated by Literar Mechana according to their distribution key.⁹ – and are paid exclusively for the specific written text produced for the respective episode or film. The share of each writer does not have to be equal. However, the writers will always be treated equally in the credits.

Credits and royalties are often interdependent, but are **not the same thing**. For example, royalties can also be paid for contributions that are too small to warrant a credit. In the field of adaptations (remakes, etc.), there are also significant differences between royalties and credits.

Fees

The fee is based on the **contract** the writer has concluded with their commissioning party. In practice, payments are usually linked to the physical piece of writing and *not* to the writing work (hourly, weekly).

The terms of a fee contract have no effect on credits or royalties —these are calculated on the actual share of the work produced.

9 <https://literar.at/docs/default-source/downloads/verteilungsbestimmungen-g%C3%BCltig-ab-1-1-2022.pdf>

Definitions

The following pages summarize the definitions of the technical terms referred to in this manual.

Film In this manual, the term “film” or “movie” refers to fictional audiovisual works **regardless of their length**. If the film is part of a series, it is also referred to individually as an **episode**, while the individual parts in a serial are usually simply called **films/movies**. “Feature film” usually refers to movie with a runtime over 70/80 minutes.

Serial A serial is defined as a group of **at least four films** that are perceived as an entity due to certain characters appearing in all of these films—usually main characters—or due to a consistent location or thematic arc. The majority of the characters and the plot differ from film to film. A film in a serial has no connection to the other films in the series in terms of content; it can be consumed without having seen other films in the same serial. The order in which films in a serial are viewed has no effect on how well a viewer can follow the characters and plot. Films in a serial can be rebroadcast separately.

Series A series is defined as a group of at least four films in which a significant part of the plot transcends the boundaries of the individual film. The plot and characters undergo a development over the course of the series, which means that films in a series should **be watched in the planned order**. Films that are part of a series tend to **not be rebroadcast separately**. Episodes are usually less than sixty minutes long.

Limited Series A miniseries is defined as a limited, predetermined number of films of various lengths that have a strong focus on the horizontal arc. It’s also referred to as a **miniseries**.

Season A season refers to a **group of related films in a series/serial** that are produced more or less simultaneously in a single production process (“in a block”) and broadcast close together in time, usually at regular intervals (e.g., weekly). In the case of non-linear distribution, the films in a season are often released all at once.

- Screenplay** For the purposes of this manual, a screenplay is defined as a **collection of material, plot, dramatic structure, stage directions, and dialogue** divided into individual scenes, which is intended to serve as the basis for an audiovisual work. It describes the entire film and each of its scenes. This also applies to silent films.
- Screenwriter** A screenwriter is defined as the person who has **actively written** the screenplay, on commission. Anyone not actively writing the screenplay cannot be considered the writer of a film. Joint brainstorming, feedback, and other types of content input are not considered “active writing” and therefore cannot lead to a credit. The screenwriter’s most important points of contact are the producer (or the showrunner, if there is one), the director, and sometimes the commissioning editor of a broadcaster/streamer.
- Pitch** A pitch is a **short presentation** that introduces the **content** and “idea” of the film. It is usually shorter than a synopsis and is generally not protected by copyright.
- Synopsis** A synopsis provides a factual overview of the theme, plot, main characters, conflicts, and narrative arcs. Its purpose is to convey what the film is about and what genre it belongs to. The synopsis is about **one page** in length for a feature-length film; for films of other lengths, it is correspondingly longer or shorter. Writing a synopsis does not lead to a screenplay credit.
- Outline** A plot outline or storyline represents a document that sits
Plot, Storyline between the synopsis and the treatment. It provides an overview of all sequences without going into detail about each individual scene. The outline serves primarily to highlight the turning points in the plot. A plot outline can lead to a → Story by credit.

- Treatment** For the purposes of this manual, a treatment is a detailed description of the plot and dramatic structure of the film, its characters, and locations. It is often used to calculate production costs or to secure further funding. A treatment normally describes every scene in the film. For feature-length films, it is **usually around twenty pages long**, and fewer pages for shorter films. Treatments for entire series are normally much longer (see also series bible). A treatment warrants a credit even if the dialogue is written by someone else.
- Series Bible** A series bible is a **comprehensive and detailed** document that describes a series/serial/miniseries (or run). Its main purpose is to make the **“world” of the series** tangible. The bible primarily describes the genre of the series, its tone and style, the universe/storyworld, the conflicts of the main characters, and how they engineer long-term narrative arcs. A bible focuses more on the characters than a treatment would: complete backstories may be included. The plot usually takes the form of longer narrative arcs. A series bible, in addition to the Written by credit for the first episode, entitles the writer to a → Created by credit. Individual ideas and writing a directorial concept do not entitle a director to either Written by or Created by.
- Rewrite** The rewrite of a screenplay involves making **significant changes** to the dramatic arc, characters, and dialogue.
- Polish** The polish of a screenplay, unlike the rewrite, **essentially retains the dramatic structure and characters**. More often than not, polishing a screenplay comprises linguistic and dialogue changes.

- Underlying Rights** “Underlying rights” refer to the rights to existing (published) existing IP based on works, such as a novel, a play, a radio play, an existing screenplay, a podcast, or similar. The adaptation of a film from a screenplay that is based on underlying rights is also referred to as a “**film adaptation**” or, if the underlying rights relate to an earlier film or screenplay, as a “**remake**”.
- Writers Room** Both a writing team and a writers room is a **group of writers** who create, revise, and/or polish one or more screenplays, outlines, or treatments on a freelance basis or as employees. As opposed to a **Writing Team**, a writers room may be hierarchically structured and is normally led by a **head writer**.
- Approval** Approval refers to the **commissioner’s acceptance** of the writer’s work. It must not be arbitrarily refused.
- First Draft** The first draft is inaptly named: While it is called the first draft, the author has already written several drafts of the screenplay at this stage. However, it is the first draft that kicks off the **screenplay notes process**.
- Final Draft** The final version or draft of the screenplay marks the end of the development and notes process—usually after rewrite(s) and polish(es). The **submission of the final draft** usually concludes the **writer’s work** on the respective project.
- Shooting Draft** This is the draft of the screenplay that will be used during production. It is usually created by the director based on the **Director’s Draft** writer’s final draft and contains numerous staging instructions. There may be minor changes to locations, dialogue, and scene structure due to practical considerations in the production process. **The creation of the shooting draft does not entitle the director to Written by or other writing credits.**

Credit The mention/crediting of a person working on a film, stating their job or the scope of their contribution.

Showrunner A showrunner is a writer who also bears responsibility for production.

Bedrock Principle 1: Writers Are Only Those Who Write

Only those who have **actually contributed** to the screenplay in the form of writing can receive a screenplay credit.

This sounds straightforward, but unfortunately, it can create confusion. A writer constantly faces **the challenge of the blank page**.

Therefore, it's not enough to merely provide ideas, offer suggestions, comment on previous work, or chime in during feedback sessions.

Likewise, tweaking a screenplay to fit the needs of production ("director's draft/shooting draft") **does not yield** a writing credit.

Bedrock Principle 2: No Credit Without Commission

Only a commission activates a credit; a credit is determined by *what* has been commissioned.

A Written by credit can therefore only be obtained by someone who has been commissioned to write or rewrite the screenplay—not by someone who makes changes without further commission.

Writers often write a treatment or a screenplay speculatively – “on spec”. If a commissioner approves this work (for example, by placing an order for further development), this is considered a commission within the meaning of this principle and entitles the writer to the corresponding credits.

Bedrock Principle 3: Only a Significant Share Warrants a Credit

Only those who have contributed a **significant share of the screenplay** (or the work that is otherwise essential for the screenplay) are eligible for a writing credit.

Internationally, a **contribution** of around **one-third** counts as “significant”. This means that only a writer who has contributed at least one-third of the content of the screenplay is eligible for a writing credit; this is not a matter of counting words, but encompasses the **creative input** of the artist.

If a writer’s contribution is less than one-third, they may be entitled to a fee and/or royalties, but not a Written by credit. This principle also means that, under normal circumstances, **no more than three** people can share a Written by credit (exception: writers rooms, writing teams).

Feature Film Credits

These credits apply to stand-alone films that are not part of a series, a serial, or a miniseries. With the exception of the last two credits listed below, these are screenplay credits.

WRITTEN BY

EXAMPLE

WRITTEN BY
Ana Ždrević

This credit is given to individuals who (a) were **commissioned** to write the screenplay, (b) **have actively written it**, and (c) have made a significant contribution to the work (definition → Screenwriter).

A significant contribution is set at **at least one-third**.¹¹ It follows that **no more than three writers** can receive a Written by credit for the same screenplay.¹²

Multiple writers are listed in **descending order** according to their contribution to the script. If their contributions are approximately equal or cannot be determined, they are listed in the order in which they worked on the script.¹³

This credit usually appears immediately before that of the director. It is always shown in the **opening credits**. It may also be mentioned in the closing credits if the director is also listed there or if there are no opening credits. The writer's name has the same font size as the director and producer.

If the writers of the storyline and screenplay are not identical, there is no "Written by" credit, but rather a division in the credits into → Story by and → Screenplay by.

¹¹ See credit → Additional Literary Material.

¹² In the unlikely event that there is not a single writer who has contributed at least one-third, only the first writer who worked on the screenplay will be named.

¹³ If these two criteria do not result in a clear order, the writers are listed alphabetically.

SCREENPLAY BY

EXAMPLE

SCREENPLAY BY
Martha Mortimer

This credit goes to

- writers who have written the screenplay, but **haven't worked on the outline or the treatment**,
- writers who have written the screenplay based on underlying rights
- writers of the screenplay if they are not identical with the outline or treatment writers.

EXAMPLE

SCREENPLAY BY
İrem Yılmaz
BASED ON THE AUDIO BOOK
"MOMENTS" BY
Eşref Akdağ

This credit also requires that the work was commissioned and that the contributor was actively involved in writing and content creation (contributing at least one-third).

The order of crediting follows the → Written by credit.

If the book draws on → underlying rights, the source material and its creators shall be named right after the screenwriter and, if applicable, simultaneously.

STORY BY

STORYLINE, PLOT

EXAMPLE

STORY BY
Beto Martínez
Charlie Zimmer

This credit is given to writers who have written a **plot outline or treatment** but have not contributed to the screenplay in a way that would entitle them to a credit.

This credit also requires that the work was commissioned and that the contributor was actively involved in the writing and content creation (contributing at least one-third).

EXAMPLE

SCREENPLAY BY
İrem Yılmaz

STORY BY
Beto Martinéz
Charlie Zimmer
İrem Yılmaz

If there is a Story by credit and the writer who receives the Written by credit would also qualify for the Story by credit under these terms (which is often the case), they receive both credits.

The order of crediting follows the → Written by credit.

ADDITIONAL LITERARY MATERIAL

If, for legal reasons,¹⁴ individuals whose creative contribution to the screenplay (or story) reaches a relevant threshold of originality but is less than one-third must also receive credit, they may be given the credit “additional literary material – story” or “additional literary material – screenplay”, depending on the activity to which their creative contribution relates.

This credit will not be awarded if working on the screenplay/story is already part of the job description of a person who receives another credit for it (e.g., directing, dramaturgy, production, acting, commissioning, etc.).

¹⁴ Due to differences in copyright law, this credit is fairly new to the US credit system. Starting 2022, ALM writers will be listed alphabetically in the end credits and on databases.

A FILM BY

EXAMPLE

A FILM BY
Salome Narimanidse

This credit can only be given if the person directing the film also wrote the screenplay. This credit combines the credits for → **Written by and Directed by.**

This credit also requires that the work was commissioned and that the contributor was actively involved in the writing and content creation (contributing at least one-third).

EXAMPLE

WRITTEN BY
Fadime al Khaled
Emre Çelik

DIRECTED BY
Emre Çelik

If more than one person is involved, the people who wrote the book must be completely identical to those who directed it – in all other cases, the → **Written by and Directed by** should be separate credits.

The order of crediting follows the → **Written by** credit.

The Austrian Screenwriters' Association advises against using the credit "A film by." Film is a collaborative medium whose appeal lies in bundling the creative input of many people from different disciplines. All departments partake in the making of a film.

SCRIPT CONSULTANT

This credit is given to individuals—often writers—who are tasked with **reading, giving notes, and assisting the development** of the screenplay, but who do not contribute any copyrightable work and do not receive any other credit.

Anyone who already receives **another credit** (e.g., producer, commissioner, director) is **not awarded a “script consultant” credit**; reading and giving notes is part of their job description.

Television Credits

These credits apply to films that are part of a series, serial, or miniseries and whose scripts were not penned in a writers room. We distinguish between one writer for all episodes, and multiple writers who contribute to the episodes.

CREATED BY

SERIES CREATED BY, CREATOR

“Created by” is a credit for writers. As such, it is also mentioned in the IMDb.

EXAMPLE

CREATED BY
Zdeněk Horák

This credit is given to those who have written the series bible and at least the majority of the first draft for the pilot episode. It is awarded in addition to the Written by credit for each episode penned by these writers.

EXAMPLE

CREATOR
Zdeněk Horák

WRITTEN BY
Zdeněk Horák

If a series does not have a bible document, this credit goes to the writer of the pilot episode, in so creating the world in which all subsequent episodes will take place.

This credit applies to all episodes of all seasons of the series.

This credit usually appears ahead of the writing credit, in the opening credits. It may also be mentioned in the closing credits if the Written by or Directed by are also shown there and if there are no opening credits. The writer's name has the same font size as the director and producer. The credit always stands alone. In the case of several creatives entitled to this credit or in the case of underlying rights, the order of crediting follows the → Written by and → Writing Team credit.

CREATED FOR TELEVISION BY

EXAMPLE

CREATED FOR TELEVISION BY
Micke Killing

BASED ON THE STAGE PLAY
"UNCLE MOHOO" BY
Tatjana Mogunova

This credit replaces → Created by when the series is based on → underlying rights.

Other rules follow the → Created by credit.

WRITTEN BY

EXAMPLE

WRITTEN BY
Zdeněk Horák

This credit is given to individuals who (a) were **commissioned** to write the screenplay, (b) **have actively written it**, and (c) have made a significant contribution to the work (definition → Screenwriter).

A significant contribution is set at **at least one-third**. It follows that no more than three writers can receive a Written by credit for the same screenplay.¹⁵

Multiple writers are listed in **descending order** according to their contribution to the script. If their contributions are approximately equal or cannot be determined, they are listed in the order in which they worked on the script.¹⁶

This credit usually appears immediately before that of the director, in the opening credits. It may also be mentioned in the closing credits if the director is also listed there and if there are no opening credits. The writer's name has the same font size as the director and producer.

¹⁵ In the unlikely event that there is not a single writer who has contributed at least one-third, only the first writer who worked on the screenplay will be named.

¹⁶ If these two criteria do not result in a clear order, the writers are listed alphabetically.

If the **writers of the storyline and screenplay are not identical**, there is no “Written by” credit, but rather a separation in the credits. → Story by and → Screenplay by.

EXAMPLE

SCREENPLAY BY
Søren Sommerfeldt

BASED ON THE PODCAST „THE SIXTH FLOOR IS DESERTED“ BY
Matti Korhonen

If the script draws on → underlying rights, the source material and its creators shall be named right after the → screenwriter and, if applicable, simultaneously. In this case, a distinction is made between storyline and screenplay, in line with the rules for Written by credits for feature films.

(TELE)STORY BY

EXAMPLE

TELESTORY BY
Ese Asumnu

TELEPLAY BY
Ndifreke Okagbare

This credit is given to writers who wrote the plot outline or treatment for an episode, but neither the bible nor the screenplay for that episode.

Other rules follow the → Written by credit.

This credit usually appears in connection with the → Teleplay by credit.

TELEPLAY BY

This credit is for writers of a TV screenplay/teleplay who have not written either the plot outline or the treatment for the respective episode.

Other rules follow the → Screenplay by credit.

This credit usually appears in connection with the → Telestory by credit.

ADDITIONAL LITERARY MATERIAL

ALM - SCREENPLAY, ALM - TELEPLAY, ALM – (TELE)STORY

If, for legal reasons,¹⁷ individuals whose creative contribution to the screenplay (or story, creation, teleplay, developed for TV) reaches a relevant threshold of originality but is less than one-third must also receive credit, they may be given the credit “additional literary material – screenplay”, “additional literary material – teleplay”, “additional literary material – (tele)story” depending on the activity to which their creative contribution relates.

This credit will not be awarded if working on the screenplay/story is already part of the job description of a person who receives another credit for it (e.g., directing, dramaturgy, production, showrunning, head writing etc.).

¹⁷ Due to differences in copyright law, this credit is fairly new to the US credit system. Starting 2022, ALM writers will be listed alphabetically in the end credits and on databases.

Writers Room Credits

WRITERS ROOMS

The writing process in a writers room is fundamentally different from the process of an individual writer.

A writers room is a **grouping of writers** (including the head writer) led by said head writer. The writers in a writers room are either **employed** or work as **freelancers**. They do not owe their commissioner/employer any written work, but rather their time, effort, and creativity.

Their fee is not calculated from whether they have created producible material—nor how much. Their fee is also not linked to whether their screenplays are ultimately approved or produced.

There are also hybrid forms of writers rooms—for example, projects in which the storylines for the season and/or individual episodes are broken by a team, but the scripts for the episodes are then written by individual writers on a separate commission.

In practice, writers rooms only exist for **series and serials**—i.e., films that consist of several parts. The work is often divided into three main **sections**:

- Development of the storyline for the entire series/season
- Development of the storyline for an episode
- Screenplay for an episode

The work in the writers room is always led by a writer. They are referred to as the **head writer/lead writer**.

Due to the organizational structure of the writers room and the fact that the work cannot always be clearly attributed to individual writers, series with writers rooms have overall **writing credits** in **addition** to individual **screenplay credits**.

CREATED BY

EXAMPLE

CREATED BY
Zdeněk Horák

This credit is a writing credit and is awarded according to the same rules as the Created by credit described under → Television Credits.

The writer who receives this credit is often also the head writer.

HEAD WRITER

LEAD WRITER

“Head Writer” is a job description as well as an overall writing credit—but not an individual screenplay credit. The “Head Writer” credit is reserved for → screenwriters.

The **head writer oversees** the work in the **writers room** and acts as the content supervisor. The head writer—usually the same person as the series creator (→ Created by)—**leads, supervises, and is responsible** for the plotting, story breaking, and writing done for a series or franchise. Even if they do not write every script, they supervise the writing of each one – and are usually the sole point of contact for production, broadcasters, and commissioners. The head writer provides the other writers with the framework for their scripts and **usually creates the final drafts** of these scripts.

If the head writer does not write any episode themselves, they will not receive any screenplay credits.

The extent to which the head writer is entitled to a screenplay credit is determined by the other rules in this manual.

WRITERS ROOM

EXAMPLE

Helen McHale has created the series. In the second season, Chloé Durand is the head writer. Under her guidance, one episode of this season is penned by Emilio Dacosta.

CREATED BY
Helen McHale

HEAD WRITER
Chloé Durand

WRITERS ROOM
Ian Tabuena
Emilio Dacosta
Sandra Ho
Dangny Falck &
Anton Falck
Fiadh McArton
Lærke Tønnesen

TELEPLAY BY
Emilio Dacosta

Writers Room credits are overall writing credits, but not individual screenplay credits.

With the exception of the head writer, this credit is given to **all writers who are members of the writers room** and who are also contractually employed in this role.

This credit recognizes the collaborative work of writers on the **storylines of the series or season**, or a specific **episode**. If you want to emphasize the nature of this function, you can add the term “telestory” to the title, for example, “Writers Room Telestory”.

Since writers rooms in Austria are usually small, the Screenwriters’ Association recommends **refraining from further differentiation** in the hierarchy, apart from giving recognition to the leadership provided by the head writer.

Newcomers or “baby writers” in their first writers room also receive this credit, unless their creative contribution was insignificant.

Some terms are used differently in different markets—for example, the US and Germany—which can lead to confusion. These include *staff writers*, *story editors*, etc. **These terms are not used in this manual.**

Those who do not receive a screenplay credit will only receive a **writers room credit** if they have been employed as a writer and **would otherwise receive no credit** at all in the respective series.

The order of credits is determined by the head writer in accordance with the rules described under → Written by credit.

Incidentally, **screenplay credits** are also awarded in writers rooms in the same way as those described under “Television Credits”, whereby the credit → Telestory by is only awarded if the episode storylines were not developed jointly by all writers in the writers' room—in this case, the plot/storylines would be covered by the credit → Writers Room.

AND THE SHOWRUNNER?

The job description of the showrunner combines creative writing activities with production tasks. **Separate credits** are awarded for this, as “showrunner” is not a credit in itself. The showrunner receives all **screenplay and writing credits** to which they are entitled based on **their actual work** or creative output.

In most cases, the showrunner is also the “**head writer**”.

For tasks within the production, the showrunner receives a credit in accordance with the contract, usually “**executive producer**”.

A credit as “showrunner” is highly unusual and is discouraged.

Writing Teams

Sometimes several writers—often two—form a **writing team**: a more or less **permanent collaboration** that is not limited to a single project. These writers tend to only available as a package and often have only **one joint contract** with the commissioners.

For the purposes of this manual, these writing teams are considered to be **one writer**.

If the writing team has a name (e.g., a company name) that differs from the names of the writers involved, the name of the writing team will be mentioned in the credits instead of the writers, at the writers' request.

Otherwise, the writers are listed with their first and last names, with their names connected by the symbol "&" and appearing together on one line.

Credits: House Rules

These rules apply to all writing credits in feature films as well as in series, serials, and miniseries—with or without a writers room.

Credits determine what someone *has* written, not what someone *should have* written.

Only a human being can produce copyrightable work: neither a company, nor an AI can do this.

The **producer** must a) inform the writer **in advance** about the **planned credit** and b) make room for the writer to view the rough cut or final cut of the film; this must be done in good time so that the writer is able to take appropriate measures to resolve any disputes before the final decision is made.

After the producer has informed the writer about the planned credit, the writer **may take their name off or choose to be credited under a different name**, in which case they are liable for ensuring that their chosen pseudonym does not infringe on any third-party rights.

If a writer has performed several tasks within a project, they are entitled to all relevant credits.

If there are → underlying rights to the material, the creator of the original and their work are to be named directly after the screenplay credit(s).

Credits: Artificial Intelligence

USE OF AI BY COMMISSIONING PARTIES

Material created by artificial intelligence does **not constitute copyright**. If such material is made available to the writer by the commissioners—for example, to write or rewrite books or develop stories based on AI material—it is considered **null and void**. This means that, in terms of credits, it would be treated as if it had not been made available to the writer.

In such cases, it is recommended that the writer's liability for any copyright infringements arising from the AI-generated material be contractually waived.

USE OF AI BY WRITERS

AI can be used in **many ways**: for inspiration or to assist with translation and research.

The use of AI must be **disclosed** to the commissioners and requires their **approval**. A commissioning party cannot press a writer to use AI.

If AI is used by the writer to such an extent that the material generated by the AI would be copyrightable if it had been created by a human being, it may change the writer's credit—to the point that the AI-generated material was actually created by another (fictional) writer without said fictional writer (the AI) receiving credit. This can even result in **the writer losing all credit**—in accordance with → Bedrock Principle 1: "Writers are only those who write."

It should also be noted that it is **virtually impossible** to **guarantee** that the generated material is **free of third-party rights** and that writers therefore expose themselves to considerable legal risk—which is recommended to be contractually released.

Hot Tips for Writers

The **crediting of your name** is neither a request nor a debt to be collected: it's a **right** that arises from §20 and §39 of Austrian Copyright law.

Nevertheless, one should not rely on the legal provisions, but rather address the issue of credits ahead of time during **contract negotiations**. It is advisable to include a **reference** to this **Screen Credits Manual** in the contract.

The contract should also contain clauses regarding credits that arise if the book is used further, for example in additional **seasons** or **remakes**.

Copyright law also stipulates that writers' names must be included in announcements of screenings and broadcasts: the contract should specify the manner in which the writers are to be included and named in **PR materials, at press conferences, and in other marketing activities**.

However, agreements on **royalties** have no place in a screenplay contract: neither producers nor commissioners (broadcasters, streamers) have any influence over it.

If **other writers** are working on the same script (or project) before or after you, **talk to them** and discuss what you consider to be an appropriate distribution of credits and royalties. If the writers cannot reach a solution, you may contact the Screenwriters' Association.

Consider the **option** of **withdrawing** your name or using a **pseudonym**.

Hot Tips for Producers

Film is a collaborative medium. That's what makes it so appealing—and at the same time, is its greatest challenge.

Congratulations, you've already done the most important thing: you have read this manual and therefore understand the importance of credits for writers. If you deal with several writers, always strive for **fairness** and ensure that the credits reflect **reality**.

Communicate clearly from the outset—preferably during contract negotiations—that you will credit writers according to the **rules in this “Screen Credits Manual”**. You may include a reference to this in your own contract with the commissioning or funding agency.

If there are **discrepancies** between this manual and the (internal) rules of funding bodies, broadcasters, streamers, or owners of → underlying rights, point this out to the writer during the contract negotiations and try to find a solution.

Be aware that a **writer expects a certain credit** at the start of their work. And since all credits mentioned in this manual require your approval, it's all up to you and your good faith to take these expectations into consideration.

If you bring **other writers** on board to continue or rewrite the script, **discuss** this with the first writer beforehand—and clarify that this may have **an impact on the credits**.

It is also recommended to state in your contract with the director that a **director's/shooting draft does not entitle them to a writing credit**. A director also works with the cinematographer, the set designer, the editor, and the casting director—without thinking of claiming a share of their credits.

Lastly, **be honest with yourself**: your idea is not protected by copyright, and to invite a writer to pitch is not a service that yields a credit. You don't need these credits; your writers do.

Arbitration

In case of a credit dispute do not hesitate to contact the **Austrian Screenwriters' Association/Drehbuchverband Austria**. We have often been able to initiate discourse to resolve conflicts. This approach is particularly important when the dispute is between the writer and a commissioning party.

Arbitration Board

If parties to a conflict—for example, several writers—want to **reach a solution together**, they can also contact the arbitration board of the Austrian Screenwriters' Association.

It was established as part of the “Drehbuch 2021” initiative and attempts to determine as **objectively and transparently** as possible how much each writer has **contributed** to the final product. The result of this process is therefore an **assessment** that contains percentages – and clarifying how the credits should be listed, in accordance with this manual.

The arbitration board deals exclusively with the **content contribution** that writers have made to a specific project. It does not deal with the contracts underlying the writer's work.

Editorial Team & Contact

✉ Drehbuchverband Austria
Stiftgasse 6
1070 Vienna

🔗 www.drehbuchverband.at

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