

# Screenplay Competitions

Tools and Insights to Help You Choose the Best  
Screenwriting Contests for You and Your Script

by Ann Marie Williams

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To my parents.  
I love you both.

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## Why I Wrote This Book

In 2013, when I first began entering screenwriting competitions, I knew very little about the competition process. I knew that I wanted to find out how my script stacked up against the competition, and I knew that I wanted to retain all rights to my work.

But that was about all I knew.

I didn't understand the judging process or that it varied from competition to competition. I wasn't aware of the different eligibility requirements pertaining to myself as a writer and the script I wanted to enter. I had no idea that so many varying types of written critiques were available. And I certainly didn't know that being a quarterfinalist in one competition meant something entirely different from being a quarterfinalist in another.

However, over the course of a few years (and dollars spent) I learned.

And the more I came to understand how screenwriting competitions worked, the more I realized that I didn't have to win competitions to benefit from them.

That realization drastically changed how I approached the entire screenwriting competition process because I learned that I could turn that process into an educational one that would help improve not only my script and my writing, but also *myself as a writer*.

Screenwriting competitions offer experiences and situations that writers aren't exposed to by the actual act of writing. Going through the screenwriting competition process helped me learn how to deal with disappointment, success, and deadlines. It helped me learn how to be patient and how to set one project aside and move on to another. I've become comfortable reading legalize because every competition I enter requires me to do so. And the competition process helped me learn to analyze and deal with critiques.

And the best part: All those benefits are within my control. Don't get me wrong, winning is great! And it can happen. But I know the odds of winning—or even placing highly—are incredibly small. Moreover, I've learned that different competitions reward script qualities differently.

Of the competitions listed in *Screenplay Competitions*, I've been a quarterfinalist in Scriptapalooza's International Screenplay Competition in the sci-fi genre. I've also been a quarterfinalist in the ScreenCraft Family-Friendly Screenplay Contest (top 25%) and a semifinalist (top 8%) in their inaugural Sci-Fi Screenplay Contest. I've been a semifinalist (top 2%) in the Austin Film Festival Screenplay Competition in the sci-fi genre, and a sci-fi finalist in the 2017 Nashville Film Festival Screenwriting Competition (top 4%). (If you're confused by the differing percentages, don't worry. So was I. I'll explain the terminology and percentages in greater detail in the "Advancement" portion of Section I.)

However, those same scripts failed to make it past the second round at PAGE and never got anywhere at Nicholl, Big Break®, BlueCat, or Script Pipeline.

So, unfortunately, I can't tell you which competitions you should enter, or even that you *should* enter competitions. Each competition is different—and so is each writer and each script.

But, I can explain the competition process (and how it varies among competitions) so that you can be better equipped to make those selections yourself, hopefully saving you time, money and a lot of confusion.

To help do this, I've selected a handful of competitions to include in *Screenplay Competitions* as way of reference and example. However, if I reference a competition in this book, it does not mean I think you should (or should not) enter that competition. Nor does it mean that these are the only competitions worth entering. Instead, the reasons I selected these competitions are three-fold:

1. They provide an overview of the similarities and differences among competitions.
2. Most of the competitions selected appear on several “top screenwriting competition” lists and are often perceived as some of the most reputable in the industry.
3. I have entered my own scripts into at least one of the competitions offered by each of the referenced competition organizations.

I should also mention that I’ve been fortunate enough to experience the screenwriting competition process from the judge’s perspective. As a result of being a semifinalist in the Austin Film Festival Screenplay & Teleplay Competition (AFF), I was asked to be one of their Readers (someone who judges for initial rounds of their competition). Not only did this allow me to experience competitions from the perspective of a judge, it gave me new insights into how to evaluate my own writing.

So, through all this firsthand experience, I’ve learned that it’s important to select competitions that are reputable and have earned the respect of the film industry. But, in addition to this, it’s important to identify which of those competitions are most likely to reward the type of script I’ve written, as well as those competitions from which I can learn the most.

I still enter screenwriting competitions with the *hope* of winning, but my *goal* is to use the competition process to better my script, my writing, and myself as a writer. If I can do that, then the time and money I spend entering competitions becomes more than a chance at winning—it becomes an investment in myself. And that moves me closer to a screenwriting career—whether I win the competition or not.

It is my sincere hope that *Screenplay Competitions* will help you do the same.



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## Terminology

One of the reasons the screenwriting competition process can be so confusing is due to terminology. Even though most competitions use the same terminology, their *definitions* of the terms aren't consistent. What one competition calls a "judge" another competition calls a "reader." Where one competition's quarterfinalists represent the top 25% of entries, another competition's quarterfinalists represent the top 15%.

So, in an attempt to avoid confusion, I've included a glossary in *Screenplay Competitions* to clarify how terms are defined *for purposes of this book*. Throughout these pages, when a term that appears in the glossary is first introduced or defined in the text, the term is displayed in bold typeface.

## Competitions Referenced

Below is a list of the competitions referenced in *Screenplay Competitions*. The official title of the competition appears first, followed by its acronym or abbreviated title, any of which may be used throughout the text of this book.

1. Academy Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting (Nicholl)
2. Austin Film Festival Screenplay & Teleplay Competition (AFF)
3. BlueCat Screenplay Competition (BlueCat)
4. Final Draft®'s Big Break® Screenwriting Contest (Big Break®)
5. Nashville Film Festival Screenwriting Competition
6. The Page International Screenwriting Awards (PAGE)
7. ScreenCraft *runs multiple format and genre-specific competitions per year.*
8. Scriptapalooza International Television Writing Competition & Scriptapalooza International Screenplay Competition
9. Script Pipeline Screenwriting Competition (Script Pipeline)
10. Sun Valley Film Festival High Scribe Screenplay Competition