

11/04/2023

SELLING WORKSHOP

NOTES Taken by Quincy Cho

Lecture By Jeane Phan Wong

A webinar focused on selling TV and film and breaking in outside of staffing

Everything here is Best Practices, not hard and fast rules.

This seminar is geared towards writers breaking in (few to zero credits) and not for writers with established credits

This seminar is led by a former long-time assistant, Jeane Phan Wong, who had done studio programs but did not get staffed right away and broke in as a writer via selling first. Jeane has since staffed and is a working TV & film writer who has sold both TV & film.

This doesn't cover everything in the seminar, these notes are cliffnotes.

OVERALL

There are six doors or access points to selling TV & film. They are:

- 1) Take vs. Pitch
- 2) Spec Script
- 3) Open Writing Assignment i.e. typically IP or idea buyer has & they look for writer
- 4) Production Overall Deal i.e. production company (e.x. Margot Robbie's Lucky Chap)
- 5) Studio (e.x. ABC Studios)
- 6) Network (e.x. ABC Network)
 - A sale can happen at any of these access points and your project can bounce around any of these access points, depending on where the money is
 - Always ask if there is money or slush funds at any of these access points
 - If they can't pay you until you get to another access point (e.x. set up at a network), evaluate IF THE FREE WORK IS WORTH YOUR TIME, (e.x. Is developing the relationship fruitful for a future opportunity? Or will they introduce you to a star? Etc.)
 - To an extent, some level of work, even "free work" begets work (e.x. 7-10 projects and 2 "sell") You have the power to say NO and turn down free work.
 - At any point during this process, you may get attachments. A big star or showrunner can be a door in itself to make a sale, i.e. a 7th access point

TV TAKE CHECKLIST

- 1000-2000 words, 5-10 min
- Personal connections (POV), themes (what you want to say), pilot storyline, comps (x meets Y), MAYBE characters but some people introduce characters as they go through the storyline, usu. opening, midpoint, & ending

TV PITCH CHECKLIST

- ~4000 words, 20-25 minutes
- All the same things in a take but fleshed out more in the pilot storyline (sometimes give act outs) + S1 arc, sample episodes, story engine (ex: monster/crime of the week), and perhaps where the series may end
- Maybe social relevance of why series is important (ex: racism à la Get Out), or data (ex 90% of Americans love thrillers and you're pitching a thriller)
- Usually need a visual pitch deck (~20 slides), can be made with canva, powerpoint, etc., usually producer can do this
- Note: for a limited series, it can be half an hour and like ~5000 words

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Feature Take is more rare, usually people just hear a feature pitch. Everything in a feature take or pitch is like a TV take or pitch respectively but providing three act structure and no series set up.

TIPS ON PITCHING

- Record yourself, hear your cadence, or practice with a writers' group
- You don't have to tell a traumatic story in personal connection, can be a funny POV
- Selling is about the WRITER + CONTENT i.e. take or pitch combined, if your level isn't high, then it's important to hone in on your personal story and/or POV
 - We gave a worksheet during the seminar to hone in on your personal story if you're not sure where to start but one easy strategy we can offer here is – ask close writer friends to describe you as a writer and ask separately so you don't an echo chamber.
- Think of a good pitch or take as an amazing pop song the exec can't get out of their head
 - Good rhythm
 - Tells a great story
 - Lyrically poetic
 - Catchy, can't get out of their head
- The take or pitch must have a photographable goal: something that can be dramatized and seen and doesn't have to include everything in pilot or feature story, it's about selling promise of the story
- Usually before pitch meeting is set, you send a sample that's similar in vein
- If it's a pilot or feature already written, then you might send something else

HOW TO SELL

- Use generals to your advantage, read the room, see if the exec or producer is willing to hear loglines or bring IP in future, then FOLLOW UP, I have sold things this way by building the relationship
 - One small thing about following up, don't make it that every time you talk to someone, you need something, genuine connections are what's going to get you work v transactional relationships
- Of course, reps set up generals and pitches, but you can steer on your own
- If you don't have reps, check networking events at alumni groups, different organizations have exec mixers or zooms (won't name them here since many of these affiliate groups are run by volunteers)
- Sometimes studios will have open calls to hear pitches but this is rare
- Lateral networking, become friends with assistants as they become execs who can buy, one of pilots sold this way
 - It bears saying, assistants are the most important fucking people in this town, be nice and don't be nice because they are gatekeepers, please just be nice

Good luck!