



New Zealand Writers Guild Puni Taatuhi o Aotearoa

NEW ZEALAND WRITERS GUILD

GUIDE TO RECOMMENDED MINIMUM WRITING RATES

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INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand Writers Guild has always advocated minimum rates and conditions for the writing of film, television, theatre, radio and other forms of script based writing. The Guild was the first organisation to negotiate a minimum agreement with theatres and in the 1980s negotiated minimum rates for the writing of television (though this agreement was swept away with the changes wrought by the Employment Contracts Act 1991).

In 1999 the Guild undertook a comprehensive review of writing rates and established the first Minimum Recommended Rates sheet. In late 2004 the Guild completed another review of rates. This Guide is a result of the information obtained from that most recent review.

This Guide contains rates for all the major types of script based writing completed for the screen and for radio. Anyone seeking rates for theatre should contact Playmarket.

INFORMATION ON USING THIS GUIDE

This Guide is to be used when contracting on domestic (ie. New Zealand funded) production. For rates on foreign productions writers should contact the Guild.

The amounts in this Guide are minimums. Experienced writers are encouraged to use these rates as a negotiating tool upon which to negotiate higher fees.

Although the rates in this Guide are not enforceable, they are the Guild's recommended minimum rates and should, wherever possible, be adhered to.

The Guild has attempted to collect information on all forms of script writing rates, however some information has not been available. If you cannot find a minimum rate for the work you are undertaking then please contact the Guild for further assistance.

ABOUT VOLUNTARY/UNPAID WORK

It is one of the principles of the Guild that no writer should work for nothing.

However sometimes there are opportunities for non-writing work or participation in projects that could be rewarding and could open doors. If you are already established as a professional writer, these are not for you. But if you are still trying to get on the ladder, these may give you useful experience and contacts.

The Guild can't check every project in detail, so if you are interested please take care and make sure you know exactly how much work, and what type of work, you may be letting yourself in for. If you find yourself contributing significant ideas or material, at that point you must ask to be paid on the same basis as other contributors. If you are in doubt contact the Guild.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The New Zealand Writers Guild would like to sincerely thank all those writers who provided information that has made this Guide possible. It would also like to acknowledge the work which has gone into this Guide and previous editions including Kathryn Burnett, Gravitas Research and Thompson Powell Consulting.

DEFINITIONS

In this Guide these words and phrases have the following meaning:

Adapted Screenplay means script which is based on an underlying work (eg. novel, short story, magazine article or play).

Deferral - means any postponement or delaying of a fee. Due to the availability of development funding the writer may on occasion agree to defer a percentage of their fee to no later than the first day of principal photography.

Feature Film means a film of sixty minutes or more in length and intended initially for theatrical distribution.

First Day of Principal Photography means the first day filming begins on a screen project.

Gross Profits means the total profit from the exploitation of a work. Sometimes referred to as Gross Points or Gross Receipts.

Net Profits means the Gross Profits from a project after certain deductions (such as distribution fees and expenses, production costs, deferments and cost of finance) are made. Sometimes referred to as Net Points or Net Receipts.

Option means the sole right to acquire the rights in a work - this right is established by an option agreement.

Original Screenplay means a script from an original idea (as opposed to an adapted script which is written from an underlying work).

Purchase means the buying of the rights to a work - this buying is established by a purchase agreement. A purchase will typically buy rights such as the right to produce, distribute, exhibit and broadcast the work.

Scene Breakdown means a detailed breakdown of the script in prose form, indicating the structure, characterisation and plot, describing the time, location and cast of each scene. It will likely also contain some representative dialogue.

Short Film means a film of between six and sixty minutes in length intended initially for theatrical distribution.

Storyline means a short outline of the story in prose form ('storyline' and 'treatment' are often used interchangeably - but it is generally understood that a storyline is a shorter document and a treatment will go into more detail and include a more intensive look at characters and action).

Television Mini-Series means a single dramatic television production intended for broadcast in two or three segments of around 90 minutes each with a storyline beginning in the first segment and concluding in the last segment.

Television Movie means a dramatic television production of ninety minutes or more in broadcast length.

Treatment means a detailed outline of the story in prose form ('storyline' and 'treatment' are often used interchangeably - but it is generally understood that a storyline is a shorter document and a treatment will go into more detail and include a more intensive look at characters and action).

Underlying Work means the already existing material which is the basis for a further work (ie. treatment, script). Examples of underlying work include a novel, short story, magazine article or play.

Writing Budget means money that encompasses entire development of script. As well as the script fees it may include an option payment, payment to consultants, editors, supervisors and additional writers.

FEATURE FILM

Introduction

Typically any engagement to write a feature film screenplay may involve the following fees:

- For an underlying work - an option payment (paid when the work is optioned) and purchase payment (paid on the first day of principal photography).
- For an original screenplay - an option payment (paid when the work is optioned) and rights payment (paid on the first day of principal photography). Any writing done while commissioned (ie. while the work is optioned) should be paid as a screenwriter's fee.
- For an adapted screenplay - a screenwriter's fee.

Option

Underlying Work

Options of the underlying work will vary in amount and duration depending on various factors and it is therefore difficult to give definitive rates. Material that is well known or by a well known author will obviously be able to command higher rates.

Recommended minimum: \$500
Recommended duration: 1-5 years

Original Screenplay

Recommended minimum: \$500 - \$1,500 per year
Recommended duration: 1-5 years



BUSINESS SENSE

The option fee should not be offset against (ie. deducted from) the purchase or script fee as then the producer is effectively asking author to pay their own option fee.

Original Feature Film Screenplay

Purchase

The purchase price will vary depending on the budget of the film and is only paid on the first day of principal photography. A purchase price is sometimes paid as a percentage of the production budget (1-3%) and if so is typically capped at a certain amount.

Recommended Minimum: \$10,000 - \$45,000
(dependent on film budget)



BUSINESS SENSE

The purchase fee (which buys the rights to a work) is separate from the script fee (which pays for the writing/rewriting of a script).

Script Fee - Original Writer

The writing budget for an Original Feature Film should be a minimum of 3.5% of the total production budget.

Recommended Minimum: \$60,000
(dependent on film budget)

25-30 page Treatment	Recommended Minimum: \$15,000
First Draft	Recommended Minimum: \$17,000
Second Draft	Recommended Minimum: \$15,000
Third Draft	Recommended Minimum: \$13,000

Script Fee - Subsequent Writers (Credited)

In the case of a second writer being brought in to complete or rewrite the original script the minimum rate per draft should be no less than the equivalent of 25% of total script fee.

Recommended minimum: \$15,000 per draft
(dependent on film's budget and original script fee)

Adapted Screenplay

Purchase of Underlying Work

The cost of the purchase of the underlying work is distinct from the cost of the writing of the adapted screenplay, even in cases where the author is the same.

The purchase price for an underlying work should be approximately 1.5% - 2.5% of the total production budget. The purchase price is typically paid on the first day of principal photography.

BUSINESS SENSE

The Guild recommends no less than 75% of script development funding from the New Zealand Film Commission should go to the writer, especially at the treatment and first draft stages.

Script Fee

The fee for an adapted screenplay should be a minimum of 2.5% of total production budget.

Recommended Minimum: \$40,000
(dependent on film budget)

25-30 page Treatment	Recommended Minimum: \$8,000
First Draft	Recommended Minimum: \$12,000
Second Draft	Recommended Minimum: \$10,000
Third Draft	Recommended Minimum: \$10,000

GENERAL NOTES ON FILM

The Guild recommends that any deferral be no larger than 30% per draft fee.

50% of each draft fee should be paid to the writer on **commencement** of each draft, the final 50% being payable on **delivery**, not on acceptance, of the work.

All feature film contracts should contain an escalation clause. This clause stipulates that if the overall production budget increases the writer's fee increases accordingly.

Payment for additional script editing and /or script consulting should not be included in the writer's agreed fee. This cost should be allowed for by the producer within the larger, overall writing budget.

Writers should be encouraged to negotiate for net profits. Experienced writers should be encouraged to negotiate for gross profits.

SPECIAL NOTES ABOUT LOW BUDGET FILM

The Guild understands that in New Zealand we make many lower budgeted films and that the writer is very often the one asked to provide services well below market rates. In recognition of the writer taking a lower fee (and thereby making an investment in the project) we recommend that the writer:

- Doesn't defer any part of the writing fee
- Is able to share in 10% (to be negotiated) of net profits or:
- Is able to share in 3-5% of Producer's gross profit.

SHORT FILM

Option

Underlying Work/Original Screenplay

Given the small budgets involved it is unusual for significant option payments to be paid on short films. However, if an option is requested there must be some payment to the author.

Recommended Minimum: \$250 per year
Recommended Duration: 1-3 years



BUSINESS SENSE

Being a Writer/Director does not mean you should take a cut in fees. Both jobs have individual merit and you should be fully paid for each role.

Purchase

Underlying Work

Recommended Minimum: 1.5% of short film's production budget

Original/Adapted Short Film Screenplay

Short films are typically produced on a minimal budget and often the writer is asked to take a small fee or suspend the fee altogether. The Guild does not recommend any writer write a script for free, even for a short film. There should always be some recompense for the writer. In recognition of the writer taking a lower fee (and thereby making an investment in the project) or offering to take the fee other than as an upfront payment the Guild recommends that the writer:

- Doesn't defer any part of the writing fee,
- Is able to share in 10% (to be negotiated) of net profits or;
- Is able to share in 3-5% of Producer's gross points.

Recommended Range: 2% - 3.5% film's production budget
(adapted screenplay - lower in the range; original screenplay - higher in the range)

TELEVISION - ONE HOUR DRAMA

Option

Original Teleplay/Concept

Recommended Minimum: \$500 - \$1,500 per year
Recommended Duration: 1-3 years



BUSINESS SENSE

Because so few television concepts move into production writers should ensure they are receiving fair fees for options and development work (writing treatments, sample scripts) - it may be the only fees you receive from the project.

One Hour Script - Originator And Writer

Purchase and Creator's/Devisor's Fee

A purchase price is paid to the creator/originator of a television series. When the series is purchased it should attract a purchase price of no less than one episode script fee (at the originator script fee rate).

A purchase contract should also include provision for Creator's/ Devisor's fee. This fee will often be paid as a set fee against each scripted episode.

The purchase price is paid on the first day of principal photography.

Purchase

Range: \$16,000 - \$25,000
(dependent on series budget)

Recommended Minimum: \$16,000

Creator/ Devisor's Fee

Range: Approximately 5-10% of all writing fees attached to the series.

Script Fee

Television scripts may be commissioned in various stages. Often a commission will take the form of a brief (2-5 page) storyline, treatment (5-10 pages), scene breakdown (5-15 pages) or first-third draft. The rates given immediately below assume a commission of treatment, first, second and third draft.

Suggested Payment Schedule:

Treatment:	Recommended Minimum: 20% of script fee
First Draft:	Recommended Minimum: 45% of script fee
Second Draft:	Recommended Minimum: 20% of script fee
Third Draft:	Recommended Minimum: 15% of script fee

Storyline

Range: \$1,000 - \$3,000
Recommended Minimum: \$1,000

Scene Breakdown

Range: \$2,000 - \$6,000
Recommended Minimum: \$2,000

Script

Range: \$16,000 - \$25,000
Recommended Minimum: \$16,000



BUSINESS SENSE

Should any draft before the third draft be accepted as the final shooting script payment of the remaining writing fee should be payable to the writer.

One Hour Series - Commissioned Writer

Script Fee

Television scripts may be commissioned in various stages. Often a commission will take the form of a brief (2-5 page) storyline, treatment (5-10 pages), scene breakdown (5-15 pages) or first-third draft. The rates given immediately below assume a commission of treatment, first, second and third draft.

Storyline

Range: \$750 - \$3,000
Recommended Minimum: \$1,000

Scene Breakdown

Range: \$1,200 - \$5,000
Recommended Minimum: \$2,000

Script

Range: \$12,000 - \$25,000
Recommended Minimum: \$12,000 with story provided
\$14,000 without story provided.

Daily/Weekly Rates

Some production companies prefer to hire writers on a daily or weekly rate. This is common for half hour adult drama and less common on children's drama and one hour adult drama.

When working on a regular rate writers should weigh up the benefits of such engagement with the disadvantages. Overall, the rate for writing is far lower than that of the per script fee. However, if a substantial amount of work is being offered (eg. several months) then that benefit may be seen to outweigh the lower overall fee.

While the Guild understands that being hired on a daily or weekly rate for the storylining phase of a one hour drama could be acceptable it prefers that one hour dramas are not scripted on weekly rates.

One Hour Drama - Daily Rate (typically for storylining)

Range: \$350 - \$650
Recommended Minimum: \$350

One Hour Drama - Weekly Rate

Range: \$2,000 - \$2,500
Recommended Minimum: \$2,000

TELEVISION - HALF HOUR ADULT DRAMA

Half hour adult drama is typically presented as a serial (ie. a show that runs several nights per week). Commissioning for the storylining and script editing phase is usually done on a weekly rate rather than as a per script fee. Commissioning for the dialogue writing is usually done as a per script fee.

Storyliner (weekly rate)

Range: \$1,300 - \$2000
Recommended Minimum: \$1,300

Script Editor (weekly rate)

Recommended Minimum: \$1,500 - \$2,000
Recommended Minimum: \$1,500

Dialogue Writer (per script rate)

Range: \$1,200 - \$2,500 (per episode)
Recommended Minimum: \$1,200 (per episode)



BUSINESS SENSE

Creators who are writing scripts on a series are encouraged to negotiate higher in the ranges presented in this Guide.

TELEVISION - HALF HOUR CHILDREN'S DRAMA/SITUATION COMEDY

Option

For Original Teleplay/Concept

Recommended Minimum: \$500 - \$2,000 per year
Recommended Duration: 1-3 years

Purchase and Creator's/Devisor's Fee

A purchase price is paid to the creator/originator of a television series. When the series is purchased it should attract a purchase price of the equivalent to one episode script fee (at the originator script fee rate).

A purchase contract should also include provision for Creator's/ Devisor's fee. This fee will often be paid as a set fee against each scripted episode.

The purchase price is only paid on the first day of principal photography.

Purchase

Range: \$5,000 - \$15,000
(dependent on series budget)
Recommended Minimum: \$5,000

Creator's/ Devisor's Fee

Range: Approximately 5-10% of all writing fees attached to the series.

Script Fee

Storyline

Range: \$600 - \$1,500
Recommended Minimum: \$600

Scene Breakdown

Range: \$1,200 - \$2,500
Recommended Minimum: \$1,200



BUSINESS SENSE

The Creator's/ Devisor's fee is an additional payment to any other fees the writer receives (ie. purchase fee, script fee). It should not be discounted just because the writer is also writing scripts on a show.

Script

Range: \$8,000 - \$15,000
Recommended Minimum: \$8,000

TELEVISION - MINI-SERIES/TELEFEATURE

New Zealand does not make many mini-series and telefeatures and examples of rates for these are therefore difficult to collect. The following are presented as illustrative examples only, not recommended minimums.

Mini-Series (two x 90 broadcast min)

Examples: \$16,000 per hour for 1st and 2nd draft and rewrites (storyline provided).
\$24,000 per 90 minute episode (originating writer)

Telefeature (90 broadcast minute)

Range: \$30,000 - \$55,000

TELEVISION - CHILDREN'S MISCELLANEOUS

There are a range of programme types in children's television. Because the duration of shows varies the following are given as examples, but not recommended minimums.

Animated Children's Show

Examples: \$1,200 (5 ½ minute episode)
\$1,500 (7 minute episode)

Live Action Children's Show

Examples: \$650 (10 minute episode)
\$1,000 (10 minute episode)
\$240 (per screen minute - for writing links)



BUSINESS SENSE

Writers should ensure they understand the business environment they work in. Understanding the economics of the industry will enable you to ensure you can negotiate both realistically and successfully.

TELEVISION - SKETCH COMEDY/REALITY/ GAME SHOW

Introduction

Sketch comedy, Reality show and Game show writers are typically hired on a per minute/sketch fee or daily/weekly rate.

Purchase

A purchase price is paid to the creator/originator of a television series. When the series is purchased it should attract around 2.5%-3.5% of the production budget of that show (unlike other television shows these shows are unlikely to have large writing budgets and therefore the purchase price is tied to the production budget).

Also, a purchase contract should include provision for Creator's/ Devisor's fee - approximately 1% of the production budget of each episode of the series or a percentage of the production management fee.

The purchase price is paid on the first day of principal photography.

Sketch Comedy

Range:	\$400 - \$500 (per minute)
Recommended Minimum:	\$400

Reality Show

Recommended Minimum:

Salaried Writer	\$1200 - \$2,000 per week
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BUSINESS SENSE

When creating Reality or Game shows writers should ensure they negotiate a share of international rights/gross profits as such formats can sell well overseas.

Game Show

Recommended Minimum:

Briefing and Meeting	No fee
Creative Conference	\$125 per meeting
Commissioning	\$110 per minute (no minimum length)
Purchase of Rights	\$40 per minute (no minimum length)
Factual Questions	\$4 per question (to be commissioned in multiples of ten)
Salaried Writer	\$1200 - \$1,500 per week

TELEVISION - DOCUMENTARY

Introduction

Documentaries are sometimes researched, written and directed by the same person. However, sometimes these tasks are done by separate individuals.

Writing towards a documentary needs to take into account whether the writer is the creator and/or researcher and/or writer of the narrative. Rates will vary depending on how involved the writer is with these various tasks.

The rates below are all based on one-hour documentaries intended for television broadcast.

Narrative writing (writer provides concept)

Recommended Minimum: \$4800

Narrative writing (concept of documentary already in place)

Recommended Minimum: \$3200

Research and narrative writing (writer provides concept)

Recommended Minimum: \$8000

Research and narrative writing (concept of documentary already in place)

Recommended Minimum: \$6400

Research only

Range: \$150-200 per day
\$500-1500 per week



BUSINESS SENSE

Specialist research (where the writer brings expert knowledge to the research) is likely to command a higher daily/weekly rate.

RADIO

Introduction

Due to the small amount of original radio script work produced the Guild has only a small sample from which to draw these rates. Radio New Zealand, the key commissioners for radio work, also have fairly set rates of pay. When contracting for radio work writers should contact the Guild to discuss the rate offered.



BUSINESS SENSE

Contracts for radio usually allow for one to three plays of the work. Any further plays should require additional payment(s) to the writer.

Purchase

Writers of underlying work will typically have the radio rights to that work purchased. Material that is well known or by a well known author will obviously be able to command higher rates.

Range:	\$1,200 - \$5,000
Recommended Minimum	\$1,200

Radio Drama

One Hour Play	Recommended Minimum:	\$3,000 - \$6,000
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Radio Comedy

Short Episodes/Sketches	Recommended Minimum:	\$150 - \$260 per 1-2 min episodes
Thirty Minute Play/Serial	Recommended Minimum:	\$1,500 - \$3,000

SCRIPT CONSULTING

Introduction

Generally it is accepted that script editors (whose work involves editing and rewriting) primarily work in television. Those who work on film scripts are commonly, but inaccurately, referred to as script editors but are often performing development work or script doctoring.

Rates for television script editors can be found in the Television - Half Hour Adult Drama/Serial section of this Guide.



BUSINESS SENSE

No script consulting fee should be deducted from the actual script fee - these fees are all additional to the fee paid to the original writer.

FILM

Script Doctor/Rewriter (Uncredited)

A script doctor/rewriter may rewrite up to 30% of script and will be employed to come in and fix a script but has no copyright interest in work and does not get a credit. Not to be confused with a second writer who works on a draft by draft basis, does have a copyright interest in the work and receives a credit.

Recommended Minimum: 30% of value of original script fee
(for work on entire script)

Note: When the work required in rewriting exceeds more than 30% of the original script, the writer crosses over from script doctor to second writer. (See the notes about Subsequent Writers in the Film section in this Guide)

GENERAL

Script/Project Assessment Consultant

A script assessor gives a one off assessment and provides feedback. The assessor does not write, edit, or develop scripts with the writer and has no copyright in the idea or script.

Range: \$325-\$550 (per script/project)
Recommended Minimum: \$325
This fee includes at least two reads, 3-5 pages of notes back to writer and a 1 hour meeting.

Recommended Minimum: Hourly rate - \$75-\$115
Daily rate - \$400-650
Weekly - \$2,200 - \$3000

Script Development Consultant

A development consultant works closely in an ongoing capacity with the other key creatives but primarily the writer. A consultant doesn't write or edit the script but gives in-depth criticism and suggestion and has no copyright in the idea or script.

Recommended Minimum: 15% of original script fee
(to be negotiated per project)

CORPORATE/EDUCATIONAL VIDEO

Introduction

The rates for corporate and educational video will vary greatly depending on who the client is. Rates for corporate clients will obviously be higher than those for government and non-profit organisations.

Unlike other forms of screen work, there is likely to be no option or purchase arrangement, simply a contract to produce a treatment and/or a script.

Because of its nature most writers find it useful to charge a per minute rate for corporate/educational video.



BUSINESS SENSE

There are no standard contracts for corporate video in New Zealand. If presented with a contract you should contact the Guild for specific advice on terms.

Range:

\$75-225 per minute
(depending on nature of client)

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