

Submission Guide

DIVA is involved in producing film, television programmes and new media content creation. We assess all unsolicited concepts, illustrations, scripts, novels, books, treatments, sketches, screenplays, and pitches sent in. If you want to submit an idea, take the time to ask yourself these questions:

What Is Your Idea?

- Is it suitable for feature film or television tele-movie? Is it a one-off or a Series?
- Who is the audience?
- If it is a series - is it one-hour drama series (usually written in blocks of 13-26 episodes), long-run serial (usually written in large blocks of half-hour episodes), situation or sketch comedy (usually written in blocks of 7, 13 or 26 half-hour episodes)?
- Is it a tele-feature, a 2-hour made-for-TV movie; or a mini-series, a 2 or 3 part series?

The quickest way to grasp the conventions of each of these forms of film or television is to watch them. For instance, a one-hour programme is actually 44 minutes long without commercials, and a half-hour programme is around 22 minutes long. One-hour drama is structured in five acts, with four commercial breaks. Half-hour drama and comedy is structured in three acts, with two commercial breaks. In most cases a book series has a larger following and readership than a one-off book.

Understanding the medium and the market will help you sell your idea to a production company.

Is There A Market For It?

Film & Television

Television and film, particularly in New Zealand is always going to be limited by finance.

How will your idea be funded?

Most NZ-made features and programmes get money from either NZ On Air (or Te Mangai Paho) or the New Zealand Film Commission, so you need to become familiar with their funding criteria. You also have to look at the expense involved in making your idea a reality - projects that are period pieces (the 18th Century costume drama), high on locations (the action-adventure series), or in special effects (the sci-fi film) are going to be expensive.

As a general rule DIVA is not interested in producing historic drama, horror or sci-fi.

Once it is made, who will buy it? If it's television, which network demographic does it suit?

This information is key to production companies, who only make shows they can place with a broadcaster.

For reasons of economy, series are always more attractive to funders and broadcasters, because the expense is spread over a number of episodes. There is a very limited market for one-off pieces (with the exception of documentary).

Is There An Audience For It?

Film & Television

Think about the intended audience and timeslot for your show. For example, 7.30pm is more family viewing, while 8.30pm is adult fare, harder-hitting stuff with higher stakes. Is it intended for older or younger viewers?

Such considerations affect the tone and sophistication of your material, because programmers rely on advertisers and advertisers are interested in who is watching the show. It is easy to forget that television is a commercial medium, a business much like any other. You must look objectively at your project and see it for more than its artistic merit.

Who will it appeal to? How topical is it? How accessible is it? Claiming that your idea will appeal to everyone sounds naive and just isn't true. All production companies have their particular brand, and are looking for something different that will appeal to a recognisable audience, not a bland product that caters for everyone.

How Do You Protect Your Work?

Film & Television

Always include the copyright symbol, the year, and your name on your work. You can provide further protection of your ideas by registering them with the Writers' Guild for a nominal fee.

DIVA receives a number of submissions, and coincidental similarities of content often occur. We cannot compensate you if material similar to yours is coincidentally submitted from another source, and subsequently optioned. If we receive anything which bears a resemblance to something we have in development or have developed in the past we will return it unread.

What do I send out?

Film & Television

Film and Television Production companies are primarily interested in ideas, particularly where television series are concerned.

Do not send in entire scripts.

Work on pitching your basic idea, keeping it relatively succinct, catchy, and interesting:

- Describe the concept in both a Logline (1-2 sentences) and Short Synopsis (3-4 Paragraphs)
- Give concise descriptions of your central characters
- Describe the world of your idea if it is unusual or specific.
- Include brief story outlines to give an idea of the story potential.
- Think mostly about the central relationships in your show, because this is where the most interesting drama will spring from.
- If your idea is a feature film or telefeature, pitch it as a treatment - a prose summary of the story. Try to keep this at less than 20 pages. You can do it in 3 pages. If your treatment reads well, you will likely be asked to send in the entire script for consideration.

Presentation: How Does Your Submission Look?

- Clearly display the title of your work
- Your name and address should appear on the title page,
- Use a conventional screenplay or book format
- Ensure your market research data is included
- Put page numbers on your work,
- Proof read your work.

What Happens Next?

Film & Television Scripts

Once your work has been submitted, we shall send you an acknowledgement by email. We require you to sign a Submission Release Form, which sets out the basis on which we undertake to assess your project. Realistically you can expect to wait several weeks for your submission to be assessed.

Eventually you will hear one of two answers when it comes:

No:

Should your idea be rejected, please remember that the competition is fierce. It is not necessarily a reflection on the quality of your work. Sometimes projects are just not timely, or the company already has something underway similar to your proposal. Hopefully you will get some indication of why your idea wasn't suitable. If your idea was thought to have some potential that wasn't fully realised, you may be asked to re-submit it in a revised version.

Generally, though, the sad news is that most ideas are turned down at the preliminary stage. This is no reason to give up. You can try your luck with another company, rework your idea to a better standard, or you can start work on your next brilliant idea and try again. Persistence, and a steady stream of interesting pitches, will up your odds of hitting on the exact thing that a producer wants. Often it is a matter of fortune/fate/chance that what you have sent in matches what a company needs. These needs can change from week to week.

Yes:

This can be very exciting, but it doesn't mean that you will see your show on screen by the following week. The company should offer to 'option' your proposal or script, which means that they borrow the rights to it for a specific period of time. If this time lapses, and they don't start work on it, you are usually free to offer it to another company. Option agreements are not overly complicated, but you may want to consult a lawyer or the Writers' Guild for more information about negotiating yours. Note that as the originator of an idea, you may not necessarily be hired to write it into script form, especially if you have no previous film or television writing credits – ie. you'll sign the option, but not receive a writing contract. This comes as a surprise to many novice writers, but for a project to be developed, funded and subsequently produced, the script(s) must be very strong. This sometimes means bringing in experienced writers to complete the project. However, if you've demonstrated a

strong grasp of story and character, the company should want to use you through the development process, and will work alongside you. Be very clear on just what your role is with regards to the project well in advance.

An option does not guarantee that your idea will make it to the screen. An optioned idea may never get made, or your option may not be renewed, for several reasons: the company may have too much on its production slate, the idea may have since been duplicated elsewhere, there may be a glut of the optioned genre appearing on TV, etc.

NEW ZEALAND FUNDING BODIES:

NZ On Air <http://www.nzonair.govt.nz>

New Zealand Film Commission <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz>

Te Mangai Paho <http://www.tmp.govt.nz>

NEW ZEALAND WRITING COURSES:

New Zealand Society of Authors : <http://www.authors.org.nz>

The Australian Association of Writing Programs <http://www.aawp.org.au/courses>

Submissions Checklist

Here are a few things to check before sending us your script/idea. Please also read our Submission Guidelines.

Are all of your contact details included?

Please make sure that your contact details are clearly marked on your submission. All work should be submitted with a street address, as we aim to return all Material that we do not develop further within DIVA.

Have you signed a release form?

Due to the volume of unsolicited material we receive and assess, we are unable to accept submissions which are not accompanied by a signed form.

Do you have a copy of your Material?

Please don't send us the only Material that you have – make sure that you send a copy to us and keep the original for yourself.

Do you own the rights to the Material?

We can only assess Material for which you are the author or you have a licence to use (in the case of Material based on or adapted from a book, film or other work).

Is your idea suited for the visual medium of film and television or a digital book?

Some stories are better told in a book or as a play.

Is your script or Material formatted correctly?

Presenting your work appropriately suggests a professional approach and an understanding of the medium and format for which you are writing.

Have you sent this Material to other developers, content producers or similar organisations?

It can get very difficult if you have sent the same material to several production companies at the same time. Please make this clear in your submission. For us to consider your proposal the Material must be clear from any liens or encumbrances.

For more information about how to pitch ideas to us, please see the Submission Guidelines.