



FREE WORK TOOLKIT

What is “Free Work”?

- “Free work” is any writing a producer or studio asks you to provide without being paid. This can include free rewrites or “producer passes,” “pre-work,” writing beyond what you were hired for, or writing services claimed to be non-writing work. Sometimes the MBA provides an enforcement option if you are asked to do free work (treatment, outline, format, bible); sometimes the best way to push back is for you to say no. When writers collectively say NO, the culture around Free Work can shift. Whatever your situation, the Guild is here to support you.

Know Your Rights

- No Writing Left Behind: when you are pitching, a producer or employer can’t ask for written material without paying you, and they can’t record your pitch.
 - o It’s not “just a pitch”: While employers and producers may use the terms “pitch,” “pitch deck,” and “outline” to argue what you are providing is not writing work, if an employer asks you for a written pitch document, it could actually be a treatment (in screen) or a story or format (in TV) which the company would then owe MBA payment for.
 - o Say no to AI transcription during a pitch meeting, including on Zoom, and tell your reps to do the same on your behalf in advance of the meeting—it’s the same as leaving free written material behind.
- Don’t start writing until you are commenced: your commencement payment is due within 7 days of commencement. If your payment is late, you are owed interest.
- Get your second step: If your deal for a first draft screenplay pays 200% or less of the applicable minimum (225% for deals under the 2026 MBA) you must be hired for a second step. See if your deal qualifies [using this guide](#).

On an if/come? Beware the free work traps associated with these deals. A signatory company, or producers acting on the company’s behalf, may not request changes to written material for free, or for a flat development fee that’s less than MBA minimum, even if they tell you the notes are intended to improve a “pitch.” The Guild likely can seek compensation for writers in these situations—please contact the Guild (contact info below), and we can discuss next steps.

For deals after 1/1/2027, all if/comes are non-exclusive and no position until you get paid for the first step.

- You determine delivery: you alone have the right to say when your draft is finished and ready for delivery—not a producer, director, or studio executive.
- Producers can't take delivery or request rewrites: only the person named in your contract can accept delivery of your draft. If other parties like producers or actors have notes, ask them to pool their notes to be addressed collectively as part of your next paid step.
- Steps must be paid: if your employer asks you for a rewrite or polish, they must pay you for the step.
- Late pay means interest: Under the MBA, payment is due within 7 days after commencement and delivery. On the 8th day, interest starts to accrue at 1.5% per month, or 18% per year on the amount of compensation that's late. You can report late pay to the Guild, which regularly submits batch demands for interest to the studio representing employer-wide late pay infractions.
- No AI without consent: your employer may not force you to use AI; you can use AI if you want to and if the company also agrees. If your employer is giving you AI-generated material (including AI-generated notes) they have to tell you.
 - In most cases, non-signatory producers aren't bound by the MBA, but employers typically want them to follow the same policies around AI that apply to writers and other employees. Producers should not use AI in connection with your work unless it conforms with your employer's AI policy—and employers generally don't want AI introduced into writing work without their knowledge.

"Under the MBA, only the individual(s) named in a writer's deal memorandum or personal service contract with the Company may request a rewrite of literary material or accept delivery of literary material."

As of the 2026 MBA, companies must say this to any producer they engage on a covered theatrical project. If a producer says they'll take delivery of your draft or asks you to rewrite it, point them to this language—or contact the Guild (contact info below) and we will.

Resources:

- Download the [Project Page](#) to collect all key information about a feature project you're considering (how many other writers are competing for the job, if IP rights have been secured, what other talent is attached).
- [Download the Producers Guide to Working with Writers](#) and use it to talk with the producers on your project and to enlist your reps as needed.
- Screenwriters, download the WGAW's [Screenwriter Handbook](#) for tips on negotiating, getting the most out of general meetings, and more.
- Not sure if you are entitled to the Guaranteed Second Step? Use this [Guide](#).
- Starting a new project or asked to start work before receiving your commencement payment? Email [Sophie Martin](#) to let the Guild know when you begin working on a step so we can help follow up when payment is due.

- Commenced on your screenplay more than 9 weeks ago and haven't delivered? If you are owed 200% of the minimum for the step or less, we can help you invoice for the next 25% of your fee. Email [Mack Harden](#) to get started.

Reporting Resources:

Did you turn in a rewrite or treatment beyond what you were contracted and paid for? Did a producer on your project say they'd take delivery of your draft or ask you for a free rewrite? Did an employer ask you to leave behind a written pitch document? Reach out to Business Agent [Mack Harden](#) to get advice about pushing back on a free work request, late payment, having the Guild intervene directly, or for any other enforcement question.

Dealing with Common Requests for Free Work

- When you are starting a deal:
 - Communicate with producers early about how many guaranteed and optional steps are included in your deal. Make a game plan for how you will use your paid steps to deliver the best version of the project. Make it clear the MBA does not allow for free work. Let them know you are aware of the boundaries set in the [Guild's Producers Guide to Working with Writers](#).
- A producer or exec demands revisions to a pitch?
 - As soon as you engage with a producer or exec, establish how many rounds of revision you are willing to make to the pitch.
 - Establish a timeline by which the pitch writing phase must conclude.
 - If these revisions are requested while under an if/come deal, tell the studio they need to add paid steps to the writer's deal if work is requested before the writer is commenced on the pilot.
- A producer or exec asks for a free outline in between steps?
 - Make it clear that there are MBA minimums for outlines and treatments. Ask them to add this step to your deal.
- A producer or exec asks to read interim pages so they can give notes?
 - Unless you the writer are requesting feedback on a section of your script, let the producer know you will finish a complete draft and then address any notes they have in your next paid step.
- In general: let the producer or executive know that the Guild is tracking the increasing demands for free work and writers are collectively pushing back.