



Code of Conduct

MISSION

The Writers Guild is a duly constituted association of Performance Writers. It is a non profit organisation, registered under number NPO 081-261 in accordance with the Non-Profit Organisations Act 71 of 1977.

As recorded in its Constitution, the aims and objectives of the WGSA are to represent, promote and protect the specific needs and interests of performance writers. This will include:

- 4.1 To protect performance writers by collectively negotiating on behalf of members in relation to terms and conditions of service, intellectual property rights and job security.
- 4.2 To empower performance writers by informing them of their economic and intellectual property rights and by advancing those rights.
- 4.3 To develop performance writers to advance their employment prospects by raising the standard of professionalism.

The Mission of the WGSA is "To protect, empower and develop performance writers in the South African Film Industry."

THE CHARTER

PREFACE

Ethical behaviour and professional relationships are cornerstones of a professional performance writer.

Writers interface with all walks of life, and deal with many varied situations. This imposes numerous intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual and social demands.

This Charter is a Code of Conduct designed to match the ethics, vision and mission of the Writers Guild of South Africa. It sets out the guidelines (and borders) in terms of which a member of the Writers Guild of South Africa ought to operate.

Because of its purport and the exigencies of the profession compliance should be free and willing.

However -

Infractions of the Charter may constitute unprofessional conduct. In the event of an impact upon the integrity of the Writers Guild of South Africa, or its other members, the Writers Guild reserves its right to terminate membership and/or to take other remedial measures.

Remember, there is a market place out there: your future as a performance writer is in your hands.

INTRODUCTION

There is a common generalisation about creative people being “disorganised and unbusinesslike”. Is it true? Does it need to be so?

Performance Writers are often independent contractors. In effect, we operate our own private businesses. This calls for Performance Writers to act and behave as professional business people.

And professional writers would be then be treated with more respect and better remunerated...

The Performance Writer’s job is to help caretake the story. Our task does not end with the words “Fade to Black.” Our work ends at the premiere. We are the story experts. Our talents and skills are unique. We should respect these, and take our job seriously. Then will we deserve to be taken seriously.

*“Being professional means doing the thing you love to do,
especially on the days you don’t want to do it.”*

Julius Erving

The Code of Conduct attempts to address not only the product, but also the Performance Writer, and what is expected from the Performance Writer.

The Code will

- guide members of the Guild
- assist members to eradicate negative connotations about creative writers
- set standards which Producers and Broadcasters can expect from members
- establish what will be expected from members and,

- ultimately ensure that Producers and Broadcasters prefer to work with members of the Writers Guild of South Africa.

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

Performance Writers are not merely selling a product to their buyers; they sell themselves. The adage “a good product sells itself” is not applicable for the products we create to the exclusion of all else, for – as with many things – what is appealing lies within the eyes of the beholder.

Buyers don't just acquire a story. Buyers trust writers: to deliver a good product; to deliver on time; to do both within the parameters of a set budgetary framework; to work well in a team. For all of this, the Buyer buys into the writer.

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

HAS CHARACTER and therefore:

- Is a role model for other performance writers
- Exhibits strong commitment to the performance writing profession
- Is willing to advocate on behalf of colleagues
- Is willing to receive training to improve writing skills
- Demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning
- Is reflective and able to learn from mistakes
- Is eager to share information and ideas with colleagues
- Is reliant, flexible, persistent, and open minded
- Exhibits good humour and resourcefulness
- Enjoys new challenges and solving problems
- Can listen without being defensive
-

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

COMMUNICATES EFFECTIVELY and therefore:

- Is able to articulate effective strategies
- Is approachable and listens attentively
- Asks questions that prompt reflection and understanding
- Offers critiques in positive and productive ways
- Uses email effectively
- Conveys enthusiasm and passion for writing
- Is discreet and maintains confidentiality
- Is able to maintain a trusting professional relationship
- Knows how to express care for a colleague's emotional and professional needs
- Knows where the boundaries are and knows when difficult decisions have to be made with fellow colleagues when they are not delivering.
- Works well with individuals from different cultures
- Easily establishes rapport with others
- Is patient.

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

DISPLAYS COMPETENCE and therefore:

- Is regarded by colleagues as an outstanding writer
- Has excellent knowledge of methodology and subject matter
- Has confidence in his/her own skills
- Feels comfortable being observed or critiqued by other writers
- Maintains a network of professional contacts
- Understands the policies and procedures of clients
- Is a meticulous observer of studio and set practices

- Collaborates well with other writers and with managers
- Is willing to learn.

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

LOOKS THE PART!

- Conduct one's self in accordance with the ethos and spirit of the Code of Conduct.
- Behave in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons and without prejudice to their race, religious beliefs, political affiliation, colour, gender, physical characteristics, age, ancestry or place of origin.
- Create an image that inspires others and puts their trust in you. First impressions last. Being a professional means looking like a professional. You can have a creative edge, but cultivate a look and an image that inspires confidence.

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

OBEYS MEETING ETIQUETTE

- Be punctual and prepared. Being late causes delays, and consequent monetary losses. It also displays disrespect.
- Attend all sessions, discussions and meetings.
- Consider other people's input. Do not try to dominate discussions or meetings. Show respect for other people's opinions. Do not interrupt other speakers.
- Get to know the people you work with by name.
- Maintain as confidential all discussions on script development projects.
- Turn off your mobile phone during meetings/discussions.
- Do not leave a meeting, unless cleared at the beginning.
- Refrain from attending business events under the influence of any alcohol or drugs.
- Honour all agreed upon deadlines.

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

FOLLOWS BEST PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

- Ensure you know what is expected of you. If unclear, ask. Asking is seen as a sign of intelligence and involvement, and not as a lack of training or intellect
- Ensure that people who need to contact you have correct details. This will prevent delays, fruitless expenditure, and frustration.
- Respect other people's time. Establish when it is proper and justifiable to call. Use your judgement as to when a crucial phone call is going to be justified – obviously do not hold up production.
- Plan your work, meetings and other commitments. Make use of a diary; do not rely on memory only! A planned schedule will assist you in not over-committing yourself and in negotiating deadlines.
- Return calls and mails promptly.
- Honour the terms of confidentiality

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

KNOWS THE CRAFT!

"There is so much still to learn"
Miloslav Rostropovich, world-famous cellist, at age 84.

Writing a screenplay is akin to doing a Master's degree. Study the craft, discuss it with fellow writers, watch movies and TV shows, criticise and praise.

Being a writer is hard work – get used to it...

- Accept that training is an ongoing and required process.
- Undertake, and complete, proper and thorough research.
- Study and use the trade terminology and jargon.
- Accept that evaluation and assessment is an ongoing and required process. Accept evaluations and assessments. Make the effort to rectify criticisms and suggestions.
- Comply with the story and script development process.
- Learn and understand the production process, and the expenses and logistics involved.
- Do not plagiarise.
- Ensure that your product meets constraints of the budget.

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

DISPLAYS ACCOUNTABILITY

When the question "Who did this?" is asked, can you raise your hand and say, "I did. I was responsible"?

Accountability means you stand by your words and your work. Make sure you deliver work with which you are happy to be identified. So:

- Do not take credit for other people's work.
- Although much of our work is collaborative, do not be ungenerous with crediting others.
- You are as good as your last script, so be consistent.
- Strive to always do your best and do not consider some jobs as easy options.
- Always deliver on time.
- Do not divulge personal or confidential information except as required by the Guild, or by law.

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

PRESENTS A PROFESSIONAL PRODUCT

- Ensure that you have read the brief; that you have interpreted it correctly; that you deliver in accordance with the brief.
- Accept notes given and ensure that you understand each one. Incorporate it in your product.
- Respond professionally and constructively to notes during the development process.
- Present work in the generally accepted format.
- Ensure that the product has been edited and is error-free. Have it proof read.
- Present your work in an orderly and neat fashion. This includes being paginated and properly bound.
- Have access to the necessary tools of the trade:
 - a reliable computer
 - back-up facilities
 - correct software and anti-virus programmes
 - email and internet access
 - communication media such as a phone and fax
 - printing facilities, and - last but not least
 - transport

A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE WRITER

RESPECTS COLLEAGUES

- Do not undermine the integrity, reputation or professional standing of a colleague.
- Be respectful and courteous.
- Be flexible and open to compromise including where timings may clash.
- Be supportive of team members, in particular, in discussion with producers. (Disagreement can be discussed privately later.)
- Share expertise and experience, and encourage cross-pollination of ideas.
- Appreciate that inadequacies exist in everyone. People are different and not all can give in equal proportion.
- Refrain from gossip.
- In relation to a conflict of professional relationships, discuss the issue informally and in confidence with the colleague concerned. Focus on the issue and not on the person.
- It is unprofessional conduct to refer a dispute concerning or arising from professional relationships to outside parties unless criminal conduct is involved.