

Good Practices - Script applications & Readers

The idea of this document is to collect good practices that we can share with our community of dramaturgs. While we realize the scope of a dramaturg's work is wide, we've collected a series of practices that reflect common projects/experiences that a dramaturg might encounter. These currently include:

- Good practices for script application process (how to write the call, what does the application ask for, how to use inclusive language, who to include in your group of readers, how much to pay, etc).
- Good practices for script readers, following the application process.

SCRIPT APPLICATIONS

Recommendations when asking for applications:

- Prioritize using inclusive language. Refer to the applicant (don't use applicant) as writer or playwright.
- Reconsider asking for anonymous copies. Given the complexities of identities that writers often engage with in their practice, there are significant benefits to understanding how the written text intersects with the playwright's identity. Additionally, artists benefit from having their names seen - it helps build reputation, which is a necessity in this industry.
- Be clear about your process:
 - Reply to playwrights to let them know you've received their application;
 - Inform playwrights when their script has been dropped from consideration;
 - Be transparent about the timelines for each stage of adjudication; and, if there is prize money or a workshop attached to the selected scripts, be upfront about the allocated budget.
- Consider using the word 'apply/application', instead of 'submit/submission.' The word *submission* reinforces a power dynamic rather than one of collaboration.

What to ask for in preparing an application for playwrights.

Be specific about what you want from writers in your letter of intent. Ask writers to engage with your organizational mission, mandate, and values. Artists should demonstrate a self-awareness surrounding their artistic goals, their challenges, and their overall growth trajectory as a writer. This is the opportunity for writers to self-identify if they wish. Letter of Intent does not necessarily have to specify race, sexuality or gender.

Also, be clear about what you intend to do with the script. Is it for use in festivals? Is it for workshop/development only? Is it for production? This information will help the writer understand how best to prepare their application.

Clearly list any parameters surrounding your call for applications (e.g., new plays, queer narratives, plays set in a certain time period, emerging playwrights, playwrights of colour,

playwrights from a certain geographic region)? If so, be clear. For example, you may identify emerging playwrights as only having **one** fully realized production.

- Ask for the writer to provide a Letter of Intent, which may include the following questions:
 - What interests you as a writer? What do you hope to accomplish?
 - What do you consider to be your greatest artistic/professional challenge?
 - Why should you be considered for this specific program? How does your personal value system resonate with this program?
 - Why do you need to work on this particular project at this organization?
 - Outline of a timeline for their writing process
 - Potential process-based needs, including budget, collaboration/collaborators, space, etc.

- Script Sample
 - Ask for a 'full beat' instead of a set number of pages (but no more than 30 pages).
 - A scene that showcases the central conflict of the play
 - A dialogue exchange to showcase talent as a writer
 - Ask for a full script for round two
 - It may be helpful to acknowledge that you are asking for work that is in-process, and you understand that it may be subject to change

SCRIPT READERS

Guiding Questions: Who are you asking to read your scripts? Do they all have similar backgrounds? Are they all around the same age or experience level?

- **Pay your readers.** Paying readers eliminates barriers to access to folks of different socioeconomic classes. Consider what you're asking of readers - is it simply reading? Do you require a written report? How much time do you expect them to put in? How much are you willing to pay per hour for their time?
- Recommended rates, based on our experience:
 - Script samples, including script sample, letter of intent, resume, letters of recommendation between \$5-\$7 USD.
 - Full scripts, including entire script, letter of intent, resume, letters of recommendation between \$15 - \$25 USD/script.
 - Hourly for script reading - \$15 - \$30 USD/hour
- **Where to find readers**
 - LMDA has an active network of dramaturgs with critical play reading experience
 - Locally, seek readers from all areas of your community: look to indie theatre, venued companies, universities or colleges
 - Consider what you are adjudicating for - if it's a TYA festival, consider asking one or two youth to be on your reading panel!
 - **If you are a more resourced organization** - post a public call out for readers, where you advertise your rates. Take the time to interview shortlisted candidates, if possible. **Hire a dramaturg/literary manager/producer to oversee this process** including the work of finding a skilled team of readers.
 - If your readers must be from within your organization, seek to get a good cross section of your employees. Consider including someone from outside the 'artistic' department - perhaps a marketer would have valuable input, or your summer student, or a technician? Everyone at the organization can contribute to how you fulfill your artistic mandate
- **'How to read our scripts' meeting.** We suggest this as a required practice for organizations employing script readers. It's an opportunity to touch base with your readers about your organization values, and how those values inform your curation practices. Here are some sample questions you could discuss:
 - What is the mission statement of your institution? How does that translate to your new play development initiatives?
 - What are your organizational intentions with this new play development opportunity? Are you asking for plays with the intention of developing them? Producing them? What kinds of writers or stories should your readers look for? Be as specific as possible.
 - Ask the reader to consider who is the writer? Where do they come from? Are they aware of their position of privilege? Are they aware of their blind spots? How relevant is this, given the content of their play or the nature of the new play development opportunity?

- Make sure the readers are aware of any parameters you've placed on the call for applications (i.e. emerging playwrights, playwrights of colour, playwrights from a certain geographic region)
- Outline specific points of contact to allow readers to engage in the reading process early on
 - In person meetings
 - Skype meetings (offer multiple)
 - Accountability among other readers
- You could also include **anti-bias training**, which is a practice of publicly asking everyone to acknowledge that we all have biases towards certain types of work, and by publicly speaking these biases aloud (“I have an affinity for musicals”, “I prioritize POC voices in my practice”, “I tend to dislike futuristic work”) can go great lengths towards helping us acknowledge our collective goals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Dramatists Guild Best Practices](#) - contest and festival guidelines

[LMDA Employment Guidelines & Sample Contracts](#)