

Writing under pressure – Sneak peek from Linda Aronson, *The 21st Century Screenplay*

It's typical of a writer's life that an important writing opportunity arises at the worst possible time. Here is a simple plan for writing when you are under pressure of time:

1. Work out how much time you can afford to devote to the writing, and create a plan with dates for completion of each stage of the work. Do not plan to do everything at the weekend or in a few consecutive days because the pressure on you will be too great. Instead, try to do a little each day. Remember that even a minute here and there can be used to brainstorm solutions to small problems. For example, a five-minute coffee break devoted to brainstorming the demands of the genre in which you plan to write will give you a huge amount of information. Added together, these minutes will move the work on its way, and also increase your confidence.
2. Consciously remind yourself that stress creates cliché. Look calmly at your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, and be aware that under stress you will make your normal mistakes. For example, if you have a weakness with structure, that weakness is liable to show itself under stress. This is not being negative, it is being focused. Write yourself reminders about problem areas in the script or with technique and stick them over your desk.
3. If you are finding it hard, that's because it's hard.
4. Throughout the writing, make use of the development strategies. Start with number 1: Define the task at hand; that is, refresh your memory about the sort of material that is needed for the sort of script you have to write. Watch relevant films and read relevant scripts. Be aware of details.
5. Decide what the genre demands in terms of emotions and pattern.
6. If you are writing a short film, check that the story can be told in the length of screen time you have.
7. Check what specific limitations, if any, the piece of work might have; for example, no period pieces, no expensive effects etc.
8. Brainstorm and explore a range of ideas as shown in the first section of *The 21st Century Screenplay*. Do not jump at your first idea because it will probably be a cliché. Later ideas are likely to be more original. Choose an idea that fits with the above points and is original and unclichéd.

(For another eight suggestions for how to cope with **writing under pressure** see *The 21st Century Screenplay*, pp. 151-124;

see also

- **creativity under pressure**, pp. 3-30;
- **permission to panic**, p. 147;
- for a wide range of extra help, the index entries under the heading **crisis in script development**