

# 10 Screenwriting Skills and Traits You Need

[Scott Myers](#)

#5: Persistence: "Hollywood is the only town where you can not fail. You can only quit trying."

During the 12+ years I've run hosted Go Into The story, I have been privileged to conduct one-on-one interviews with over two hundred screenwriters including dozens of [Black List](#) and [Nicholl Fellowship writers](#). Along the way, it's been fascinating to learn the variety of approaches to the craft, yet at the same time how certain universal themes recur.

I was struck by **five personality traits** and **five skill sets** that keep popping up in these conversations, so I thought it would be helpful to do a series, a checklist if you will, of areas we can focus on as we develop as screenwriters.

## Screenwriting Trait #5: Persistence

As any of you who follow this blog or my Twitter feed know, I collect quotes. On writing. Screenwriting. Creativity. Why? For many reasons, but this may be the most fundamental one: Sometimes when you are floundering and flailing in the roiling waters of creative uncertainty, and your ability to write a story feels like it's being washed away by a tsunami of doubt, a good quote

can function like a life preserver, and keep you afloat until you ride out the storm.

With that nautical frame, I offer to you one of the best quotes about working in the entertainment business I have ever run across:

*"Hollywood is the only town where you can not fail. You can only quit trying." — Dennis Foley*

That is so true — especially about screenwriting — and it speaks to the power of persistence. And what is persistence? Here are three definitions:

*Persevering especially in spite of opposition, obstacles, and discouragement.*

Honestly as far as screenwriting is concerned, that's the Unholy Trinity we face on an ongoing basis: Opposition, Obstacles and Discouragement. It's not only severely difficult to write a good story, it's a major challenge to get into a position where you are even able to have the opportunity to get paid to write a story. And then to actually get a movie produced? I have a friend who has worked in the business as a screenwriter for over two decades and has never had a movie made. Not one. Projects get green lit. Then something happens. Red light. Or the movie gets produced, but it turns out to be a disaster. You're hot. You're cold. You're working. You're not. Honestly to be a screenwriter, you have to have the creative spirit of an angel, but the grit of a warrior to

handle the relentless challenges you face.

*Constantly repeated.*

The challenges persist. So do rewrites. In a recent interview I conducted with a screenwriter, he told me he wrote 16 drafts of a spec script. 16! That is persistence as repetition. But at the end of the day, that very screenwriter sold that spec to a major studio for nearly a million dollars. That is persistence as payoff.

*Lasting or enduring tenaciously.*

This gets to the heart of screenwriting persistence: You just have to hang in there, keep writing and believing in yourself. Screenwriter Brad Ingelsby had this to say in an interview I did with him:

*If you're passionate about the material and the story, and you believe in yourself then it can absolutely happen to you. I'm the perfect example of someone who got extremely lucky, so I always tell aspiring writers, "If you work hard enough and believe in the story, then there's a place for you."*

*There's a place for you...* but only if you are persistent enough to work for it over the long haul.



"I am going to NAIL this story... but only after I eat a muffin."

Michael Werwie wrote 9 scripts before he won a Nicholl Fellowship. John Swetnam wrote 17 scripts before he landed his first paying gig. M. Night Shaymalan wrote 5 drafts of *The Sixth Sense* before he realized this: Malcolm Crowe is dead.

A screenwriter must have persistence as part of their arsenal of traits.

Here's another quote to help you through the dark times and perhaps my personal favorite:

[The only way out is through.](#)

From FADE IN to FADE OUT. That is the writing journey

for each story you craft. But there is a world of stuff *outside* the actual page-writing through which you must also persist. Summon up the staying power to stick around. All it takes is one script to change your life. Believe me, I know this from my own personal experience.

So if you have Passion... Courage... Consistency... Flexibility... and Persistence, you have the traits a screenwriter needs to succeed in Hollywood. But you also needs skills. That is what we will explore next week.

[Part 1: Passion](#)

[Part 2: Courage](#)

[Part 3: Consistency](#)

[Part 4: Flexibility](#)

Back Monday with more!