

# Reader Question: Advice for someone wanting to give writing a full-time shot?

[Scott Myers](#)

First and foremost, you have to want it. I mean **really** want it. The competition is fierce. Think of it this way: Any time you **aren't** writing, someone else is. A *lot* of someones. So your desire has to be such that writing is your number one priority.



When you aren't writing, someone else is.

Here is an example. In March 2014, I interviewed [Stephanie Shannon](#) who won the 2013 Nicholl Fellowship with her screenplay *Queen of Hearts*. When she decided she was

going to write the script using the Nicholl deadline as motivation, Stephanie was working as a manager's assistant:

**Scott:** *Assistant gigs, from everything I've heard, a great way to learn the business, but they're notoriously challenging, especially hours. How did you carve out time to write?*

**Stephanie:** *I just became really singularly focused. I was determined I wasn't going to let another year go by without finishing a feature. I told myself there was no way I was going to miss the Nicholl deadline. I have never been more determined to do anything in my life.*

*It was a pretty isolating time for me, though. I'd work all day as an assistant, I'd get home at night, and I would write. I'd wake up and work a little in the morning, then go to work. Sometimes I'd just pull out my laptop and write at my desk while answering phones, or in my boss' office while he was out at lunch. Then on Fridays I would go home after work, and I wouldn't really reemerge until Monday. I was so into the story that it didn't feel like I was torturing myself. I was excited, and I looked forward to working on it, which was a really great feeling.*

Stephanie's last lines lead me to the next thing I'd like to say: **You not only need to want it, you have to learn to love it.** You may *think* you love writing. But what about if

you are breathing, eating, and living it? Day after day. Week after week. Month after month. The energy wanes, your interest flags. You have to learn to love it... even if there are times you hate it. That may sound contradictory. I suspect most writers understand what I mean.

The last point I'd make about attitude: **You've got to be in it for the long haul.** If you are serious about trying to make writing a career, you've got to work at it daily, but play the long game. And that means immersing yourself in the craft. You want to develop solid writing practices that will enable you to deliver the goods when you land gigs... so you can keep landing gigs.

How to learn the craft? Here are three things you can... no, check that... you **must** do.

[Watch movies. Read scripts. Write pages.](#)

How best to do that?

[1, 2, 7, 14.](#)

**1: Read 1 screenplay per week.**

**2: Watch 2 movies per week.**

**7: Write 7 pages per week.**

**14: Work 14 hours per week prepping a story.**

If you're not willing to do this at a bare minimum, go back to

my first point. Do you want it? *Really* want it? If you do, you should have no problem committing yourself to this type of regimen.

There are other things.

Read books. Listen to music. Take walks. Study art. Watch people. Hear conversations.

In other words, live life. Every second of your life is filled with stimuli that can not only inspire you with story ideas and elements you can use in your writing, it also feeds your soul. And you will need spiritual sustenance to keep you going.

Let me give you a goal: **Three scripts. Three treatments.** That's what you should aim to have in hand when you make a legitimate push to break into the business. Those scripts need to be written, rewritten, rewritten again, vetted by writers who know story as well as pro readers. Those treatments don't have to be full outlines, but convey a story in three acts, strong on character description. And these should all be your strongest story concepts which means you will want to be generating ideas on a consistent basis, working on only the best ones.

A word about income. Try to find a job that lends itself to writing. In January 2013, I interviewed 2012 Nicholl Fellowship winner [Michael Werwie](#). He made a living as a bartender. Check out his thoughts on that gig:

*Bartending couldn't have been a more perfect fit. I had my days completely free and I used that time to write. I'd wake up, eat breakfast, and write, and that just became a discipline, to the point where if I skipped it or didn't have time to do it for whatever reason, it felt strange. I would do that every day, and would also take meetings, if and when I had those (which were few and far between for many, many years). Bartending allowed me to make the most money while working the fewest hours. It was a good balance because I could treat writing like a full-time job and still pay the bills.*

When I was first writing scripts, I was doing stand-up comedy, so I scheduled my work three weeks on, one week off. I'd break story on my cassette tape recorder while driving between gigs up and down the 101 or the I-5 in California, and transcribe notes to legal pad at night. Then in my week off, I'd pound out pages. There are jobs. And there are jobs which are writer-friendly. Find one of those.

Let me close with this anecdote. Some years ago, I was leading a workshop at UCLA and invited as a guest one of my former students [Lisa Joy](#). At the time, Lisa was writing for the USA TV series "Burn Notice" after having been on staff of the ABC series "Pushing Daisies". Subsequently, Lisa sold a feature spec script ["Reminiscence"](#), then co-wrote the pilot "Westworld" and executive produces the HBO series.

In our session in Westwood, Lisa said something I've

always remembered: "Before I broke in, I decided I may not be a professional writer yet... but I'm going to conduct myself as if I am."

Every piece of advice I provide above? What Lisa said encapsulates it.

Conduct yourself like a professional writer.

Pro writers want it.

Pro writers love it... even when they hate it.

Pro writers are in it for the long game.

Pro writers watch movies... fanatically.

Pro writers read scripts... obsessively.

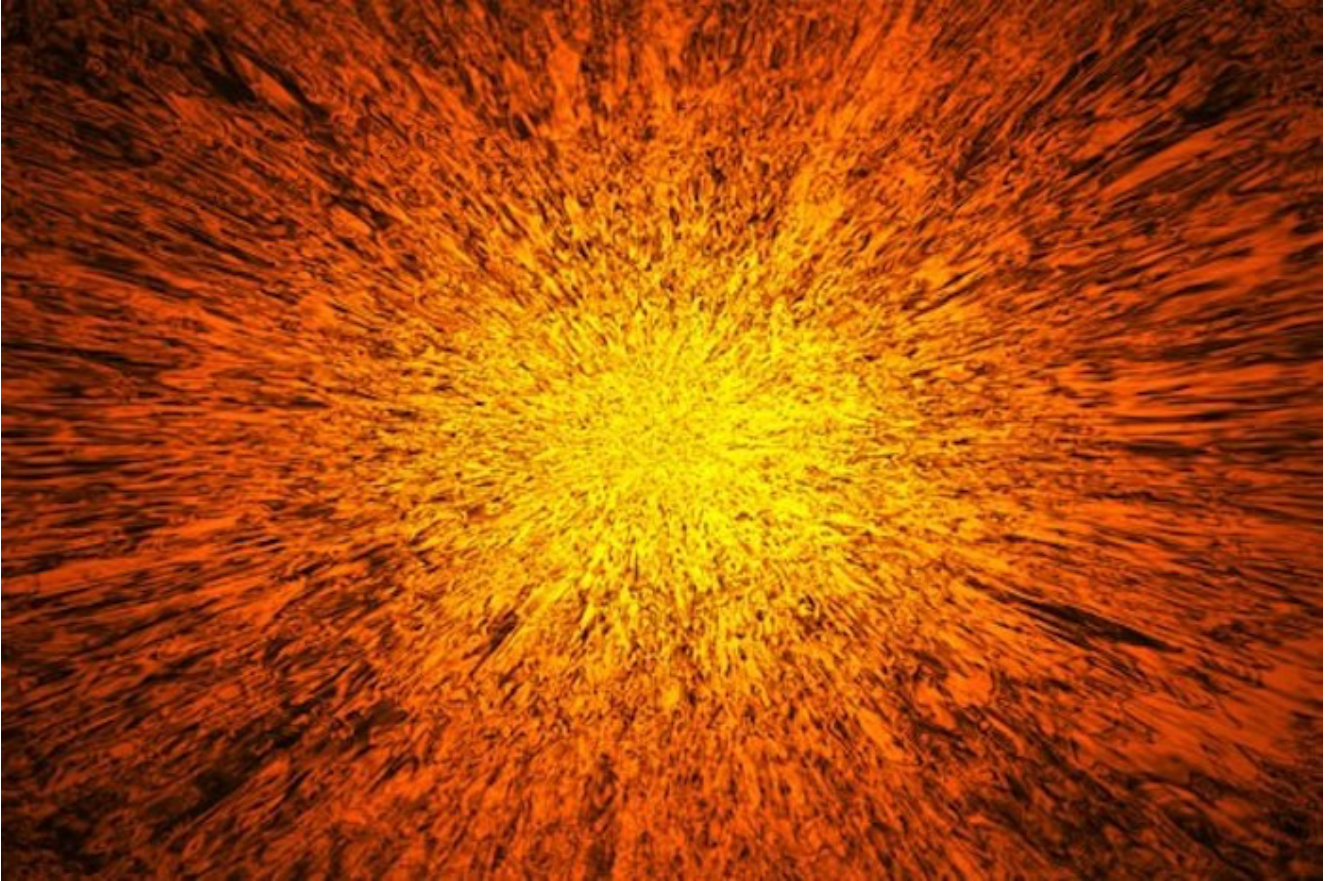
Pro writers write pages... daily.

Pro writers live life... and feed their creativity.

Finally, let me suggest a change in language. Instead of giving it a "shot"... make a "commitment". That's what's needed. A total commitment of mind, body, and soul.

To help speed you on your way, a big honking blast of creative juju!





Onward!

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