







CAN A WRITER WIN MORE THAN ONE FELLOWSHIP IN A YEAR?

WHAT ARE WINNING WRITERS REQUIRED TO DO DURING THE FELLOWSHIP YEAR?

WHAT HAPPENS IF A FELLOW SELLS A SCRIPT OR IS HIRED TO WRITE ONE DURING THE FELLOWSHIP YEAR?

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WITH EXACTLY THE SAME SCRIPT?

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## WRITERS AND SCREENWRITING CONTESTS

OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, SCREENPLAY COMPETITIONS HAVE PROLIFERATED. BESIDES THE OBVIOUS – THE CASH PRIZES – WHY SHOULD AMATEUR WRITERS CONSIDER ENTERING COMPETITIONS?

## DON AND GEE NICHOLL

### Q: WHO ARE DON AND GEE NICHOLL?

A: Don Nicholl was a British writer who was invited by Norman Lear to join the staff of the groundbreaking television series “All in the Family” early in its run. Don went on to produce “The Jeffersons” and then, leaving the Lear family, he became an executive producer of “Three’s Company” and its spin-offs. He died in 1980 with his name gracing hundreds of TV episodes.

Don’s widow, Gee, remembering the tough times they had endured at the beginning of their careers, established the Nicholl Fellowships in his memory, initially at Stanford University and then at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. She and Don had often spoken about helping other writers, and she hoped that the fellowship would make the struggle a little easier for those just starting out.

Sadly, Gee Nicholl died unexpectedly in January 2009. All of us connected with the Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting miss her tremendously.

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### Q. HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE ‘NICHOLL’?

A: It’s pronounced the same as “nickel.”

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## THE BASICS

### Q: WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO ENTER THE COMPETITION?

A: You need to submit an original feature film screenplay in PDF format, a completed online application form and an entry fee (amount varies depending on when you enter: \$48 by 11:59 PM March 3, \$63 by 11:59 PM April 3, \$88 by 11:59 PM May 3).

Full-time students at an accredited college/university are eligible for a discount on their entry fee in 2021. Indicate your status in the demographic section of your online application. The discount will be offered in the payment section.

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### Q. WHEN ARE THE APPLICATION FORMS AVAILABLE?

A: The online application typically becomes available in late January. The application period for the 2021 competition will close May 3.

**Q. WHEN IS THE REGULAR ENTRY DEADLINE?**

A: In 2021, the deadline is 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on April 3. The late and final deadline is 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on May 3.

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**Q. HOW DO I ENTER THE COMPETITION?**

A: By accessing the Academy Nicholl Fellowships application materials online. Once you establish an account, you can complete an application form, upload a PDF version of your script and pay the entry fee.

Entrants from the previous year's competition are contacted by e-mail with a link to the Nicholl page when the competition opens (usually in January).

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**Q. CAN I ENTER BY MAIL BY SUBMITTING A PAPER COPY OF MY SCRIPT AND A PRINTED APPLICATION FORM?**

A. No, you can only enter the competition online. We no longer provide printed application forms, nor do we accept screenplays by mail.

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**Q: IF I CREATED A NICHOLL ONLINE ACCOUNT IN A PREVIOUS YEAR, CAN I USE THAT SAME ACCOUNT TO ENTER THIS YEAR?**

A: Yes. Once you create an online account, you can continue to use it in subsequent competitions; there is no need to create a new account.

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**Q: CAN I ENTER MORE THAN ONE SCRIPT INTO THE ACADEMY NICHOLL COMPETITION?**

A: Yes, but each entrant is limited to three scripts per competition year. Each entry requires a separate online application form and entry fee. Under no circumstances may an entrant submit different versions or multiple copies of the same script. Doing so may result in all versions of the script being disqualified. Each writer, whether a sole author or member of a collaborative writing team, may enter no more than three scripts.

In other words, if Jane and John enter one script they wrote as a team, each of them may be connected to two more scripts, individually or as a team.

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**Q: CAN I ENTER MULTI-PART SCRIPTS?**

A: No. If you have Great Story Part 1 that then continues into Great Story Part 2 as two scripts and you can't understand Great Story Part 2 without having read Great Story Part 1, then the scripts are not considered stand-alone and not eligible. The exception is if each part can be read as a separate, stand-alone screenplay.

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**Q: HOW CAN I PAY THE ENTRY FEE?**

A: Entry fees can only be paid online with a credit or debit card.

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**Q: WHERE DOES THE ENTRY FEE MONEY GO?**

A: Generally speaking, the entry fees go into a pool of funds to cover contest costs – administration, network and database expenses, printing – but one could look at it as covering first-round reading costs.

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**Q: WHAT ARE THE PRIZES?**

A: Up to five \$35,000 fellowships are awarded to new screenwriters each year. From 1986 through 2021, 186 fellowships totaling \$4,750,000 have been awarded.

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## **ONLINE APPLICATION PROCESS**

**Q: WHY CAN'T I FIND OUT MY SCRIPT'S STATUS IN THE COMPETITION ONLINE?**

































A. No, it is not true. The goal of the Academy Nicholl Fellowships is to identify and encourage talented new writers, and it doesn't matter whether the writers submit comedies, thrillers, science fiction, horror or drama. See the list of genres of "Winning Scripts" below for confirmation.

The reason more dramas appear on various lists of Academy Nicholl entrants is that more dramas are entered into the competition each and every year.

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## Q: IN THE COMPETITION, DO GOOD SCRIPTS GET PASSED OVER?

A: Not intentionally, but there's no way around it. The whole reading enterprise is incredibly subjective. That's why every script is read at least twice in the first round. If the first reader just doesn't connect with a script, the second read gives the script another chance to find a champion. We hope that our readers aren't swayed by their personal tastes, but they're human, too.

To further the Academy's commitment to encouraging and valuing diversity in the industry, the Nicholl Fellowships Program takes measures to ensure that our selection process is as fair as possible and without bias.

Throughout the competition we direct scripts to readers who might have an affinity for them. We ask our readers about their genre likes and dislikes. If one says, "I love horror and science fiction," that reader will receive relatively more scripts in those genres. If another says, "I hate horror and science fiction but love historical dramas," that reader will receive more historical dramas and as few horror and science fiction scripts as possible.

By adding a second read for every script during the first round, we have eliminated the possibility of a good script being knocked out by a single reader.

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## WINNING SCRIPTS

### Q: WHAT ARE THE GENRES OF THE SCRIPTS THAT HAVE WON THEIR WRITERS ACADEMY NICHOLL FELLOWSHIPS?

A: Genres of Nicholl Fellows' Entry Scripts (1989–2021)

action-adventure – 11  
animated comedy – 1  
comedy – 9  
romantic comedy – 5  
comedy-drama – 14  
coming-of-age drama – 13  
drama – 61

romantic drama-fantasy – 2  
horror – 3  
science fiction – 4  
thriller / crime / caper – 23  
war / terrorism – 12  
Western – 3

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**Q: IF YOU WERE A WRITER ABOUT TO START A NEW SCRIPT THAT YOU WANTED TO ENTER IN THE ACADEMY NICHOLL COMPETITION, WHAT STORIES WOULD YOU CONSIDER?**

A: In a way, story is everything, and at the same time the choice of a particular story doesn't really make a difference. There's a Graham Parker song title that probably applies here – "Passion Is No Ordinary Word." Beginning writers have to be passionate about their stories and their characters.

It doesn't matter whether you're writing about a disaster at sea, alien hunters, cops investigating a murder in 1950s L.A., or a uniquely personal tale drawn from your own experience. Love your story, know it inside and out, and be passionate about your characters and their problems. When you're connected to your material in this way, your energy and emotion will likely shine through to the reader. And that's the person you have to grab – whether in a contest or in an agent's office or in a big studio. If you really care about your story, maybe a reader will too.

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**Q: HOW MANY ACADEMY NICHOLL FELLOWSHIP-WINNING SCRIPTS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED?**

A: Of the 186 scripts that have earned their writers fellowships from 1986 to 2021, 19 have been produced. Warren Taylor's "In the Dark" as "In the Eyes of a Stranger" (CBS-TV), Radha Bharadwaj's "Closet Land," Jim McGlynn's "Traveller," Mark Lowenthal's "Where the Elephant Sits," Myron Goble's "Down in the Delta," Ehren Kruger's "Arlington Road," Mike Rich's "Finding Forrester," Karen Moncrieff's "Blue Car," Deborah Pryor's "Briar Patch" (aka "Plain Dirty"), Jacob Estes's "Mean Creek," Dawn O'Leary's "Island of Brilliance" (as "Admissions"), Doug Atchison's "Akeelah and the Bee," Robert Edwards' "Land of the Blind," James Mottern's "Trucker," Bragi Schut's "Season of the Witch," Jason Micallef's "Butter," Destin Cretton's "Short Term 12," Geeta Malik's "Dinner With Friends" as "India Sweets and Spices" and Nikole Beckwith's "Stockholm, Pennsylvania."

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**Q: CAN I READ THE NICHOLL-WINNING SCRIPTS?**



A: All of the Nicholl-winning scripts may be read at the Academy’s Margaret Herrick Library, whose core collection includes thousands of feature film screenplays.

Since the Academy does not hold the rights to any of these screenplays, it is not common practice to make them available online. However, with the permission of the writers, several of the Nicholl-winning scripts are available [here](#).

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## AFTER THE COMPETITION

### Q: WHAT DO THE WINNERS WIN?

A: The winners receive \$35,000, spread over a one-year period. It’s distributed in five \$7,000 checks, paid quarterly – the first installment on day one and the second through fifth at the end of each quarter.

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### Q: CAN A WRITER WIN MORE THAN ONE FELLOWSHIP IN A YEAR?

A: Our rules state that you cannot hold another fellowship simultaneously. So if you accepted a Disney fellowship while you were a finalist in our competition, you’d be disqualified. (Having previously received a Disney fellowship would disqualify you on the basis of earnings.)

You also cannot win an Academy Nicholl Fellowship more than once.

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### Q: WHAT ARE WINNING WRITERS REQUIRED TO DO DURING THE FELLOWSHIP YEAR?

A: The intent of the Academy Nicholl Fellowships is to give fledgling writers the ability to take some time off from their “day jobs” so that they will have more time to write. We expect fellows to complete one script during their fellowship year, but we don’t really care whether they complete one or four – it’s important only that they write. That’s the goal.

Beyond writing a new script, there are no other requirements. Fellows are not required to move to Los Angeles. They are invited to join other fellows at monthly lunches but attendance is not required.

### Q: WHAT HAPPENS IF A FELLOW SELLS A SCRIPT OR IS HIRED TO WRITE ONE DURING THE FELLOWSHIP YEAR?

A: That has happened on a number of occasions. Current fellows are free to sell scripts. In the case of a writing assignment, the fellow takes a leave of absence from the fellowship and returns only after completing the professional assignment. Fellows have up to three years from receipt of their first fellowship check in which to complete the fellowship requirements.

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**Q: COULD A FELLOW PARTICIPATE IN THE SUNDANCE LABS DURING THE FELLOWSHIP YEAR?**

A: Yes.

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**Q: WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF A FULL-TIME STUDENT WAS A WINNER OF THE COMPETITION?**

A: That has happened on several occasions. A student winner would simply defer the beginning of the fellowship year until after the completion of his or her educational requirements. For instance, if we awarded a student an Academy Nicholl Fellowship in November, and the student was not slated to graduate until the following June, we would defer the start of the fellowship year until June.

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**Q: ARE THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO PLACE IN THE COMPETITION DISTRIBUTED TO PRODUCTION COMPANIES?**

A: Each year, we compile contact lists of quarterfinalists, semifinalists and finalists that include each entrant's name, script title and genre. Additionally, at the discretion of the entrant, a contact phone number, e-mail address, and log line are included. We distribute the lists to producers, executives, agents, managers and others in the development community who know about the competition and contact the Academy to request them. We do not release home addresses – only phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

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**Q: ABOUT HOW MANY REQUESTS FOR THOSE LISTS DO YOU GET?**

A: Each year, we distribute hundreds of copies of the lists, which seem to be passed along within the development community.

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## Q: DO THE LISTS GENERATE MANY INDUSTRY QUERIES?

A: Anecdotal evidence suggests that while some quarterfinalists receive up to a half-dozen contacts, others do not receive a single e-mail. Reaching the semifinals seems to generate more e-mails, and the finalists report considerably more contact. These industry queries come from agents, executives, managers and producers.

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## Q: IS THERE AN AWARDS CEREMONY?

A: Yes, since the competition's beginning in 1986, the new fellows have been introduced at an awards ceremony. In 2013, the presentation was expanded and shifted to the Academy's Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Beverly Hills so that more people, including Nicholl entrants and the public, would have an opportunity to attend. Event attendees include the winners and their guests, previous fellows, Academy Nicholl Committee members, Academy members who served as judges, invited members of the industry and press.

With the move to the 1,000-seat Goldwyn Theater, a live read of excerpts from the fellowship winning scripts by professional actors was added. For more details, pictures and videos from the Academy Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting Awards Presentations & Live Read, visit [here](#).

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## RESUBMISSIONS

### Q: BECAUSE OF THE INHERENT SUBJECTIVITY OF THE JUDGING PROCESS, DO YOU THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO RESUBMIT A SCRIPT THAT HASN'T ADVANCED IN PREVIOUS YEARS?

A: It's difficult to say "yes, keep sending in your script and your entry fee" when it may be a waste of money. On the other hand, good scripts have been passed over. Given the subjectivity of the process and the fact that we try to direct repeat scripts to different readers, scripts often fare differently in different years. In fact, on several occasions, writers have come back and have done better.

### Q: WITH EXACTLY THE SAME SCRIPT?

A: Some scripts have been re-entered over and over again. One script reached either the quarter- or semifinals four years in a row. (By the way, the writer of that script won a fellowship in 1995)

with a different script.) A 1992 semifinalist won a fellowship with the same script in 1993; two previous semifinalists won with the same scripts in 1996.

Three past quarter- or semifinalists became winners in 1997. One of those writers had reached at least the quarterfinals with eight different scripts over the years. From 1998 through 2002, we had three writers reach the finals in consecutive years and win a fellowship the second time around. Two did it with the same script; the third won with a different script. Several writers who had not previously made it past the first round ended up winning in another year. In 2015, two of the fellowship-winning writers were past semifinalists with the same script while another twice was a quarterfinalist and once was a semifinalist all with different scripts than that which won. In 2016, two of the fellowship-winning writers were past semifinalists with the same script while two others won with scripts that previously did not advance.

So persistence and perseverance sometimes pays off.

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## AGE, SEX AND GEOGRAPHY

Q: WHAT IS THE AGE RANGE OF ACADEMY NICHOLL FELLOWSHIP WINNERS?

A: The youngest fellow was 21 when she entered the competition; the oldest was 66.

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Q: WHAT IS THE AVERAGE AGE OF ACADEMY NICHOLL WINNERS?

A: Just over 36.

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Q: HOW MANY WOMEN HAVE WON ACADEMY NICHOLL FELLOWSHIPS?

A: Sixty of the 181 fellowship winners have been women.

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Q: HOW DOES THAT COMPARE WITH THE PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE ENTRANTS?

A: Since the beginning of the competition, about 32 percent of the entries have been submitted by women.

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**Q: WHERE DID THE VARIOUS ACADEMY NICHOLL WINNERS LIVE WHEN THEY ENTERED THE COMPETITION?**

A: One-hundred and four of the 181 winners resided in California; 19 hailed from New York; 5 were from Virginia; 8 from Texas; 4 from Pennsylvania; 3 from Illinois and North Carolina; 2 from Minnesota, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Georgia, and Washington; and 1 each from Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah; as well as 3 each from Australia and the United Kingdom; 2 from Canada; and 1 each from Brazil, Japan, Malaysia, and South Africa.

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**Q: WHY SO MANY CALIFORNIANS?**

A: Two reasons: first, over the years over 40 percent of all entrants have resided in California; second, talented writers who want to break into the movie industry are apt to relocate to California. The majority of California winners were born and raised outside of California.

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**Q: HOW DID FOREIGN ENTRANTS FARE DURING THE 2021 COMPETITION?**

A: About 19% of the 2021 entries came from countries other than the U.S. Of the 365 entrants who advanced to the quarterfinals and beyond, 58 (about 15%) consisted of submissions from a foreign country or territory.

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**Q: HOW MANY NICHOLL FELLOWS RESIDED OUTSIDE THE U.S. WHEN THEY WON?**

A: Three fellows, including two of the 2016 winners, were from Australia; three were from the United Kingdom; two resided in Canada; one lived in Japan; one was from South Africa; and one of the 2017 winners was from Brazil. One of the 2019 winners was from Malaysia.

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**SUBMITTING SCRIPTS TO AGENTS AND PRODUCERS DURING THE COMPETITION**

**Q: IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO SUBMIT A SCRIPT TO AGENTS AND PRODUCERS AFTER YOU'VE ENTERED IT IN THE ACADEMY NICHOLL COMPETITION?**

A: Yes. Writers should continue any and all modes of marketing their scripts without regard to their status in the competition.

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**Q: WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF A WRITER WERE TO SELL A SCRIPT DURING THE COMPETITION?**

A: If a writer were paid more than \$25,000 during the competition, that writer would become ineligible. Given the typical slow pace of contract negotiations and writer payments, it would be possible for a writer to reach the Academy Nicholl quarterfinals, to sign a contract for the sale of a script, and to remain eligible for a fellowship, so long as he or she does not receive payment for the script during the competition.

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**Q: CAN SCRIPTS BE ENTERED IN THE NICHOLL AND OTHER COMPETITIONS SIMULTANEOUSLY?**

A: Yes. However, you cannot hold the Academy Nicholl Fellowship while you hold another fellowship. Winning a competition in which you are hired to write or in which your script is essentially under an option arrangement would make you ineligible for the Academy Nicholl competition.

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**Q: CAN A WRITER WIN OR PLACE IN OTHER SCREENWRITING CONTESTS AND REMAIN ELIGIBLE FOR NICHOLL?**

A: Yes. A writer can win or place in other screenwriting contests and remain eligible for the Academy Nicholl competition, particularly if prize money does not secure rights to the writer's script. If the prize money is contingent upon the winner signing an option or any other professional writing agreement, it will count toward the writer's \$25,000 earnings limit.

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**Q: WHEN WOULD WINNING A CONTEST MAKE A WRITER INELIGIBLE FOR THE ACADEMY NICHOLL COMPETITION?**

A: Any contest that offers prize money of over \$25,000 that is contingent upon the winner signing an option or any other professional writing agreement would make a writer ineligible for the Academy Nicholl competition.

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## MISCELLANEOUS

**Q: DO YOU PROVIDE READER COMMENTS TO ENTRANTS?**

A: Since 2015, entrants have been able to purchase the option to view reader comments for the script. Depending on how far the script goes in the competition, comments may be from two to six different readers, up to and including the Quarterfinal round. These comments are released on the date specified in the online application, no earlier than after the first round notification emails have been sent.

These comments are not intended as comprehensive notes; they're just a peek at the reactions a reader has to the entry.

Purchase of comments is not required for entry; it is optional when you enter the competition. Comments can retroactively be purchased after submitting a screenplay up to the final deadline for entry. After the competition is closed to entries, comments will no longer be available for purchase.

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**Q: CAN I BUY JUST READER COMMENTS FOR MY SCRIPT?**

A: Sorry, a script has to be entered into the competition in order to have the option of viewing reader comments. We are not offering a script notes service.

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**Q: CAN I BUY OR VIEW READER COMMENTS FOR A SUBMISSION FROM A PREVIOUS YEAR?**

A: No. Reader comments are only accessible during the calendar year of the competition. Entrants who purchase them can print their comments on or before December 31st.

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**Q: HOW MANY SCRIPTS HAVE BEEN ENTERED INTO THE ACADEMY NICHOLL COMPETITION SINCE IT STARTED?**

A: Through 2021 we've received more than 182,000 entries. Here's the breakdown by years:

1986 – 99 entries  
1987 – 459 entries  
1988 – 231 entries  
1989 – 1,395 entries  
1990 – 2,888 entries  
1991 – 3,814 entries  
1992 – 3,515 entries  
1993 – 3,854 entries  
1994 – 3,934 entries  
1995 – 3,695 entries  
1996 – 4,181 entries  
1997 – 4,006 entries  
1998 – 4,446 entries  
1999 – 4,150 entries  
2000 – 4,250 entries  
2001 – 5,489 entries  
2002 – 6,044 entries  
2003 – 6,048 entries  
2004 – 6,073 entries  
2005 – 5,879 entries  
2006 – 4,899 entries  
2007 – 5,050 entries  
2008 – 5,224 entries  
2009 – 6,380 entries  
2010 – 6,304 entries  
2011 – 6,730 entries  
2012 – 7,197 entries  
2013 – 7,251 entries  
2014 – 7,511 entries  
2015 – 7,442 entries  
2016 – 6,915 entries  
2017 – 7,102 entries  
2018 – 6,895 entries  
2019 – 7,302 entries  
2020 – 7,831 entries  
2021 – 8,191 entries

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## **WRITERS AND SCREENWRITING CONTESTS**

**Q: OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, SCREENPLAY COMPETITIONS HAVE PROLIFERATED. BESIDES THE OBVIOUS - THE CASH PRIZES - WHY SHOULD AMATEUR WRITERS CONSIDER ENTERING COMPETITIONS?**



First, a few words of advice: Don't enter screenplay competitions solely because you need the money. These competitions may seem like lotteries, with plenty of money to go around. But all of them, especially those that offer the largest prizes, are highly competitive. More than 99 percent of writers who enter contests will not receive a cash prize.

But there are a number of positive results that can arise from entering a competition:

Contests can serve as stepping-stones.

Winning writers, and occasionally runners-up, have used the "heat" generated by their contest victory or placement to jump-start their careers. Winners of the largest contests usually find an agent quickly (if they are not already represented). Their scripts are welcomed by major production companies and studios. If the writer so desires, this typically leads to meetings with countless development execs. Writers who have won major contests have often sold or optioned a script or been hired to write or rewrite a project within a year after winning. This often leads to other work or other sales.

Contest results can be added to a résumé or query letter.

Placing in a contest should certainly be mentioned in a query letter and added to a résumé when appropriate. While the mention of a victory or placement in an obscure contest will not guarantee positive responses from agents or producers, it can't hurt you. Mention of placement in major contests has often garnered writers reads at agencies and production companies.

Contests can serve as yardsticks.

While most contests do not offer any kind of written feedback on an entrant's script, the script's performance may serve as a good indicator of whether the script is ready for submission to Hollywood agents and producers. Reaching the second round of any contest suggests that something is going right. Reaching an advanced round of highly competitive contests may suggest that the script is meeting or is close to meeting professional standards. On the other hand, an early departure from one or several contests may suggest that the script isn't ready.

Contests can open doors and initiate professional contacts.

Since many contests use industry professionals as judges at advanced levels, it is possible to make contacts simply by advancing in a competition. Some contests provide lists of quarterfinalists, semifinalists and finalists to interested agents, producers and development execs. For a very few writers, these contacts have led directly to a career.

Contests provide deadlines.

Writers have been known to complete scripts when a deadline looms.