



The writing questionnaire

Screens of tomorrow Collective

Screens of tomorrow is a movement initiated by a hundred French audiovisual and film professionals who want to tell stories that highlight a more inclusive and sustainable society. These works of fiction, whatever their form, are not necessarily militant or dogmatic in nature. They preserve the narrative arc of stories that are captivating, intriguing, moving, compelling, and successful. They take inspiration from current concerns to normalize sustainable behavior on the screen and contribute to raising awareness in the general public.

This non-profit approach, initiated by Sparknews (environmental and social storytelling expert) and Get the Moon (film industry expert), was funded by industry stakeholders and several foundations. None of the participants had a private interest in this collaborative project, but all have found it to be of collective interest for their work and their teams.

Screens of tomorrow Guide

This guide, created by and for TV and film professionals, serves as a means for reflecting upon writing and story line development routines to create new reference points for viewers. It includes a questionnaire and resource center containing studies and expert advice. Three versions of the guide are available for writing, production, and distribution professionals, so everyone can take action within their own context as part of a collective industry-wide approach.

The writing questionnaire

You're a screenwriter. Your stories and characters inspire and/or influence viewers who enter your imaginary world. You're looking to incorporate elements of a more inclusive and sustainable society into your story lines.

This guide includes three guiding questions based on the cornerstones of story development: the characters, the societal model, and the characters' mission. You will find a summary of the guide on this page.

The full guide includes approximately thirty questions and is available for download. Its quick and easy-to-use format invites you to reflect upon your story without hindering your creativity and without there being any right or wrong answers.

This questionnaire is not an exhaustive list. Feel free to make it your own and use it to guide you in your screenwriting goals.

1. Who are your characters?

Parity, inclusion, disability, and cultural, ethnic, and social diversity... Our history and societies are the product of a profound diversity that contributes to their strength and value.

The goal of this chapter is to reflect upon how your main and secondary characters are established and whether they reflect our social diversity. Without imposing quotas, these questions allow you to explore the diversity of your characters and how it impacts your story.

A few key figures:

- 47.8% of lead actors are female. (Source: UCLA, Hollywood Diversity Report, 2022, Part 1: Film)
- 3.57% of on-screen 3-person group interactions are between three women versus the 40.74% that take place between three men. (Source: "Using data science to understand the film industry's gender gap" 2020)
- 95% of characters with disabilities in the top 10 TV shows in the US are played by able-bodied actors. (Source: "The Ruderman White Paper, On employment of actors with disabilities in television" 2016)
- 38.9% of lead actors in theatrical and streaming Hollywood films produced in 2021 are people of color. They have maintained their proportional representation, which was achieved for the first time in 2020. (Source: UCLA, Hollywood Diversity Report, 2022, Part 1: Film)

Questions :

- What are the profiles of the main characters in your story? What are their physical features ? What is their gender, sexual orientation, geographical origin, perceived origin, occupation, age, etc.?
- What are the profiles of your secondary characters and extras? Think about the same characteristics listed above.
- Could the characters in your story be embodied by profile types other than those already identified?
- If your characters are not from different cultures, traditions, or backgrounds, could changing their profiles enrich your story?
- Who are your female characters? How do their words and actions contribute to the story? Who are your male characters? How about your non-gendered characters?

- Does your story include characters with disabilities or impairments (visible or invisible, physical or mental)?

> If so, do you treat the disability as an integral part of the story line to challenge viewers' perceptions of this disability? Or is it a component of one of the characters, without being the focus, so as to "normalize" disability?

> If not, could including a character with a disability add value to your story?

- Does your story include LGBTQIA+ characters? Is the issue of gender and sexual orientation given any particular consideration in your story? How is it addressed? Why is it addressed?
- Do the stereotypes and misconceptions typically associated with your character profiles add value to the story? If not, could you update their profiles to include other characteristics that are less expected?
- Have you consulted experts or individuals directly concerned with gender/diversity/inclusion issues to best describe the reality of these situations?
- Can the characteristics of some of your characters evolve based on the final casting in order to adapt to the profiles of the selected actors ?

2. What is your characters' mission?

The concept of “success” includes many facets that go beyond those conveyed by the current dominant models (financial gain, the appeal of power, etc.).

This part of the guide offers ways to explore and highlight new sources of personal and collective fulfillment and development by reflecting upon characters' aspirations and their understanding of current issues.

Instead of creating smooth or predictable characters, these questions take into account the contradictory nature of human beings and lead them to new, more contemporary reflections.

A few key figures:

- *25% of respondents report having heard about the climate crisis through fictional TV or film. (Source: Research A Glaring Absence : the Climate Crisis is Virtually Nonexistent in Scripted Entertainment, 2021)*
- *77% of survey respondents report having learned about a social or environmental issue through fictional TV or film. (Source: Research A Glaring Absence : the Climate Crisis is Virtually Nonexistent in Scripted Entertainment, 2021)*
- *0.6% of the 37,453 film and TV scripts analyzed by researchers at the University of Southern California (USC) specifically mentioned "climate change" (Source: Research A Glaring Absence : the Climate Crisis is Virtually Nonexistent in Scripted Entertainment, 2021)*
- *12,715: The number of times “climate change” was mentioned in UK TV shows in 2020, which is 9,590 more times than in 2018. (Source: WE ARE ALBERT, Subtitles to Save the World: An Analysis of How UK Broadcasters Are Exposing Audiences to Climate Change Through Their Content, 2021)*

The psychology of characters :

- What is the primary goal (power, wealth, freedom, social connection, love, travel, comfort, stability, survival, etc.) of your main and secondary characters?
- Do they have a certain awareness of environmental and social issues?
- If so, how is this awareness embodied in their behavior? Does it evolve throughout the story?
- If not, do they become aware of these issues at a certain point in the story? How do they react?
- Does this awareness have an influence on their relationships with the other characters and on the narrative arc?
- How is it perceived (positively, negatively, neutral) by other characters?
- How do you think your characters might evolve by the end of your story?

Relationship with success and power :

- What does money represent (success, pleasure, anxiety, power, freedom, constraint, taboo, an objective, etc.) for the characters who mention it?
- Do the characters depend upon one another or show mutual support and collaboration?
- Which elements of the story (abundance, belonging to a community, cultural heritage, possessions, social connection, connection to nature, technology used in daily life, etc.) make the main characters happy?
- Which elements make them unhappy?
- How do secondary characters perceive these elements?

3. Which societal model serves as a backdrop for your story?

Our consumption of natural resources exceeds what the Earth is able to replenish in a year. According to Earth Overshoot Day, it would take 1.75 Earths to regenerate what we consume. Because humanity will have to adapt to these fixed planetary limits, the goal of this chapter is to reflect upon your characters' habits and lifestyles (their relationship with consumption, nature, etc.) in order to identify other models that are more compatible with the resources actually available.

A few key figures:

- *80%: This percentage represents the relative average duration of nature scenes in Walt Disney films in the 1940s. In the 2000s, the duration dropped to 50%, highlighting a decrease in nature representations over time. (Source: Public Understanding of Science, Historical evidence for nature disconnection in a 70-year time series of Disney animated films 2014)*
- *At current global consumption levels, we would need 1.8 Earths to meet our needs and 5.1 Earths if every human consumed like an American. (Source: How Many Earths? How Many Countries? – Earth Overshoot Day article)*
- *50% of the world's population will live in regions where water resources will no longer be sufficient by 2025. (Source: World Resources Institute)*
- *69% of vertebrate populations disappeared between 1970 and 2018. (Source: WWF Living Planet Report 2020)*

Model of consumption :

- Under what conditions, and to meet what need(s), do the characters in your story become consumers? Do they consume to meet their daily needs, for enjoyment, to compensate for a disappointment, etc.?
- How do your characters respond (in an immediate, reasonable, or unreasonable way) to this need to consume?
- What emotions (joy, hysteria, addiction, instability-related distress, etc.) are associated with moments of consumption?
- Do you mention local, seasonal food?
- Are waste and recycling taken into account?

- If you want viewers to question your characters' behaviors and the reactions they elicit, would you prefer to call attention to behavior that is incompatible with our current limitations (e.g., a character who throws their cigarette butt on the ground and is caught) or normalize more sustainable behaviors (e.g., all the characters throw their cigarette butts in the trash without calling attention to it)?
- What decorations, accessories, and hobbies (types of transportation, housing, clothing, tourism, etc.) are shown on the screen?

What image do they project? Could they be replaced by other elements with less environmental impact?

What role do living beings (fauna and flora) play in your story?

- How is flora represented? Is it non-existent or prominent (minimal decoration)? Are there scenes dedicated to flora?
- Is it domestic or wild?
- Do the characters interact with the flora?
- What emotions are associated with these scenes?
- Are there animals in your story? Do they have a specific role?
- What types of animals (wild, domestic, or captive) are there?
- How do they relate to the characters? How are animals treated in the story?
- What behaviors or situations can be associated with scenes that include animals? What image do they convey to viewers?

Lexicon

Captive species

In this context, this expression refers to animal species that have become accustomed to the presence of human beings but retain their characteristics as wild animals (e.g., A wolf may have been tamed by human beings, but it will never be fully domesticated).

Daily needs

This definition is not static, as it is subject to interpretation by each individual. It is used in this guide to designate the physiological needs associated with rational and necessary consumption.

Abraham Maslow, an American humanistic psychologist (1916–1972), identified five types of basic needs that are still referred to today and that he classified as follows:

1. Vital or physiological needs (eating, drinking, sleeping, breathing, etc.)
2. Safety and protection needs (personal security, employment, health, property, etc.)
3. Social needs (love, friendship, belonging, etc.)
4. Self-esteem needs (confidence, respect for others, etc.)
5. Self-actualization needs (personal accomplishment)

Disability

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” (Source: United Nations)

The World Health Organization classifies disabilities into 5 broad categories:

- Motor disability
- Sensory disability (visual and auditory)
- Psychological disability (illnesses affecting personality)
- Cognitive disability (intellectual disabilities)
- Disabling illnesses

Diversity

All persons who differ from one another in terms of geographical, sociocultural, or religious origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, etc., and make up the national community to which they belong. (Source: Larousse)

Lexicon

Environmental and social issues

This expression represents the challenges related to planetary limitations and social justice perceived as needing to be taken into account to promote a sustainable society that respects living beings. These challenges include climate change; biodiversity preservation; the transition to sustainable agricultural and food systems; sustainable mobility; well-being, health, and quality of life; the commitment to equality, parity, and inclusion for all; the fight against poverty and exclusion; waste reduction; etc.

Inclusion

Act of integrating a person or group by putting an end to their exclusion, particularly their social exclusion. (Source: Larousse) Social inclusion is about changing how we view our relationship with others and with differences. Rather than wanting “nonconformists” to come as close as possible to the “norm,” the norm itself is re-evaluated.

Intersectionality

Theorised by Afro-feminist activist and lawyer Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, this sociological term refers to the situation of people who simultaneously experience several forms of discrimination or domination in a society. For example: A Black, lesbian woman is likely to experience three types of discrimination related to her gender, her perceived origin, and her sexual orientation.

LGBTQIA+

This acronym designates people who are not heterosexual by repeating the first letter of other forms of sexuality, including:

L for lesbian

G for gay

B for bisexual

T for transgender: A person whose sex at birth does not correspond to their gender identity (the opposite of cisgender: A person whose sex at birth corresponds to their gender identity).

Q for queer: A person who does not consider themselves as heterosexual or does not identify with a defined gender.

I for intersex: A person born neither male nor female.

A for asexual: A person who does not “feel the need to engage in sexual relations”

+ for all other sexual and gender identities not covered by the acronym

Lexicon

Living beings

In the strict sense, this term refers to beings animated by life, as opposed to inert objects. From a biological point of view, this term includes human beings, plants, and animals.

To this we can also add the definition of biodiversity as defined by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which was signed in Rio in 1992: "Variability among living organisms from all sources, including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems."

Parity

La parité signifie que chaque sexe est représenté à égalité dans les institutions. C'est un instrument au service de l'égalité, qui consiste à assurer l'accès des femmes et des hommes aux mêmes opportunités, droits, occasions de choisir, conditions matérielles tout en respectant leurs spécificités. La notion de parité constitue le fondement des politiques de lutte contre les inégalités entre les femmes et les hommes. (Source : INSEE)

Perceived origin

Involves dividing individuals according to common categories based on whether they are perceived as being "white," "Black," "Asian," or "other."

Stereotypes

A ready-made opinion reducing individual characteristics. Synonyms: clichés, prejudices. (Source: Le Robert)