



The Warner Bros. Television Writers Workshop

Could this be your ticket to prime time?

Dreaming of writing for the small screen? Then, the Warner Bros. Television Writers Workshop could be your ticket to fame and fortune. It worked for Tad Quill, a 1996 graduate who's now an executive producer on the hit NBC comedy "Scrubs." He learned about the workshop from his neighbor, another graduate who also made it big: Greg Garcia, the creator of "My Name Is Earl."

"Garcia got into the workshop and then immediately got a staff writing job," Quill says. "It seemed like a great way to break in." Other graduates from the workshop have landed jobs on shows like "Desperate Housewives," "Friends," "The Sopranos," "Without a Trace," "Cold Case" and "The West Wing."

The workshop, which teaches every aspect of spec scriptwriting and provides exposure to top TV writers and executives, has become the premiere program for aspiring TV writers to

train in a professional environment. "The idea behind the workshop is to find talented people who have no connections to this business, train them and put them on shows," says Debbie Pearlman, head of the workshop since 2001. "We're the only studio that has a workshop, and we're the longest running. It's been a big success."

Created in 1976 by an executive in the story department of what's now Warner Bros. Television, the workshop was intended to act as a farm team for the studio's comedies. With hour-long dramatic shows gaining in popularity in the 1990s, a drama-writing workshop was added in 1998.

"Since I've been here, most of the people who've gotten jobs from the workshop have come from drama," Pearlman says.

But to get to that point, you have to get in—and competition is fierce. Each year, the workshop receives almost 500 applications and spec scripts (from

a current show on the air) for the 10 spots in each class. A script is the first step in a process, which includes an interview that may lead to acceptance in either the comedy or drama workshop. "A good spec script gets you a meeting," Pearlman says. "If you come in, and we're impressed with you as a person, and you have the type of personality that we feel producers would hire, we take you."

Each workshop works differently. In the drama workshop, you rewrite the spec script that got you into the workshop, with the help of a mentor and a writer on the Warner Bros. lot, who provides notes and feedback as if you're a staff writer on their show. The six-week class also features guest speakers like Aaron Sorkin from "The West Wing" and "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip." Once the workshop is over, participants have six weeks to write a brand-new script. This way, they have two strong samples to show what they can do.

In the comedy workshop, participants write a script in just 10 weeks, during which Pearlman teaches them the format and formula of the sitcom. In addition, students bring in work to share with the rest of the class. "Each person has to read a scene to check for laughs," Pearlman says. "It's like a table-read situation you'd have on a show."

All of this is preparation for working in the real world of television. "It gives you a chance to work with other writers, as well as an opportunity to learn how to meet deadlines," Quill says. "Best-case scenario, it gets you a staff writing job. It absolutely gave me my start."

If you're interested in applying for The Warner Bros. Television Writers Workshop, visit www2.warnerbros.com/writersworkshop or call (818)954-5700. —CHRISTLE FIEDLER