



**SEATTLEBLACK
FILMFESTIVAL**

The Storytellers Toolkit

Masterclass

July 11, 2020

Moderated by: Shannan E. Johnson

Completed by: Numa Perrier

General Questions

How does your team (Agent, Manager, Publicist), including yourself, help structure your brand so when your name enters a room, your voice and vision are clear to ensure that you land gigs that are right for you?

Numa Perrier: I don't think of myself as a "brand" I'm an artist who is drawn to exploring, exposing and expressing intimacy, in a way that centers the lives and desires and Black women. My work speaks to this and my team focuses on that when making introductions. The clarity around this is a process. It's like creating an algorithm between us when a script comes in I can say I didn't love it, or yes please more like this. We fine tune that along that especially as my ambitions grow. I'm seeking things and they seek me as well. I don't feel bound to a genre but I do know what excites me most and we lean in that direction.

What is your role, as a creative of color with success in the industry, in creating opportunities for emerging diverse voices and stories? In what way do you give back to the writing community?

N.P.: I give back by hiring. Every job I create for myself creates jobs for more like me, and I insist on that whether it's an indie self-funded project or something for a larger studio. I feel uncomfortable being looked at as a mentor. I see myself as a peer, a contemporary in the space. So I hire more than I "mentor".

What is your process for receiving notes from executives? How do you know which notes to take into consideration and where do you draw the line and push for your vision?

N.P.: I take all notes from execs into consideration. I've been on both sides of this as a producer/exec and as the creative so I feel like I really understand the balance here and the structure at play. It starts with working with people who you already respect and honoring that there is a collaboration happening, even if you are leading it. With execs who may be holding the pocket book there's a dance and a debate and it's part of the process. I stay fluid and use witchcraft when necessary. Just kidding. No, really.



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How can you tell the difference between a screenplay that should be made and one that is best used as a writing sample to get another writing gig? How do you objectively assess your work if you don't have a group of peers who understand industry screenplay standards?

N.P.: Why write something that you wouldn't want to have made? This makes no sense to me. That's a waste of everyone's time. Everyone needs a small group of trusted people to read their work- it could be three people, or it could even just be one person at first, and you can find those peers in writing groups. You can create those peers by subscribing to different online classes as well. You want to find writers who are stronger than you to read your work, but these are relationships that you cultivate by also reading scripts and giving generous thoughtful feedback. Trusting someone to read your work means you have to also be a trustworthy person and reciprocate. If you don't have that then you have to be that person for yourself until you do. Read that script out loud, record it, listen to it back. What flows? Where are you repetitious? Where and how can you be more honest in the work?

What's a general meeting, how do you book them, and how do you seal the deal?

N.P.: A general meeting is like a blind date with an industry executive except of course you can google them and see what they are all about, but it's a moment for you to meet and learn a bit about each other. You talk about what you're looking to do and they talk about what their mandate is and hopefully you get to know each other a little bit personally as well and connect in that moment. There's no deal to seal it's about expanding who you know in the industry and who knows you. Normally my agents line these up for me and honestly sometimes I feel like it's pointless but I've learned quickly that that's not actually true. My tv series came out of a general meeting and so did my latest directing job. I had to get used to the idea that each of these meetings is about expanding possibilities and just relax and enjoy the moment. Like a first date or meeting with a new friend.

What's the best piece of advice that you didn't listen to that you live by now? What was your journey to that revelation?

N.P.: Get your paperwork and agreements with each other done upfront on every project no matter how large or small the budget is. Don't wait until later when people's feelings and circumstances can change direction.



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What does it mean to write for the reader and not the screen? How does “the read” affect the process of getting your screenplay made?

N.P.: I don't understand this. If you are writing a script it should be one that can be made and one that you would want to be made.

With everything going on with the ATA and the coronavirus changing the landscape of filmmaking, how important is it to have representation to get meetings?

N.P.: Representation absolutely helps. But talent will also shine through and land you that representation. So be your own rep first. Have business meetings with yourself or a small group of people. Map out weekly goals the same way you would want your rep to do. Reps get 10percent and they do ten percent of the work. You will always still have to do the 90 percent (or more!) And create your work with or without the rep! The work will showcase who you are and the rest will come!

What materials are absolutely necessary when going into a meeting to pitch your screenplay/idea for a screenplay? Are there different/additional materials needed if a writer is seeking financing or distribution of a completed film?

N.P.: Your vision and passion for the project should be clear and palpable. Visual aids are very useful such as a lookbook or very short video reel that represents the project. An outline or one sheet is usually enough for a pitch, but they always ask for the script so have that ready too so you can follow up with that. It always comes down to the script! But movies and series are sold without that as well, usually when your previous work has excited them. It also helps to know what the general budget of the project is.

What's your writing process? Do you have a favorite place? Do you need to be alone? Do you listen to music?

N.P.: I like to be alone when I write but it's nearly impossible while raising a child so I am able to do it otherwise but I do prefer to be alone. I get fixated on a song and have it on repeat for hours on end. I love to have a little whiskey sometimes to summon the gods and just have the space to dance around, lay on the floor, take breaks and sometimes I enjoy having a series on that I love but have seen many times - like fleabag- when I'm writing. If I am alone it kind of keeps me company and dares me to be better.



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When writing on contract (writer-for-hire), what's your usual mandated turnaround time? How important is it to have an efficient writing process as a professional writer?

N.P.: I work well under pressure or maybe I am a glutton of the anxiety that induces. Someone told me to have deadlines in your mind but don't announce them because then people are all over you to meet them instead of giving you the time you need. I found this to be true but I also need deadlines to act as a boundary for my procrastination. So yeah I'd say for a fresh draft of something I like to have 6 weeks if it's under 60 pages and 8 to 10 weeks if its feature length. If it's a rewrite I can cut those times in half usually. I always ask them what their timeline is first though.

How many writing projects are you comfortable with tackling at a time and why? What parts of your process allow you to successfully multitask?

N.P.: I'm comfortable with 2-3 at a time. I like being able to move from one to the other. And if the themes differ it gives me a nice break. I'm not a single-minded person so I do better with multi-tasking to a limit.

Writer/Director Questions

As a writer/director, how open are you to bringing other people's stories to life? What is your process for choosing content?

N.P.: I like to bring other people's stories to life I love that part. When I feel that connection to a world or life that I haven't quite lived but feel close to it or drawn to it then I want to explore that through my filmmaking. Then I bring those parts of myself that feel aligned to it as well and it takes on new shape. And writing is tough work. So getting a script that is strong and exciting gets my imagination running on how I can translate that on screen. I love that.

As a writer who is not an aspiring director or producer, do you think having a proof of concept is a good way to jumpstart a writing career?

N.P.: If you only want to write and not direct or produce that script is your proof of concept. You wrote it and it's your property. There are many directors who do not write so go find them and become a team. Great partnerships can be born like this.

Coming into the industry knowing that you want to be a writer/ director (not a writer who directs or a director who writes), what's the best way to make yourself known in the



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industry in both lanes and gain the trust to be able to tackle your own projects on the studio level?

N.P.: The best way from my experience was to create the work myself. I am both a writer and a director, but no one cared about me saying it. They only ever cared when they got an invitation to see the work. So if that's important to you then write and direct your first projects to make that clear. And continue to be clear about that when you are asked. I consider myself a writer/director, however I still love to direct scripts I did not write. I don't see myself doing a lot of writing on projects that I'm not also directing. It's good to be clear about that but the clarity comes in the work.

TV Writer Questions

At the staff writer level, how do you know what you bring to the table and when to make your voice heard in the room? What's your process for understanding the series and writing in the Creator's/ Showrunner's voice?

N.P.: I can answer this from a show runner point of view. We are looking for writers with varied strengths to create that cohesive unit so it's good to know what you're strong at whether that's dialogue, plot, editing etc. When we meet with writers we want to feel their personal connection to the material and hopefully this is also reflected in the writing sample. We want writers who aren't afraid to speak up. The room is about everyone's participation and you often spend many hours talking and listening and thinking over things together. You can best learn your strengths by getting feedback from writers groups. This will evolve over time but having your work read and reading others work is how you get into that rhythm.

How do you best prepare for a meeting with a showrunner for staffing?

N.P.: Be very prepared. Know their work as inside out as you can. Know your personal connection to the project and don't be afraid to express it. If you can find an interview with them listen to that so you can get a feel for their personality before you meet. See if you have anything in common. You don't have to mention it in the room but it will help you relax and if it comes up naturally then mention it. If the script for the project is available read it several times and be ready with a few ideas or takes on the characters. If you're a fan of the series say why from a writer's point of view as well as a fan.

If you jumped from TV writing to features or vice versa, what was that process like and when did you feel comfortable in your career taking the leap? How are the two parts of the industry similar or different?



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N.P.: *I don't see the process as being largely different. You have to know the world and the characters and where they are going. You have to know why you are the one who should be writing this. They both require structure but each structure can be very different. We are in a place where the approach has been stretched in so many different ways so it's more about identifying what really excites you.*

In television, what does it mean to produce your own episode as a writer? Are all members of the writing staff given the opportunity? What skills are necessary to successfully produce an episode?

N.P.: *Producing as a writer is sometimes hands on and sometimes it's about credit and compensation. It's a form of promotion as well. I don't know that all writers are given that opportunity, it's to be worked out in your deal going in. I would definitely always ask for it though.*

What skills and experience are necessary to be a successful showrunner? How do writers put themselves in a position to run their own show?

N.P.: *I come from the indie TV space - Web series and served as showrunner on the projects that were a natural fit for me to lead. It's about guiding the room and creating an environment for the best ideas to come forth. It's about recognizing each writers strengths and knowing what to assign to who and when. It's about keeping the show on track and creating that track while leading the writing team. You also have to be able to re write scripts and step in when necessary. You put yourself in the position by being clear with yourself and your team that it's your goal to show run. Then you learn from the best and be the best writer you can be. If you create your own series that gives you more leverage but you may have a co show runner at first which is not a bad thing if the two of you click. Sometimes you do not want to be a show runner either - there are series creators who choose not to do that work. But it comes down to your leadership qualities and your team negotiating that.*

What's a typical turnaround time to write an episode and how is this affected by the production schedule?

N.P.: *This varies from show to show, some are a one week turn around for a first draft, some are several weeks. Everything depends on the overall production schedule which also can vary depending on the network or streaming platform, whether it's a half hour or hour, single cam multi cam etc.*