

HEADS UP: this step involves reading this longer text document, so be sure to save the URL in case you need to come back to it.

As you undertake the process of determining whether or not to invest your time, energy, focus, and resources into a rigorous, 2-year, intensive and comprehensive program that is designed to provide you with both the insights and skills required to launch and further a successful career as a professional screenwriter, it might make sense to assess where you are in your competence level of a number of those different key skill areas.

This kind of self-assessment or evaluation is particularly challenging, but it's going to be important to this application process for a number of reasons.

First, this application process is different from the usual sort of assessment or judging process whereby you submit examples of your creative work for judgment by a panel of experts. The intention or hope being that early signs of "talent" will stand out in the evaluation of the applicant's creative work thus far.

However, at MPii, our research indicates that all that traditional method does, at best, is determine who has a head start over others, which doesn't seem very fair to those who come from less-advantaged backgrounds, or who may be differently abled.

But also, if a major reason that MPii is providing this unique program is because it provides access to the most impactful insights, concepts, as well as practical tools and techniques for career success, many of which are fundamental to building the higher-level craft skills required for a writer's talents to be able to truly shine, and most of which are not available anywhere else in the world, then...

How much sense does it make to evaluate the caliber of the applicant's creative work before they've had the opportunity to gain access to, learn and practice those very skills, which will most impact their level of craft and demonstrate their talent?

It's a little ridiculous. But in defense of those traditional programs with their biased application process, it's not like there's a well-established and time-tested alternative method for more fairly determining who among the as-yet-untrained should be allowed to gain special access to the most comprehensive and highest-level career success training in the world for currently working as well as future professional screenwriters.

This method we are currently using, which you are participating in, is a bit of an experiment.

It's an experiment based on years of heavy research into the questions surrounding what attributes make for more likelihood of career success for professional screenwriters. And we can

tell you that “talent” while on the list, is not even in the top 10. Other aspects, such as reliability, work ethic, positive can-do attitude, courage, and craft skills, are far more important to career success. And what if each and every one of those human attributes can be significantly improved with the right training and practice, and the right environment that supports that training and practice?

And what if it matters more how ready, willing and able someone is to learn, practice and grow in all of those areas (and more), than how much “talent” their early, untrained work might (or might not) demonstrate?

And, BTW, if you are thinking that because you attended a top film school or an industry fellowship that you have the training you need to succeed, we can only tell you that our years of research say that’s highly unlikely, simply because much of what is divulged in the Career Excelerator program isn’t available anywhere else. And the amount of practice you received was simply not sufficient to give you a credible chance to truly and deeply learn the skills required for a top-level career as a professional screenwriter.

And, in order to make a more meaningful assessment, it might be useful to ground that self-analysis in some context first. To help you do that, let’s step through some concepts that you may or may not already be familiar with, which might prove helpful.

NOTE: the following is a text-based training on some aspects of the human condition that may have some important implications for professional screenwriters. Especially as written material, it may be a bit dry, or dense. For those who are more visual or experiential learners (like many of us in the screenplay trade), we’ve included a few links to videos and graphics. If you find yourself needing to go back and re-read or take a break and come back to it, that’s okay. We are not going to test you on details, we just want you to have the benefit of some of these concepts, as you go through your own process of evaluating the value of this particular program to you and your career as you see your needs for support in moving forward to a meaningful career as a professional screenwriter.

HOW HUMANS LEARN and GROW COMPETENCY:

The first concept is a basic theory about how we humans learn new skills and achieve or fail to achieve higher levels of competency. This theory establishes 4 stages of self-awareness as a new skill is being learned, practiced and then finally owned.

It also suggests a few areas where this process might break down, stall or plateau, resulting in lower levels of competency, which often the individual may not be aware of.

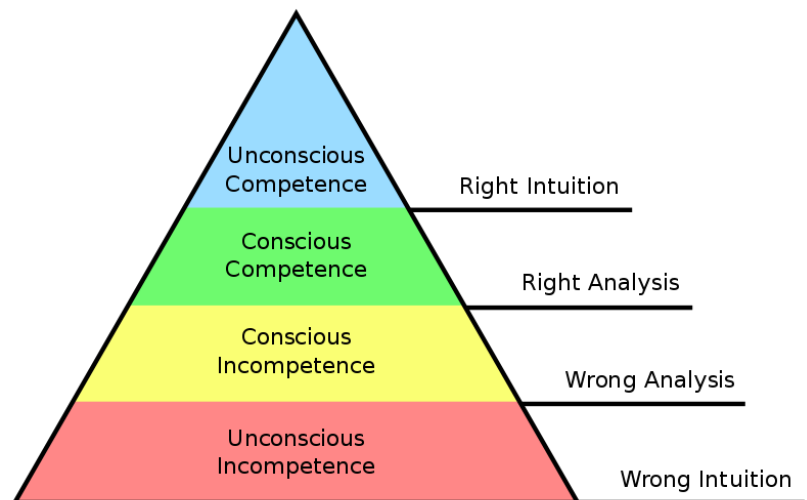
According to Wikipedia (which while not an officially 'peer reviewed' academically accepted source, tends to have a pretty good read on what the real world general understanding or basic consensus is as a starting point), the four stages are:

1. **Unconscious incompetence**

The individual is not aware of, or does not understand, or know how to do something and does not necessarily recognize the deficit. They may deny the usefulness of the skill [or mistakenly think that they have a sufficient level of the skill when they do not yet]. The individual must recognize their own incompetence, and the value of the new skill, before moving on to the next stage. The length of time an individual spends in this stage depends on the strength of the stimulus to learn.

2. **Conscious incompetence**

Though the individual does not understand or know how to do something, they recognize the deficit, as well as the value of a new skill in addressing the deficit. [Deliberate Practice and] the making of mistakes can be integral to the learning process at this stage.



Hierarchy of Competence

3. **Conscious competence**

The individual understands or knows how to do something. However, demonstrating the skill or knowledge requires concentration. It may be broken down into steps, and there is heavy conscious involvement in executing the new skill. [At this stage a significant amount of focused deliberate practice is vital in building the necessary skills to credibly move to the next level of that particular skill].

4. **Unconscious competence**

The individual has now had so much practice with a skill that it has become "second nature" and can be performed easily. As a result, the skill can be performed [intuitively].

There are a number of factors that can influence how and why people may struggle with the learning process, especially for something as complex as the many different skills required for a successful career as a professional screenwriter. For example, there's a lot more to the career strategy knowledge and skills, networking skills, collaborative creative work skills and other "people skills," as well as a much higher level of story craft skill, than most aspiring and even working screenwriters tend to realize.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to learning new skills and achieving higher levels of competency, is in recognizing the need to improve in the first place. Otherwise, it's too likely that you can get stuck in Stage 1 (Unconscious Incompetence). Not actually being fully competent, but unaware of what you don't yet know. And quite possibly mistakenly thinking that you are further along than you actually are.

For reasons that we'll explore more below, this is an extremely common problem. And one which the vast majority of those screenwriters attempting to launch and grow professional careers are not aware that they are suffering from.

Or maybe they might have a subtle feeling that they might be missing something, but they're not sure exactly what it is.

This challenge can be amplified by all the less-than-reliable advice available at film schools and online in blog posts, podcasts, and video interviews with working professionals (or semi-professionals), who may not have sufficient or deep enough understanding of some of the many-layered dynamics at work when it comes to the complexities of launching and then furthering a top-level career as a professional screenwriter. The sources of this information, while well-meaning, may be seeing the situation too much from their own point of view, and in their own blindness to the other sides of the equations, they might unintentionally be steering you wrong for your particular situation.

And there are aspects of human nature that may make this more challenging.

WHAT MAKES THE LEARNING AND GROWING SKILLS SO CHALLENGING:

In particular, there are a number of biases that can blind or distort our view of our own competency, especially relative to that of others, and/or to what is required for professional level results.

For example, in the field of [social psychology](#), **illusory superiority** is a condition of [cognitive bias](#) wherein a person overestimates their own qualities and abilities, relative to those of other people. Wikipedia explains that, "Subjects describe themselves in positive terms compared to other people, and this includes describing themselves as less susceptible to bias than other people. This effect is called the "[bias blind spot](#)" and has been demonstrated independently."

One such form of bias has been theorized as the **Dunning–Kruger effect**, which is a cognitive bias whereby people with low ability at a task overestimate their ability, as measured by comparing their [self-assessment](#) with actual performance.

This is why, in order to really learn and improve skills, more than additional information and knowledge is required. Most people need coaching to help them to identify where additional practice is needed in the first place, and then of course they need the opportunity to practice in order to improve their level of competency. And the vast majority of future professional screenwriters will need a lot more practice than they realize.

If they are aware of the concept of [Ericsson's ~10,000 hours](#) or more of focused practice as a requirement to get top-level 'good' at any skill or profession, most would-be screenwriters expect to count all the hours they've spent watching movies and television since early childhood.

Unfortunately, for the most part, that's not the kind of 'practice' that counts, at least not fully.

It must be a much more active, conscious, focused and [deliberate practice](#). Practice that involves working on developing story craft skills, and actively testing and honing those skills through constant and consistent practice and feedback, and then going back, rethinking and improving your work (many, many times, for something like ~10,000 hours).

IT TAKES HIGHER LEVEL SKILLS TO BE ABLE TO EVALUATE LEVELS OF SKILL:

Additionally, there's the matter of until one has achieved master level understanding, experience and skills, they may not be capable of accurately evaluating something as someone's competency, especially in something as complex as each of the 3 main areas that need to be mastered in order to succeed as a professional screenwriter:

Career-Building Strategies, where most of the advice and tactics available online, in film school, and even in industry standard practices, can often be counterproductive to the career prospects of the individual applying that advice.

Collaborative Creative Process skills required to successfully navigate the challenges of Hollywood story development, which are not well understood in our industry. Therefore, much of the advice and protocols taught and even practiced in the daily work and professional interactions of even working screenwriters is counterproductive to creativity itself.

And especially when it comes to the wide range of master-level **Story Craft** skills required to be able to reliably and consistently deliver professional caliber results, most

working screenwriters don't have a very good understanding of where they are, and what they would need to learn to get to that higher level of mastery.

AND YET, MORE BIASES:

There is another related bias that makes self-evaluation even more challenging.

CONFIRMATION BIAS, which might broadly be understood as:

The tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior [beliefs](#) or values.^[1] People display this bias when they select information that supports their views, ignoring contrary information, or when they interpret ambiguous evidence as supporting their existing attitudes.

The effect is strongest for desired outcomes, for emotionally charged issues, and for deeply entrenched beliefs. Confirmation bias cannot be eliminated entirely, but it can be managed, for example, by education and training in [critical thinking](#) skills.

While there are a number of forms and aspects of confirmation bias that can significantly impact one's ability to self evaluate their own skills in something as complex as screenwriting, it's probably quite obvious that for most people who are seriously endeavoring to launch and/or further a meaningful career as a professional screenwriter, that there would naturally be a great deal of emotionally charged desired outcomes. And, of course, any underlying belief— positive or negative— about one's skills as a writer might be contributing factors, right?

Related to this, oftentimes, early-stage writers gain a sense of confidence that may be unwarranted. When peers give positive feedback on a writer's work or teachers give them an A on a project, it's easy to see how a beginning writer might believe that they have what it takes to make it in the industry.

Something that is often so less considered is that the positive feedback they are getting is frequently in relation to others who are also still in the Unconscious Incompetence phase of their learning rather than in relation to the level of craft of working professionals writing industry-pro-grade scripts.

Furthermore, those giving this perhaps overly-positive, early-stage feedback often have their own agendas or constraints they are operating under. For example, when other newer writers give positive feedback to peers, they often have long-term relationships in mind, and/or they are operating under the unspoken but very human agreement/hope that "If I go easy on you, you'll go easier on me."

And when professors or teachers skew toward the positive with their feedback critiques, they

are often, to their credit, trying to encourage your nascent talent and career interest. Additionally, whether they mean to or not, they are often, naturally, trying to support the idea that their curriculum has been effective for you.

So as a result of all this (plus a few more things we're about to get to), there's a tendency, because of this false sense of accomplishment, for writers to believe that they already have what it takes to be a successful professional writer in the industry. Whereas, in reality they are merely stuck in that first category of developing their skill, the Unconscious Incompetence stage, and often stay stuck there mistakenly thinking they have a higher level of competency at the myriad different skills required to be a successful working professional screenwriter.

THE GAP:

And then, as if that were not enough, when it comes especially to screenwriting, there's a whole other bias/blind spot-type challenge or obstacle to being able to self-evaluate where any writer is in terms of their professional level competency.

At its core, screenwriting is a form of communication, whereby a writer is attempting to commute or transport a movie that they are imagining in their mind, into the minds of others, via the process of reading words on a page in a specific form or format.



In screenwriting, like all forms of communication, there is a gap between the writer and the reader. That gap is always present and most of the time a challenge. And in screenwriting it's an extra major challenge.

So as we have seen, we often struggle to see that we may not be as competent as we think, especially when it comes to complex craft skills like those required for professional levels of screenwriting, where the writer themselves likely has multiple biases that work like blinders when it comes to what they have written, especially in terms of what a typical reader would/could reasonably get from those words on the page.

There's a perceptual GAP between the writer's view of their own writing and that of the reader, where the writer tends to see their own writing as containing more layers, nuances, emotion, etc.

Whereas a typical reader would not get all that from the script, because the writer(s) doesn't (yet) have the higher-level skills required to convey all of that on the page. Or perhaps more accurately, to get all that to come off the page and create a more effective movie in the reader's mind.

The Career Excelerator for Screenwriters at MPIi is purpose-built to provide the highest level insights and training in the world in exactly this area, as well as the other key areas that our research over years has overwhelmingly indicated are most impactful for career success for working professional screenwriters.



As an illustration of this “Gap” challenge, consider the TAPPING and LISTENING communication experiment first conducted by Stanford psychologist Elizabeth Newton, where test subjects were assigned one of two roles: 'Tapper' or 'Listener'. The tappers were given a list of popular tunes, such as "Happy Birthday to you" and "Jingle Bells". They were then assigned to pick a song at random, and tap out the tune with their fingers on a table, and the listeners had to guess the song.

And before the tappers began to tap out the tune, they were asked to predict the probability that the listeners would be able to guess the song correctly. The tappers predicted a 50% chance (once for every two attempts) that they would be able to get the listeners to guess the tune correctly. Then when they tapped out the song, the results were, well, not as expected. Of the hundred and twenty times a tune was tapped, only 3 times did the listener correctly recognize the song— which is only about about 2.5% of the time, or once for every 40 attempts.

And here's the most interesting part. The tappers grew really frustrated at the listeners for not being able to guess the song more accurately. They couldn't understand why they just weren't

“getting it.” To the tapper, it couldn’t have been more obvious. These were well known and rather basic/simple songs. Were these listeners just not that good at listening? Had the people running the test purposely recruited bad listeners for the role?

While it’s probably obvious to you what was going wrong, the tappers weren’t realizing that when they tapped out the song on the table, the melody and even the lyrics were naturally playing in the tapper’s own heads (in addition to the rhythm they are tapping)— how else could they know what rhythm to tap out, right?

But the listeners were only getting the tapping sound— no melody, no lyrics.

So it’s not that the listeners were stupid, as the tapper might suspect. But that the tapper has access to more information (in their mind) than what was being communicated to the listeners. The listeners were not getting the vital information contained in the melody and the lyrics.

If you need a little extra help to visualize this experiment, check out [this short video about it with simple animations on YouTube](#).

All forms of communication are subject to this sort of miscommunication, which is commonly referred to as “the Curse of Knowledge” (when the sender is blind to knowledge they have, but they aren’t thinking of the need to get that information across to the recipient of the attempted communication).

NOTE: for a bit more on this check out this [20 minute video presentation by MIT professor Miro Kazakoff on the topic](#).

Writing is somewhat similar, where the writer is the tapper and the reader is the listener.

And screenwriting even more so. After all, that’s what a screenplay is now. A form of communication to transfer a movie in the mind of a writer into the minds of the many others who are needed to get the movie made. And they get that movie into their heads by reading this weirdly formatted document of words on a page. And, here’s the thing...

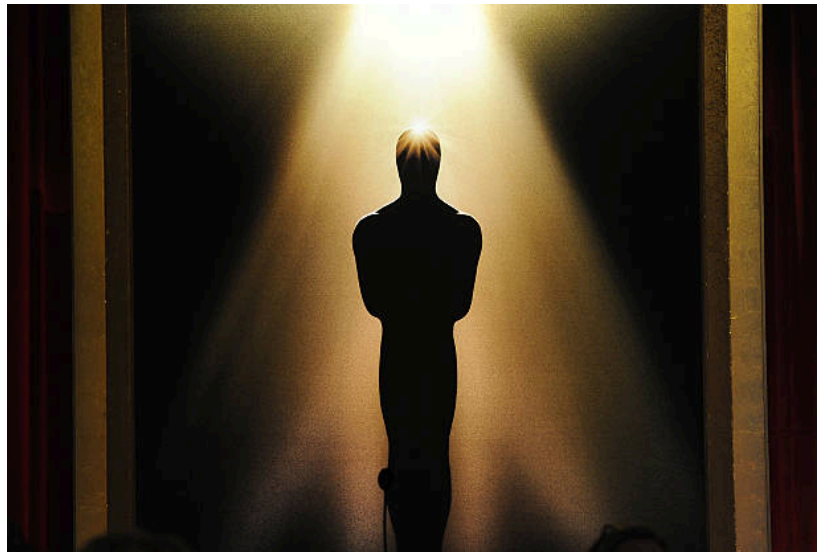
There are a lot of different aspects of the mind movie that play in the head of the writer when they read back over their own scripts, that are frequently not shared sufficiently with the reader for a reasonable reader to be able to access that information for the mind movie that the reader is trying to play in their head.

That information gap creates so many miscommunication opportunities, minor or maybe massive, where there's always a Gap between the intended mind movie and the one that plays in most reader’s heads.

Therefore, when you are evaluating your own written work, you're like the Tapper. It's obvious to you what each moment of the mind movie looks like, and more importantly what it feels like, emotionally. You know what the character's motivations are. You know the emotional resonance of every line of dialogue. You know what the character is intending each action (including the dialogue) to mean. You know what the character is holding back.

And of course, when you read your own writing, the "actors" of your mind movie will tend to deliver each moment with all the beautiful nuances of an Academy and Emmy-Award level performance.

In other words, your evaluation of your own writing will almost always be distorted by the fact that you have both so much (too much) information in advance, and also that you will tend to have a positive inclination toward the material, both of which the reader and/or audience won't necessarily get from the much more limited information, and/or the less-than-perfectly presented story and character elements that are actually on the page.



Conversely, when you evaluate the work of others by reading their scripts or seeing their shows, you are like the Listener. You are lacking key information, and often left struggling to 'get the gist of things' due to insufficient information on the page about what's going on.

And, as if that wasn't a big enough challenge, the screenplay form and format is so restrictive and regimented, it makes it even more difficult to get all the necessary information across to the reader. And of course, the reader (and all of their bosses, the execs) stands between the screenwriter and the financing and other support required to make the show and present it to the end audience. So getting the reader to play a clear, powerful version of the mind movie, is much more challenging than most screenwriters realize.

One contributing factor that exacerbates that challenge is the screenplay form itself. The screenplay form originated as simply the blueprint for the cast and crew to keep track of all the scenes they needed to record on set, so that a complete and ideally cogent movie can be assembled in the editing room. It's a format which was never really designed for the job of creating a mind movie in a reader's reader's head. As a set of plans for the cast and crew, it's quite regimented, extremely sparse, and much more technical in nature than writing such as

literary prose that's designed to get across things like character nuances to readers (a novel, short story, article, essay, etc).

Nonetheless, reading the script became a way for industry professionals to get a sense of what the movie would be like, in order to make professional evaluations, such as should they risk financing the movie, or should they risk their star acting career by being in the movie, etc. And because top-level decision makers in Hollywood are busy people, and reading whole scripts takes time, the bosses started relying on assistants and lower-level staff to cover that responsibility of reading the scripts for them and providing them with a brief synopsis and evaluative comments in a report that is now referred to as "Coverage".

ALSO, and this part is huge... Screenwriting is about using extremely few words to describe what is on the screen and sound track. ONLY. All other information is, in a sense, not allowed.

The screenwriter doesn't get to tell the reader what's going on internally inside the character's head and body the way a short story writer or novelist gets to.

Note: if you've read screenplays, you may have seen examples of even big name screenwriters writing in the description lines and parenthetical, telling the reader what's going on internally in the character, but it's actually a semi "Don't Example" since even though that information might help the reader (including actors, director, etc) to understand, follow and find more credible what's going on for a particular character, that information doesn't transfer directly out to the audience (the way it does with a novel, short story or article where the 'end audience' is the reader reading the author's words directly), and that can dangerously contribute to the movie not working for audiences.

But, still, even though it's not appropriate for the screenwriter to merely tell the reader what's going on inside the characters, the screenwriter must find clever ways to make the reader of the screenplay feel or at least sense the emotions that the characters are going through, so that the reader has an emotional experience of the story as it plays out in a mind movie in their head.



This is NOT easy. In fact, many writers as they come to screenwriting mistakenly think that it will be easier than writing a novel. Afterall, it's less words and pages, right?

Yes, that's generally true, but arguably that's a big part of what makes it so much more difficult to write a compelling screenplay, than to write an similarly emotionally engaging and satisfying novel. With novels there's a lot more opportunity to more readily share more information with the reader. More melody and lyrics (and you can just tell the reader about the dolphin), whereas the screenplay form

often feels like merely tapping the beats out and hoping the reader will guess the right song.

Master-level screenwriting is about finding ways for there to be hints of the melody and lyrics along with those paltry taps.

At Motion Picture Industry Institute, we have been studying the challenging impacts of these biases, as well as many other factors that significantly impact the career success of professional screenwriters (as well as the other major crafts, such as director, producers, editors, executives, etc.). For over 3 decades now, we have been developing high-impact insights, tools, techniques to address these challenges and turn them into competitive advantages for working professionals in our industry.

The Career Excelsator for Screenwriters program is packed with those insights, tools, techniques as well as little know and closely-guarded insider strategies, tactic and skills that have been developed at MPii based on decades of research and high-level experience working in the trenches of Hollywood (as well as international) story development.

Hopefully, this information is helpful to you as you consider how you might go about evaluating your level of competency in the many different skills that are required for success as a professional screenwriter. Such an evaluation might be useful to you as you consider whether this program is a good fit for you and your career goals.

BTW, if you feel a bit overwhelmed by all that information and want to go back over it before pressing on, go right ahead. That said, we're not going to test you on your knowledge and understanding of the above-referenced information in the application process, so it's up to you.

When you feel ready, go to [THIS FORM HERE](#) and answer a few questions before moving on to the next step of the application process.