The Writing Questionnaire

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.

Its quick and easy-to-use format invites you to reflect upon your story without hindering your creativity, and without 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.

You'll find the underlined words in the glossary at the end of the guide.

ABOUT THE SCREENS OF TOMORROW MOVEMENT

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 on screen and contribute to raising general public awareness.

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.

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.

What are the profiles of the main characters in your story? What is their age, name, gender, sexual orientation, geographical origin, perceived origin, occupation, physical characteristics and distinguishing features, values, cultures, traditions, spirituality, etc.?

Have you created profiles at the intersection of several identities?

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?

A FEW KEY FIGURES

47.2% of lead actors in films released in 2021 are women.
Source: UCLA, Hollywood Diversity Report, 2022, Part 1: Film

3.57% of interactions involving three characters are between 3 women, compared with 40.74% between three men.
Source: "Using data science to understand the film industry's gender gap" 2020

2.8% of the characters in prime-time TV series in the US in 2021 have a disability, whereas disabled people represent 26% of the American population.
Source: GLAAD, 2022

38.9% of lead actors in theatrical and streaming Hollywood films produced in 2021 are people of color. This proportion was reached in 2020, and has been maintained ever since.
Source: UCLA, Hollywood Diversity Report, 2022, Part 1: Film

1. WHO ARE YOUR CHARACTERS?

Does your story include characters with <u>disabilities</u>, impairments or illnesses (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 <u>LGBTQIA+</u> 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 <u>stereotypes</u> and misconceptions typically associated with your character profiles (protagonists and antagonists) add value to the story? If not, could you update their profiles to include other characteristics that are less expected?

How do the words (dialogue and interjections) and actions of each character contribute to the story? Do characters speak and behave differently based on their gender, perceived origin, geographical origin, etc.? Do they convey stereotypes? Could making changes pleasantly surprise viewers and/or enrich your character's profile or background?

Have you consulted experts/people directly concerned by the characteristics and issues assigned to your characters, to ensure they are represented as realistically as possible?

Can the characteristics of some of your characters evolve with the final casting, to suit to the profiles of the selected actors and actresses?

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.

These questions give an opportunity to explore the spirit of contradiction in human beings through the lens of contemporary reflections, and to create complex characters far from being smooth or predictable.

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?

A FEW KEY FIGURES

64% of the world's population considers climate change to be an emergency.
Source: UNDP & Oxford University, 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

3 films nominated for the 2024 Oscars are set in a society where climate change is present.
Source: Climate Reality Check, 2024

2. WHAT IS YOUR CHARACTERS' MISSION?

Does this awareness have an influence on their relationships with the other characters and on the narrative arc?

How is it perceived (positively, negatively, neutrally) 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, the part played by technology in everyday 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.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

What societal models and social organisations would you like to see on screen?

Have you consulted experts/people directly concerned by the characteristics and issues of the social organisations you describe, to ensure they are represented as realistically as possible?

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

We would need **1.75** Earths, at current global consumption levels, 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

25% of the world's population lives in a country facing extremely high water stress throughout the year, using more than 80% of available water resources, resulting in a high risk of water shortages.
Source: World Resources Institute, 2023

69% of vertebrate populations disappeared between 1970 and 2018.
Source: WWF Living Planet Report 2022

3. WHICH SOCIETAL MODEL SERVES AS A BACKDROP FOR YOUR STORY?

MODEL OF CONSUMPTION

What lifestyles, settings, accessories and hobbies (types of food, transportation, housing, clothing, tourism, etc.) are inherent within these societal models?

What image do they project? Do the stereotypes usually associated with these lifestyles bring added value to the story, or could they be developed in a less anticipated way?

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)?

3. WHICH SOCIETAL MODEL SERVES AS A BACKDROP FOR YOUR STORY?

WHAT ROLE DO <u>LIVING BEINGS</u> (FAUNA AND FLORA) PLAY IN YOUR STORY ?

How is flora represented? Is it non-existent, an arena (a simple backdrop), or 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 <u>captive</u>) 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?

Do the animals and plants convey stereotypes?
For example, are spiders or swamps shown negatively by default? Could changing these perceptions bring added value to the story?

Glossary

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)

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 refers to a generally marginalised set of gender identities and sexual and romantic orientations.
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 former insult reappropriated by people who do not identify with heterosexual or cisgender norms. This term now refers more broadly to the LGBTQIA+ community as a whole.
I for intersex: The term intersex is used to describe those presenting one or more sexual biological characteristics (genital, gonadal or chromosomal) not considered "typically male" or "typically female".
Being intersex does not mean that a person is transgender, as a person's sexual characteristics do not define their gender identity.
A for asexual: A person who has little or no sexual attraction to anyone; and for aromantic: A person who has little or no romantic attraction to anyone.
+ for all other marginalised romantic or sexual orientations and gender identities not covered by the acronym.

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
Parity means that each gender is represented equally. It is an instrument at the service of equality, which consists in ensuring the access of women and men to the same opportunities, rights, opportunities to choose, material conditions while respecting their specificities. The notion of parity constitutes the foundation of policies to combat the disparities between women and men. (Source: INSEE)

Perceived origin
This refers to the assimilation of individuals into common-sense categories ("white", "black", "Asian") according to subjective perception criteria (appearance, name, etc.).

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