

# The SCREENWRITING

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## Method

Paige Irene Bruns is an award winning screenwriter and director. After graduating from Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida with a BFA in Film, Paige decided not to go straight to Hollywood, but take her skills to the next level by founding Affinity Insight Pictures in May of 2020. Affinity Insight Pictures is a Michigan-based film production company that draws on narrative storytelling to tell thought-provoking, hard-hitting stories that portray some of the harsh realities of both societal and quotidian struggles. Paige has written and directed a plethora of short films including "VOID" and "Beat-Down". She most recently wrote and directed a short drama film, "Anchor" which premiered in June 2021.

Coming up next, Paige is working on a drama series expected to debut in 2022. Paige has been recognized by film festivals worldwide, earning nominations and wins in several categories including Young Filmmaker Award, Best Student Director, Best Narrative Short, Best Woman Short and Best Short. Outside of writing and directing, Paige enjoys listening to her favorite artists including John Mayer, film photography, reading, boating and spending quality time with family, friends and her puppy Brinley. As a storyteller and artist, Paige recognizes the importance of using her platform to participate in and encourage thoughtful conversations regarding societal and quotidian issues to inspire and create positive change.

Paige strives to make each of her projects catalysts for positive change. In addition to "Anchor", some of her other projects including "Beat-Down" have plots centered on topics such as mental illness. Paige enjoys creating films that mean something to people. One of the most rewarding parts of her craft is being able to connect with individuals and hear their stories. Most recently, Paige has released short film "Anchor" which follows the story of Haleigh Emerson, a bright and independent college student who experiences a traumatic sexual assault at a party and simultaneously, how the handling of it affects her relationship with her best friend Cam - a nationally ranked swimmer with his eye on the Olympics.

## Paige IRENE BRUNS

Paige most recently directed and wrote a short drama film, "Anchor" starring Sierra Green, Mitchell Cole, Sergio Myers, and Noah Roderiques which was released in June. "Anchor" follows the story of Haleigh Emerson, a bright and independent college student who experiences a traumatic sexual assault at a party and simultaneously, how the handling of it affects her relationship with her best friend Cam - a nationally ranked swimmer with his eye on the Olympics. Paige strives to tell thought-provoking, hard-hitting stories that portray some of the harsh realities of both societal and quotidian struggles.

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# What inspires you to write?

As someone who feels emotion deeply, I am incredibly inspired by people and their experiences. For me, screenwriting has always been a way of working through and understanding my own emotions, so I am very motivated by the concept of exploring human psychology and relationships through writing. **Any suggestions for aspiring writers on how to deal with writer's block?** Writer's block, as any writer will tell you, is one of the most frustrating parts of the job - and it's inevitable. I used to think that in order to be a successful writer, you had to have everything picture-perfect from start to finish. I thought being stuck meant you didn't know your characters or the goal of your story well enough. The truth is, you could spend years in development, crafting and getting to know your characters and still end up with writer's block - it's not a measurement of your abilities, it's part of the process. That being said, here are a few of the concepts I focus on when writer's block hits and I'm feeling overwhelmed. **Go back to the root of your story.** Remind yourself of the intent. Why are you telling this story? What about it interests you? What is the goal? What do you hope to accomplish by writing it? You know your characters better than anyone - use that to your advantage. Ask yourself: How is he/she feeling? What does he/she want? What do they need? What are they thinking? How would he/she feel about this happening and how would that present itself within their actions? Who are they at their core? How does what is happening change/complicate/affect that? Going back to the basics helps me to make the most effective and honest plot decisions that are true to my characters and the story's intent. Ironically, it often leads to new ideas with strong ties to the core goals and motives.

**Listen to music that fits the tone of what you are writing.** I've found that when I'm stuck on a particular moment or sequence, playing a song/creating a playlist which evokes the intended emotion helps me work through the block. I'll sit down, close my eyes, listen to the music and walk through the scene in my head. It encourages me to surrender to the headspace and emotional state of my characters. Sometimes just listening to something that sparks that emotion in you, without pressure to figure it out, brings solutions. All of a sudden, those moments become bona fide because everything that is happening - every reaction, every decision made, stems from genuine emotion opposed to something that has been carefully crafted. Don't stress it - accept that writer's block is just part of the process. Oftentimes, the most authentic moments come from those blocks. **What stories do you enjoy telling the most?** I really enjoy and am drawn to hard-hitting, emotional dramas that touch on some of the harsh realities of both societal and quotidian struggles. We are so receptive to what we watch on our screens which is what makes storytelling such a powerful art form. Being introduced to real world issues which we may not be exposed to in our everyday lives and the sense of awareness that comes with that is something I really value. Telling such poignant and pertinent stories has presented me with the opportunity to examine situations from every perspective, which I think has provided me with a deeper understanding of empathy and the importance of communication.

**Any writers/directors you dream of working with?** I admire so many writers and directors! Greta Gerwig, Dan Fogelman, Vince Gilligan, Damien Chazelle, Eric Roth - just to name a few. I'm a huge fan of Taylor Sheridan as well so working with him, in any capacity, would be a dream. He's a masterful storyteller with a strong ability to craft narratives that carry a unique balance of simplicity and depth, which is something that I really respect. **What key factors help create strong characters?** There are so many factors that aid in creating strong characters, but the one that I keep closest to my heart and something that I am constantly reminding myself of, is the concept that vulnerability leads to authenticity. As a storyteller, I am completely immersed in the emotions and mental arcs of my characters, which is something I used to be absolutely terrified of. I am constantly putting myself in the shoes and emotions of other people - oftentimes, individuals that are living lives with experiences far different from my own. Creativity is a very private thing, until it's not. By allowing yourself to surrender to every element of the story, you've all of a sudden made it very personal which makes the idea of sharing it with anyone, let alone the entire world, a bit daunting. At the same time, it's what enables you to tell an authentic and truthful story. Acquiescing to those emotions gives you the ability to craft characters that reflect real human beings and at the end of the day, storytelling is all about relatability. We all want to see a piece of ourselves in the characters we watch on our screens.



**How can writers submit their screenplays to development?** We are currently in development of a new website that will include a portal for writers to submit screenplays. Prior to the launch of this new website I would encourage individuals to reach out to our development team at [info@affinityinsightpictures.com](mailto:info@affinityinsightpictures.com) if they are interested in submitting a script. **What generally goes into a pitch for looking for funding?** There's a saying that, "Everything in life revolves around economics". Creative people tend to disagree with this notion; I know I did at one time. In reality, economics, finance and fund raising are critical elements to the success of every project. As demand for content increases, so does the number of interested investors, many of whom are sophisticated but not experienced in the entertainment and film industries. Therefore, it is important to be well-versed in the language of both the traditional studio and the private equity worlds, while understanding their tolerances for risk and expectations of returns. Although Box Office and other revenue streams can be complicated to predict, diligent and cost effective operational management and a track record for delivering projects under-budget is the key to attracting funding.

**Do writers need representation?** Historically, yes but many processes within the industry are transforming due to the increase in demand for content. With that being said, major studios still prioritize content submitted via representatives. **What do agents look for in a writer's portfolio?** Being an agent is extremely complex and I am in no way an expert in this field. However, what my company looks for in a writer's portfolio are scripts which display a strong and compelling cinematic vision of what the film/show is or could be. **What programs do you recommend for writing screenplays?** I'm a big fan of Final Draft. I've written several scripts on the software and I really enjoy the simplicity and ease of the program. Milanote is another really great site - especially for outlines, beat-boards and character development. I recently started using the program for a series I'm working on and I absolutely love it!



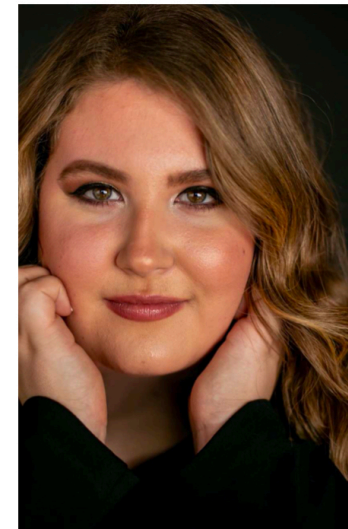
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## BEHIND THE SCENES

**Do you recommend writers also direct?** I would absolutely recommend that writers experience directing, at least once. Both jobs are storytelling positions, but require two very different skill sets and mentalities which I think is very beneficial for both to experience. As a side note, as a writer, getting to watch your story come to life from start to finish is such a surreal experience. As the director, you will quite literally have your hands in every element of development which makes the process even more sentimental. **What valuable lessons can writers learn from directing?** As a writer, stepping into the shoes of a director is extremely valuable - even if for a brief time. I always say I have two creative sides of my brain - the writer and the director. I often joke that the director in me hates the writer because of the specific, detailed and often complex vision that I've created...and now we have to find a way to execute it.

Directing opened my eyes to the reality of what can be conveyed visually and how to best communicate it through writing. Also, I found that my experience working alongside actors has aided me in writing dialogue. I have a heightened awareness of the importance of individualizing speech styles and patterns in order to create conversations that are authentic to how people communicate. **Any books/movies/shows that have impacted you the most?** There have been several books/movies/shows that have impacted me over the years - Wizard of Oz, Hell or High Water, Wind River, Whiplash, This is Us, Breaking Bad, Yellowstone, Friends. However, the one I find myself going back to the most is the book "Outliers" by Malcom Gladwell. It changed everything for me. It was the first time I was introduced to the 10,000 hour rule and it has influenced me every day since.



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**Taking on the role of directing and learning the logistics of bringing a story to the screen really helped me understand scope and how to identify filler within my writing.** I often become attached to the characters I've created and the world in which they live which then creates a tendency to want to lay everything out in great detail in the script. When you're dealing with such a visual medium, you can convey a significant amount of information through what we see on the screen - through the production design, sound design, acting, etc. You want to give the audience the pieces of the puzzle but let them solve it themselves opposed to telling them through dialogue.

**Any festivals you recommend?** The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) is one of my favorites. It essentially takes over downtown Toronto for a week every year and people travel in from all over the world to watch the films. The city is filled with film fanatics and creatives - it's such a unique experience. The festival draws in quite a number of large films so it's not uncommon to be surrounded by well known filmmakers and actors. The Orlando Film Festival is great as well. They do a lot for featured filmmakers throughout the week and there are a plethora of networking events and opportunities to connect with other creatives. I've met so many talented storytellers through the festival, many of whom I've gone on to work with!

**Advice you would tell your younger self?** Find Balance. The entertainment industry can be incredibly overwhelming at times, especially when you're just starting out and it can come with a tremendous amount of pressure. It's easy to get trapped in the mindset that in order to be successful you have to work around the clock, 24/7. In reality, it's more of a marathon than a sprint. Consistent hard work and dedication are huge parts of achieving your goals, but making time to go out and live life is just as vital. That's where the stories come from. The more experiences you have - the more you're exposed to, the better storyteller you'll be. Your ability to tell narratives and craft characters who feel like authentic and truthful human beings will expand drastically. Finding balance is key.