WGAW ANIMATION

WGA COVERAGE FOR ANIMATED FEATURES
A guide for agents, managers, and attorneys

Animated feature films represent a massive percentage of the worldwide box office. Five of 2024's ten highest grossing films were animated, generating nearly $5 billion worldwide. In most cases, the writers on these films receive no residuals because they were not written under a WGA contract.

In August 2022, more than 1,500 WGA writers signed a pledge committing to advocate for WGA coverage on all animated projects. Their efforts are beginning to pay off.

Over the past three years, several high-profile animated projects in both film and television have been written under WGA contracts, affording their writers higher compensation, proper residuals, health and pension contributions, and essential credit protections.

In this guide, we explain why agents, managers, and attorneys should push for WGA coverage on all writer-client deals.

WGA coverage makes these jobs significantly higher-quality for writers, with greater potential to share in the projects' success and to receive the appropriate credit that is a key tool for advancing a screenwriter's reputation. **Writer representatives can play a critical role in making WGA coverage the norm.**

Background

In live-action film and television writing, WGA coverage is a given, because WGA is the exclusive bargaining partner with the studios. These writers work under the terms of the WGA Minimum Basic Agreement.

In animation, the WGA is not the exclusive bargaining partner. Writers may find themselves working under three different arrangements: the standard WGA contract, the IATSE 839 (The Animation Guild, or TAG) contract, or non-union. Studios can choose project by project.

Many studios have traditionally been unwilling to offer writers a WGA contract. As a result, many writers (including many high-profile feature writers) simply won't consider any animation work, because they refuse to work non-WGA and assume a WGA deal is impossible. But increasingly, it is possible.

How to Get Clients WGA Deals

Obviously, all writer deals are based on leverage. The greatest leverage writers have is saying no. Writers increasingly understand what they're giving up taking a non-WGA deal in animation—so here's how to get a WGA deal.

Prioritize studios that will play ball. Call the WGA to strategize as you figure out where to pitch. *You and your client have the most leverage when you are pitching an original idea, and some companies may be willing to gain a competitive advantage offering WGA deals to get them access to talent.* Independent studios and foreign money producers may also be more receptive. Technology is expanding the animation field beyond the legacy media companies.

But push for coverage at any and every studio; any studio can make a WGA deal. None of them are locked to another union, such as The Animation Guild (IATSE 839, or TAG). Projects can be WGA for the writing services and TAG for everything else. It's straightforward for these companies to become WGA signatories (and most already are).

Make sure live-action is the default. If there is any live-action in the project—including hybrid animation and motion capture projects—it is under the WGA's jurisdiction and is WGA-covered. Do not let a project like this be declared "animation" at the development stage. Incorporating live-action elements can help secure a WGA deal for an animated project.

Understand how WGA deals can fit the project. Week-to-week and term feature deals, in addition to screen flat deals, are already covered in the 2023 MBA. If you have questions, contact the Guild.

Let studios know they are losing out on talent. Tell animation studios which of your clients will only write under a WGA contract. *WGA coverage offers stronger retention and better stability on the project.* In contrast, WGA members report that when they work on non-covered projects, they are immediately looking for their next job, often to keep their WGA health insurance.

If your client passes, say why. If your client passes because you're not able to secure them a WGA deal, *make sure the creative execs and others at the company know it*. Business affairs may be acting on principle rather than logic.

Remember that WGA coverage is a long-term investment in your client's career. Residuals, credit protections, and pension and health contributions allow writers to survive and thrive. Animation writers deserve all of these benefits.

For more information on WGA feature animation deals, please contact Cathy Genovese at the WGAW: 213-782-4853 or cgenovese@wga.org.