

# A guiding light for TV, film writers

Teaching talented screenwriters the business smarts to succeed

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STAFF REPORTER

You can make a good living as a film and television writer right here in Toronto, says industry veteran Kyle Muir.

But success requires more than just talent, according to Muir, 32. Would-be writers need to have as much savvy about the business side of the game, and about marketing their ideas, as they do about creating an engaging script.

"It's a small industry (in Toronto), not nearly as big as Hollywood. And it's not easy when you're first starting out. But with the right network and the right body of work, it is possible," he says.

Muir will begin teaching a series of evening courses at Centennial College next month

that will guide aspiring writers through the labyrinth. Four courses over two semesters will earn them a certificate in screenwriting for film or television.

"It's not just going to be theory," Muir promises. "There's going to be a lot of writing, a lot of hands on."

By the end of the program, he says students will not only have a wide body of work to show for their efforts, they'll also walk away with a firm grasp on how to sell their scripts.

"It's who you know. It's knowing the industry and actively going out to industry parties and hustling, talking to people, talking to other writers — what are the jobs out there?" Muir says.

Students will meet industry insiders. Guest



lecturers will include *Corner Gas* head writer Kevin White, *Billable Hours* screenwriters Adam Till and (Gemini-nominated) Max Reid.

A professional writer needs a literary agent because once a writer is hired, negotiating contracts can be a complicated business, Muir says. He'll discuss how to get a reputable agent, how to talk to them, as well as inviting a number of agents into the classroom.

Muir says when he sat down to design the program, he worked hard to distil what he'd learned during his decade-long career to eliminate any padding or filler.

"Screenwriting is such a technical form of writing, so you obviously have to learn it. It takes an awful lot of work to figure out how to write the different formats."

For example, he says television has one writing format for a half-hour series, another for an hour-long series and yet another for 15-minute webisodes. Writing for movies demands a whole different form.

Muir opted to split the program's writing courses so students could choose between film and TV. To earn a diploma, students will complete four courses over 144 hours: one course in the business of screenwriting, one in the art of pitching and two scriptwriting courses in either film or television.

The business course includes preparation for self-employment. Like any start-up business, students have to set up goals, Muir says.

This course asks them to prepare a five-year business plan.

"If it's not working out in that time, then think about doing something else," he advises.

Muir has amassed about two-dozen writing credits. Born in Winnipeg, he graduated from Norman Jewison's Canadian Film Centre in Toronto. He's working on a TV animation comedy series called *Producing Parker*, starring Kim Cattrall, and has written for Showcase's *Billable Hours* series.

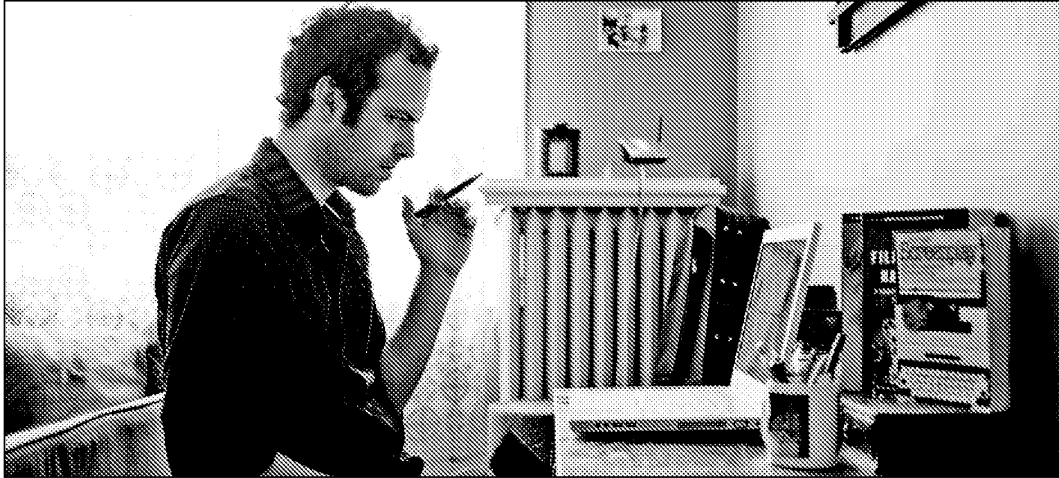
"I've got seven other projects in various stages of development," he says. "Not long ago, I was in Los Angeles pitching to HBO, Showtime, Fox."

Among other projects, his idea for a half-hour comedy series called *The Administrator* has been making the rounds in Canada and the U.S. for more than a year, but hasn't snagged a buyer yet.

"You have to have patience. That's why it's important to have more than just one thing on the go," he says.

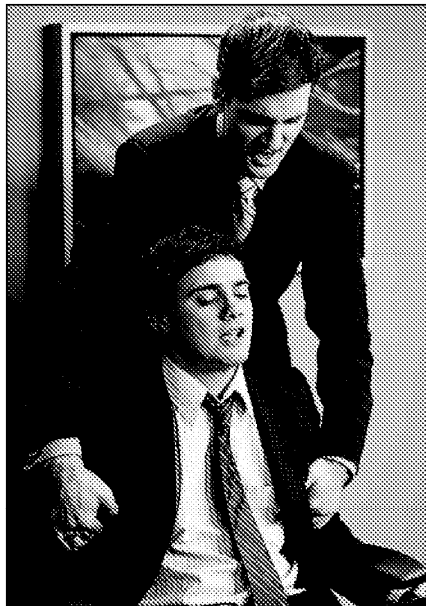
"Sometimes you get so far (with a script) and nothing comes of it. And sometimes things go on for years and (suddenly) you have to wipe the dust off it because somebody wants to make it."

The 14-week scriptwriting courses start Sept. 8 for film and Sept. 10 for television. Tuition is \$320 per course. For more information, go to [centennialcollege.ca/media](http://centennialcollege.ca/media).



Toronto screenwriter Kyle Muir hopes to share the secret of his success with budding writers through a new two-semester certificate program at Centennial College.

AARON VINCENT ELKAIM  
FOR THE TORONTO STAR



Kyle Muir has written for *Billable Hours*, starring Brandon Firla and Fabrizio Filippo.