How Not to Write a Screenplay: 101 Common Mistakes Most Screenwriters Make

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All good screenplays are unique, but all bad screenplays are the same. Flinn's book will teach the reader how
to avoid the pitfalls of bad screenwriting and arrive at one's own destination intact.

How Not to Write a Screenplay: 101 Common Mistakes Most Screenwriters Make Details

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Screenwriters Make Denny Martin Flinn , Lauren Rossini (Editor) , Carla Green (Designed by)**

From Reader Review How Not to Write a Screenplay: 101 Common Mistakes Most Screenwriters Make for online ebook

John says

Didn't help much, I took a class called "writing for short media" and that helped more than this book ever could. However, it is called "How NOT to write a screenplay". So it gives examples of poor writing and then tells you what could have made it better. Either way, didn't help for what I was looking for but did re-iterate things I had already learned. Yep.

James Caterino says

Currently reading this again, just to sharpen up and get the technical and creative momentum moving.

A really useful book for screenwriters that makes great use of classic (and brilliantly written) screenplays to illustrate practical lessons in story, character, and structure. The excerpts from such knockout screenplays as Shane Black's wickedly acerbic Lethal Weapon, James Cameron's Aliens, and Randall Wallace's Braveheart alone are worth the price of this book.

Even if you are not a screenwriter, there is information in here that can benefit any kind of writing. I've always believed that learning how to write a good screenplay is the perfect blueprint for building a solid foundation as a writer because above all else it emphasizes clarity and focus.

I wish there had been some more information on script structure, and perhaps some analysis of bad movies and why they failed. But overall, this book is just about the perfect manual for "How Not To Write a Screenplay". This is a solid, well written and informative book about the craft of screenwriting, filled with terrific examples of some common pitfalls to avoid.

Neil Brimelow says

Probably the best book to bring a little reality to those new to screenwriting.

The book is best to supplement other books on screenwriting, but is a must read. What Denny Martin Flynn does best is to get the writer to realize that they're not the best thing since sliced bread, and to identify the large amount of cliches that have been around in screenwriting forever, and how to avoid them.

If you're an aspiring screenwriter this book will wake you up and hopefully give you at least a sense of self-awareness about your own writing and what to avoid doing when writing that next big script.

Ilovefilm says

I'm engaged in writing a feature, and as I was looking for some recommended books on the subject, I stumbled across this one. Geared for the independent screenwriter intent on selling their script, it's marginally useful to me on my main project, but nevertheless contains a wealth of great information from someone who's written and read a vast number of scripts.

Ranging from the practical to the esoteric, the advice begins logically with the cover page of the script and delves deeply into the reasons certain formats work. The first two-thirds of the book confront the mechanics of writing a great script, focusing on the way a reader's mind works (specifically, a Hollywood executive that might buy your script) and exploiting that.

The remainder of the book is about the tricky part: the content of the script. Like Syd Field's "Screenplay", this gets into the why/how relationship of what you write. Since I'm not new to reading about the art of screenwriting, this section felt necessary to the book, but less useful as new information to me. I'm glad it's there in one handy reference for sure. The bibliography of script clips he used was fascinating, because it called to mind all those great films I'd seen and put them into context.

Two things I would change: I would add a glossary of screenwriting terminology and an index for quick reference at the end.

Angie says

This is a great reference book. Small, easy to carry around in a laptop bag, it points to some common mistakes that even someone who thinks they're halfway intelligent (like myself) would make in trying to write their scripts. I highly recommend it. And while yes, I have a copy that can be borrowed, it can only be borrowed by actual friends, not just online friends. (that way I will know where you live)

Gretchen Alice says

A valuable primer on what to do (and what not to do) for screenplay formatting.

Tristan Drue Rogers says

Informative as hell.

James Caterino says

Currently reading this again, just to sharpen up and get the technical and creative momentum moving.

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Bradford says

Blech. This book had an occasional useful tidbit but otherwise was a waste of time at best and dangerous to the writer at worst. It's a book that encourages self-editing ("don't ever do this, don't do that, be sure not to make this common mistake!"), a thought process that destroys creativity. Comparatively, would reading a book about "What basketball playing mistakes NOT to make" improve your basketball skills? Probably not much.

Wendy Jones says

Although the last part of this book differed in its advice from most others, the first 2 thirds were filled with bits of info not found elsewhere, so well worth it.

Peggy Bechko says

Writing screenplays? Just want to know how it's done - or rather how it's NOT done? Being a writer and having optioned scripts myself I have to say, this book is great. It's all about avoiding the pitfalls of bad screenwriting and it provides examples of screeplays to demonstrate. If you have an interest in screenwriting this book is a great read.

Rich Stoehr says

I looked at over a dozen books giving advice on how to write a screenplay for a feature film before I chose "How Not to Write a Screenplay." The other books were filled with fluffy, meaningless encouragement like "Before you turn in your Oscar-winning script..." My eyes couldn't roll back far enough into my head for that one. By contrast, Denny Martin Flinn packs his book with helpful, meaningful advice on what most budding screenwriters get wrong, and how to make it right. Within five minutes of looking at it, I found three things that were incorrect about how I had been formatting the screenplay I'm working on, and once I saw the problems, I could also completely see why doing it the right way made more sense for a potential reader.

Flinn writes efficiently, with a no-nonsense style that I really found appealing. He's honest and he's clear, and he gets right to the point on why things work the way they do. Even better are the examples he's chosen: From "Alien" to "The Elephant Man" to "Lethal Weapon," each of the script examples highlighted in the

book is perfect for the point Flinn makes, and gives the reader a thorough grounding in what he is talking about.

"How Not to Write a Screenplay" is divided into three main parts: "Form," "Content," and "Development." "Form" is easily the longest and most in-depth section, taking up about two-thirds of the book, while "Development" (the stage which occurs after a screenplay is purchased and is being produced) is only a few pages in length. Clearly, Flinn wanted to emphasize the form of screenplay writing for this book, so readers looking for help with content or the development stage might do well to look to another book. Flinn himself makes no bones about what his book is about, as in the Introduction he states: "If you can avoid the faults I have collected here, you may not write a particularly good screenplay. But you won't write a bad one. The rest is up to you."

In terms of the form of screenplay writing, this book is an invaluable resource to learn from. By showing the reader what not to do, he makes the resulting screenplay more readable to a potential producer, and thus more likely to garner the interest of the person reading it. In terms of content and development, the book is helpful in some ways, but the most helpful section is by far the first one. This book is ideal for a screenwriter who has a good idea and wants to have a go at it, but isn't sure how to get it right so that someone might actually read it. Flinn's advice will help that writer get it onto paper.

Here's the skinny: this book gives its advice from the standpoint of a frequent reader of screenplays, and I already feel that it has made me a better writer of screenplays. I can't think of a better reason to give it a shot than that.

Matt Lennert says

This book was written 20 years ago and every word of it still applies. It's got great examples, plenty of "don'ts" that make perfect sense, and it is written in a lively and funny way. It's a book no writer should ever get rid of—ironically, I bought my copy in a dusty old used bookstore—because it is such a great reference. After writing a draft, a writer should go back through the script and look for the potholes that Denny warns against.

It's divided into three section: FORM, CONTENT, AND DEVELOPMENT. Most of the book is focused on form, which are the nuts and bolts of a script and how it should be structured and formatted properly. The content section describes what makes a good story, a good scene, and what executives are likely to respond positively to. The last section on development, describes what it is like to deal with executives who want to change your story and how to navigate that with professionalism and grace.

I always know when a book is a 5-star read because I slow down near the end and avoid the last pages because I don't want it to be over. When looking for Flinn's next great book I was saddened to see that Flinn died in 2007, but he left behind something worthy and wonderful to many people.

Perre says

Filled with great tips from a Hollywood reader's point of view. Flinn explains at the outset that he's someone who reads scripts all day and knows at a glance if a script falls on his desk was written by an amateur. There

are tell-tale signs, and that's the 101 mistakes he steps us through, showing examples of a disastrous approach compared to a good approach to the same problem. Examples?

Don't write "First Draft" on your title page. Instead write the date you submitted it.

Don't put the name of a production company on your screenplay, unless it has been purchased.

These are two simple rules you learn right away that'll save you the headache later when a reader wonders if the screenplay was already purchased? They also have the attitude that "you and your friend who hope to make a film one day are not a production company." - so only put a production company if there's a real one attached.

You wouldn't know this unless you had a guide, and Flinn takes his role as guide seriously. Very very helpful book for screenwriters. And pretty useful in contexts where you're not screenwriting, and have another project you're submitting somewhere. Many of the same lessons apply.

Clint Hall says

The first half of this book reads like you've just sent your producer friend the worst screenplay of your life and he has just given you a hundred pages of annoyed notes. I found it very tedious, especially the notes on simple style that all writers should know. I do understand that he wouldn't be trying to drive home these simplistic ideas if he hadn't seen it come across his desk multiple times by mutiple writers. I'm reminded of a quote I once heard "Don't confuse the love of writing for the love of reading". Perhaps in Screenwriting it should be somewhere along the lines of "Don't confuse the love of watching movies with the love of writing them". Don't get me wrong, there are gems of information in the first half, but where the book shines is in the second.

I would recommend this book just because of the information in the back half, or to anyone that wanted to read 5 page excerpts from 20 different movies.