



supplement if you are getting into screenwriter. The more you understand the process the easier it will be on you. As that goes I do recommend reading books like this. With that said I highly suggest this much better book as a necessary piece for anyone learning to write screenplays:[...]Very good.6 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Every screenwriting instructor should use this book!By Mish G.Stempel's premise: that screenwriting students can learn just about as much from analyzing bad and so-so scripts as they can from studying the good ones. And, he's right. Using nearly 100 examples (the earliest being 1962's "Lawrence of Arabia"), Stempel guides his readers through plot, story, character, and dialogue and lets them draw their own conclusions. His own writing style is concise, very clever, and wonderfully candid, and the man can spot plot and logic holes at 50 paces. I have recommended this book enthusiastically to all my clients, writing students, and colleagues (even to my agent!), and their feedback has been as enthusiastic as my own.13 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Lackluster, conventionalBy Jeffrey StewScreenwriter manuals can be potentially great resources, but the best advice is the simplest: read the damn scripts yourself, taking care to identify what you like and what you don't. A close reading of "Michael Clayton" or "Chinatown" yields more insight into the art of screenwriting than anything in Syd Field. In that sense, "Understanding Screenwriting" is more helpful than most screenwriting books because it challenges its audience to glean lessons from good, mediocre and bad screenplays.Unfortunately, the book itself is filled with largely banal and mostly unhelpful tips and pointers. Each chapter reads like a book report on a particular screenplay; superficial recaps of the movie's plot are combined with loose observations about glaring plot holes or character inconsistencies (amusingly, when Stempel offers suggestions for smoothing over the clumsy plotting that undermines the final third of "Collateral," his suggestions are even more outlandish, like adding a conniving, bloodthirsty prosecutor). Throughout, the tone is more descriptive than analytical, and on the few occasions when Stempel pauses to address larger concerns about rhythm, structure, pacing or theme, his conclusions are just plain wrong.Perhaps the best example is his analysis of the Coen Brothers' (or "Cohen Brothers," as he sometimes spells it) movie "Fargo." The most challenging aspect that "Fargo" poses to a screenwriting instructor is how to grapple with the curious (and controversial) scene midway through when Marge Gunderson talks with her former high school classmate Mike Yanagita. Mike makes a hilariously awkward attempt at hitting on Marge, which she politely rebuffs. He then tearfully confesses that he's been lonely since his wife and former classmate Linda Cooksey died of cancer. Later in the film Marge discovers that this story was a lie, and that Mike was actually harassing Linda, who is still alive.As Stempel points out, viewers have a lot of questions about this scene. Why is it in there? What is its purpose? The conventional wisdom is that it's simply a funny scene that underscores how nice Marge is. Stempel repeats this idea: "Marge is so smart, so nice, so warm, so perfect, that we need to see a little human weakness, vanity in this case, to make her as well rounded as she is."A deeper, better explanation (and one I confess I found on a discussion thread on a movie web site) is that when Marge later learns about Mike's lies, she decides to again interview Jerry Lundegaard, played by William H. Macy. It's at that point that she begins to believe that Jerry, whom she didn't otherwise suspect, was lying to her. Mike's connection to the rest of the film is subtle, but it underscores Marge's dawning realization of just how deceptive and selfish people can be. The scene is also a beautiful illustration of how the Coen Brothers calibrate and structure their scripts. Unfortunately, this is the kind of insight that's otherwise lacking in this thoroughly pedestrian book.

From the author's introduction: This book isn't about me, it's about you. I am a teacher, not a guru. As a wise teacher once said, "With a guru it is all about the guru-his vision and the students' loyalty to him. Whereas with a teacher, it is all about the students learning." You should be reading this book because you, as screenwriters, directors, producers, development executives, critics, historians, students in those disciplines, and just plain movie fans want to learn about screenplays.Feisty, clever, entertaining, and at times incredibly arch and cutting, Tom Stempel's Understanding Screenwriting delivers a practical how-to (or how-Not-to) guide to writing a screenplay. Why study a bad screenplay? For the simple fact that it will train you to look for problems in your own work and avoid them in the future. \* Why does Rear Window's success owe more to John Michael Hayes's screenplay than Alfred Hitchcock's directing?\* Why is Bull Durham's "I believe in the church of baseball" one of the great opening lines in the history of movies?\* Why is James Cameron's first draft screenplay for Titanic better than the film?\* What can we learn from Kinsey about writing about sex for American audiences?\* Why is Lawrence of Arabia one of the best examples of "writing for performance" in films, not only the performances of the actors, but also of the director, cinematographer, and composer?Stempel guides the reader through a cross section of cinema: historical epic, adventure,science fiction, teen comedy, drama, romantic comedy, suspense-films with budgets large and small. selective in its discussions and (sometimes withering) analyses, Stempel dissects the blockbusters and the bombs, discusses why certain aspects of a screenplay work and others d

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collections, all levels." - S. B. DeMasi, CHOICE, September 2008 (S. B. DeMasi CHOICE)"Understanding Screenwriting: Learning from Good, Not-Quite-So-Good, and Bad Screenplays is more than just another 'how to write' guide for aspiring film writers: it uses actual productions to analyze what makes a screenplay successful or not. Stories highlight writers' works and juxtapose short takes with longer analysis of key works in the industry, making it the perfect guide for any library strong in screenwriting and drama." Midwest Book , December 2008Stempel takes some of his best lessons from some of the worst screenplays to teach the reader that you can learn as much from mistakes as masterpieces. The author also addresses the multiple levels of screenwriting from crafting a performance to writing for special effects. Script Magazine the book will have an audience among prospective screenwriters, but it also merits the attention of others involved in the mediumSumming Up: Recommended. All film collections, all levels. - S. B. DeMasi, CHOICE, September 2008 (Sanford Lakoff CHOICE)Understanding Screenwriting: Learning from Good, Not-Quite-So-Good, and Bad Screenplays is more than just another 'how to write' guide for aspiring film writers: it uses actual productions to analyze what makes a screenplay successful or not. Stories highlight writers' works and juxtapose short takes with longer analysis of key works in the industry, making it the perfect guide for any library strong in screenwriting and drama. Midwest Book , December 2008About the AuthorTom Stempel is the author of five books, two of which were published by ContinuumFrameWork: A History of Screenwriting in American Film and Storytellers to the Nation: A History of American Television Writingthe others being Screenwriter: The Life of Nunnally Johnson; Screenwriting; and American Audiences on Movies and Moviegoing. He is Professor of Cinema, Cinema-Television Department, Los Angeles City College. He has taught on these subjects for more than thirty years.