

NEED

SCREENWRITER'S BIBLE

A COMPLETE GUIDE
TO WRITING,
FORMATTING,
AND SELLING
YOUR SCRIPT

*6TH EDITION
EXPANDED
& UPDATED*

BY DAVID TROTTIER

Praise for *The Screenwriter's Bible*

A “bible” for those of all persuasions. Whether you are a rank beginner who needs instruction, or an old pro who needs reminding, you could not do better than Dave Trotter’s book. A brilliant effort by a first-class, dedicated teacher.” —William Kelley, Academy Award–Winning Writer, *Witness*

“Love your book—very practical. I’ve kept it near my desk since high school and I still go back to it.” —Travis Beacham, Screenwriter, *Pacific Rim*, *Clash of the Titans*, *Dog Days of Summer*

“An invaluable resource—a treasure chest of useful information—not only for new writers but also for seasoned veterans.” —Professor Richard Walter, UCLA Screenwriting Faculty Chairman

“Whenever I am writing, I have *The Screenwriter's Bible* close at hand for reference.” —Ellen Sandler, Emmy-Nominated Co-Executive Producer, *Everybody Loves Raymond*

“Good, common sense. Sets up practical guidelines without encroaching on the writer’s creativity. Easy to follow—feels like a workbook that will be used and not just read. The author is encouraging, but reminds the writer of the realities of the business.”—Candace Monteiro, Partner, Monteiro Rose Dravis Agency

“Contains chapter and verse on all aspects of screenwriting, and addresses every key and fundamental principle from how far to indent dialogue to how to speak to the agent’s assistant.” —*Script Magazine*

“Offers all the essential information in one neat, script-sized volume. . . . New screenwriters will find *The Screenwriter's Bible* invaluable; experienced

screenwriters will find it an excellent addition to their reference shelf.” —
Hollywood Scriptwriter

“If you have the gift, this book will show you how to use it.” —Victoria
Wisdom, Producer-Manager and Former Literary Agent at ICM and Becsey
Wisdom Kalajian

“An excellent resource book and overall guide that can be of tremendous
assistance to answering the many questions that screenwriters have.” —
Linda Seger, Author, *Making a Good Script Great*

“Delivers more in 400 pages than can be found in several screenwriting
books. A true gem that measures up to its title.” —*Writer’s Connection*

“The best screenwriting book available, and the book to buy if you’re buying
just one.” —Dov S-S Simens, Founder, Hollywood Film Institute

“Easy to read and surprisingly broad in its coverage.” —*New York
Screenwriter*

“The formatter alone is worth the price of the book.” —Melissa Jones,
Hollywood Story Analyst

“Just what the script doctor ordered . . . a ‘must have’ reference tool for new
and experienced screenwriters. Straightforward, to the point, and accurate.”
—Wisconsin Screenwriters Forum

“So well written that, with its implementation, you should be well on your
way to creating a formidable screenplay.” —Tom Griffith, *The Screenwriter’s
FORUM*

The Bible Provides Clear Answers to Crucial Questions:

- How do I get discovered in today's difficult, crowded marketplace?
- How do I sell my script if I don't have an agent? How do I find an agent?
- How do I get in the game now, even if I don't live in L.A.?
- How do I summon my muse and spark my creative energy?
- What is the Character/Action Grid, and what makes it so fast and effective in evaluating and revising my work?
- What common formatting mistakes turn off agents and readers?
- What are the tricks to effective scene construction and transition?
- What is the single most important key to writing great dialogue? And what are the seven deadly dialogue sins?
- How do I write a query letter or one-sheet that will get my script read?
- How do I build a winning, compelling pitch? What are the unwritten rules?
- What "breakthrough" strategies can jump-start my screenwriting career?
- What is meant by the "heart of the story," and how do I get mine beating?
- How do I break into television, the New Media, and other lesser-known markets?
- What are the 10 keys to creating captivating characters?
- What basic plot paradigms do virtually all stories utilize?
- How do I find the "high concept" in my own script so that I can sell it?
- Where can I find a clear writing process that will motivate me to finish my script?

- How can I add dimension, depth, and emotion to virtually any story?
- How do I bring my characters to life and fascinate readers?
- What are the 10 tools every writer needs (and few have) before approaching the market?
- Where do contests fit in my strategic marketing plan?
- Where can a new writer get free feedback?
- How does Hollywood really work?
- How is a spec script different from a shooting script, and how do I write it?
- What writing opportunities are often overlooked by screenwriters?

It's all in *The Bible*.

Here's what the sixth edition contains:

- The spec-formatting guide recommended by agents, readers, and producers.
- A sensible plan to jump-start your writing career and get in the game now.
- More on character development and dialogue writing that will help make your characters compelling and clear.
- The latest in proper screenplay format. This section has been completely updated and expanded by “Dr. Format” himself, with additional examples of virtually every conceivable formatting situation. Shows correct format plus how to apply it.
- Timely new advice on creating and delivering pitches, and writing one-sheets.
- An updated marketing section that includes ways to get “discovered” in today’s crowded marketplace.
- More than 50 pages of sample scenes written in proper format, and a complete analysis of each.
- Plenty of worksheets with detailed instructions that will guide you in creating a laser-sharp strategic marketing plan.
- More tips, techniques, and pointers on writing a successful screenplay.
- Specific up-to-date marketing advice. There are more effective ways to get read and get assignments than sending query letters to agents—find out what these are.
- Includes over a half-dozen writing and revising exercises with suggested revisions to help you excel in your writing craft.
- Two sample treatments, a Hollywood coverage, and a sample release form.
- Hundreds of examples and illustrations that you can apply right now to your own writing or script marketing project.

- An extensive, easy-to-use index.

Completely up-to-date and completely reliable

EVERYTHING YOU NEED UNDER ONE COVER

***The Screenwriter's Bible*—your authoritative source**

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BY DAVID TROTTIER

SILMAN-JAMES PRESS
Los Angeles

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eBook ISBN: 9781935247623

Cover design by Heidi Frieder

Silman-James Press

www.silmanjamespress.com

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Resources

Introduction to the sixth edition of *The Bible*

Twenty years ago, in response to student and client requests, I created the first edition of *The Screenwriter's Bible*. Where has the time gone? Since then, I have coached aspiring writers around the world. And throughout this period, I have come to understand that there are core principles and techniques that help screenwriters get off to a fast start. The result is the sixth edition of my work, which I believe to be the best edition of the bunch, and clearly the timeliest.

In fact, this 20th Anniversary Edition is dedicated to you, the developing screenwriter or pro, and to the students and clients who have inspired me with their dedication and creative vision. You have made this edition possible.

In this volume, I help you begin the screenwriting and script selling journey and guide you along the way. Not that you won't need help and encouragement from others—you will—but every aspect of screenwriting is covered in this work. That's why I call it *The Screenwriter's Bible*.

There are five guidebooks in *The Bible*. Each book is self-contained and can be read independently of the others. In addition, each can be used as a handy reference. You will find yourself turning to *The Bible* again and again. Most writers, regardless of experience, will benefit from a thorough reading of all five books. Here's a helpful insight into each book or section:

- *Book I: How to Write a Screenplay* is based on my award-winning audio series and national seminar. My hope is that you'll find it a

concise and clear presentation of screenwriting essentials. Use it as a primer or as a refresher when you're stuck. Books I and II can be used concurrently as you write your script. In fact, Book I will occasionally refer you to Book II (actually a *workbook*) at appropriate junctures.

- *Book II: 7 Steps to a Stunning Script* is a workbook that takes you step by step through the writing process. The first step deals with creativity, "summoning your muse," and overcoming blocks. The other six steps include the pre-writing, writing, and revision phases.
- *Book III: Proper Formatting Technique* not only provides the crucial formatting standards by which your script will be judged, but teaches something of screenwriting itself. Even if you have a complete knowledge of formatting, reading this book will improve your writing style. This formatting guide has become the *de facto* industry spec screenplay formatting standard.
- *Book IV: Writing and Revising Your Breakthrough Script* is an annotated guide to spec writing. Since samples of spec scripts are so rare, this section will prove valuable to you because you must write a spec script to break into the business. Try your hand at revising the poorly written sample scenes and then compare your versions with mine. Also review the first nine pages of an actual spec script with my line-by-line analysis.
- *Book V: How to Sell Your Script* presents a detailed marketing plan with useful worksheets that takes the mystery out of selling to Hollywood and to the many other screenwriting markets. The plan is comprehensive as well as specific. With it, you'll be able to target your market with effective sales strategies.

(Note: *The Screenwriter's Bible* is sold with the understanding that neither the publisher nor the author is engaged in rendering legal advice. If legal assistance is required, the services of an entertainment attorney or other competent professional should be sought.)

I invite you to share with me your reactions to *The Bible*, and I hope it

becomes a help and a guide to your personal writing success. I wish you the best.

Keep writing,

Dave Trotter
dave@keepwriting.com

HOW TO
WRITE A
SCREENPLAY

BOOK I

A Primer

How stories work

THE NEXT GREAT SCREENWRITER

You may have heard that breaking into the movie business is tough. It is.

However, if you write a script that features a character that has a clear and specific goal or desire, and there is strong opposition to that goal, leading to a crisis and an emotionally satisfying ending, your script will automatically find itself in the upper 10%. Few developing screenwriters have mastered even the *basics* of screenwriting.

If your script also presents a well-crafted story built on an original concept or premise and featuring a fascinating character with which people can become emotionally involved, there are agents and producers awaiting the advent of the next great screenwriter.

You can be that next great screenwriter if you work hard, learn your craft, and develop discipline. You'll need to apply the fine art of pleasant persistence. And there are going to be disappointments. But you can do it! Now stop for just a moment and say that to yourself.

All successful screenwriters begin in the same way. All write one or more feature-length scripts of about 100 pages or so. Even if you want to write for television, your best means of entering the industry is via a feature script that you can use as a sample or a pilot.

Book I is designed to help you write that one spec script that's going to get

you noticed. What is a spec script? It's the script you're writing now on the speculation that someone will buy it later. Unless you are being paid in advance to write, you are writing a spec. Book II gives you specific direction in the writing process. Book III is your industry standard formatting and style guide, while Book IV will provide additional help in applying formatting and spec writing principles to the nitty-gritty of the actual writing. Book V helps you sell your script and/or find work.

THE STRENGTH OF THE SCREENPLAY FORM

A screenplay differs from a stage play or novel in a number of ways.

A novel may describe a character's thoughts and feelings page after page. It's a great medium for expressing internal conflict. A stage play is almost exclusively verbal; soap operas and sitcoms fit into this category. A movie is primarily visual. Yes, it will contain dialogue—it may even deal with internal things—but it is primarily a visual medium that requires visual writing. I have seldom read a “first screenplay” that did not have too much dialogue and too little action. You may have that same common tendency to tell rather than show.

Picture a stage play in which a babysitter cuts paper dolls with her scissors. The children are upstairs playing. From the other side of the room, a robber enters. He approaches her with a knife. Just in time, she turns and stabs him with the scissors. Not particularly suspenseful. In an actual stage play, these people would probably talk to each other for 10 minutes before the physical confrontation, because the conflict in a stage play generally comes out in dialogue. That's the strength of the stage play form.

A novel may focus on the thoughts and feelings of each character. That's the strength of the novel form—inner conflict. Perhaps the babysitter contemplates suicide, and this is the robber's first job. Neither is sure he/she can go through with it. These inner conflicts manifest themselves through inner dialogue.