



500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend

By Jennifer Lerch

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If Your Screenplay Can't Get Past the Hollywood Reader, It Can't Get to Hollywood

This ultimate insider's guide to screenwriting is designed to get you past the fiercest gatekeepers in Hollywood: the Hollywood script readers. This small army of freelancers will be among the first to read and evaluate your script and then to recommend it -- or not -- to the studios, directors, and stars.

Designed for quick and easy access, these 500 points are a step-by-step recipe. They cannot guarantee success, but failure to follow them can almost certainly guarantee failure. Tips include:

- * **Get your foot in the door: 23 ways to make a good first impression on the Hollywood Reader**
- * **Screen talk: why it is *essential* to write dialogue that looks good *on the page***
- * **Your goals in each act: how to make your story unputdownable from beginning to end**
- * **Specific genre issues: writing a romance? a mystery? a thriller? Learn their special requirements and pitfalls**
- * **The final scenes: how to go out with a bang that will wow the Hollywood Reader**
- * **Still didn't get positive coverage? Inside info on what to do and how to do it**

Written by an industry insider who has recommended scripts that have sold for as much as one million dollars, this is the only book to show you what the Hollywood Reader wants to see. Clear, smart, and completely authoritative, *500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader* is by far the simplest, most practical book ever to hit the entertainment shelf.

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By Jennifer Lerch Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #760048 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Gallery Books
- Published on: 1999-07-13
- Released on: 1999-07-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.44" h x .50" w x 5.50" l, .38 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 176 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

So you want to write a movie! You could consult Robert McKee's influential *Story*, Syd Field's rather schematic *Screenplay*, which extrapolates lessons from famous films, or novelist-turned-screenwriter Meg Wolitzer's literate *Fitzgerald Did It*, inspired by her own experience.

But the script you pour your soul into won't be read by a single soul you've ever heard of. If a star or mogul reads anything about your story, it will be in the form of "coverage," a brief report reducing your screenplay to a one-sentence summary, with a very few pages of synopsis and ratings of your characters, dialogue, and plot. That report is written by a Hollywood reader, who is likely to be a smart woman desperate to find something she can recommend to her boss--someone like Jennifer Lerch. If her eyes glaze over, you're dead.

Your eyes won't glaze over reading Lerch's 500 brisk mini-lessons. How many pages can you turn in? Not over 120. How crucial are the first 30 pages? Utterly. How many big, climactic moments do you need in those 30 pages? Two. How many scenes do you need in the dramatic opening sequence? Three to five. How many parenthetical comments directly addressed to the reader can you include? One or two per script. How about your favorite passages, where you plumb your characters' inner depths? Throw them away: "If the character doesn't say it, wear it, or do it, delete it." How do pros write? "Staccato. Economical." That's how Lerch writes. And if you want to get anywhere in Hollywood, you'll have to please someone just like her. Know your enemy--and make her your best friend. --*Tim Appelo*

About the Author

Jennifer Lerch has been a Hollywood Reader for more than a decade, including eight years at the William Morris Agency. She lives in Los Angeles.

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Introduction

Have you ever gone to a movie and thought, *I could write something better than that?*

Let's say you *do* write a screenplay. When you send it to a talent agency, production company, or movie studio, it will land on the desk of a Hollywood Reader. This Hollywood Reader is often the first and only person to make a decision about whether or not your screenplay is something the company should consider.

Why do Hollywood Readers get to make these big decisions?

Hollywood movie studios and production companies receive tens of thousands of screenplays each year, and executives cannot read them all. So the film industry uses Hollywood Readers to sift through the screenplays in search of those that measure up to their standards and offer the elements they're looking for.

Meet the Hollywood Reader

The average Hollywood Reader is college educated, culturally savvy and often has excellent writing skills of her own. Most important, the Hollywood Reader has a proven track record of knowing what screenplay concepts, stories, and characters click with executives, what elite acting talent would give their eye teeth to be in on, and what hits a nerve with audiences. The Hollywood Reader also knows how to communicate all

the essential points about the screenplay to the executive in a brief, insightful document that the Industry calls coverage.

Coverage

Think cheat sheet when you think coverage. It's the unofficial Cliffs Notes version of your screenplay. And more people in Hollywood read the cheat sheet than read the original document (your screenplay).

That's a scary thought for any screenwriter. But it can be less frightening if you know what the Hollywood Reader looks for when evaluating your screenplay -- because then you can make those areas as strong as possible so the reader gives positive comments in the coverage.

Unclear about what coverage looks like? Let's explore it.

The Anatomy of Coverage

The Hollywood Reader's coverage report usually has four parts: a concept line(s), a synopsis, a comments page, and a graph.

- * The *concept* sums up your story in a sentence or two.
- * The *synopsis* details your screenplay's story line in several paragraphs or pages.
- * The *comments* page analyzes the screenplay's strengths and weaknesses, compares it to existing films, and offers a bottom-line opinion about whether the company should consider buying, producing, or casting clients in your project.
- * The *graph* shows the executive at a glance where your characters, story, dialogue, and structure rate.

If the Coverage Is Positive.

If the coverage intrigues the executive because of the comments or story idea, she *may* begin reading your screenplay. If the screenplay delivers on the Hollywood Reader's promises, that executive may decide to option or buy your screenplay or (in the case of a talent agency) represent it or recommend it to a client.

A Trade Secret

A not-so-well-kept secret among Hollywood insiders is that an executive may buy your screenplay *without even reading it*. Her thoughts about your screenplay will be based solely on the Hollywood Reader's coverage. In fact, Hollywood executives daily discuss screenplays over the phone by reading from coverage. Both parties know what's going on. The person who "wins" in the conversation is the executive who has the better coverage: That's the importance of getting good coverage.

This Book Can Help You Get Better Coverage

No other book demystifies the work of the Hollywood Reader by exposing the nitty-gritty elements the pros look for when evaluating your work. Each page offers the inside information you need in order to write a screenplay that can make it to the executive's desk with glowing coverage. Tips on everything from concept to story to structure, characters, dialogue, pacing, and more are arranged in an easy-to-use format that covers the essentials of writing a screenplay, cover-to-cover.

These tips apply to most stories and address the flaws that most often undercut a writer's work. To prevent

the complication of cross-referencing, some tips are repeated with the intention of making the book as easy as possible to use.

Bottom line: The information contained in these pages is as universal and fail-safe as you're going to find. If it's not included in this book, chances are you probably don't need to do it!

What the Hollywood Reader Wants to Do with Your Script

Every script reader in today's Hollywood wants to be the one to bring her boss the next Academy Award winner, the project that will draw top talent, the screen story that will define a generation -- the best script around. And any reader worth her salt knows that searching for great scripts is like mining diamonds: You've got to know how to spot potential and grab it when you see it because most scripts don't have an immediate sparkle. Some do. But most do not.

That's not a slam on screenwriters, some of whom are incredibly gifted. It's reality. And that reality benefits you. How?

A Script Doesn't Need to Be Perfect

A script does not need to be perfect in order to sell in today's Hollywood. Each script has its own reasons for selling -- sometimes it features an original character or a unique, catchy concept that grabs a studio executive who has visions of a snappy one-sheet (a movie poster). A script might have the breezy dialogue that gets beneath the skin of its characters. Or the story line may hit a timely note. It could be that a script happens to fit the genre a studio is trying to fill on its production slate. The script could catch the fancy of a gifted talent agent who has the ability to sell anything, and who often does sell anything on any given day in Hollywood.

The point: A script doesn't need to be anywhere near perfect to sell in Hollywood's marketplace. Some scripts are AMAZING. Most are not. And that's great news if you're a screenwriter. All you've got to do is write a script that can get you great coverage from the Hollywood Reader.

What a Reader Looks For

This book shows you what a script reader looks for when evaluating a screenplay. It alerts you to common flaws in screenplays and provides ways in which you can correct some of these flaws and strengthen just about any project.

Not every tip applies to every script. But many of the tips can be applied to most scripts.

The Readers Who Contributed to This Book

Each tip has been reviewed by working Hollywood Readers who don't have an ax to grind.

Do these readers know anything about screenwriting? Well, during the process of writing this book, two of the contributors became working screenwriters. One reader became a staff writer on a popular network television show, and another received a screenwriting contract worth more than \$1 million and is scripting comedy features for premier directors in addition to his contract. Another reader has since become an employed producer. Yet another reader is a respected story executive.

These people know what they're talking about.

And these readers typify the person who will read your script: people who are interested in building careers

in entertainment. People like you.

So Relax

This book attempts to put your mind at ease about the Hollywood Reader by walking you through the process of what a reader may look for when evaluating a project. The scripts written by the top writers do almost all of the things covered in this book. That's what you want to shoot for: doing as much as you can to craft a screenplay that is beyond reproach.

This book exists ultimately for one purpose: to help you move into the ranks of working screenwriters. The information comes from the point of view of someone involved in the sales process. That someone may be a reader, but that reader is a person. An audience. An audience of one to which your screen story must play as if it's unfolding on a movie screen. And this audience isn't looking for anything more than the audience down at the neighborhood multiplex looks for. She wants to be entertained, to experience life through someone else's eyes, to grow through a dramatic experience.

Play to this audience of one. Write with passion, humor, honesty, and always with imagination.

Chances are, the Hollywood Reader wants to recommend some project this week. Make that project be yours.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Betty Ahlstrom:

Here thing why that 500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend are different and reputable to be yours. First of all studying a book is good nevertheless it depends in the content of the usb ports which is the content is as yummy as food or not. 500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend giving you information deeper and in different ways, you can find any guide out there but there is no guide that similar with 500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend. It gives you thrill examining journey, its open up your current eyes about the thing in which happened in the world which is might be can be happened around you. You can bring everywhere like in recreation area, café, or even in your way home by train. In case you are having difficulties in bringing the paper book maybe the form of 500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend in e-book can be your option.

Miriam Normandin:

With this era which is the greater man or woman or who has ability to do something more are more important than other. Do you want to become one among it? It is just simple strategy to have that. What you are related is just spending your time almost no but quite enough to get a look at some books. On the list of books in the top list in your reading list is usually 500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend. This book that is certainly qualified as The Hungry Slopes can get you closer in turning out to be precious person. By looking up and review this guide you can get many

advantages.

Paulette Wang:

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Anthony Bankston:

What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got scholars? We believe that that question was given by teacher to their students. Many kinds of hobby, Every person has different hobby. Therefore you know that little person such as reading or as studying become their hobby. You should know that reading is very important along with book as to be the matter. Book is important thing to increase you knowledge, except your current teacher or lecturer. You will find good news or update concerning something by book. Different categories of books that can you take to be your object. One of them is niagra 500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend.

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