Screenwriting Tips, You Hack: 150 Practical Pointers for Becoming a Better Screenwriter

By Xander Bennett

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Screenwriting Tip #99 Voice-over usually feels like scaffolding. You know - something you left in there when you were constructing the first draft, but really should have torn out after it served its purpose.

Screenwriting Tip #120 Always remember that funny trumps everything. Your script could be written in crayon with your name spelled wrong on the cover, but if it's genuinely funny, none of that matters.

Screenwriting Tip #156 The easiest way to write kick-ass protagonists is to make them incredibly good at what they do.

Confused at the outline stage? Stuck in the swamp of Act Two? Don't know who your protagonist is or where she's going?

You might feel like a hack. But don't worry - you're not alone. Even the most experienced writers feel like this at times. Sometimes we just need a few short pointers and reminders to set us on the path again.

Xander Bennett worked as a script reader in the trenches of Hollywood, reading and covering hundreds of mediocre screenplays. After months of reading about heroic Sea World trainers, transgendered circus detectives and crime-fighting chupacabras, he couldn't take it any more. Xander started a blog called 'Screenwriting Tips, You Hack', a place designed to provide short, witty tips on screenwriting for amateur writers all the way up to journeymen scribes.

This book is the evolution of that blog. Dozens of the best tips (along with many brand-new ones) have been expanded into bite-sized chapters full of funny, insightful, highly-usable advice. Let Xander's pain be your gain as you learn about the differences between film and television structure, how to force yourself to write when you *really* don't want to, and why you probably shouldn't base your first spec script around an alien invasion.

• Get valuable advice from inside the system, written by a former script reader.

- Go step-by-step through the entire process of writing a screenplay, from concept to first draft to polish to marketing your script.
- Expanded tips offer real examples of what works and what doesn't, written in a witty and conversational voice.
- Advice for all levels of screenwriter, from absolute novice to seasoned spec writer.
- A focus on Hollywood film, while also featuring extra advice for television and writers outside the US.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

How to steal dialogue and mannerisms from your loved ones like some kind of crazed, screenwriting Frankenstein. There are a lot of screenwriting advice books out there, but I think you'll find this one's a little different. It won't lie to you, lecture you, or sugar-coat the truth. What it will do is give you a broad range of tricks and techniques with which to tackle your next screenplay. Whether you're about to write your first spec script or your tenth, *Screenwriting Tips, You Hack* will help you on your journey. Good luck and happy writing! --Xander Bennett P.S. I solemnly vow that this book contains none of the following words: "filmic," "diegesis," "mise-en-scene," or "auteur." And that's a guarantee.

Three Bonus Screenwriting Tips from Xander Bennett Not Found in *Screenwriting Tips, You Hack* **1. Stuck on characterization? Sample and remix.** What's your protagonist's worldview, the unique way of looking at things that sets her apart? How do you make Minion #2 a different person from Minion #1? And what kind of quirk or mannerisms might you use to bring your secondary characters into the spotlight? Characterization--making fictional people seem real--is hard work. Or is it? If you're looking for the cheap and easy route to character, think remixing. Actors do this all the time ("I'm going to play this crooked businessman like early DeNiro, with a dash of George Bush") and you can do it too. Take a character you know, mix them up and drop them into a new role. Write your love interest as a female version of Gaius Baltar; your sidekick as a teenage Seth Rogen; your villain as "Julius Caesar meets my great-aunt Hilda." Don't worry, the Character Police aren't going to bust your door down for taking inspiration wherever you can find it. **2. Develop your voice.** Writers are supposed to have a "voice," right? It's that inimitable style that sets you apart, that makes your scripts read differently from all the others out there. Having a voice is about letting a part of yourself shine through your screenplay... and screenwriting is about selling yourself (or so they say). So how do you get one? Do what all budding novelists do: start by emulating your favorite writer. This comes naturally to prose authors, but for screenwriters it's not so intuitive. Perhaps it's because we watch movies more than we read scripts, but for many writers their first script is written in a passionless, neutral tone. Well, that ain't going to stand out from the pack. Forget what they say about screenplays being "blueprints." Screenplays are symphonies... and you can't make music without passion and style. How do you find your style? Read a lot of scripts to see what the pros' voices sound like. JJ Abrams doesn't read like Aaron Sorkin, who doesn't read like Kurtzman and Orci. Analyze the speed of an Abrams script, or the patter of Sorkin's dialogue, and try to emulate it in your own writing. At first you'll just be copying. But then you'll see the underlying structure, the shape and cadence of a pro writer's style, and your own unique voice will start to take form. **3. Video game scripts benefit from mystery more than other screenplays.** In game scripts, even more than other forms of writing, less is more. Partly this is because no player enjoys having control taken away from them--unskippable cutscenes, long intros and pages of elaborate backstory often feel like distractions from the gameplay. Trimming a few lines of NPC dialog, or shortening a popup text box by just a few sentences, can dramatically increase player engagement in the story. What they lose in understanding they make up for in, well, actually caring about your script. It's also because solving puzzles, exploring narratives and uncovering mysteries is what game players do. They're among the smartest, most engaged screen audiences because they have a direct stake in the story: they're playing it! This allows you to create the sense of a vast world through judicious sprinkling of story clues (as in Bioshock) or through clever use of atmosphere and background details (see Amnesia: The Dark Descent). Portal tells a gripping, life-and-death story with only two characters (one of whom is mute); much of that narrative success can be attributed

to never explaining the situation or talking down to the player. In video games, you can write a mystery and expect your audience to engage with it... and probably solve it. Review

*"Bennett's pointers cover all aspects of the writing process, beginning with the mental preparation necessary before you ever put pen to paper, or, fingers to keyboard. He then leads us through the full arc of drafting, revising, polishing, and ultimately pitching and selling your screenplay. Like most screenwriters, Bennett is well-versed in pop culture, and his movie references are a geek's delight...Unless of course, you're too much of a geek, and you notice that his reference to Rocky III teaching us that there's no easy way out actually refers to Rocky IV. Hair-splitting aside, Bennett's easy-to-apply screenwriting tips can only improve your writing."--MoviePie "I've never written a screenplay, but I still believe that Xander Bennett's Screenwriting Tips, You Hack, has made me a better writer. I'm not being facetious here; Bennett's book has given me a much better appreciation for techniques of screenwriting and helped me ask questions about how I write my still-non-screenplay work."--review on DGSwartz.com "Screenwriting Tips, You Hack elaborates upon close to 200 tips from the popular micro-blog that's now under the umbrella of The Black List. These great tips are compiled into helpful chapters on outlining, characters, ideas, rewriting, etc., which makes the book great for referencing when you've hit a particular roadblock in your writing. It also features a ton of helpful real-life examples, from Top Gun and Forrest Gump to Groundhog Day and Breaking Bad. Bennett's experience as a reader definitely informs his effective prose, but the book is filled with suggestions as opposed to complaints. Screenwriting Tips, You Hack is definitely a book that can help you think about your script in a new way - or help you get started on your first script!"--AspiringTVWriter.blogspot"The book is an informative and easy read, but what makes it special is that it appears that every point that can be thought of was thought of and presented. Not only is the advice given sound, there is also support of each point. The way it was written was part of its charm. I found it very amusing and I can honestly say that I learned a few things that I will employ in my future screenplays. If you are a screenwriter, this book is a useful tool with advice that you can take and see how it applies to you and how you write and produce. If you are not a screenwriter, you can learn a great deal about the field and learn a lot about the process. I highly recommend this book."--Newzbreaker.com"At the top of the top, I found Screenwriting Tips, You Hack; A snarky, witty, to-the-point tip-of-theday written by Xander Bennett. If you're not familiar with Xander and his daily dose of screenwriting gold, you've been missing some of the simplest screenwriting instruction that the internet has to offer. There are some fantastic long form blogs that go into the weeds of writing or pull back the curtain on the process or chronicle the journey of a struggling writer - and I love all of these and still read them - but what I've really grown to appreciate about Screenwriting Tips is that it is short and to the point. In one sentence Xander can highlight a common mistake, provide and example and offer a solution. That's not easy to do. That's why his blog is a must read."--SteamMyScript.com"Just got my complimentary copy in the mail. Great book. I'd say that even if I hadn't gotten mine for free. Screenwriting Tips, You Hack. 150 Practical Pointers For Becoming A Better Screenwriter by Xander Bennett. It's a VERY useful book. Not as useful as mine, of course, but damn close. Plus, it has an index, which mine does not! He was a reader in Hollywood for a good while. Long enough to know the ins and outs of the business, not long enough to go insane. I am requiring the book for my screenwriting students, and that is a VERY short list."-YourScreenplaySucks.wordpress.com"Are you a screenwriter looking for a magic 8 ball of insider tips and tricks of the trade? Do you feel like a hack? Then you should check out Xander Bennett's hilariously insightful Screenwriting Tips... You Hack: 150 Practical Pointers for Becoming a Better Screenwriter. The book, an evolution of Bennett's infamous screenwriting tips blog, offers tweet-sized tidbits of priceless writing advice for writers at any stage in their career or writing process. "--TribecaFilm.com*About the Author

Xander Bennett is a former Hollywood script reader turned pro screenwriter. Inspired by the mediocre scripts he covered as a reader, he started the blog 'Screenwriting Tips,You Hack'. Screenwriting Tips has delivered a tip per day since 2009, and is the home of the online script notes service Hack Notes. Bennett has written professionally for film, television, videogames, role-playing games, and graphic novels. Users Review**From reader reviews:**

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