

Playwriting Seminars 2.0: A Handbook on the Art and Craft of Dramatic Writing with an Introduction to Screenwriting

By Richard Toscan


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Playwriting Seminars is “a treasure-trove of information, philosophy, and inspiration” (Theatre Journal), “an absolutely essential guide to all aspects of playwriting and a valuable whitewater raft trip down the rapids of Hollywood screenwriting” (Magellan), and “a terrific learning environment for writers” (WebCrawler Select). It was also a recommended resource for playwrights at New Dramatists (NYC). The Handbook’s initial concepts came from the author’s work with Lucasfilm and the BBC. It was originally developed for playwrights and screenwriters, but has since been used by writers of fiction and nonfiction books. This new edition covers all aspects of writing full-length plays with an expanded treatment of screenwriting for Hollywood and independent film as well as diagrams of key elements of dramatic structure. Playwriting techniques are explained with many examples from classic and contemporary plays performed today by America’s regional theatres as well as on Broadway and Off-Broadway. The 392 page Handbook explains the interconnections between characters and plot and the importance of subtext to character development in the contemporary theatre (what characters don’t tell us matters as much as what they say in dialogue). Key exercises are included for developing “voice” as a writer and for creating the essential dual plot structure that supports intriguing characters in today’s theatre. Many professionals in theatre and film are quoted on key parts of the art and craft of playwriting and screenwriting to help explain effective techniques. Special sections of the Handbook focus on getting inspiration and avoiding writer’s block, editing first drafts, professional script formats for theatre and film (including software), how to launch new scripts, putting together submission packages for theatres and competitions, how to write an effective script synopsis and writer’s bio, working with directors, actors and agents, how to survive audience “talkbacks” following readings and workshop productions, methods to adjust your playwriting skills for screenwriting and television work, and options for making a living at the craft of dramatic writing.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Richard Toscan was Dean of the School of Theatre at the University of Southern California where for many years he taught playwriting and play analysis. His professional work as a producer, story editor, playwright, and judge of new play and screenplay competitions informs his approach to what makes new plays work in the contemporary theatre. He has worked in association with Lucasfilm and many noted figures in theatre, film, and television. That experience has led him to stress the importance of developing “voice” as a playwright and the dual plot structures used by nearly all produced playwrights today. His radio dramas have been broadcast throughout the world by the BBC, NPR, CBC, and ABC. Toscan later taught playwriting and screenwriting while Dean of Portland State University’s School of Fine & Performing Arts. More recently he was Dean of Virginia Commonwealth University’s School of the Arts where he founded the Cinema Program.

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