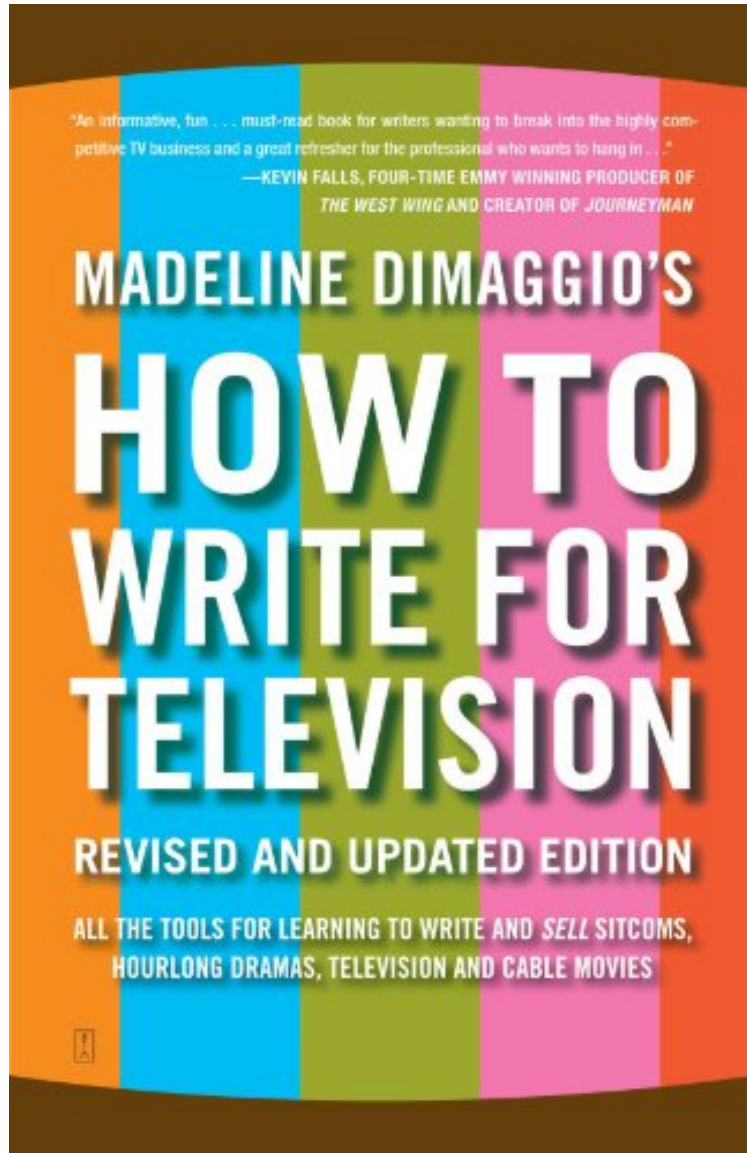


(Mobile book) How To Write For Television

## How To Write For Television

*Madeline Dimaggio*

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**Madeline Dimaggio : How To Write For Television** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How To Write For Television:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is a very good book on writingBy Mark W. WilcoxThis is a very good book on writing. As I started reading, I proceeded to apply this to every variety of television and I was astounded to see how true to reality this method of writing is. As a published author, reading this book is like going

back to get a master's degree. There is always something to learn, and this book proves that to be so. Well Done, Madeline.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good for a start.By .The book is okay. Good for a beginning on how to write scripts for television, but it doesn't go into the craft of writing quality stories is as much detail as other books.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Applegood book

TV Writing the Right Way! In this guide for every student of the small screen and every scriptwriter dreaming of breaking into the business, writer-producer Madeline DiMaggio hands you the tools of the trade. With dozens of examples from today's hit shows, as well as perennial classics, DiMaggio walks readers through the scriptwriting process, from learning how to watch TV like a writer to developing your script, pitching it, and eventually sealing the deal. DiMaggio answers the questions on every aspiring television writer's mind, with chapters on: The tools of scriptwriting Hooks that sell Creating the pilot Developing the episode, step by step How to create riveting characters Writing long form and cable movies Adaptations and collaborations Marketing your script DiMaggio combines her own experience with advice to writers from others in the trade, including agents, producers, animators, and more. This readable, reliable book has been a trusted reference for nearly two decades and is now revised to include the most up-to-date information from today's television climate, from writing for cable, reality, and TV-movie formats to the ever-evolving face of the sitcom. A must-read for anyone aiming to write for TV, *How to Write for Television* will continue to help budding writers reach their small-screen goals and will prepare them for working in the rapidly changing world of TV.

About the Author Madeline DiMaggio has written for TV under contract to Paramount Studios and as a TV freelancer. Her work includes over forty hours of produced scripts for successful sitcoms, one-hour dramas, TV pilots (both half hour and one hour), soaps, animation, documentaries, *Movies of the Week*, cable movies, and films.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. 1. Introduction TV is where it's happening. It's where the money is, where the jobs are, where product is pumped out fast, and where writers have the privilege of seeing their material produced. This isn't necessarily so in films, where the process is very slow and the writer can be a one-hit wonder. According to Writers Guild of America statistics, TV jobs outnumber film jobs by two to one. There are about four hundred movies made a year, and about three thousand television episodes. In television, if writers can find a way in, if they have the talent and know how to play it, they can go from a freelancer to a staff position, to story editor, to producer/creator, and even rise to the pinnacle of television, the showrunner. It happens; one of my former students even managed to pick up four Emmys along the way. And there are others who have achieved success. They have wonderful stories, some of which I will share with you. I don't take credit for their success. It doesn't validate me as a teacher: they had what it takes. But their success validates what I believe in -- that achieving dreams does happen. The business of television has changed since this book was first written, and I have changed as well. I continue to write, and I have sold movies to cable and television and sold two feature films. I'm currently attached to numerous projects, have a number of screenplays under option, and continue to teach. My screenwriting workshops have taken me to colleges and universities across the country, and farther. I've taught soap writing in Finland, where conflict is considered disrespectful (try that one!), and sitcom writing to the Chinese who don't speak a word of English (that one's even better!). My favorite workshops are the small private ones, where I work with writers in helping them develop their scripts. Getting to know my students and watching them grow as writers has made teaching a very satisfying part of my life. Many of these writers are on their fifth and sixth screenplays. They get better with each script. If I see a project I think has market appeal, I will try with all my power to help them find access. Two years ago I joined forces with another writer/producer, Joanne Storkan, and we formed the banner Honest Engine Films. I see the market from a different perspective now -- from both the buyer's and seller's point of view. I've become one of those people who too often says, "I'm sorry, we have to pass." I hate saying those words, because I know how the writer feels on the other end. But producing has given me many new insights, which I have shared with my students and will share with you throughout this book. I make no false promises about this business. Let's face it: deciding to make a living by writing television scripts is not often a practical or easy career choice. Television agent Mitch Stein, whom I interview later in the book, told me that when he speaks at conferences he likes to sit at the end of the dais, so when they finally get to him and ask his advice, he can tell everybody in the room, "Go buy a bus ticket and get out of town. Someday you will thank me for it." Consider this: The Writers Guild of America, West, and Writers Guild of America, East, together represent about 11,000 members, about half of whom work in a given year. According to Chuck Slocum, Assistant Executive Director who tracks all the numbers for both Guilds, out of the working half of the membership, the median income from writing over a five-year period is \$62,000 per year. There are about 3,000 episodes of television written each year. Almost all of them are written by staff writers. On average a series has about a dozen writers. Now for the good news. It can be done -- you can break into television writing. It happened to me; it's happened to some of my students. The industry is full of writers who somehow managed to buck the odds. Not all of these writers are related to somebody, nor did they all begin with contacts. Some of them lived outside the LA area. Their stories are as diverse as their personalities and the TV shows they write for. But the writers did all have one thing in common -- good ideas,

well-written spec scripts, and some knowledge of marketing. The spec scripts were their calling card. They opened doors to an eventual sale. The Story of Kevin Falls I met Kevin in Los Altos, California, at Foothill College. It was one of my first college classes. He was a journalism major from Cal Poly. He had wonderful energy and enthusiasm and didn't miss a beat. I read his first screenplay; it was quite good, and I could tell that he had talent. The script didn't sell, but in the marketing process, Kevin found an agent. He kept writing. He completed his second screenplay -- it also didn't sell -- but he kept writing. One day I got a call from him. He was angry and distraught. He had three completed screenplays to his credit and still no bites. I completely understood his frustration, but I had a feeling he wouldn't give up. About six months later I heard from him again. He called to tell me he had just signed a four-picture deal with Disney Studios. An executive there, a woman whom I came to know later, had read one of his scripts. She was not interested in buying the script, but she loved the way it was written. She called Kevin's agent and asked to read more. The agent sent down those two other scripts that had never sold. Again, for various reasons, she didn't buy the scripts, but she found the writing wonderful. It was not only consistent, but Kevin's style was perfect for the Disney genre. He was immediately placed under contract. I saw Kevin a number of years later at a writer's conference in Hawaii where I was speaking with Kathie Fong Yoneda, a former executive at Disney Studios. Kevin, at the time, had just signed on to write the *Pretty Woman* sequel, a project that later was shelved because of casting problems, and he, at the moment, was writing the movie *The Temp*. During the Q A, a young hopeful asked Kevin how many spec scripts he had written before he sold one. Kevin responded, "Seven." The kid's mouth dropped open. He asked what kept him going, and I'll never forget Kevin's answer. He said he was getting on the Bayshore freeway, and asked himself the same thing, What if I never sell a screenplay? And he got the answer. It doesn't matter. I'll just leave them to my kids. I love it so much I'm going to keep on writing anyway. I kept track of Kevin's career because his name kept popping up on the television screen, and I saw him year after year picking up Emmys. We met for a drink when I asked to interview him for my book. At the time his new show, *Journeyman*, was on the air. It was a great series, intelligently written, intricately woven, and filled with whopper surprises, but the timing was bad: the writers' strike was about to hit just as the show was gaining momentum, and *Journeyman*, along with some other good series, would become one of its casualties. Kevin's enthusiasm hadn't waned. It was pretty clear he still loved what he did. I asked him when he had made the turn from features to television. He said he was a big sports fan, and when he heard HBO was doing *Arli\$\$\$*, a show about a sports agent, he looked into it and got on staff. He stayed with the show for three years, then wanted off. His agent convinced him to hang on for one more year and he'd get him a co-executive producer credit, and that would later help him get a better network job. A year passed, and the agent asked Kevin where he wanted to go. Kevin was a huge fan of *Sports Night*. When he heard they were looking for somebody, he got a knot in his stomach; he'd give anything just to be in the same room with those people. He met with the staff twice and didn't think it went well. But at the third meeting, Aaron Sorkin was there and asked Kevin if he could start that day -- at noon. He said it was the single most fulfilling moment of his career to be a co-executive producer with Aaron Sorkin on *Sports Night*! He continued working with Sorkin on *The West Wing*, where he served as co-executive producer for sixty-seven episodes that garnered four Emmys before going out on his own. Since then, he's been executive producer, creator, and showrunner for shows too numerous to mention. Go to [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) and type in his name if you'd like to see a list of his credits: it's two pages long. My friend Pamela Wallace (Academy Award winner for *Witness*) believes that there's a defining moment in every character's life that subconsciously designs who they will become. I think that happens in our professional lives as well. For Kevin, I think it happened the day he was driving down the street and asked himself what he would do if he never sold a screenplay. He decided it didn't matter; he was going to keep writing anyway. I think that was the moment that defined Kevin Falls's success. There are two ways you can learn to write for television. One is to read television scripts, and the other is to write them. "How to" books are helpful, and I certainly hope you buy this one. But when you get right down to it, there is no text better than the actual script. For this reason, I have included in this book excerpts of scripts I have collaborated on or written in half-hour, one-hour, and two-hour movie formats. I use these examples to facilitate stepping you through the development process. They make it easier, because you have actual pages of action, narrative, and dialogue in front of you. We will begin with the basic tenets of scriptwriting, then move on to the hooks that television rests on. We'll analyze these hooks so you'll know what producers are looking for in spec scripts. My goal is that you'll never watch the tube the same way again -- that every time you turn on your television set, you'll recognize what we've discussed, and your education will become much more than a one-time read. ...