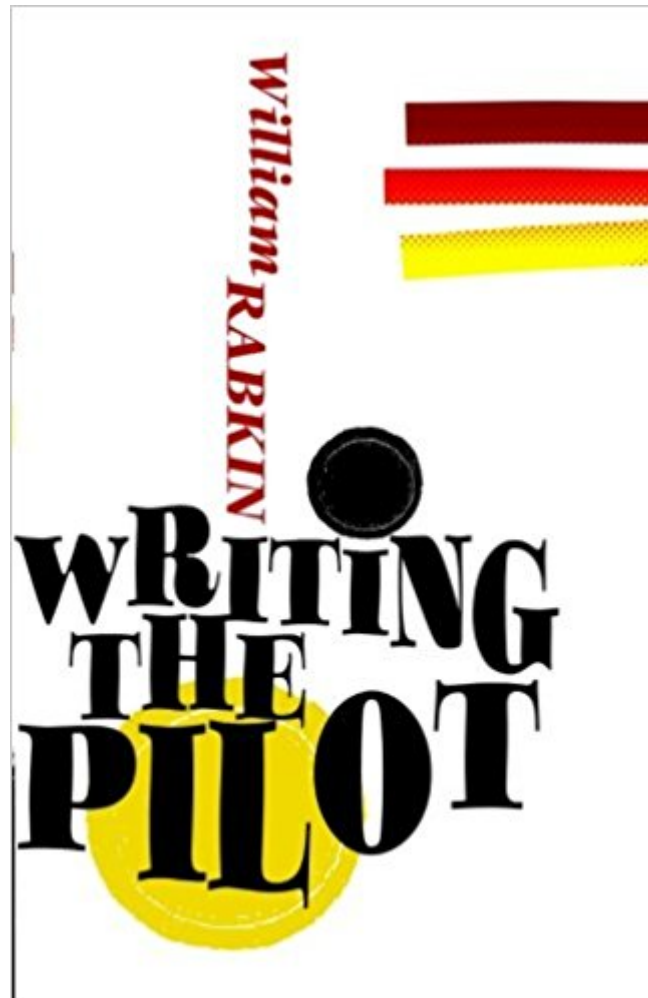




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# Writing The Pilot



## Synopsis

Television networks are so desperate for new voices and fresh ideas that for the first time in history they're buying spec pilot scripts and turning them into series. Today's aspiring writer can be tomorrow's showrunner. But it's not easy. Conceiving and writing a pilot that can launch a series is a complex assignment even for a seasoned pro. This book will take you through the entire process, from your initial idea through the finished script. You'll learn how to identify a concept that can carry one hundred episodes or more; how to create characters who will stay interesting year after year; how to design the unique world those characters will live in; how to identify the essential elements that will set your series apart from everyone else's; and most importantly, how to capture it all in one 60-page script. Riverside-Palm Desert's low residency MFA program.

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## Customer Reviews

William Rabkin is a veteran showrunner whose executive producing credits include the long-running *Diagnosis Murder* and the action hit *Martial Law*. His recent writing credits include *Monk*, *Psych*, and *The Glades*. He has written a dozen pilots for broadcast and cable networks, and written and/or produced more than 300 hours of dramatic television. He currently teaches screenwriting in the University of California,

A short but information-packed book. I wrote the novel *FLASHFORWARD*, upon which the ABC series was based, and was also a scriptwriter for that show; the analysis of what went wrong in transitioning *FLASHFORWARD* (which is referred to as *FLASH FORWARD* -- two words -- in this

book) from a pilot into a TV series is cogent, and the advice on writing pilot scripts is excellent. The last chapter should, perhaps, be the first, though: yes, spec pilots are selling -- the claim made on page one and here on the page for the book -- but almost exclusively from established writers who have years of experience working in writing rooms on other shows; otherwise, as the author says, without some other reason -- huge Twitter following, real-life experience in a heroic profession -- the chances of getting your pilot script read by someone who can actually produce it are almost nil. Still, the book is called **WRITING THE PILOT**, not **SELLING THE PILOT**, and it very much delivers on that score.

Rabkin writes about writing the dramatic 1-hour pilot. If you're planning on writing a half hour, read something else. Half hour comedies are a weird animal. But back to this book: It's a straightforward insightful book that I would suggest you read at the outset of your endeavor to write a pilot. And if possible, know your logline first. Otherwise, Rabkin's ideas will be too abstract if you can't immediately use them to scrutinize what you're working on. This book is not for the novice writer who has never written a play, screenplay or at least attempted to write a dramatic pilot. I say this because it's not a nuts and bolts step by step instruction manual for writing pilots. There are those out there, but this isn't it. Neither is it a book that's going to tell you how to put a scene together or write dramatically. Writing is a tenuous dance between a psychotic dissociative state and structural engineering, and reading books like this is great for reinforcing the engineering. Rabkin takes writing a pilot down to the conceptual fundamentals of conceiving a television series. If you're a feature writer and figure writing a TV pilot is easy--it's just a feature only half as long--read this book. There is so much you have to get right in creating a series, and you'll have a much easier time of things if the scrutiny comes sooner rather than later. And lastly, Rabkin references a lot of shows I really dig, and his prose style is articulate but breezy. I have the attention span of a toddler when it comes to books on writing, but I managed to tear through this book from cover to cover (figuratively speaking) in one sitting. I am now going to write my new pilot. If it sells or I get staffed, I'll update this review ;-)

I hadn't paid attention to the number of pages when I bought this, so when I got it in the mail I was a little \*meh\* that I'd spend \$9 on what felt like more of a pamphlet than a book. But man. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. This book gets straight to the meat of the matter again and again and again, and the examples provided are all reduced down to the most important and helpful details. I'm underlining things all over the place in this book, writing down notes from it, using it to add to the questions I'm asking myself as I write, etc. It's a great resource, and it's so much cheaper than so

many other recommended books on the subject, that it only makes sense to add this to your reference library. If you're looking for a good place to start, this can be it. Go for it.

In our digital age, it is clear that forms of entertainment are rapidly changing. TV series that used to be looked down upon as a minor form are now hot while Hollywood, once the Queen of entertainment has a hard time keeping up. Novels - even in the ebook format - are beginning to look like they're coming in last, even behind video games. It is time therefore for writers to look at what is happening on TV and learn how to do it. This is why "Writing the Pilot" is such an essential read - highly informative and crystal clear. But, and this is a big but, writing TV specs is one thing and selling them is quite another as explained in the last chapter. In fact, only established writers manage to sell specs; this is not something the average professional novelist can hope to do, much less the newbie. In that sense, if you thought you could learn to write specs in order to sell them to TV networks, you're in for a disappointment. The book however is very useful to help you think through your novel: the approach, the structure, the pace. Some of the advice applies straight to novel writing and it's not the kind of advice you normally get in your MFA course. Which is why I highly recommend it.

I had my first Pilot script, or at least the outline of it, pretty well under way before buying this book. It occurred to me that, despite having written a number of short films of varying length, and even a feature-length screenplay, I knew nothing about writing for TV - aside from the fact that there are generally more than 3 acts in an hour-long drama. After reading this book - a quick and easy read - I'm not a whole lot closer to having the format of the teleplay mastered, but I do have a much more concise idea about what it takes to make a worthwhile pilot. It's about ending up with something much more than fifty-some-odd pages. It's about creating something that can sustain dozens and hundreds of such scripts and setting it up properly. The author's advice is very practical and down-to-earth, with plenty of contemporary real world examples. He discusses the viability of the pitch pilot in the contemporary TV business but gives you realistic expectations about the challenge of it. I'm convinced that in the current day, writing a pitch pilot is something every aspiring writer should be doing, not because it's going to sell and make them rich, but because it's part of what makes you a TV writer.

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