

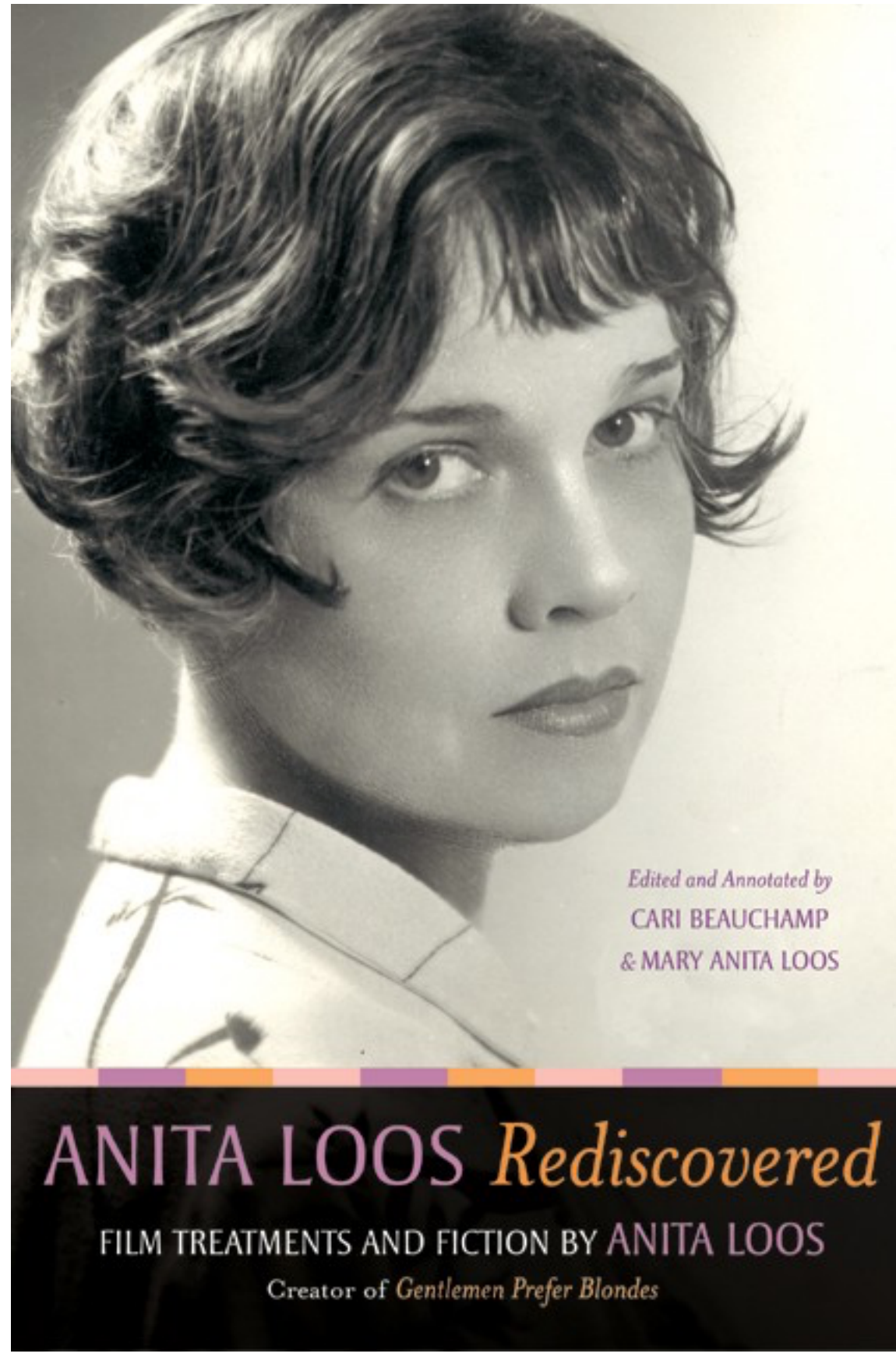


# “How to Write Photoplays” by John Emerson and Anita Loos

Scott Myers [Follow](#)  
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If you are a screenwriter, you should know about [Anita Loos](#). Loos was one of the most influential writers in the early history of American cinema, associated with [136 film projects](#) per IMDB.



Married to writer John Emerson, the pair wrote perhaps the earliest book on screenwriting in 1920: “How to Write Photoplays”.

Here are the chapter titles:

- I. Let’s Write A Movie
- II. Tools And Trades
- III. Getting The Story Across
- IV. The Photoplay Writer’s Dictionary
- V. The Theme
- VI. Star Sympathy
- VII. “Action! Camera! Grind!”
- VIII. The Synopsis
- IX. The Continuity
- X. Titles and Sub-Titles
- XI. A Model Scene
- XII. Marketing The Story
- XIII. Writing For The Camera
- XIV. Scenery For Scenarios
- XV. The Actor’s Angle
- XVI. Character On The Screen
- XVII. The “Interest”
- XVIII. The Kind Of Stories That Sell
- XIX. What To Write — And Not To Write
- XX. Cutting The Picture
- XXI. Writing For The Censors
- XXII. The Pictorial Element
- XXIII. The Denouement
- XXIV. How To Begin
- XXV. Midway In The Photoplay
- XXVI. The Final Close-Up
- XXVII. The Love Expert

Okay, maybe not Robert McKee or Syd Field, but isn’t it remarkable how many of those topics have relevance for today’s screenwriters?

Gee, wouldn’t it be kind of fun to flip through this book. But come on, it’s 92 years old. There’s no way you could possibly find it, right?

Wrong. Check [this](#) out: You can read the book online for free!

But you know what? I shall save you the trouble. Each Sunday for the next several weeks, I will post key excerpts from the most applicable chapters of this book. And you will be absolutely amazed at how little things have changed in terms of the fundamentals of the screenwriting trade in nearly a century’s time.

Here is a short film called *The New York Hat* (1912) written by Loos, directed by D.W. Griffith, and starring the biggest star of the era Mary Pickford.



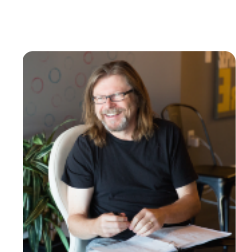
Screenwriting wisdom from Loos in the weeks to come.

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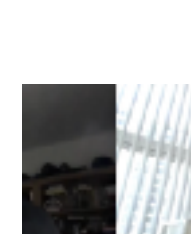
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