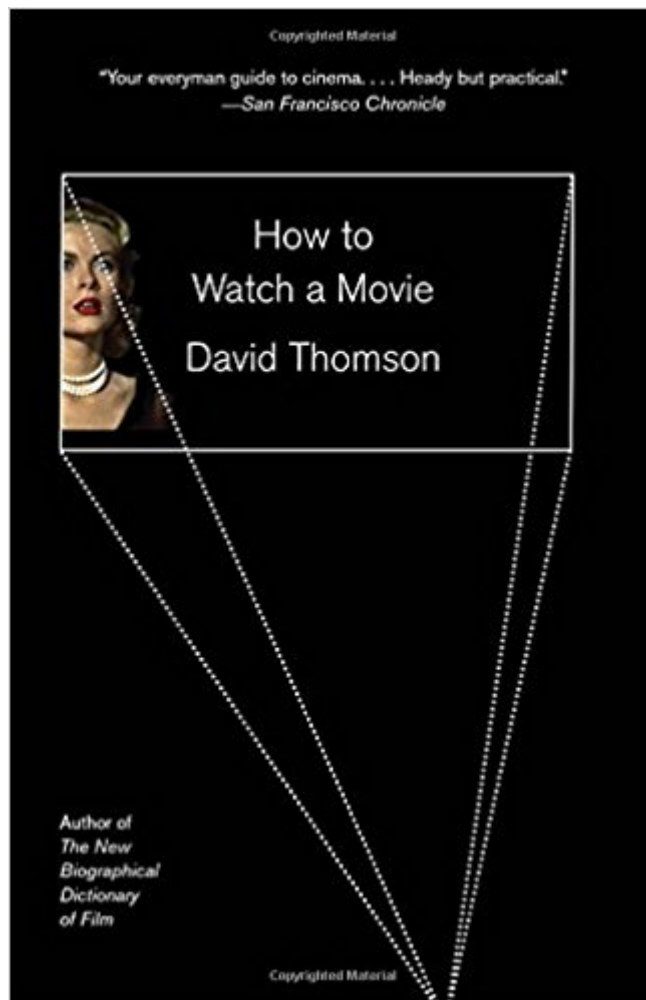


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# How To Watch A Movie



## Synopsis

In his most inventive exploration of the medium yet, David Thomson—one of our most provocative authorities on all things cinema—shows us how to get more out of watching any movie. Guiding us through each element of the viewing experience, considering the significance of everything from what we see and hear on-screen—actors, shots, cuts, dialogue, music—to the specifics of how, where, and with whom we do the viewing, Thomson explicates the movie watching experience with his customary candor and wit. Delivering keen analyses of films ranging from *Citizen Kane* to *12 Years a Slave*, in *How to Watch a Movie*, Thomson shows moviegoers how to more deeply appreciate both the artistry and the manipulation of film—and in so doing enriches our viewing experience immensely.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Your everyman guide to cinema. . . . Heady but practical.”—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“A love story. . . . A book that will get you thinking about the magic of film.”—*NPR*

“David Thomson’s love affair with the movies is one of the great blessings of our culture. *How to Watch a Movie* confirms yet again that he has the most learned and independent eyes in the criticism business. Somehow he freshens everything.”—*Leon Wieseltier*

“Chatty and authoritative. . . . Both wonderfully informative and a beautifully written paean to the movies and their continuing ability to inspire and enthrall.”—*The Sunday Times (London)*

“Easygoing, essayistic. . . . This isn’t an academic manual or *Movies for Dummies*. You read Thomson for contact with

an urbane and provocative intelligence. • The Washington Post

David Thomson has written about film for The Guardian, The Independent, The New York Times, The New Republic, Salon, Movieline, Film Comment, and Sight & Sound. He is the author of more than thirty books on film, including The New Biographical Dictionary of Film, Rosebud: The Story of Orson Welles, and The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood. He lives in San Francisco.

Disappointed. Usually I've found Thomson's books to be more insightful, humorous and informative, and was eager to learn, after almost 70 years of watching movies, to find out if I was doing it wrong. Guess not. There really wasn't anything new here, except for a few autobiographical anecdotes which were delightful. He has a wealth of cinematic knowledge which I've enjoyed over the years, through both hearing him in person on several occasions and in reading other works of his. However this was warmed over hash.

I thought it would be about the fundamentals of movie watching, but it was just essay about the author reminiscing about movies he had seen. I didn't even finish reading the book.

Headline says it all.

Thompson obviously knows his stuff. But that's the problem with this book- stuff. Much of it is trivia. I have trouble at times with his sentence construction and syntax. Try and figure this one out: "...the truth twenty-four times a second is there as chaperone to the way running the frames together may promote a dream." Or consider: "The legend goes that it was unmediated footage from Vietnam that turned the public against the war there. That begs only one question: that the American public at large never gave up its support for that war." So where is that begging question? Near the end he admits that his book is not about "How to Watch a Movie." However, his comments on the 1966 Swedish film "Persona" directed by Ingmar Bergman are clear and perceptive.

You buy your ticket, and maybe some popcorn, and take your seat in a theater. Or, more likely, you put the DVD in the player or call for a flow from the streaming service. And that's how you watch a movie. You don't need to know how to do it, you just do. So why look at a book called \_How to Watch a Movie\_ (Knopf)? Well, for one thing, the author is David Thomson, a prolific critic and author of \_The New Biographical Dictionary of Film\_. For another

thing, Thomson probably knows a lot more about movies than you do, and thinks about them more, and could increase your enjoyment of what for many is a passive sitting and letting the movie flow in. Plus, he might just have some suggested movies that you ought to make sure you see. And also, he is an entertaining writer, and his book is a collection of essays on movies and the experience of watching them, and his love of movies is a joy to read about. Thomson actually sympathizes with the viewers whose history of moviegoing has been *“to believe we should relax, take it easy, sit back, and enjoy ourselves.”* But there is no such thing as pure enjoyment without thought; and thinking about the workings of a movie can make the movie more rewarding. There is nothing wrong with *“good, pleasing films that deserve no more than a single viewing... They are smart, confident entertainments, nicely played, but they have no significant ambition or sense of mystery. They are small stories, well told, and all deeply old-fashioned, even when the effects are very special.”* There are for Thomson movies in another category, movies that can be watched repeatedly and seen in different ways at different times of life or with different emphases. There *“Citizen Kane\_ or Bergman\_ \_Persona\_.* But you don’t have to go to the art house for examples like this. Thomson writes that when he first saw *\_Casino\_* he didn’t like it; it was one more Scorsese gangster movie. Ten years later, he found it playing regularly on cable and watched it repeatedly; it became a parable of Robert De Niro’s *“rationality versus Joe Pesci’s madness, or order versus chaos, and the desperate comedy of De Niro being thwarted at every turn.”* So, how do you watch a movie? Keep your eyes open. Enjoy the entertainments that are worth one view, and really worth one, no more. The movies that are more complex, watch them over and over again and value how they change. And keep in mind all the valuable insights Thomson has here on music, editing, cutting, montage, screenplays, money, heroes, and more. Hollywood used to ballyhoo, *“Movies are better than ever,”* but use the valuable perceptions here to make them so for yourself.

Much like Tarantino, author David Thomson is an encyclopedia of movie knowledge and while he occasionally rambles, he never rants nor does he ever get harsh and force his opinions down another’s throat. Despite a bit of an off-center narrative and unstable start, Thomson’s takedown eventually propels like a rocket into the jugular of what makes the typical movie viewer tick, what they might (not what they are required or should as he’s not tacky nor is he trying to be trivial and force you to do something) look for in a film, familiar themes (with various examples- so if you’ve

seen one but not the other, he'll hit most of the targets and get his points across) and why everyone keeps coming back and rewatching these films that they admire for whatever reason. Eventually, he gains bigger points when he talks about the various celebs/filmmakers and how all it takes is a few hits and they're cinema gold in the longterm, why everyone can relate to various themes (some without even realizing it) regardless of whether it's a serious or campy movie, and he manages to even draw examples from even hit TV shows and video games. The book is fairly recent, with a publication date of 2015, and truly works best when he uses other people in his lifestyle's reactions. For whatever reason, despite being very long and detailing complicated aspects, he somehow doesn't come off as self-indulgent. So in the long term, while I would highly recommend this for film buffs who crave great film history, review compilations, making of's, critiques on various themes and biographies, this won't be first on the list due to it taking a bit to kick-start. It is however going to at least be recommended for a Top 20 since it's diverse enough to where it should appeal to most audiences without losing them or feeling only appropriate for certain demographics. Unlike some of the other books themed around movie interests, this didn't feel like one had to do twice as much homework, let alone be treated to an unfocused essay that somehow became an overdone best-seller. Check it out, whether by rental or by purchase (used or new, you'll get your money's worth).

I truly loved this book. It seems a distillation of Thomson's lifetime fascination with the movies. It responds to how we watch movies in 2015 and how we might watch them in the future.

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