

Is This Thing On? (2025) – Screenwriter’s Breakdown for Educators

Screenplay By: Bradley Cooper & Will Arnett and Mark Chappell

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

FYC/AMPAS Draft: December 10, 2025; 106 pages.

Drama / Comedy (dark/dramedy flavour) / Family Relationships (marriage)

LESSON PLAN

MENTOR: Nick Runyard | 8FLiX Institute (for Emerging Screenwriters)

PROFICIENCY: **NOVICE** | ADVANCED BEGINNER | COMPETENT | PROFICIENT | EXPERT

REQUIRED READING: Is This Thing On? (2025) Screenplay (8FLiX.com [free account required for downloads]).

OPTIONAL READING: Funny People (2009 - Judd Apatow), Enough Said (2013 - Nicole Holofcener), Lost in Translation (2003 - Sofia Coppola), and Inside Llewyn Davis (2013 - Joel Coen & Ethan Coen)

Logline

A stand-up comic trying to rebuild his life after divorce mines his own failures for material—only to realize the punchlines hit closer to home than he’s ready for.

What This Screenplay Teaches

Is This Thing On? is a study in low-volume storytelling -- proof that a screenplay doesn’t need big plot turns to move forward, only emotional honesty and forward momentum in character. It shows how comedy can emerge from vulnerability, silence, and social discomfort rather than punchlines.

This is a script about reinvention after collapse, where the mic isn’t a path to fame -- it’s a place to stand when everything else has fallen away.

Discussion Topics

- Writing comedy without “joke density”
- Emotional stakes vs external stakes
- Vulnerability as narrative engine
- Realism vs wish fulfillment in creative success stories
- Dialogue that feels unscripted but precise
- Why awkwardness can be more revealing than conflict
- Reinvention stories without redemption arcs
- How tone signals audience trust

Tone Breakdown

Primary Tone: Intimate Observational Comedy

Small moments, quiet beats, and humor rooted in recognition rather than surprise.

Secondary Tone: Melancholic Self-Reinvention

The story carries the ache of divorce, aging, and starting over -- never sentimental, never cruel.

Tertiary Tone: Awkward Social Realism

Open mics, empty rooms, half-listening crowds -- comedy as lived experience, not fantasy.

Undercurrent: Vulnerability as Risk

Every joke is a gamble. Not for laughs -- for dignity.

In short:

Quietly funny, gently sad, deeply human -- comedy that breathes instead of shouts.

Screenwriting Takeaways

- **Comedy doesn't require punchlines**

Humor comes from honesty, timing, and discomfort.

- **Low plot ≠ low momentum**

Emotional progression replaces traditional stakes.

- **Dialogue thrives on imperfection**

Stumbles, pauses, and misfires carry character truth.

- **Stand-up as metaphor, not fantasy**

The script avoids the myth of overnight success.

- **Scenes end on feeling, not jokes**

Emotional shifts matter more than button lines.

- **Restraint is a skill**

The screenplay trusts the audience to lean in.

Critical Lens: What Works vs Where It Challenges Students

What Works

Authentic emotional voice

- The script feels lived-in rather than constructed.

Tonal discipline

- Humor and melancholy coexist without undercutting each other.

Naturalistic dialogue

- Conversations feel overheard, not written.

Honest depiction of creative spaces

- The stand-up world is shown without glamour or cruelty.

Character-led structure

- The story moves because the protagonist does.

Where it Challenges Students

Deliberate minimalism may test some readers

- The absence of conventional plot turns requires patience.

Secondary characters remain lightly sketched

- Their function is primarily relational, not transformational.

Low external stakes limit narrative propulsion

- Emotional engagement must do all the work.

Comedy expectations may clash with tone

- Viewers expecting laugh-per-minute pacing may misread intent.

Why This Screenplay Matters for Students & Emerging Writers

This screenplay demonstrates that restraint is a craft choice, not a lack of ambition. Its limitations are inseparable from its strengths, making it an ideal teaching text for discussing tone control, audience expectation, and the difference between being funny and being truthful.

It asks writers to consider:

- What happens when we stop trying to entertain?
- How much plot do we really need?
- Can vulnerability carry a scene on its own?

Writing Exercise (high impact):

Write a two-page stand-up scene where:

- 1) No punchlines are allowed.
- 2) The goal is emotional honesty, not laughs.

Then revise the scene once, adding humor only through timing, omission, and discomfort.

Mentor Nick says:

“Comedy often emerges when you stop chasing it.”

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