

Set Lighting Technician's Handbook:

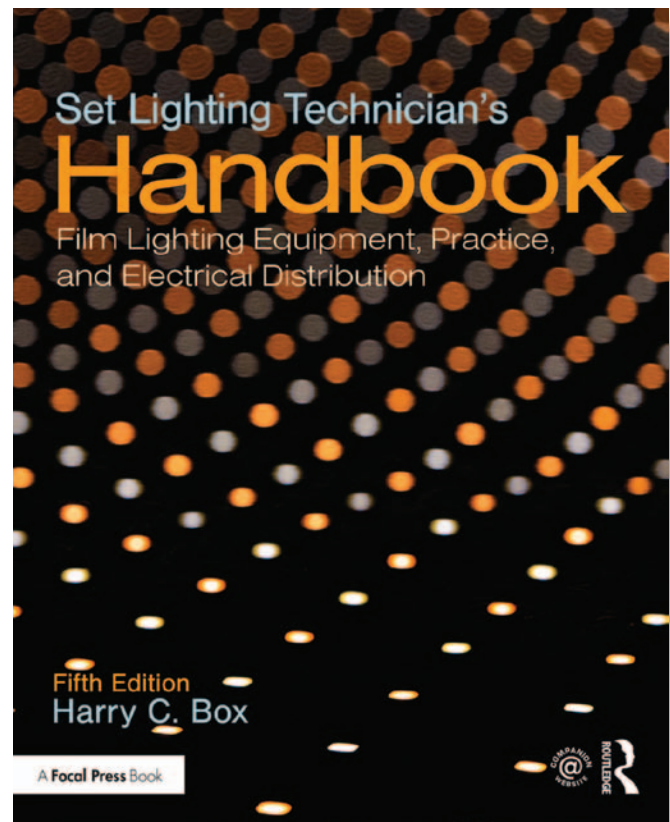
Film Lighting Equipment, Practice, and Electrical Distribution

REVIEWED BY KARL G. RULING

SET LIGHTING TECHNICIAN'S HANDBOOK tests the definition of “handbook.” My *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines “handbook” as “a book capable of being conveniently carried as a ready reference.” The hard-copy of *Set Lighting Technician's Handbook* weighs more than four 8" crescent wrenches and won't fit in any pocket I have, so it can't be “conveniently carried.” However, this only counts against carrying it around. It's good to have—and to read. It's a comprehensive text and reference for lighting technicians in motion picture and television production, explaining, not simply the equipment needed to light a set, but telling a technician how to do the job, how to fit into the working community on location or in a studio. That working advice would be invaluable to any person trying to make a career in motion picture lighting, but a lot of the book is good information for anyone in entertainment lighting, including theatre and live events.

Set Lighting Technician's Handbook has 21 chapters, eight appendices, and a glossary; it's quite comprehensive and spans a wide range in technical density. The first chapter is “Set basics: Your first barbecue,” and explains basic titles and job descriptions, such as gaffer, key grip, and best boy—with jokes about how many it takes to screw in a light bulb. This is entry-level material, but by the time the reader gets to the 21st chapter the book is dealing with color gamuts (Rec. 709, Rec. 2100, and Rec. 2020) and the numerous measures to quantify color rendering ability (CRI, CRI 15, CQS, TM-30-18, TLCI-2012, TIMF-2013, and SSI). There are discussions along the way of the typical spectrum of a phosphor-conversion white LED and how CRI test sample R9 is outside the Rec. 709 gamut. Every topic is clearly and interestingly explained.

I can't find a geographic scope declared for *Set Lighting Technician's Handbook*, but the content suggests it would be most useful for people working in the US motion picture industry. It probably will be useful for people in much of Canada, too. The units are US customary units (feet and pounds, American Wire Gauge). The electrical code referenced is *NFPA 70*, the *National Electrical Code*, which is not the *Canadian Electrical Code*. There are important differences between the *NEC* and *CEC*, but a lot of set lighting technician's actual work—e.g., positioning and focusing



luminaires, adding scrims and flags—is not governed by the *NEC* or *CEC*. The book's work-place advice is immersed in the language, work-place hierarchy, and equipment available of the motion picture industry in the United States today. Some of that language makes me cringe (“best boy” is sexist and can sound racist), but giving the reader the language as it is, is probably the right thing if the goal is to help a set lighting technician get a gig and build a career. There is a particular vocabulary and work-place culture in the motion picture industry in the US (really, in every production community), and being successful in that industry is more likely if the language and roles are acknowledged and not fought—not initially. When a technician has developed a reputation as the go-to

technician, then she might push successfully for some different words.

I found the work-place advice to be a valuable and unusual part of the book. I have lots of books that tell me about lighting equipment, power distribution, and color, but few that say much about how actually to do the work. Chapter 11, Set Protocol, is all about what goes on the set during a shoot, who does what, and how a lighting technician can help the work go smoothly and quickly. “Each time the first AD announces a new shot, the lighting technicians working the set should quietly get close to the lights that they might need to move and watch the gaffer and DP for instructions. Even when lighting activity is at a minimum, one lighting technician should always be on or near the set.” There’s further advice about positioning a light while another technician gets the power, and steps to take to avoid annoying or blinding people when turning on a light. “This kind of courtesy is not just a matter of politeness but also one of professionalism.” Chapter 11 stands out, but all the chapters are about what a set lighting technician actually has to do. For example, “Shooting on moving vehicles” in chapter 19, offers the advice that cables for lighting equipment mounted on the tow car, need to be “neatly tied and out of the way. Be sure that nothing will slip loose, rattle, drag, or get under the tires when the car gets on the road.”

Just about every entertainment lighting book has a chapter on different lighting angles lighting performers. None I have on my shelf are as good as Box’s chapter 4, “Lighting Strategies.” A lot of it is specific to motion picture lighting (a kicker would probably be a mezzanine blinder in the theatre) but the variety of angles and effects is interesting and inspiring—and they have names! “Rembrandt cheek patch lighting” is the textbook key light position of 45° to the side and 30° above horizontal. “Wrapping the key” is adding a second, soft source on the same side as the key light, to help maintain the directionality of the key, but lightening the shadow areas and helping

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make curved surfaces look curved. Box created the sample lighting scenes using Set.a.light 3D; they are far more clear than the photos of spouses, students, and statuary I have seen in other lighting texts.

Set Lighting Technician’s Handbook has lots of tables in the appendices useful for people working on set. The hard-copy is heavy for a tool box, but eReaders are much lighter. A couple of eBook versions are available for a little less than the cost of the paperback. I used VitalSource for this review. It annoyed me with pop-ups offering to read aloud to me, color-code the text, add emoji stickers, and make flashcards, but

maybe a student will find these tools handy. However, there’s a Kindle version too. Any eBook version will allow you to search the text and jump from topic to topic, and a portable reader weighs only a few ounces—just don’t toss a crescent wrench into the toolbox on top of your eReader! ■



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