

SCHOOL OF CINEMA AND INTERACTIVE MEDIA
WINTER QUARTER - 2014-2015
DC 101 – SCREENWRITING FOR MAJORS

INSTRUCTOR:	Brian Zahm	SECTION:	501
OFFICE HOURS:	TH 12:30-5:00	CLASS #:	20266
OFFICE LOCATION:	CDM 455	CLASS TIMES:	TU 1:30-4:45 PM
E-MAIL:	bzahm@cdm.depaul.edu	CLASS LOCATION:	CDM 708

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces digital cinema majors to dramatic writing for motion pictures. The topics covered include screenplay format, visual writing style, scene craft, story structure, character, and dialogue. In addition to completing targeted scene assignments, students are expected to develop and write a short screenplay. This is a very intensive class with several writing assignments designed to hone your skills. Not only will you be able to build material for your writing portfolios, but hopefully have a script for DePaul's Script database to be potentially made into a film.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- » Students will learn to execute standard screenplay format
- » Develop strong visual writing skills
- » Improve their creative writing process
- » Expand ability in scene craft, character development, and narrative structure
- » Deliver high-quality, original creative projects on deadline

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this course.

REQUIRED TEXT

- » **TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING** by David Howard and Edward Mabley
(ISBN 10: 0312119089) A stellar and quite down to earth assessment of screenwriting tools of the trade and its function and realities within the industry. This book's a gem.
- » **THE HOLLYWOOD STANDARD** by Christopher Riley (ISBN: 10: 1932907637)
A stellar guidebook to formatting scripts successfully.
- » **DESIRE2LEARN (D2L):** Some additional readings will be posted on D2L. (under CONTENT)
- » **CLASSMATES' GROUP SCRIPTS:** You will need to read and critique your peers' scripts with a written response.

REQUIRED SUPPLIES

» **SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE:** You will be required to use screenwriting software. Final Draft is strongly recommended for those with a serious career focus on screenwriting, producing and/or directing. The software is \$99 with a student discount at: <http://www.finaldraft.com/>. You can also obtain a free download of the Celtx screenwriting program at: <https://www.celtx.com/index.html>. *MICROSOFT WORD IS NOT GOING TO CUT IT!*

ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

» ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION: 10%

You must attend class for your benefit, and that of your peers. This class is driven by the interaction of classmates critiquing scripts, so you must be actively engaged in class and when submitting written peer critiques. Responses to readings will be necessary during discussions, and will also be in the form of an occasionally quiz if necessary.

» SCENE ASSIGNMENTS: 15%

Three short scripting assignments will help hone your craft as you gear up for your final script.

» WRITTEN CRITIQUES: 10%

You must provide written critiques of your peers' scripts (that are in your assigned groups). Group feedback will help the writer move ahead faster with his/her work.

» PRE-WRITING PACKET: 15%

Pre-writing is a crucial way to know your characters and know the world you are creating and will help you discover strengths and weaknesses early in your story development. Solid Pre-writing will make it much easier when it comes to the writing of the actual screenplay. This packet will include a logline, character biographies, character trait worksheets, a treatment (broken down into 3-acts), and your story charted on *The Structure of Modern Formula*.

» SCRIPT: DRAFT 01: 25%

Proper formatting of your short fiction screenplay and incorporating classic story forms from the readings and lectures is essential for success on this assignment. Your screenplay's principle elements will be limited to three main characters and locations.

Some things to keep in mind, as this assignment is 25% of your final grade:

- Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell.
- Spelling, grammar and punctuation count - Proofread your work, proofread it again, and then proofread it one more time just to be sure.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - It may be a good idea to have a friend/family member look over the script as well.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required. Refer to texts for the course, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.
- Action description should be lean - Only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Use your plot points as a guide.
- Avoid exposition heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Your script must be at least 8 pages, but should not exceed 12 pages.
- Ask questions if you need help.
- Don't wait until the last minute. It takes time to develop a solid narrative - You won't be able to do it in one night.

» SCRIPT: DRAFT 02: 25%

The first draft is one thing, but the subsequent drafts are where an idea really starts to take shape. Take what you learned from Draft One, and apply this to Draft Two.

A few things to keep in mind, as this assignment is 25% of your final grade:

- The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort.
- You must include a cover page.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops and self-evaluation in order to craft your revised draft.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- Spelling, grammar and punctuation count - Proofread your work, proofread it again and then proofread it one more time just to be sure.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required. Refer to the textbook for this class, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.
- Your script must be at least 8 pages, but should not exceed 12 pages.

A = 100-93, A- = 92.9-90, B+ = 89.9-87, B = 86.9-83, B- = 82.9-80, C+ = 79.9-77, C = 76.9-73, C- = 72.9-70, D+ = 69.9-67, D = 66.9-63, D- = 62.9-60, F = 59.9+Below.
“A” indicates Excellence, “B” indicates Very Good, “C” indicates Satisfactory, “D” indicates Poor, “F” indicates the student has NOT accomplished the objectives of the course.

GRADING POLICY

Professional writers must adhere to strict deadlines. Students are expected to turn in all assignments by the established deadlines. **LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.** I will not accept the excuse of technological failure or absent-mindedness (you all have phones...set alarms for due dates!). *Back up your work and do not leave your work until the last second!* This is your warning. All grades will be kept current on D2L.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

You are expected to be on time, and if you plan on missing or being late to a class are expected to notify the instructor **BEFORE** that particular class. The instructor reserves the right to determine whether an absence or tardy is “excused.” Unexcused absences or tardiness will negatively affect your grade. *Please see **Course Policies as Suggested by the Dean of Students Office** at the end of the syllabus to see how your grade will be affected.* Attendance will be kept current on D2L. If you want to question a recorded absence or tardiness, it must be done within a week of the recorded occurrence. **DO NOT COMPLAIN** about your final grade if you have skipped class and your final grade was reduced. This is your warning!

COMPUTER/CELLPHONE/I-PAD ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY

If you are using any personal or school electronic equipment during class for anything other than class-related work, *you will be asked to leave and will be counted as absent for that class.*

E-MAIL POLICY

You are expected to read all e-mails from the class instructor because you are responsible to know the information they contain. *So, you should check your e-mail at least once every 24 hours!*

Type **DC 101 SCREENWRITING** in the subject of all e-mails to the instructor about this class. Please **DO NOT** JUST REPLY to my all-class e-mails because your response might get lost in the shuffle—*Send me an individual e-mail. I will do my best to get back to you in short-order, but please allow up to 24hrs for the instructor to respond.*

PROJECT FILE LABELING + FORMAT POLICY

Please Label all Files as Such (ex. Student is QUENTIN TARANTINO and he is submitting the “DATE” SCENE ASSIGNMENT): **TARANTINO_DATE.pdf**

All Projects should be submitted in PDF format! Projects NOT submitted in the proper format or not labeled correctly WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. THIS IS YOUR WARNING!!!

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION POLICY

All work submitted for this class should be original work made specifically for this class. If you are found to be submitting work you have made for another class you will receive zero credit for that particular assignment.

I will grade the first project file that is submitted. Check and double-check the work you are submitting. Do not submit the wrong file, an incomplete file, a corrupted file, etc. Submit the correct project file by each deadline. Most work will be submitted through D2L Dropbox. Do not leave this until the last second—upload several hours before the deadline to be safe! *Again, no late work is accepted!*

EXCUSES (i.e. LACK OF PROFESSIONALISM)

My classes are designed to teach professional conduct and particular skill-sets. Time management skills are essential for all endeavors. The wonders of modern technology make it easy and simple to stay organized, on time and on task. Please remember, an excuse is just that—an *excuse*. Here are just a few examples of excuses for not meeting class obligations that I won't accept (and do not add to this list):

- a. I have a life...
- b. I forgot...
- c. I didn't realize...
- d. I mixed up the dates...
- e. I don't "do" books...
- f. My alarm didn't go off...
- g. I was busy working on other projects...
- h. My job called me in so I had to work and couldn't do my assignment...
- i. I would have made the deadline if the deadline wasn't when it was...
- j. It's just easier to do it my way, so I did it my way...
- k. Other classes don't have me do it this way, so I did it their way...
- l. I was not aware of class policy...
- m. I didn't read the e-mail you sent out, so I didn't know...
- n. The cage checked me out bad equipment, so I couldn't...
- o. My hard-drive crashed and I didn't back up my work...
- p. The internet was slow when I tried to turn in my project...
- q. I accidentally submitted the wrong project file, but it was on time...
- r. I didn't do the assignment as you asked, but don't worry, I got it all worked on in my head...
- s. I have to go on vacation...
- t. I was at a bar and...
- u. I didn't look on the syllabus...

DC 101: COURSE SCHEDULE

All assigned readings/assignments are to be completed by the following class. All assignments have strict **DUE** deadlines noted in the schedule.

WEEK 01 – January 6th

IN CLASS:

- a) Intro to Class: Syllabus Overview
- b) Lecture: What is a Screenplay?
- c) Screening: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

BEFORE NEXT CLASS:

- a) Buy Your Books & Acquire Screenwriting Software!!!
- b) READINGS:

The Hollywood Standard

Forward, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide (through page 27)

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" Movie Script

http://sfy.ru/?script=one_flew or

<http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/oneflewover.html>

The Tools of Screenwriting

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" Analysis 202-213

WEEK 02 – January 13th

IN CLASS:

- a) Lecture: The World of the Screenplay
- b) Screenings: Short Films

BEFORE NEXT CLASS:

- a) ASSIGNMENT: Scene_Mood and Atmosphere
- b) READINGS:

The Tools of Screenwriting

About Screenwriting and Basic Storytelling (3-40), Visuals (88-90)

The Hollywood Standard

Shot Headings (29-62), Direction (63-80)

Genre Basics

<http://www.filmsite.org/genres.html>

Jan 18th by 5pm – DUE: “Mood and Atmosphere” Assignment (PDFs. Submitted via D2L under “MOOD”)

WEEK 03 – January 20th

IN CLASS:

- a) Workshop: Mood and Atmosphere (**Bring Assigned Copies**)
- b) Lecture: Character
- c) Screenings: Short Films

BEFORE NEXT CLASS:

- a) ASSIGNMENT: Preparation for a Date
- c) READINGS:

The Tools of Screenwriting

*Characterization (63-65), Planting and Payoff,
Elements of the Future (pages 72-76)*

D2L: It's About a Guy Who.pdf/Save the Cat.pdf

Jan 25th by 5pm – DUE: “Preparation for a Date” Assignment (PDFs. Submitted via D2L under “DATE”)

WEEK 04 – January 27th

IN CLASS:

- a) Workshop: Preparation for a Date (**Bring Assigned Copies**)
- b) Lecture: Conflict, Goals, Stakes & Urgency (i.e. Your Story)
- c) Screenings: Short Films

BEFORE NEXT CLASS:

- a) ASSIGNMENT: Interrogation or Seduction
- b) READINGS:

The Tools of Screenwriting

*Protagonist, Conflict, Obstacles (43-49),
Activity and Action (81-83), The Dramatic Scene (91-94)*

The Hollywood Standard

Dialogue (81-102)

D2L: 3 Act-Structure.pdf/Types of Conflict.pdf

Feb 1st by 5pm – DUE: “Interrogation or Seduction” Assignment (PDFs. Submitted via D2L under “SEDUCTION”)

WEEK 05 – February 3rd

IN CLASS:

- a) Workshop: Interrogation or Seduction (**Bring Assigned Copies**)
- b) Lecture: Genre + Exposition
- c) Screenings: Short Films

BEFORE NEXT CLASS:

- a) ASSIGNMENT: 3 Pitches (Loglines) For Films
- b) READINGS:

The Tools of Screenwriting

Exposition (60-62)

The Hollywood Standard

Transitions, Punctuation (103-111)

D2L: What is It.pdf/The Structure of Genre.pdf

WEEK 06 – February 10th

IN CLASS:

- a) Lecture: Dialogue + The Writing Process
- b) Pitch: 3 Short Script Ideas
- c) Assigned: Groups (Might Be Sooner...)

BEFORE NEXT CLASS:

READINGS

The Tools of Screenwriting

Dramatic Irony (68-70), Dialogue (84-87)

Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59),

Outlining, Plausibility (76-80)
The Hollywood Standard
Special Pages (131-139)

February 15th by 5pm – DUE: GROUP A Prewriting Packets + Filled Out Grade Sheet
(PDFs. Submitted via D2L under “PREWRITING”)

WEEK 07 – February 17th

IN CLASS: Workshop: Group A Prewriting Packets (Bring Assigned Copies)

February 22nd by NOON – DUE: GROUP B Prewriting Packets + Filled Out Grade Sheet
(PDFs Submitted via D2L under “PREWRITING”)

WEEK 08 – February 24th

IN CLASS: Workshop: Group B Prewriting Packets (Bring Assigned Copies)

March 1st by 11am – DUE: GROUP A Draft 01 Scripts + Filled Out Grade Sheet
(PDFs Submitted via D2L under “DRAFT 01”)**
****By Noon I will send GROUP A an e-mail with all the scripts to be critiqued*

WEEK 09 – March 3rd

IN CLASS:

- a) **DUE: Group A** Peer Written Script Critiques (Bring 1 Printed Copy for Instructor +
Bring 1 Printed Copy for the Script Author)
- b) Workshop: Group A Scripts - Draft 01 (Bring Assigned Copies)
- c) Lecture: Rewriting

BEFORE NEXT CLASS:

READINGS

The Tools of Screenwriting

Rewriting (95-97)

D2L: Rewriting.pdf

March 8th by 11am – DUE: GROUP B Draft 01 Scripts + Filled Out Grade Sheet
(PDFs Submitted via D2L under “DRAFT 01”)**
****By Noon I will send GROUP B an e-mail with all the scripts to be critiqued*

WEEK 10 – March 10th

IN CLASS:

- a) **DUE: Group B** Peer Written Script Critiques (Bring 1 Printed Copy for Instructor +
Bring 1 Printed Copy for the Script Author)
- b) Workshop: Group B Scripts - Draft 01 (Bring Assigned Copies)
- c) Lecture: Rewriting

BEFORE NEXT CLASS:

READINGS

The Tools of Screenwriting

Rewriting (95-97)

D2L: Rewriting.pdf

FINALS – March 17th (2:45pm-5pm)

IN CLASS:

- a) **DUE: ENTIRE CLASS** Scripts – Draft 02 (Printed Copy + Assigned Copies)
+ Filled Out Grade Sheet
- b) Workshop: Select Scripts

Note On Requirements (and the Syllabus in General)

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class and posted on D2L. AS A MEMBER OF THIS CLASS, YOU ARE REQUIRED TO KNOW AND FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES SET FORTH ON THE TOTALITY OF THIS SYLLABUS. These guidelines are established to ensure all students know what is expected of them, and so all students are treated equally by being held to the same standards.

Online Course Evaluations

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in [CampusConnect](#).

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

Academic Policies

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the [University Academic Calendar](#). Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment.

Students with Disabilities

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at:

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.

Phone number: (312)362-8002

Fax: (312)362-6544

TTY: (773)325.7296

Course Policies as Suggested by the Dean of Students Office

Attendance: Students are expected to attend each class and to remain for the duration.

Coming 15 minutes late or leaving 15 minutes early constitutes an absence for the student.

The overall grade for Attendance & Participation drops one-third (33pts) after any absence. Three absences for any reason, whether excused or not, may constitute failure for the course.

Class Discussion: Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the day's topic. Participation allows the instructor to "hear" the student's voice when grading papers. Secondly, students will be called upon by the instructor to offer comments related to the reading assignments. Students must keep up with the reading to participate in class discussion. Attitude: A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others when the instructor is speaking, mocking another's opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student issues.

Civil Discourse: DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be [Socially Responsible Leaders](#). It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

Cell Phones/On Call: If you bring a cell phone to class, it must be off or set to a silent mode. Should you need to answer a call during class, students must leave the room in an undistruptive manner. Out of respect to fellow students and the professor, texting is never allowable in class. If you are required to be on call as part of your job, please advise me at the start of the course.