

## **WRITING THE TELEVISION SPEC SCRIPT (WINTER 2016)**

DC 400-801

THURSDAYS (5:45 – 9:00)

14 East Jackson #209

Instructor: Christopher Parrish

Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00 – 5:30

Office: CDM465

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Office #: (312)362-5534

### **TYPE OF INSTRUCTION:**

Lectures, Powerpoint presentations, script readings and Writers Lab work with peers.

**SOFTWARE:** Final Draft strongly suggested (but not required).

**MATERIALS:** Pen/Pencil, Index Cards

### **WITHDRAWAL DROP DATES:**

January 17, 2016 – Last day to drop classes with no penalty.

February 21, 2016 – Last day to withdraw from Winter 2016 classes.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In this class, students will learn the basic teleplay structures for both half-hour and hour-long television shows. Students will choose an existing show and write a spec episode, practicing the skills of matching character voice, formula, structure and tone.

### **PREREQUISITE(S):**

DC 101: Screenwriting for Majors

DC 201: Introduction to Screenwriting

-or-

DC 501: Storytelling for the Screenwriter

To be specific, there are two main parts to this course – A.) learning the overall structure, format, style, tone and dialogue of various scripted primetime network television shows, with an emphasis on situation comedies and one-hour dramas and B.) **Completing an individual spec episode of an existing primetime situation comedy or one-hour drama currently on-the-air or a “reboot”** of a sitcom or drama not currently on-the-air, including the complete first draft of a teleplay and an outline.

The instructor will guide students on how to strike the delicate balance between writing an episode that embodies the characters, structure, tone, and dialogue of an existing show while expressing the student’s own creative voice, point of view and style.

The class will survey programs and scripts of various types, including single-camera sitcom, multi-camera sitcom, one-hour drama and animation. They will verbally pitch plot ideas of episodes for their favorite show to their peers and instructor. Like professional screenwriters working on an actual series, student writers will go through the entire process within our mock “Writers’ Room” and take turns as the designated “Showrunner.” As the course progresses, students will engage in their own “punch-up” sessions.

Over the course, each student will have their teleplay or script read aloud in class by “casting” their classmates in the roles for a “Table Reading.” Constructive criticism and active participation is mandatory, as is assigned homework.

Schedule permitting, students will also have the opportunity for a classroom Q&A (via Skype) with Hollywood professionals who have written for and/or been involved with primetime network sitcoms and/or hour-long dramas.

#### **REQUIREMENTS:**

No writer improves without receiving feedback on his or her work. You and your classmates will engage in an unofficial and mutually beneficial contract with one another by reading each other’s work and giving respectful and constructive criticism. **Class participation is mandatory.**

#### **DEADLINES:**

Just as if you have been hired to write on assignment for a television series, **MEETING YOUR DEADLINE IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL.** Without a valid documented medical excuse or legitimate family emergency, assignments must be turned in on time or no points will be awarded for late work.

#### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

**All written assignments must be typed in 12 pt. Courier font in a pdf file and posted on D2L.** Scripts should also be free of spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors, unless the dialogue or storyline otherwise calls for it. All scripts and scenes are to be done in proper screenwriting format. Most professionals use Final Draft but it is not required for the course. **Please make certain all assignments include your name, the course title and number and the date of the assignment due.**

**EMAILS:**

Please sign your first and last name with every email you send. I check my email every day and will have a response for you within 24 hours. **My email is cparris6@cdm.depaul.edu**

**THE NO, ZILCH AND ABSOLUTE ZERO TOLORANCE POLICY ABOUT NEGATIVE CRITICISM:**

When new and aspiring writers share their work with others, it can be an emotionally charged situation leaving the writer feeling very vulnerable. Throughout your screenwriting careers, you will inevitably receive catty, insulting, idiotic and nonproductive criticism of your work. However, in our classroom, absolutely none of it will be tolerated. If and when there is something you dislike about a classmate's writing (and you will), it is your obligation to express it. But more importantly, it is your responsibility to express why it is you think so respectfully, and ideally, suggest a way to fix it. At the same time, the person receiving constructive criticism from their peers will do so in a polite, non-defensive and professional manner.

**GRADE BREAKDOWN:**

Pitch of Your Chosen Series: 5%  
Show Bible: 5%  
Loglines: 5%  
Beat Sheet/Card Presentation: 5%  
Your Episode Outline: 20%  
First Half of Script: 25%  
Second Half of Script: 25%  
Class Participation: 10%

Course Calendar:

**1/7/ 2016 - Week #1:** Introductions, Syllabus Overview

A very brief rundown on how TV shows are written, produced and staffed.  
Why you need to write a TV spec to break into the business.  
What shows to avoid when writing a spec script. What shows to consider.  
What is the shelf life of your spec script in Hollywood?

Breaking it all down: TV EPISODE ANATOMY

What are the beats?

Structure. How many acts in a sitcom and a drama?

Is there an average number of scenes?

Act breaks. When do they come?

What about an animation script?

How long should my script be?

How long should my scenes be?  
Storylines and running gags.

For your viewing and deconstructing pleasure:  
Everybody Loves Raymond: "A Date for Peter" Written by Mike Royce.  
(\* \* Episodes are subject to change \* \*)

**Homework Assignment:** Prepare a 5-10 Minute Pitch of Your Chosen Series. DUE: January 14<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**1/14/2016 - Week #2:** Show Bibles & Characters

Classroom Activity: Pitches of TV Series

Lecture: Show Bibles. What goes in them? What are they good for?

Lecture: Characters. Exploring the psychology of character, conflict and relationships.

**Homework Assignment:** Show Bible. DUE: January 21<sup>st</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**1/21/2016 - Week #3:** Loglines

Classroom Activity #1: Read & Workshop Show Bibles

Lecture: Loglines

Classroom Activity: Name That Episode Logline Game

**Homework Assignment:** 10 Loglines for Episodes - DUE: January 28<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**1/28/2016 - Week #4:** Beatsheets/Index Cards & Script Stew

Lecture: Beatsheets & Script Stew (Structure, Conflict, Sets & Tone)

Classroom Activity #1: Beatsheet Breakdown of a Drama  
Star Trek: Enterprise "Carbon Creek" Written by Chris Black.  
(\* \* Episodes are subject to change \* \*)

Classroom Activity #2: Logline Musical Chairs

Lecture: What are popular themes of shows and how do their creators' make them their own?

Exploration and consistency of tone.

Popular settings and why these locales are repeatedly used.

**Homework Assignment:** Beatsheet of your episode – DUE: February 4<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**2/4/2016 - Week #5:** Outlines

Classroom Activity: Present & Workshop Beatsheets/Index Cards

Lecture/Screening: Outline of Primetime series

**Homework Assignment:** Outline of your episode – DUE: February 11<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**2/11/2016 - Week #6:** Spec Script Do's & Don'ts

Lecture: Spec Script Do's & Don'ts

Classroom Activity: Workshop Script Outlines

**Homework Assignment:** Write Pages (1 – 10) of Spec Script – DUE: February 18<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**2/18/2016 - Week #7:** Table Read Pages (1 – 10)

Classroom Activity: Table Read & Workshop Script (Pages 1 – 10)

**Homework Assignment:** Based on notes, revise Pages (1 – 10) and write Pages (11 – 20) of Spec Script – DUE: February 25<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**2/25/2016 - Week #8:** Table Read Pages (11 – 20)

Classroom Activity: Table Read & Workshop Script (Pages 11 – 20)

**Homework Assignment:**

Write Pages (21 – 30) of Spec Script

TURN IN FIRST HALF OF REVISED SCRIPT (if comedy the first 20 pages, if drama, the first 25 pages)

ALL ARE DUE: March 3<sup>rd</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**3/3/2016 - Week #9:** Table Read Pages (21 - 30)

Classroom Activity: Table Read & Workshop Script (Pages 21 - 30)

**Homework Assignment:**

Write Pages (31 - Tag if a Comedy / 31- 40 if a Drama) ALL ARE DUE:

March 10<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**3/10/2016 - Week #10:** Table Read Pages (31 - Tag/ Page 40)

Classroom Activity: Table Read & Workshop Script (Pages 31 - Tag / Page 40)

Homework Assignment: **Complete script with revised pages. NO EXCEPTIONS. LATE WORK WILL NOT BE GRADED OR ACCEPTED.**

ALL ARE DUE: March 17<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

Changes to Syllabus: This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If changes occur, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

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 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](http://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: [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu).

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