

INTRODUCTION TO TELEVISION WRITING (AUTUMN 2016)

DC 272

WEDNESDAYS (1:30 – 4:45)

14 East Jackson #211

Instructor: Christopher Parrish

Office Hours: Tuesdays (12:55 – 5:25) *Making appointments in advance strongly encouraged*

Office: CDM465

Email: cparris6@cdm.depaul.edu

Office #: (312)362-5534

TYPE OF INSTRUCTION:

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

SOFTWARE: Final Draft strongly recommended (but not required.)

MATERIALS: Pen, Access to Xerox machine

REQUIRED READING: (Provided by Instructor)

WITHDRAWAL DROP DATES:

September 20, 2016 – Last day to drop classes with no penalty.

October 25, 2016 – Last day to withdraw from Autumn Quarter classes.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The primary objective for this course is to learn how to write for television, for both network and cable, focusing on fiction and non-fiction TV programs including news, talk, documentaries, dramas and comedies. The course will assist students in improving their writing skills, as well as help them understand the basic approaches and techniques in writing for television.

PREREQUISITE(S):

DC 101: Screenwriting for Majors

DC 201: Introduction to Screenwriting

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 a mutually beneficial contract with one another by reading each other's work and giving respectful and constructive criticism. **Class participation is mandatory.**

DEADLINES:

When professional screenwriters are hired to write on assignment for a television series, **MEETING DEADLINES 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**

POLICY ON PEER TO PEER 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 may occasionally receive mean-spirited and/or 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, it is your obligation to express it. But more importantly, it is your responsibility to express why it is you think so respectfully and 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:

5 Minute Pitch of Your Chosen Series: 5%

Loglines: 5%

Character Hot Seat Exercise: 5%

Beatsheet: 5%

Beatsheet Notes for 3 Classmates: 5%

Your Episode Outline: 15%

First Half of Script: 25%

Second Half of Script: 25%

Class Participation: 10%

Course Calendar:

9/7/ 2016 - Week #1: "Everybody Loves Intros and Syllabi"

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?

What is an A Story? A B Story? A Running Gag?

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 Minute Pitch of Your Chosen Series.

DUE: Wednesday, September 14th by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

9/14/2016 - Week #2: “And Here’s the Pitch”

Classroom Activity: Pitches of TV Series

Lecture: The Episode Logline (the most important sentence of your show)

Classroom Activity: Name That Series Logline Game (time permitting)

Homework Assignment: 10 Loglines of your episode A stories

DUE: September 21st by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

9/21/2016 - Week #3: “Logline Speed Dating”

Classroom Activity: Logline pitches for your script

Lecture: Characters on the Couch. Exploring the psychology of character and relationships.

Homework Assignment: Character Hot Seat Prep

DUE: September 28th by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

9/28/2016 - Week #4: “In the Character Hot Seat” and “Script Stew”

Classroom Activity: Character Hot Seat

Lecture: Script Stew (Character, Conflict, Structure, Tone & Setting)

Lecture: Beatsheets (The Bathroom Break Update Approach)

Homework Assignment:

- 1.) Write up Beatsheet of your episode
- 2.) Read THE KING OF QUEENS "NO ORLEANS" outline
- 3.) Watch the episode on YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYMF9yZxSXw>

DUE: October 5th by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

10/5/2016 - Week #5: "No Stranger Things Than Beatsheets and Outlines"

Classroom Activity: Share and exchange beatsheets and notes with your group

Lecture/Screening: Outlines

Classroom Activity: Outline Index Card Breakdown of STRANGER THINGS (Pilot) Written by The Duffer Brothers – one act per group

Homework Assignment:

- 1.) Copy of your beatsheet notes to classmates and instructor
- 2.) Outline of your episode

DUE: October 12th by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

10/12/2016 - Week #6: Spec Script Do's & Don'ts

Lecture: Spec Script Do's & Don'ts

Classroom Activity: Group Workshop Script Outlines

Homework Assignment: Write Pages (1 – 10) of Spec Script

DUE: October 19th by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

10/19/2016 - Week #7: Table Read Pages (1 – 10)

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

Homework Assignment: Write Pages (11 – 20) of Spec Script

DUE: October 26th by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

10/26/2016 - Week #8: Table Read Pages (21 – 30)

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

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)

EACH DUE: November 2nd by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

11/2/2016 - 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:

November 9th by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

11/9/2016 - Week #10: Table Read Pages (31 – Tag/ Page 40)

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

Lecture: “So, You’re Moving to L.A.”

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

ALL ARE DUE: November 16th by 1:30 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

Changes to Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, 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 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: <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

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.

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.
Phone number: (312)362-8002
Fax: (312)362-6544
TTY: (773)325.7296

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 participation drops one-third 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.