

DePaul University
School of Cinematic Arts

DC 301-701: Advanced Screenwriting I

Fall 2016

Tuesday 5:45 – 9:00PM, 14 E. Jackson 209 and Online

Professor Scott Myers: smyers15@cdm.depaul.edu
312-362-1120

Office Hours: TUE 3:00-4:15PM, WED 2:30-4:00PM

Description

In this course, students study, analyze and produce motion picture scripts. This course emphasizes the use of traditional storytelling, classic mythology and how these devices apply to contemporary screenplays. Students will move from concept/treatment to a completed first act of a feature length screenplay of their own. This script will be completed, revised, and polished in DC 302 and DC 303. PREREQUISITE(S): DC 101 or DC 201

Readings

“Writing Movies for Fun and Profit” by Robert Ben Garant and Thomas Lennon, ISBN-10: 1439186766 (Required)

Supplemental resource material to be provided by the instructor on D2L.

Objectives

- Learn how to originate, develop, and assess story concepts
- See how story structure emerges from developing characters
- Work with the Hero’s Journey and Three-Act / Eight-Sequence Structure
- Understand the role of metamorphosis in the Protagonist’s journey
- Use loglines, treatments, and beat sheets as part of the story-crafting process
- Become comfortable with ‘constructive critique’ in a workshop setting
- Establish solid writing habits in delivering assignments on deadline

Outcomes

- Produce a scene-by-scene outline for a feature length movie
- Write the first act (20-30 pages) of an original screenplay

Course Management

This course is housed and managed on **D2L**, where both the online and in-class sections are linked together. There you will find course news, assignments and additional reading materials, and discussion boards for posting assignments and holding conversations.

Each week's recorded lecture and discussion (available shortly after 9PM each Tuesday) will be available here: <https://col.cdm.depaul.edu>.

Should you have problems accessing lectures, request assistance:
<http://colsupport.cdm.depaul.edu/ErrorReport.aspx>

To best serve the purposes of time management and fair consideration for all, students will be divided into three working groups: **A**, **B**, and **C**. Assignments are due **Mondays at Noon**.

Course Outline

Week 1 – September 13

Story Concept: The Foundation of Your Script

Assignment: Loglines and pitch paragraphs for three potential screenplays

Read: WMF&P, Ch. 1-3 & 11

Week 2 – September 20

Protagonist: Who, Where, When, What, and Why?

Workshop: Loglines and Pitch Paragraphs (**Group A**)

Assignment: Protagonist Character Treatment

Read: WMF&P, Ch. 23-25, Protagonist Character Treatment "Up" (on D2L)

Week 3 – September 27

Brainstorming: The Creative Power of Curiosity

Workshop: Protagonist Character Treatment (**Group B**)

Assignment: Master Brainstorming List

Read: Master Brainstorming List example (on D2L)

Week 4 – October 4

Plotline: Your Protagonist's Physical Journey

Workshop: Master Brainstorming List (**Group C**)

Assignment: Four Primary Plotline Points Beat Sheet

Read: "Bubbles" (screenplay on D2L)

Week 5 – October 11

Subplots: Character Interrelationships and Narrative Function

Workshop: Four Primary Plotline Points Beat Sheet **(Groups A + B)**

Assignment: Subplots Treatment

Read: “Man Up” (screenplay and scene-by-scene breakdown on D2L)

Week 6 – October 18 [NO CLASS SESSION]

Themeline: Your Protagonist’s Psychological Journey (Lecture on D2L)

Written Feedback: Subplots Treatment **(Groups A, B + C)**

Assignment: Four Themeline Movements Treatment

Read: “The Imitation Game” (screenplay on D2L)

Week 7 – October 25

Sequences: Your Screenplay’s Mini-Stories

Workshop: Four Themeline Movements Treatment **(Group C)**

Assignment: Ten Major Plotline Points Beat Sheet

Read: “Up” (screenplay and sequence breakdown on D2L)

Week 8 – November 1

Narrative Throughline: Your Screenplay’s Story Structure

Workshop: Ten Major Plotline Points Beat Sheet **(Group A)**

Assignment: Narrative Throughline

Read: “Ex Machina” (screenplay on D2L)

Week 9 – November 8

Format, Style, and Page-Writing

Workshop: Narrative Throughline **(Group B)**

Assignment: Write script pages -- The Opening to The Hook.

Read: The Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting format guide (on D2L)

We will set aside 20 minutes for course evaluations in class this week. You may complete the evaluation on a mobile device (details later).

Week 10 – November 15

Scene-Writing, Transitions, and Narrative Drive

Workshop: Script Pages -- The Opening to The Hook **(Group C)**

Assignment: Write script pages to the end of Act One (The Lock)

FINAL ACT ONE DUE (20-30 PAGES): NOVEMBER 22 at 9:00PM in Dropbox on D2L

Assignment Details

LOGLINES AND PARAGRAPH PITCHES (DUE SEPTEMBER 20)

Per guidelines laid out in Week 1, each student is responsible for generating three story concepts and developing them into loglines and one-paragraph pitches. We will workshop them in class (**Group A**), assessing each per genre, marketability, narrative potential, and the student's emotional connection to their stories. Goal: Each student will select one story concept to develop in the course and write as an original screenplay.

PROTAGONIST CHARACTER TREATMENT (DUE SEPTEMBER 27)

Using a set of key questions as detailed in Week 2, students will write a treatment delving into their Protagonist character. The answers to these questions create the foundation for the story's structure. We will discuss students' treatments (**Group B**) in class.

MASTER BRAINSTORMING LIST (DUE OCTOBER 4)

Students will engage their story's key characters using Questionnaires, Biographies, Interviews, and Monologues, as examined in Week 3, then create a Master Brainstorming List. They will begin the process of 'wrangling' their story by creating a top sheet of bullet points, narrative elements they think will be relevant moving forward in the story-crafting process. Lists (**Group C**) to be reviewed in class.

FOUR PRIMARY PLOTLINE POINT BEAT SHEET (DUE OCTOBER 11)

As presented in Week 4, students will answer four questions – What is the story's beginning? / What is the end of Act One? / What is the end of Act Two? / What is the story's ending? – as the basis of this week's beat sheet assignment and workshop discussion (**Groups A + B**).

SUBPLOTS TREATMENT (DUE OCTOBER 18)

Using the principle Subplot = Relationship as detailed in Week 5, students will identify key sets of character relationships and in their Subplots Treatment reflect on how each relates to the Protagonist, Plotline, and Themeline. NOTE: NO CLASS SESSION THIS WEEK. WRITTEN FEEDBACK: (**Groups A, B + C**).

FOUR THEMELINE MOVEMENTS TREATMENT (DUE OCTOBER 25)

Guided by Week 6 content and discussion, students will write a treatment exploring their Protagonist's transformation in four movements: Disunity – Deconstruction – Reconstruction – Unity. We will workshop treatments (**Group C**) in class.

TEN MAJOR PLOTLINE POINTS BEAT SHEET (DUE NOVEMBER 1)

As explained in Week 7, students will expand their Four Primary Plotline Points into a beat sheet detailing Ten Major Plotline Points, establishing the signposts for plotting their story's sequences. Beat sheets **(Group A)** to be workshopped in class.

NARRATIVE THROUGHLINE (DUE NOVEMBER 8)

Guided by the previous week's presentation, videos and interviews with professional screenwriters, students will work with note cards, dividing scenes into four parts: Act 1, Act 2A, Act 2B, Act 3, then create a Narrative Throughline outline. We will review students' outlines **(Group B)** in class.

SCRIPT PAGES: THE OPENING TO THE HOOK (DUE NOVEMBER 15)

Working off their Narrative Throughlines, students will write the first half of Act One (approximately 10-15 pages) paying attention to format and style guides presented in Week 9. We will workshop pages **(Group C)** in class.

SCRIPT PAGES: FINAL DRAFT / ACT ONE (DUE NOVEMBER 22, 9PM)

Students will turn in the final draft of their script's first act with an eye toward its narrative drive and transitions between scenes as explored in the Week 10 content.

Additional Feedback and Support

During the term, each student will do a one-on-one session with the instructor to help guide them through the story prep process and make sure they are on track.

In addition, if a student struggles with their story or has some questions about the process, they are encouraged to visit during office hours or inquire about setting up an appointment to meet with the instructor at an alternate time.

Note

In order to streamline the learning experience, all students' stories will feature:

- One Protagonist
- Positive Transformation Arc
- Three Act Structure
- Eight Sequences

In addition to maximize the commercial viability of their scripts:

- No superhero stories
- No \$100 million extravaganzas

This approach creates a context in which students will engage in intensive character development and rely on plot rather than spectacle to tell their stories.

There *may* be some exceptions to these guidelines, but only if the student presents a compelling case to write a different type of story and convinces the instructor they have the wherewithal to pull off such a scripted project.

Grading

Each week's assignment is worth a maximum of ten points, adding up to 100 total, which comprises one third of your total grade. You will be graded on effort, creativity, originality, and the application of course materials and discussion to your writing.

You will also receive a maximum of ten points per week for participation, adding up to another 100 total points, or a third of your overall grade. Whether in-room or online, you will be expected to actively participate in the conversation about the group we are discussing in class during a particular week, and also all of the assigned readings. This means thoroughly reading all of that material and then formulating clear, timely, supportive notes for your peers, and thoughtful, engaging responses to the reading.

The final, revised first-act of your screenplay is worth 100 points, and should represent the very best writing you can put forth. It must be between 20-30 pages.

Each student may complete one extra credit assignment worth a maximum of ten points. That assignment is located under "Dropbox" on D2L.

Late work will not be accepted without a legitimate excuse communicated to the instructor in a timely fashion.

These values are minimums for each grade:

A	= 95	C+	= 78
A-	= 92	C	= 75
B+	= 88	C-	= 70
B	= 85	D+	= 69
B-	= 80	D	= 65

Attendance

Absent in-room students will forfeit both their participation and assignment grade for each class they miss (20 total points or 6% of the final grade). Tardiness will be considered an absence.

Decorum

We must respect each other, our collaboration and the work at hand. Be truthful but sensitive when giving notes. Be prepared to solve problems instead of just pointing them out. Personal attacks and disruptive actions will not be tolerated.

Laptops/Cell Phones

If your computer and the mind attached to it drift away from class, and I so much as suspect you of online activities not related to the task at hand, you will lose laptop privileges for the entire semester. Phones must be silenced and stowed.

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 the professor. Plagiarism will earn you an immediate F in this course.

Alterations

The professor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at any time. Students will be apprised of any and all changes with clear instructions should they occur.

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: csd@depaul.edu.

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

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](#) or via a mobile device in class during the Week 9 session.