DC 343 801 WRITING THE SHORT SCREENPLAY
WINTER 2017
MON 5:45pm - 9:00pm
INSTRUCTOR: DANIEL KLEIN
OFFICE: 505
OFFICE HOURS: TUES 11:00am-1:30pm
Email: daniel.klein@depaul.edu
January 15, 2017 Last day to drop WQ2017 classes without penalty
February 19, 2017 Last day to withdraw from WQ2017 classes
This syllabus is subject to change at professor's discretion

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course focuses on the fundamentals and art of cinematic storytelling in the short format screenplay. Emphasis is placed on telling a story that relies on rising action and compelling characters. Students will explore the elements of classic three-act narratives as they pertain to the visual medium. Constructive analysis will be used in discussing produced scripts, weekly assignments, and group workshops to reveal the writer's unique voice and perspective.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Learning goals:
* Students will be able to analyze the three-act structure as applied to the short film
* Students will study in-depth components of plot, character, and dialogue
* Students will be able to critically analyze traditional narratives
* Students will establish their own voice and tone
* Students will be be execute 3, 5 and 10 page original narratives

Students will write polished short films of varying lengths that can be produced thereafter, as the student's thesis or via another route of production. Students will workshop these scripts with their peers in order to produce the most polished draft possible.

The short scripts created for this course will be written with student production in mind - Limitations in terms of budget, cast, locations and special effects must be taken into consideration.

A major goal for this course is collaboration and the intent is to build a "writers room" within our class to help foster everyone's work and see it successfully executed during the students' tenure at DePaul.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

  • *The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler   **ISBN-10:** 193290736X
  • *The Screenplay* by Syd Field   **ISBN-10:** 0385339038
  • Various Screenplays
  • Additional Assigned Readings & Handouts

Software:

Final Draft – If you're going to take other screenwriting courses or pursue screenwriting beyond this class, it may be worth it to invest in professional screenwriting software now. For a limited time, Final Draft (industry standard) is on sale for $99 for DePaul Students only:
http://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-9-edu-verified.html

Celtx-free software (all scripts must be delivered as PDFs).

COURSE POLICIES:

-Attendance:
Each week's class consists of lectures and screenings; attendance is **<u>critical</u>**. For the purposes of this class an absence is defined as not showing up for class or showing up 15 minutes, or more, late for a class without the approval of the professor. All unexcused absences will result in a reduction of the attendance/participation grade.

-Assignments:
Reading assignments must be completed by the date to which they are assigned in the syllabus. Reasonable deadlines are given for completion for each assignment. Consequently late assignments will not be accepted without prior consent of the instructor.

-Examinations:
Students who do not take exams during the regularly scheduled time will receive a failing grade for exams unless they have contacted the instructor in advance to arrange for a make-up exam. Make-up exams will be administered by the College according to its make-up exam schedule.

-Course Lectures/Reading Assignments:
Lecture presentations will occur weekly. The textbooks offer an opportunity for independent learning that supplements the lecture presentations. The instructor will use both the classroom and the textbooks. Lectures may introduce additional material not available in the readings, and the readings may explore concepts not mentioned in class. BOTH SOURCES ARE NEEDED.

-Content Changes:
Depending on time factors, assignments projected for the term may require alteration or rescheduling.

-Food Policy:
No food or beverages are allowed in the lecture room.

-Sexual Harassment:
The policy as specified in the student handbook will be adhered to in this class.

GRADING:

Class Attendance, Participation 30%
Assignments 10%
Project 1 20%
Project 2 30%

A = 100-93, A- = 92-90, B+ = 89-88, B = 87-83, B- = 82-80, C+ = 79-78, C = 77-73, C- = 72-70, D+ = 69-68, D = 67-63, D- = 62-60, F = 59-0.   A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work.

WEEK BY WEEK

WEEK 1

Introductions (professor and students), syllabus walk through, basic introduction to the expectations of the class.

Discussion about screenwriting: why we tell stories, why we write, what we write about, screenwriting vs. novels and plays, premise versus story. Clarifying the "value" of a short film, how a short film can serve as currency for the writer, either as a foundation for a feature or television or web series, etc.

Introduction of "Script Guidelines" (screenplay format. What are the standard "rules" on/of the page) and "Log Lines". Read several log lines (famous and otherwise) aloud in class and discuss.

"Networking": students will introduce themselves and spend 10-15 minutes meeting, learning about each other.

Screening: the class will watch several "successful" and/or noteworthy short films to better understand the "vernacular" of a short and discuss thereafter (about how they were received and how these shorts served the filmmakers thereafter).

Assignment #1: Students come to class with a short (2-3 mins) story from his/her life to tell aloud.

Assignment #2: 3 page scene with a beginning, middle and end. 2 characters. Send to me by **11:59pm the night before class #2 as a PDF**.

Assignment #3: Write 3 log lines for potential final short scripts for this class. Be prepared to pitch them to the class. These are short films that you might want to write. (Keep the production limitations in mind.)

READ: Pages 3-20 Vogler (The Writer's Journey)
Chapters 1-5 Field (The Screenplay)

WEEK 2

Lessons: Characters, Stories, Drama and Conflict.

A discussion about great (memorable) characters from movies and why they were memorable or compelling. Context versus content, premise vs. story and why "character" is critical. What makes for a great character? (Action, conflict, behavior, environment, history, etc.)

Students each tell their personal stories aloud. First introduction of the concept of "the pitch" (to be expounded on later), discussion of great/ memorable shorts stories, and feature films with "sequences" that were their own distinct short stories.

Students have work (3 page scenes) read aloud in class.

Students pitch their log lines aloud in class. Read log lines and choose which story you will develop for your first script (5 pages)

Lecture: What is three act structure (features and shorts)? What are "plot points"? What are "story" and "character"? What is "conflict"? Character intro example.

(Time-permitting) Screening: the class will watch "successful" and/or noteworthy short films (likely: "La Jetee", "Six Shooter" and, if time permits, "Spider") and discuss them after — both how the class received them creatively and how these shorts served the filmmakers thereafter.

Assignment #3: Character Bios (main and secondary)

Assignment #4: Step outline (beat sheet)

Assignment #5: Half of the class rough draft of the 3-5 page script for next class. Send to me by **11:59pm the night before class #2 as a PDF**.

READ: Pages 23-79 Vogler (The Writer's Journey)
        Chapters 7-9 Field (The Screenplay)

WEEK 3

Briefly describe and discuss "Paris je t'aime" and the concept of an "omnibus feature" (as well as other famous examples of collected shorts: "Love Actually", "New York Stories", "V/H/S", "Four Rooms"). Elaborate on the "currency" of short films (vs. features or as proof-of-concept for features and/or television projects).

Discussion about conflict in stories — how to create a through-line and establish obstacles. What makes for reasonable or "accessible" conflict in stories.

Discussion about a "scene" (as a unit) vs. a "sequence" (a series of scenes connected by a common through-line).

Read aloud in class the rough drafts of scripts from half the class.

Assignment #6: Develop Three to Five Short Film Log Lines for Thesis (8-12 pages) and prepare to pitch them aloud.

Assignment #7: The other half of the class prepares rough drafts of the 3-5 page script for next class. Send to me by **11:59pm the night before class #2 as a PDF**.

WEEK 4

Discussion about premise (plot and theme) vs. story in the context of the films viewed thus far.

Discussion about "structure", what is traditional three-act structure and the "eight sequences" in feature films, as well as other paradigms. And how to successfully ignore all of that in the writing of a good short film.

Read aloud in class the rough drafts of scripts from the other half the class.

Pitch all of the scripts for the thesis projects aloud. Students settle on one short film story to explore as the thesis.

Screening (time permitting): the class will watch "successful" and/or noteworthy short films (likely: "The Red Balloon", "Five Feet High and Rising") and discuss them after — both how the class received them creatively and how these shorts served the filmmakers thereafter.

Assignment #8: Write out a treatment and/or step outline (beat sheet) for the short film.

Assignment #9: Write out character biographies for any "main characters", including all pertinent information from birth up to page one of the script. Students will present outlines in class the following week.

Assignment #10: Students will deliver their "final drafts" of their 3-5 page script (following the readings in class). Send to me by **11:59pm the night before class #2 as a PDF**.

WEEK 5

Discussion: "Screenplay language" (what to avoid). Read aloud in class openings and selections from various scripts including: "Chinatown", "The Long Kiss Goodnight" and "Tester".

Read aloud final drafts of their 3-5 page script.

Screening (time permitting): the class will watch "successful" and/or noteworthy short films (likely: "Kiwi", "Meshes of the Afternoon", and, if time permits, "Copy Shop") and discuss them after — both how the class received them creatively and how these shorts served the filmmakers thereafter.

Students present their treatments/step-outlines to be read by classmates and me.

Assignment #11: Half of the class rough draft of their first 5 pages of the thesis. Send to me by **11:59pm the night before class #2 as a PDF**.

WEEK 6

First half of the class conducts table-reads in class. Discussions following each read (what's resonating, what people have questions about, etc.)

Assignment #12: The other half of the class prepares rough drafts of their first 5 pages of the thesis. Send to me by **11:59pm the night before class #2 as a PDF**.

First half of the class continues writing the second half of the film. Due in two weeks.

WEEK 7

Second half of the class conducts table-reads in class. Discussions following each read (what's resonating, what people have questions about, etc.)

Discussion: writing = rewriting (and rewriting and rewriting). How to deal with writer's block and what it means if you hate writing (or rewriting).

Screening (time permitting): the class will watch "successful" and/or noteworthy short films (likely: "Please Say Something" and "The External World") and discuss them after — both how the class received them creatively and how these shorts served the filmmakers thereafter.

First half of the class turns in first draft of their short film scripts.

Assignment #13: First half of the class finishes rough draft of their thesis. Send to me by **11:59pm the night before class #2 as a PDF**. Second half of the class continues writing the second half of the film. Due in two weeks.

Assignment #14: Students hear briefly about the next lecture regarding "The Business of Film". Everyone is required to bring in three (3) questions that they have about the industry as it pertains to screenwriting or short films.

WEEK 8

"The Business of Film"

An intense look at screenwriting in the industry, in-depth examination of the role of Agents, Lawyers and Managers, Studios, Networks, Production Companies, etc. Focus on: how screenplays serve as currency for the writer, the process of a screenplay garnering support and interest from the industry.

Assignment #13: Assigned table reads of entire thesis scripts for the first half of class.

WEEK 9

Table reads first half of class, including discussion and notes.

Assignment #14: Assigned table reads of entire thesis scripts for the second half of class. First half of class will polish their short.

WEEK 10

Table reads second half of class, including discussion and notes.

Assignment #15: Finish your short film screenplay

WEEK 11

FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAYS ARE DUE. Screenplays must be submitted by the start of the scheduled Final Exam time. (No exceptions unless arranged ahead of time.)

ONLINE INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION

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 two weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online at https://mycti.cti.depaul.edu/mycti.

EMAIL

Email is the primary means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. Students should be sure their email listed under "demographic information" at http://campusconnect.depaul.edu is correct.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/

PLAGIARISM

The university and school policy on plagiarism can be summarized as follows: Students in this course should be aware of the sanctions that can be imposed against someone guilty of plagiarism. If proven, a charge of plagiarism could result in an automatic F in the course and possible expulsion. The strongest of sanctions will be imposed on anyone who submits as his/her own work any assignment which has been prepared by someone else. If you have any questions or doubts about what plagiarism entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials be sure to consult the instructor.

INCOMPLETE

An incomplete grade is given only for an exceptional reason such as a death in the family, a serious illness, etc. Any such reason must be documented. Any incomplete request must be made at least two weeks before the final, and approved by the Dean of the College of Computing and Digital Media. Any consequences resulting from a poor grade for the course will not be considered as valid reasons for such a request.

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