

**DePaul University**  
**School of Cinema and Interactive Media**

**DC 101-504, Screenwriting for Majors**

Winter 2017, Tuesday/Thursday 11:50AM – 1:20PM

14 East Jackson, room 209 at Loop Campus

**Instructor: Brad Riddell**

Office CDM 521 (243 S. Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60604)

Office Hours: T,W,R 11AM-12PM

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**Summary of Course and Outcomes**

This course introduces digital cinema majors to scripted dramatic writing for media production. The topics covered include screenplay format, visual writing style, scene craft, story structure, character development, and dialogue. In addition to completing several writing assignments, students will develop and write one short screenplay.

**Course Objectives**

- Students will be able to employ standard screenplay format
- identify elements of scene craft, character development, and narrative structure
- demonstrate expanded visual writing skills
- apply a work-flow process to their creative writing
- prepare original writing projects on a deadline
- analyze and assess their own work and that of their peers

**Textbooks and Printed Resources**

"Tools of Screenwriting" by David Howard and Edward Mabley ISBN-10: 0312119089  
(Required)

"The Hollywood Standard" by Christopher Riley ISBN-10: 1932907637 (Required)

Additional readings provided by instructor

**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/edu>.

You can also obtain a free download of the Celtx screenwriting program at:

<https://www.celtx.com/index.html>. Amazon Story Writer is available at:  
<https://storywriter.amazon.com/>. **All assignments are to be saved in PDF.**

**Course Management**

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to:

<https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home> and enter using your campus connect username and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, materials, weekly assignments, etc.

### **Attendance**

Attendance and participation are mandatory. An unexcused absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or arriving more than 10 minutes late, constitutes a reduction in your participation grade. Any assignments due on an absence day will be given a zero.

### **Grading Policy**

Class attendance and participation: 10 points

Two Quizzes: 20 Points

Scene Assignments 30 points

Short Script Draft 1: 20 points

Short Script Draft 2: 20 points

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, F is substantially unsatisfactory.

### **Course Outline**

(T = Tuesday, TH = Thursday)

#### **Week 1**

Tues. 1/03 Lecture: Course Intro, What is a Screenplay?

READING:

*Tools of Screenwriting*: About Screenwriting and Basic Storytelling (3-40), Visuals (88-90)

*The Hollywood Standard*: Forward, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide (through page 27)

Thurs. 1/05 Lecture: Character

READING:

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

*The Hollywood Standard*: Shot Headings (29-62), Direction (63-80)

ASSIGNMENT: Mood and Atmosphere, Five Things About You

#### **Week 2**

Tues. 1/10 Workshop: *Mood and Atmosphere*

READING:

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

*The Hollywood Standard*: Dialogue (81-102)

*Mamet* (on D2L)

Thurs. 1/12 Lecture: SCENES with Conflict & Goals, Stakes & Urgency

ASSIGNMENT: *Preparation for a Date*

### **Week 3**

Tues. 1/17 Workshop: *Preparation for a Date*

READING:

*Tools of Screenwriting*: Exposition (60-62)

*The Hollywood Standard*: Transitions, Punctuation (103-111)

Thurs. 1/19 Lecture: Exposition

ASSIGNMENT: Interrogation

### **Week 4**

Tues. 1/24 Workshop: Interrogation

READING: The War of Art, Script Frenzy (on D2L)

Thurs. 1/26 Lecture: Process and Professionalism

ASSIGNMENT: Seduction

### **Week 5**

Tues. 1/31 **Quiz 1, Deliver *Seduction* Online**

READING:

*Tools of Screenwriting*: Dramatic Irony (68-70), Dialogue (84-87)

*The Hollywood Standard*: Special Pages (131-139)

Thurs. 2/2 Lecture: Dialogue and Dramatic Irony

Assignment: *Wrongest Person*

### **Week 6**

Tues. 2/7 Workshop: *Wrongest Person*

Thurs. 2/9 Lecture: Genre Writing

Assignment: Genres

### **Week 7**

Tues. 2/14 Workshop: *Genres*

READING:

*Tools of Screenwriting*: Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59), Outlining, Plausibility (76-80)

Thurs. 2/16 Lecture: Writing the Short Script Part I

ASSIGNMENT: *Three Loglines for Short Script*

## **Week 8**

Tues. 2/21 Workshop: Pitch Three Loglines for Short Script

Thurs. 2/23 Lecture: Writing the Short Script Part II

ASSIGNMENT: *Short Script Draft I*

## **Week 9**

Tues. 2/28 Workshop: Short Script Draft I

Thurs. 3/2 Workshop: Short Script Draft I

READING

*Tools of Screenwriting: Rewriting* (95-97)

ASSIGNMENT: *Rewrite Plan*

## **Week 10**

Tues. 3/7 Lecture: Common Missteps & Rewriting Part I, Workshop *Rewrite Plan*

Thurs. 3/9 Lecture: Common Missteps & Rewriting Part II

ASSIGNMENT: *Short Script Draft II*

**3/14 Quiz 2, Final Short Film Script Due**

## **Assignments**

### Scene Assignments

You will write a total of six scene exercises throughout the quarter based on the topics we cover in class – specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided on D2L. These exercises will typically be assigned on Thursday and will be critiqued in class the following Tuesday. You are expected to bring a printed copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Dropbox link on D2L AND to the proper discussion board. Each scene assignment is 5% of your final grade (30% in total). Please save files to your group dropbox as a PDF, and use your last name and the name of the assignment: *YourNameInterrogationScene.pdf*

You will be graded on:

- Style and Format
- Creative execution of the assignment within the given parameters
- Use of dramatic techniques presented in class and the readings

### Quizzes

Two quizzes, one at the midterm and one at the final, will cover topics drawn specifically from lectures and course readings. These will feature multiple choice, T/F, fill-in-the-blank, and short screenwriting tasks.

### Short Script Draft I

You will submit a first draft of a short script that is to be no longer than 10 pages. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- 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.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required.
- You must include a properly-formatted cover page.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - it may be a good idea to have a friend look over the script as well.
- Action description should be lean - only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Develop a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Avoid exposition-heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- 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 and achieve the grade you want.

### Short Script Draft II

This is your final writing assignment. The final script is to be no longer than 10 pages. Points to consider:

- The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort. Correcting typos and making small tweaks is not a rewrite.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops, and your own self-evaluation to craft your revised draft. Get outside opinions if you can.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count even more. Proofread again.

### In-Class Workshops

By enrolling in this course, you agree to share your ideas and writings with the professor and other students in the class. You must acquire express written consent from any writer in the class should you wish to share his/her work with someone who is not enrolled in this course. Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. 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.

### **Creative Subject Matter**

As this is a creative writing course, controversial subject matter may enter into the conversation. Students have the right to express themselves artistically in their writing and address challenging issues. If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for personal reasons, you may be excused for the remainder of that class without penalty. Inclusion of individuals from the class, or direct personal attacks on members of the class will not be tolerated in course material. If you feel you are being individually targeted by material written or discussed in class, please inform the instructor as soon as possible.

### **Decorum and 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.

### **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 your professor. But know this: plagiarism will earn you an 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](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).  
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](#).

# SCA Screenwriting Grading Rubric

	UNSATISFACTORY	COMPETENT	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
CONCEPT	Does not possess a concept that can support the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot	Contains a practical, yet ultimately derivative concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot	Contains an original and viable concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot	Contains a cinematically innovative and viable concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot
CHARACTER	Lacks developed character(s) that consistently struggle to evoke empathy and/or intrigue, dialogue has little distinction of character and purpose	Presents common archetypal character(s), dialogue is often on-the-nose, yet passable	Presents well-developed and active character(s) that evoke empathy and/or intrigue, dialogue is paced appropriately and serviceable throughout	Presents complex, original, and active character(s) that garner empathy and/or intrigue from the onset, dialogue is efficient, engaging, and organic to the world of the story
PLOT	Fails to develop a discernable set-up, through-line, and resolution	The set-up, through-line, and resolution is evident, but largely by-the-numbers	There is a serviceable set-up, through-line, and resolution	There is an interesting set-up, compelling through-line, and satisfying resolution
MARKET	Struggles to grasp the basic conventions of the intended genre(s) and does not appeal to the target audience	Follows the basic conventions of the intended genre(s) – labors to draw target audience	Follows the conventions of the intended genre(s) – appeals to the target audience	Follows and elevates the conventions of the intended genre(s) – resonates with the target audience
TECHNICAL	Consistently lacks understanding of industry standard script format – spelling and grammar errors throughout, action description struggles to capture what can be seen or heard on-screen, and/or fails to meet the required page length for the intended format	Displays some understanding of industry standard script format – few spelling and grammar errors, action description is serviceable, and meets the required page length for the intended format	Displays an understanding of industry standard script format – free from spelling and grammar errors, action description reveals only what can be seen or heard on-screen, and meets the required page length for the intended format	Displays a mastery of industry standard script format – free from spelling and grammar errors, action description showcases the writer's unique voice, and meets the required page length for the intended format