

# SCWR 101-403 Screenwriting for Majors

**When:** Fall Quarter 2020/21 · MON & WED · 11:50am - 1:20pm  
**Where:** Online Sync/Hybrid (via Zoom)

**Instructor:** Josh Wolff · [jwolff4@depaul.edu](mailto:jwolff4@depaul.edu) \*If you do not receive a response from me within 24 hours, assume I did not get your email.

**Remote Office Hours:** Tuesdays 1:00pm - 2:30pm (CST) via Zoom (By appointment please)

## Summary of Course

This course introduces digital cinema majors to dramatic writing for motion pictures. The topics covered include theme, plot, story structure, character, and dialogue. Emphasis is placed on telling a story in visual terms.

**Prerequisites:** None

## Course Outcomes

In addition to completing several writing assignments, students are expected to develop, outline, and write a short screenplay.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course 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
- produce original writing projects on a deadline
- revise their writing based on feedback from the professor and their peers
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

## Required Textbooks

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

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

**Previous Course Number:** DC 101

## Screenwriting Software

You are required to use screenwriting software in this course. Students interested in developing their screenwriting skills beyond this course may consider purchasing the industry standard Final Draft (available to students at a discount at [store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-11-edu-verified.html](https://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-11-edu-verified.html)). Free options include Writerduet, Highland, & Celtx.

All assignments are to be saved in PDF.

## D2L

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 logon and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, course outline, video lectures, discussion forums, weekly assignments, etc.

## Grade Breakdown and Scale

Class Attendance & Participation	15%
Four Scene Assignments	20%
Concepts/Loglines	5%
Step Outline/One Scene	10%
Short Screenplay Draft I	20%
Short Screenplay Final Draft	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.*

NOTE: Students in all undergraduate classes, with the exception of those in CEO cohort programs, may opt to change the grading basis for any or all of their courses to Pass/D/Fail. A grade of Pass (P) will indicate that the student's work met expectations for a grade of at least C-. Work that would merit a grade of D+ or D in the traditional grading basis would still earn a D+ or D. Work that does not merit a passing grade will earn a Fail (F). The Pass/D/Fail grading option may apply to any graduation requirement, including courses in the major, minor, Liberal Studies Program or open electives. See the following FAQs for more information: <https://resources.depaul.edu/coronavirus/faqs/Pages/classes-academics-students.aspx>

## Assignments

### Scene Assignments (20% of Final Grade)

Prior to drafting full screenplays, you will write a total of four scene exercises during the quarter based on the topics covered in the prerecorded lectures and readings — specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided in assignment sheets on D2L under Content. These exercises will typically be assigned on Sunday and will be due the following Sunday. They will then be critiqued in the subsequent class that week. You are expected to provide digital copies of the assignment to peers for workshops and submit a copy to the corresponding Dropbox link on D2L. Each scene assignment is 5% of your final grade (20% in total). Please save files as a PDF, and use your last name and the name of the assignment: **YourNameInterrogationScene.pdf**

### Concepts/Loglines (5% of Final Grade)

You will expand, in writing, on at least 2 original, narrative film concepts (i.e. no experimental or non-narrative films) for an approximately 10-minute (10-page) short film that you could ideally produce while a student at DePaul. You will develop one concept into a full screenplay throughout the rest of the quarter. For each proposed film concept, you will include:

- 1.) a single sentence logline describing the core concept of the narrative (in present tense), and
- 2.) a minimum of one written paragraph indicating the following information about the proposed film: who the protagonist is, the source/potential of conflict in the story, the film's genre classification (comedy, horror, action, thriller, etc), and any other details necessary to convey your concept clearly.

Files must be uploaded to the D2L by the assigned due date/time in the Course Schedule.

### Step Outline/One Scene (10% of Final Grade)

This assignment is comprised of two parts:

- 1.) You will expand your film concept into a **Step Outline**. This step outline will elaborate on the content of every scene/beat in your film and must include an ending, even if that ending is likely to change in the future.
- 2.) You will **choose one integral scene from your Step Outline for which you plan to include a significant dialogue exchange and develop the scene** fully.

[Note: You may of course include dialogue in other scenes, but only one scene needs to be written in its entirety with dialogue.]

The style and formatting of your scene must adhere to the guidelines specified in The Hollywood Standard (i.e. written in present tense, proper indentation for dialogue, etc). Only write about what can be seen or heard, without dictating camerawork. Avoid writing about the characters' thoughts or feelings in the direction.

A step outline should feature a step-by-step breakdown of your short screenplay. Each step is a one or two sentence statement that describes the action in a scene and how it builds. The steps should be numbered as they will eventually appear in your screenplay followed by a brief description of what will transpire in that scene.

Example:

1. AMERIGO BONASERA, undertaker, tells DON VITO CORLEONE, the aging head of the successful Corleone crime family, the story of how his daughter was assaulted by two men. Don Corleone will help Amerigo deal with his problem in exchange for a favor in the future. The meeting, which is being held during the wedding of Corleone's daughter, is very matter-of-fact/business-like.

## General Guidelines

- Use 12 pt. Courier New Font
- Make sure your scene descriptions are in present tense
- Use all CAPS when introducing a new character.
- Must be submitted as a PDF file

Files must be uploaded to D2L by the assigned due date/time in the Course Schedule.

### Short Screenplay Draft I (20% of Final Grade)

You are expected to submit the first draft of your short screenplay to the corresponding D2L Dropbox link by the assigned due date/time in the Course Schedule.

You will be workshopping your first draft with your peers in live class sessions.

A few 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.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - It may be a good idea to have a friend/family member look over the script as well.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required. Refer to texts for the course, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.
- Action description should be lean - Only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Use your plot points as a guide.
- Avoid exposition-heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Your script must be at least 8 pages, but should not exceed 10 pages.
- Ask questions if you need help.
- 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.

### Short Script Final Draft (30% of Final Grade)

You are expected to submit your Final Draft of the short screenplay to the corresponding D2L Dropbox link by the assigned due date/time in the Course Schedule. A few of things to keep in mind, as this assignment is 30% of your final grade:

- **The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort.**
- You must include a cover page.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops and self-evaluation in order to craft your revised draft.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- 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. Refer to the textbook for this class, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.
- Your script must be at least 8 pages, but should not exceed 10 pages.

## **Course Policies**

### **Class Format**

Each week will consist of a variety of in-class (via Zoom) and outside-of-class exercises and screenings. There will be one full-class lecture session kicking off the quarter, after which you will be split into 2 smaller groups. Group A will meet via Zoom every Monday, and Group B will meet every Wednesday. You will be required to view weekly pre-recorded lectures on course concepts/assignments that are posted every Sunday on D2L under Content. Assignments will always be given on Sunday, due the following Sunday before your workshops. You are expected to watch the pre-recorded lectures, as well as short films and clips, outside of class in preparation for the week; participate in any Discussion Board discussions; meet during class hours via Zoom for your group's writing workshops; and/or meet individually to discuss the progress of your short film screenplays.

### **Outside Screenings**

Films and clips will be made available to you on D2L and/or ColTube. In addition, a selection of classic "common ground films" that will be referenced repeatedly throughout the quarter will be made available on ColTube. If you have not seen these common ground films, viewing them earlier in the quarter will help ensure retention of course concepts.

[DISCLAIMER: Films may include adult language, violence, & sexual content.]

### **In-Class Workshops**

Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. To facilitate this, you will be participating in weekly whole class/small group workshop sessions that will enable you to showcase your scene assignments, loglines, step outlines, and the first draft of your short screenplay. Live class sessions will be primarily used as the time for workshopping scripts.

### **Attitude/Civil Discourse**

We must respect each other, our collaboration and the work at hand. I put an emphasis on demonstrating kindness, generosity, and respect to one another at all times. 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 instead of giving focus to the work and your peers. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the virtual classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student issues.

## Attendance/Participation

Attendance and participation in all assigned lecture/workshop group meetings is mandatory, as is the viewing of pre-recorded course concept lectures. Students who are absent obviously cannot participate in class. For the purposes of this class, an absence is defined as not showing up for scheduled meetings, sleeping or otherwise not being present for the workshops, or showing up 15 minutes late or more for a scheduled meeting. Failure to watch pre-recorded lectures in their entirety will also result in the loss of Attendance points. All absences (from both group workshops and failure to view pre-recorded lectures) will result in a deduction from your Attendance/Participation grade; if you are absent 3 times, you will automatically drop a full final letter grade. **If you miss 5 classes you will automatically fail.**

(Note: Excused absences may be obtained from the Dean of Students Office under certain circumstances and given the proper documentation.)

## Late Work

Assignments must be completed and uploaded to D2L in PDF format by the date and time specified in the Class Schedule. Late written work will receive a 20% grade deduction for each day it is submitted late. Final Draft Screenplays, however, must be turned in by the assigned due date/time (the Final Draft deadline marks the official end of the course). Submissions by email will not be accepted. I also suggest backing up work with a Cloud file storage service, as computers crash.

## Changes to the 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. Please see <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/Pages/online-teaching-evaluations.aspx> for additional information.

## Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/academic-integrity/Pages/default.aspx>.

**If the instructor finds a student has violated the Academic Integrity Policy/ plagiarized their work, the student will fail the course, receiving an automatic F grade.** (Note: Turnitin is used to check the originality of submissions on D2L.) Actions taken by the instructor in this regard do not preclude the university from taking further action, including dismissal from the university.

## 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>

## Incomplete Grades

An incomplete grade is a special, temporary grade that may be assigned by an instructor when unforeseeable circumstances prevent a student from completing course requirements by the end of the term and when otherwise the student had a record of satisfactory progress in the course. All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval. Information about the Incomplete Grades policy can be found at <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx>

## Withdrawal

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system <http://campusconnect.depaul.edu>. Withdrawals processed via this system are effective the day on which they are made. Simply ceasing to attend, or notifying the instructor, or nonpayment of tuition, does not constitute an official withdrawal from class and will result in academic as well as financial penalty.

## Retroactive Withdrawal

This policy exists to assist students for whom extenuating circumstances prevented them from meeting the withdrawal deadline. During their college career students may be allowed one medical/personal administrative withdrawal and one college office administrative withdrawal, each for one or more courses in a single term. Repeated requests will not be considered. Submitting an appeal for retroactive withdrawal does not guarantee approval.

College office appeals for CDM students must be submitted online via MyCDM. The deadlines for submitting appeals are as follows:

Autumn Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent winter quarter



Winter Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent spring quarter  
 Spring Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter  
 Summer Terms: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

### Excused Absence

In order to petition for an excused absence, students who miss class due to illness or significant personal circumstances should complete the Absence Notification process through the Dean of Students office. The form can be accessed at <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/dos/forms.html>.

Students must submit supporting documentation alongside the form. The professor reserves the sole right whether to offer an excused absence and/or academic accommodations for an excused absence.

### Preferred Name & Gender Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the quarter so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal need. For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy at <https://policies.depaul.edu/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=/policy/policy.aspx?>

### Students with Disabilities

Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling them to access accommodations and support services to assist with their success. There are two office locations:

- Loop Campus (312) 362-8002
- Lincoln Park Campus (773) 325-1677
- Email: [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu)

Students who register with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact Dr. Gregory Moorhead, Director of the Center, privately to discuss how he may assist in facilitating the accommodations to be used in a course. This is best done early in the term. The conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Please see <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx> for Services and Contact Information.



## Course Outline/Schedule

(M = Monday, W = Wednesday)

### Week 1 - Course Intro/Structure, Cinematic/Visual Storytelling, Formatting

W. 9/9 **[ALL Students on Zoom]**

*Reading for next class: "The Tools of Screenwriting" 3-40, 63-65, 72-76, 88-90*

*"The Hollywood Standard" Intro-28, 29-62, 63-80,*

*Assignment: Scene Assignment 1 Due 9/13*

### Week 2 - Basic Structure, Character Development

M. 9/14 **GROUP A** Workshop: Scene Assignment 1

W. 9/16 **GROUP B** Workshop: Scene Assignment 1

*Reading for next class: "The Tools of Screenwriting" 43-49, 81-83, 68-70, 91-94, 60-62*

*Format Handout*

*Assignment: Scene Assignment 2 Due 9/20*

### Week 3 - Writing Scenes with Conflict, Goals, Stakes & Urgency

M. 9/21 **GROUP A** Workshop: Scene Assignment 2

W. 9/23 **GROUP B** Workshop: Scene Assignment 2

*Reading for next class: "The Tools of Screenwriting" 84-87*

*"The Hollywood Standard" 81-102, 103-111, 131-139*

*Assignment: Scene Assignment 3 Due 9/27*

### Week 4 - Dialogue

M. 9/28 **GROUP A** Workshop: Scene Assignment 3

W. 9/30 **GROUP B** Workshop: Scene Assignment 3

*Reading for next class: "The Tools of Screenwriting" 49-59, 76-80*

*Assignment: Scene Assignment 4 Due 10/4*

### Week 5 - Plot and Theme

M. 10/5 **GROUP A** Workshop: Scene Assignment 4

W. 10/7 **GROUP B** Workshop: Scene Assignment 4

*Assignment: Loglines and Concepts Due 10/11*

### Week 6 - Writing the Short Script

- M. 10/12 **GROUP A** Workshop: Loglines and Concepts
- W. 10/14 **GROUP B** Workshop: Loglines and Concepts

*Assignment: Step Outline and One Scene Due 10/18*

### Week 7 - Layering and Details, Exposition

- M. 10/19 **GROUP A** Workshop: Step Outline and One Scene
- W. 10/21 **GROUP B** Workshop: Step Outline and One Scene

*Assignment: Revised Step Outline Due 10/25*

### Week 8 - The First Draft

- M. 10/26 **GROUP A** Workshop: Revised Step Outline
- W. 10/28 **GROUP B** Workshop: Revised Step Outline

*Reading for next class: "The Tools of Screenwriting" 95-97*  
*Assignment: Short Screenplay Draft I Due 11/1*

### Week 9 - Rewriting

- M. 11/2 **GROUP A** Workshop: Short Screenplay Draft I
- W. 11/4 **GROUP B** Workshop: Short Screenplay Draft I

*Assignment: Short Screenplay Draft II (Ungraded) Due 11/8*

### Week 10 - Common Missteps / Genre Writing

- M. 11/9 **GROUP A** Workshop: Short Screenplay Draft II
- W. 11/11 **GROUP B** Workshop: Short Screenplay Draft II

*Assignment: Short Screenplay Final Draft Due 11/18*

### Week 11 - Course Summary, Process, and Pitching

- M. 11/16 Individual Meetings (Sign up week prior)
- Short Screenplay Final Draft - Due Wednesday, November 18th by 2pm***