

SCWR 101-202: Screenwriting for Majors

Winter Quarter 2021

Time: Tuesdays 1pm – 4:15pm (CST)

Modality: Online Sync [via Zoom]

Instructor Information

Jef Burnham

Pronouns: he/him/his

Email: jburnha1@depaul.edu*

Remote Office Hours: Wednesdays 8:30am-10am & 12pm-3pm (CST)

[Appointments through [BlueStar](#)]

*If you do not receive a response from me within 24 hours, assume I did not get your email.

Course Description

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 Objectives

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

Additional required readings will be provided in PDF format on D2L under Content.

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). Free options include Writerduet, Highland, & Celtx.

Grading Scale

A	93-100 %
A-	90-92 %
B+	87-89 %
B	84-86 %
B-	80-83 %
C+	77-79%
C	74-76 %
C-	70-73 %
D+	67-69 %
D	60-66 %

Grade Breakdown

Scene Writing: Mood & Atmosphere	5 points
Scene Writing: Preparation & Aftermath	5 points
Concepts/Loglines	5 points
In-Class Pitch Exercise	5 points
Step Outline/One Scene	15 points
Final Draft Screenplay	25 points
Midterm	20 points
<u>Attendance/Participation</u>	<u>20 points</u>
TOTAL	100 points possible

Scene Writing

Prior to drafting full screenplays, you will write sample scenes according to guidelines provided to you in the assignment sheets on D2L under Content.

- 1.) For the **Mood & Atmosphere** exercise, you will write 3 scenes focusing on the visual and aural presentation of a single space in differing genres.
- 2.) For **Preparation & Aftermath**, you will write a pair of scenes showing a character preparing for an event and then returning from that event. This assignment will force you to tell a story visually and to convey information about events without showing those events.

Concepts/Loglines

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 short film 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 relating 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 clearly convey your concept.

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

Midterm Exam

The midterm is an **online** exam covering the assigned readings from *The Tools of Screenwriting* and *The Hollywood Standard* through Week Five. It will be taken on your own time outside of class through D2L (under Content>Midterm or More>Quizzes). The exam is timed. You will have 90 minutes to complete it from the time you begin, and it must be completed and submitted by the due date/time in the Course Schedule in order to receive credit for the assignment.

Draft Pages (Step Outline/One Scene)

This assignment is comprised of two parts:

- 1.) You will expand your film concept into a **Step Outline** written in your chosen screenwriting software. This step outline will elaborate on the content of every scene 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, dialogue and all.

[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.

In-Class Pitch Exercise

Students will be expected to write a two-minute teaser pitch for their films and deliver it in-class during your group's final workshop session.

Final Draft Screenplay

Your completed, 8-10 page screenplay must be uploaded to the appropriate D2L Submissions Folder by the date/time stated on D2L. Scripts must adhere to the guidelines specified in *The Hollywood Standard*, without dictating camerawork.

Notes on the Evaluation of Student Work:

Grading rubrics according to which written assignments are assessed will be available on D2L under Content. In order to obtain the desired grade on any assignment, students must review and adhere to these guidelines. In general, written work will be evaluated according to the clarity of your writing, adherence to assignment guidelines, and basic mechanics (i.e. spelling, grammar, and punctuation). Please allow up to 7-10 days for the return of graded materials.

Course Policies

Class Format:

Each week will consist of a variety of in-class and outside-of-class exercises and screenings. There will be one full-class lecture session kicking off the quarter, after which you will be required to view weekly pre-recorded lectures on course concepts/assignments, participate in Discussion Board discussions, and meet during class hours via Zoom for your assigned group's writing workshops. On workshop days, Group A will meet from 1:00PM-2:30PM and Group B will meet from 2:45PM to 4:15PM. (Groups will be assigned Week 1 of Class.)

Attendance:

Attendance 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 of 1 point from your Attendance/Participation grade; **if you are absent more than 2 times, you fail the course.**

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

Participation:

Participation in all in-class exercises and Discussion Board discussions is expected.* Students are expected to participate in weekly Discussion Board conversations about a variety of short films, a screenplay, and a feature film with their peers in order to supplement lecture material. Group workshops may require page readings be completed in advance and students will receive ample notice. I assess both the quality and quantity of participation in class to elevate collective learning. Participation in the course is worth 1 point per week and will be calculated based on the quality and quantity of your participation in workshops and Discussion Boards both.

*Initial posts in the weekly Discussion Board are due by 11:59pm (CST) each Thursday, and your replies to peers by 11:59pm (CST) each Sunday.

Outside Screenings & Common Ground Films:

Students are *required* to view pre-recorded lectures, as well as short films and clips outside of class in preparation for various lectures/discussions throughout the quarter, and one feature film, *Groundhog Day* (1993), in order to participate in the Week 9 discussion. Screenings must be completed on your own time by the date listed in the course schedule.

Films 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.

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

Late Work:

Assignments must be completed and uploaded to D2L in PDF format and quizzes completed 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.** Midterms and 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 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. For additional information, please see <http://wapp.is.depaul.edu/OnlineTeachEvalMobile/FAQ/studentfaqhome.aspx>

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <https://offices.depaul.edu/academic-affairs/faculty-resources/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>

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

policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332

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 – Lewis Center #1420 – (312) 362-8002
- Lincoln Park Campus – Student Center #370 – (773) 325-1677

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 Schedule

Week 1: Introductions & What is a Screenplay? [ALL Students on Zoom] (1/5)

We will discuss:

1. Syllabus/Course Structure
2. **Scene Writing: Mood & Atmosphere** Assignment due by Noon (CST) on 1/12
3. Choosing screenwriting software & finding tutorials online. (You are responsible for learning how to use your software properly.)
4. Foundational concepts of the screenplay

Week 2: Scene Writing I Workshop (1/12)

Readings Due

Tools of Screenwriting: About Screenwriting & Basic Storytelling (3-40), Visuals (88-90)
The Hollywood Standard: Script-Typing Software & Proofreading (154-163), Appendix A Sample (166-175)

Outside Screenings Due

1. Assigning Scene Writing II: Preparation & Aftermath Lecture

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Scene Writing I: Mood & Atmosphere to D2L by Noon (CST) on 1/12

Week 3: Scene Writing II Workshop (1/19)

Readings Due

Tools of Screenwriting: Planting & Payoff / Elements of the Future (72-76), Protagonist, Conflict, Obstacles (43-49), Characterization (63-65), Activity and Action (81-83)
The Hollywood Standard: Quick Start Guide & Single-Camera Format (1-27)

Outside Screenings Due

1. Stakes, Urgency & Obstacles Lecture
2. Assigning Concepts + Loglines Lecture

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Scene Writing II: Prep & Aftermath to D2L by Noon (CST) on 1/19

Week 4: Concepts + Loglines Workshop (1/26)**Readings Due***Tools of Screenwriting*: Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59)*The Hollywood Standard*: Scene Headings (29-32 & 42-62)**Outside Screenings Due**

1. Writing the Short Film Lecture

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Concepts + Loglines to D2L by Noon (CST) on 1/26**Week 5: 3-Act Structure / Assign Step Outline/One Scene [ALL Students Meet at 1pm] (2/2)****Readings Due***Tools of Screenwriting*: Development of the Story (66-68), The Outline and Step Outline/Plausibility (76-81)*The Hollywood Standard*: Direction (63-80)**Outside Screenings Due**

1. Assigning Midterm Lecture

Week 6: Preliminary Outlines Workshop (2/9)**Readings Due***Tools of Screenwriting*: The Dramatic Scene (91-94), Dialogue (84-87)*The Hollywood Standard*: Dialogue (81-102)**Outside Screenings Due**

1. Before Viewing the Lecture, screen these clips:
[Scene from Good Will Hunting \(1997\)](#)
[Scene from Five Easy Pieces \(1970\)](#)
[“It’s Not about the Nail” \(2013\)](#)
[Scene from Goodfellas \(1990\)](#)
[Scene from The Room \(2003\)](#)
2. Beats & Scenes Lecture
3. Dialogue Lecture

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

1. **Midterm Exam** must be submitted on D2L by 11:59 pm (CST) on 2/9
2. **Step Outline/One Scene** - in order to facilitate workshops, submit to D2L by Noon (CST) **on Sunday, 2/14**
[Each Workshop’s advance readings will be posted to group Discussion Boards. Prepare type-written notes on each set of pages, post them as replies.]

Week 7: Step Outline/One Scene Workshop I (2/16)**Readings Due**

Tools of Screenwriting: Dramatic Irony (68-70)

Outside Screenings Due

1. Tension & Causality
2. 5 Types of Tension Lecture
3. Genre Writing Lecture

Week 8: Step Outline/One Scene Workshop II (2/23)**Readings Due**

Groundhog Day Screenplay (1990 Danny Rubin Draft)

Week 9: Final Drafts + Formatting / *Groundhog Day* Analysis [ALL Students Meet at 1pm] (3/2)**Outside Screenings Due**

Before class on 3/2:

1. *Groundhog Day* (1993) [On D2L or coltube.cdm.depaul.edu]
2. Assigning Pitches Lecture

Week 10: Student Pitches Workshop (3/9)**Readings Due**

Tools of Screenwriting: Rewriting (95-97)

The Hollywood Standard: Special Pages (131-139), [revisit] Proofreading (160-163)

Outside Screenings Due

1. Before you pitch: Rewriting & Packaging Lecture

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Pitches (delivered in-class on 3/9)

FINAL DRAFTS DUE:

Upload to D2L by in PDF format by Tuesday, March 16 at 4:45 pm (CST)