

SCWR 101-405 Screenwriting for Majors

When: Fall Quarter 2022/23 · TU · 10:00AM - 1:15PM

Where: 14 East Jackson, #209

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

Office Hours: **Online Only** Mondays 11:30AM-1:00PM(CST) via Zoom (By appointment only)

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. Films and scenes examined in this class will highlight creators and characters from a wide range of diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities.

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
- identify how diverse backgrounds and perspectives uniquely affect story and character development
- 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 SCWR majors at a discount). Free options include Writerduet, Highland, & Celtx. **All assignments are to be saved/delivered as PDFs.**

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, submission folders, discussion forums, weekly assignments, etc. **Students are responsible for uploading writing assignments to that session's D2L Submission Folder. This must be done by Monday 5PM. Format: PDF.**

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.

Screenwriting assignments must demonstrate professionalism and investment in the material, showcase techniques and ideas discussed in class, offer a unique take with a clear voice, and present a proper grasp of grammar, format and style.

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

In terms of the class participation grade, students are expected to provide feedback during the workshop segments of each class session. In addition, each student must provide at least **one point of feedback** for every member of their group each week in their respective online discussion boards.

Finally, in order to impress upon students the importance of a professional writer's attention to detail, one point will be deducted for each writing assignment:

- If you do not upload to both the Submission Folder and your group's Discussion Forum for that week
- If you do not upload as a PDF

- If you don't save the file with this exact file name: Your last name and the name of the assignment: **YourNameInterrogationScene.pdf**

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 lectures and readings — specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided in assignment sheets on D2L under Content. These exercises will typically be assigned at the end of every class and will be due by 5PM on Mondays. They will then be critiqued in the subsequent class that week. You are expected to provide 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 5-10-minute (5-10-pages) 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 numbered plot 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 in a word/pages file
- 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 workshoping 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 5 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 final 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 5 pages, but should not exceed 10 pages.

Course Policies

Outside Screenings

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

Trigger Warnings

This course recognizes that to engage with media is to engage with historic and ongoing problematic representation, as well as the ways that harmful representation impacts students in different ways. Therefore, any course content displaying racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material will be made known in writing posted on that week’s module and/or the newsfeed prior to the viewings, so that students may make informed decisions about their mental and emotional health and well-being. Students may inform the professor of any material that they cannot engage with to find a suitable alternative.

In-Class Workshops

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.

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 their work with someone who is not enrolled in this course.

NOTE: Students will be divided into six groups (Groups A, B, C, D, E, and F), and will be expected to provide feedback on their fellow group members' writing assignments in the D2L Discussion forums.

Creative Subject Matter

As this is a creative writing course, controversial subject matter may enter into the conversation. Students should expect to read, hear, and participate in discussions about some stories which include varied subject matter including sex, drugs, alcohol, violence, politics, religion, and so forth. 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.

Attitude/Civil Discourse

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 someone is speaking, mocking another's opinion, emailing, texting or using the internet instead of giving focus to the work and your peers.

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. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

COVID-19 Health and Safety Precautions

Keeping our DePaul community safe is of utmost importance in the pandemic. Students, faculty and staff are expected to (1) wear a mask as required at all times while indoors on campus; (2) refrain from eating and drinking in classrooms; (3) keep current with their COVID-19 vaccinations or exemptions; (4) stay home if sick; (5) participate in any required COVID-19 testing; (6) complete the online Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus training; and (7) abide by the City of Chicago Emergency Travel Advisory. By doing these things, we are Taking Care of DePaul, Together. The recommendations may change as local, state, and federal guidelines evolve. Students who do not abide by the mask requirement may be subject to the student conduct process and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office. Students who have a medical reason for not complying with any requirements should register with DePaul's Center for Student with Disabilities (CSD).

Attendance/Participation

Students are expected to attend every class, if healthy, and arrive on time. Students are expected to provide feedback during the workshop segments of each class session. In addition, each student must provide at least **one point of feedback** for every member of their group each week in their respective online discussion boards.

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 class, or showing up/leaving 15 minutes or more. (Note: Excused absences may be obtained from the Dean of Students Office under certain circumstances and given the proper documentation.).

Please do not come to class if you are feeling ill.

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.

Respect for Diversity and Inclusion at DePaul University as aligned with our Vincentian Values

At DePaul, our mission calls us to explore “what must be done” in order to respect the inherent dignity and identity of each human person. We value diversity because it is part of our history, our traditions and our future. We see diversity as an asset and a strength that adds to the richness of classroom learning. In my course, I strive to include diverse authors, perspectives and teaching pedagogies. I also encourage open dialogue and spaces for students to express their unique identities and perspectives. I am open to having difficult conversations and I will strive to create an inclusive classroom that values all perspectives. If at any time, the classroom experience does not live up to this expectation, please feel free to contact me via email or during office hours.

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. 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.

Posting work on online sites, such as Hero

All students are expected to abide by the University's Academic Integrity Policy which prohibits cheating and other misconduct in student coursework. Publicly sharing or posting online any prior or current materials from this course (including exam questions or answers), is considered to be providing unauthorized assistance prohibited by the policy. Both students who share/post and students who access or use such materials are considered to be cheating under the Policy and will be subject to sanctions for violations of Academic Integrity.

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

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

(T = Tuesday)

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

T. 9/13 Intros, Syllabus, What is a screenplay?, Formatting

*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,
Format Handout
The Movie Script "Inside Out"*

Assignment: Scene Assignment 1 Due 9/19 by 5PM

Week 2 - Review Formatting, Basic Structure, Character Development

T. 9/20 Discuss: Structure, Character, Workshop: Scene Assignment 1

*Reading for next class: "The Tools of Screenwriting" 43-49, 81-83, 68-70, 91-94, 60-62
Assignment: Scene Assignment 2 Due 9/26 by 5PM*

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

T. 9/27 Discuss: Conflict - GSU, 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 10/3 by 5PM*

Week 4 - Dialogue & Exposition, Loglines

- T. 10/4 Discuss: Dialogue, Exposition, Loglines Workshop: Scene Assignment 3
Reading for next class: "The Tools of Screenwriting" 49-59, 76-80
Assignment: Scene Assignment 4 Due 10/10 by 5PM

Week 5 - Endings, Beginnings, Plot vs. Theme

- T. 10/11 Discuss: 3-Act Structure, Plot & Theme, Workshop: Scene Assignment 4
Assignment: Loglines and Concepts Due 10/17 by 5PM

Week 6 - Step Outlines, Writing the Short Script

- T. 10/18 Discuss: Step Outlines, Scene-Writing, Workshop: Loglines and Concepts
Assignment: Step Outline and One Scene Due 10/24 by 5PM

Week 7 - Layering and Details, Genres, Writing the Short Film Part 2

- T. 10/25 Discuss: Layering and Details, Plant & payoff, Workshop: Step Outline and One Scene
Assignment: Revised Step Outline Due 10/31 by 5PM

Week 8 - The First Draft, Copyright and Pitching

- T. 11/1 Discuss: The First Draft, Workshop: Revised Step Outline
Reading for next class: "The Tools of Screenwriting" 95-97
Assignment: Short Screenplay Draft I Due 11/7 by 5PM

Week 9 - Rewriting

- T. 11/8 Discuss: Rewriting, Workshop: Short Screenplay Draft I
Assignment: Short Screenplay Draft II (Ungraded) Due 11/14

Week 10 - Polish and Edit, Process, and Course Summary

- T. 11/15 Discuss: Polish and Edit, Workshop: Short Screenplay Draft II
Short Screenplay Final Draft - DUE TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22nd by 2pm