

# SCWR 301 Story Development

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**When:** Tuesday · 1:30pm – 4:45pm  
**Where:** 14 East Jackson / RM 207 / Loop Campus

**Instructor:** Matt Quinn · [mquinn@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:mquinn@cdm.depaul.edu) · 312-362-5807 · CDM 509  
**Office hours:** Monday, Tuesday, & Wednesday · 11:00am – 1:00pm

## Summary of Course

This course is designed to help the emerging writer focus their creativity into a viable original project for a feature film. The lectures, workshops, and assignments are designed to enable the student to identify and develop material they have a strong personal connection to. Emphasis is placed on extensive research of the subject matter, creating memorable characters, and crafting a strong dramatic throughline.

## Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- apply established narrative techniques toward the development of a feature story with a well-structured plot and thoroughly developed characters
- utilize the sequence approach to create consistent tension and effective story organization
- create a complete, professional-quality step outline for a feature screenplay
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

## Prerequisites

None

## Grading

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Class Attendance and Participation | 10% |
| Writer's Statement                 | 5%  |
| Script Reading Synopsis            | 5%  |
| Five Loglines                      | 5%  |
| Story Package                      | 10% |
| Treatment                          | 10% |
| Step Outline                       | 20% |
| Hook                               | 5%  |
| Step Outline Rewrite               | 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.

## Textbooks

Assigned readings provided by the instructor

## Software

You will be required to use screenwriting software in this course. [FINAL DRAFT](#), [FADE IN](#), [HIGHLAND](#), [WRITER'S DUET](#), and [CELTX](#) are options. WRITER'S DUET and HIGHLAND provide versions that are free for students. Students in the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film and Television Screenwriting, Comedy Filmmaking, and Showrunner Concentrations and Screenwriting

## Attendance

Attendance and participation are mandatory. An absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or arriving more than 10 minutes late to class, constitutes a reduction in your overall grade.

## D2L

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to: <https://login.depaul.edu/ldap/login?service=https%3a%2f%2fd2l.depaul.edu%2fd2l%2fcustom%2fcas> 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.

## Group Workshops

Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. To facilitate this, every student will be assigned to one of four groups. A segment of each class will focus on a discussion of that week's assignment and then breaking off into your assigned group or to workshop each student's submission and/or presenting this work to the entire class. The schedule for the latter sessions is provided below.

- Group 1 – October 4<sup>th</sup>, November 15<sup>th</sup>
- Group 2 – October 4<sup>th</sup>, November 15<sup>th</sup>
- Group 3 – October 11<sup>th</sup>, November 8<sup>th</sup>
- Group 4 – October 11<sup>th</sup>, November 8<sup>th</sup>

## Content Warning

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. Please be aware you may encounter racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material in the creative work, readings, and/or lectures presented in this course. Content warnings will be provided prior to lecture and writers will be

expected to label potential triggers in their assignments submitted to D2L, and then again before their workshop session begins, so students may make 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.

## Course Outline

### Week 1 – September 13<sup>th</sup>

Lecture: Course Intro, The Auteur Screenwriter

*Assignment: Writer's Statement, Script Reading Synopsis*

### Week 2 – September 20<sup>th</sup>

Lecture: The Cinematic Concept

Workshop: Writer's Statement

*Assignment: Loglines*

### Week 3 – September 27<sup>th</sup>

Lecture: Pitching, Story Packages

Workshop: Five Loglines

*Assignment: Story Package*

### Week 4 – October 4<sup>th</sup>

Lecture: Cause and Effect Storytelling, Treatments

Workshop: Story Package – Groups 1 & 2

*Assignment: Treatment*

### Week 5 – October 11<sup>th</sup>

Lecture: Character

Workshop: Story Package – Groups 3 & 4

*Assignments: Treatment*

### Week 6 – October 18<sup>th</sup>

Lecture: Fulfilling the Promise of Genre & Concept, Step Outlines

Workshop: Treatment

*Assignments: Step Outline*

### Week 7 – October 25<sup>th</sup>

Lecture: Layering / Relationships

Workshop: Treatment

*Assignments: Step Outline*

### Week 8 – November 1<sup>st</sup>

Lecture: Crafting the Hook

Workshop: Step Outline

*Assignments: Step Outline Rewrite, Hook*

### Week 9 – November 8<sup>th</sup>

Workshop: Hook – Groups 3 & 4

*Assignments: Step Outline Rewrite*

**Week 10 – November 15<sup>th</sup>**

Lecture: Moving to Draft

Workshop: Hook – Groups 1 &amp; 2

*Assignments: Step Outline Rewrite***Assignments****Writer's Statement (5% of final grade)**

The aim of the Writer's Statement is to articulate the purpose, philosophy and inspiration of your creative work. Questions to consider when crafting your statement:

- What genres and styles of projects inspire you?
- How do you wish to be seen as a content creator by industry professionals?
- What recurring storylines and themes are exhibited in your work?
- Who is your audience and why does your work appeal to that audience?

The Writer's Statement should be one page single-spaced. It is worth a total of 5 points and must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission link and your assigned D2L Group Discussion Forum by 11:59pm on Sunday, September 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Script Reading Synopsis (5% of final grade)**

Read the assigned feature length screenplay (available to download on the D2L Submission Folder) and write a one-page plot synopsis, no more/no less, that focuses on the main characters and plot. Character names should be in ALL CAPS the first time they are introduced in the prose. This must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission link before class on Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Five Loglines (5% of final grade)**

Develop five loglines to pitch in class on Tuesday, September 27<sup>th</sup>. One of these loglines should be based on IP (intellectual property) in the public domain. You will eventually develop one of these ideas into a feature length screenplay that you will be working on for the duration of the course. Each logline should include character (protagonist), conflict (what is the central conflict of the narrative?) and a sense of resolution. Please bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a PDF file with the loglines to the corresponding D2L Submission link before class on Tuesday, September 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Story Package (10% of final grade)**

The Story Package is worth a total of 10 points and is broken down into two parts:

- Teaser Pitch - You will present a five-minute teaser pitch in-class on Tuesday, October 4<sup>th</sup> (Groups 1 & 2) or Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> (Groups 3 & 4) that focuses on a personal connection, characters, plot overview, etc. There are no rules or expected format for the pitch other than making a strong attempt to "sell" your assigned script within the allotted time frame.

- One Sheet – This document must include: Title, contact information, logline, genre, and plot overview broken down into three paragraphs (one for each act). Examples provided on the D2L Content page. This portion of the assignment must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission link before class on Tuesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>.

### **Treatment (10% of final grade)**

The Treatment is worth a total of 10 points and must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission link and your assigned D2L Group Discussion Forum by 11:59pm on Sunday, October 16<sup>th</sup>.

The feature film treatment provides a thorough overview of the plot in present tense prose. This assignment must be a minimum of 4 pages. While there is no fixed template for a treatment, it should include the following:

- Title
- Logline
- Label potential triggers (racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material) in the header section of the assignment.
- First act in roughly three paragraphs (page 1) – Introduce central characters and dramatize the setup for main conflict
- Second act in roughly six paragraphs (pages 2 & 3) - Dramatize how the conflict in act one leads to tangible subplots, the midpoint, and the second act turning point
- Third act in roughly three paragraphs (page 4) - Dramatize the climax and resolution

### **Step Outline (20% of final grade)**

The Step Outline is worth a total of 20 points and must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission link and your assigned D2L Group Discussion Forum by 11:59pm on Sunday, October 30<sup>th</sup>.

A feature length outline should have anywhere from 75 - 100 scenes. The length is largely dependent on the type of narrative (general rule of thumb is that there are less scenes for character-driven story/more scenes for plot driven material).

Please label potential triggers (racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material) in the header section of the assignment.

It is critical that you provide enough scenes to sustain the intended length of your narrative – Ex: Coming up with 40 scenes or less for a feature is simply not enough material and will result in a significant deduction in your step outline grade. Please make a point to speak with me if you're planning to write an unconventional narrative that will require an unorthodox outline.

Each scene of your step outline will contain a slug line for the location and time of day. The scenes should be numbered as they will eventually appear in your screenplay followed by a brief description of what will transpire in that scene.

Example:

Scene 1: INT. DON CORELONE'S OFFICE - DAY

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 Corelone 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 Corelone'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

### **Hook (5% of final grade)**

The Hook is worth a total of 5 points and must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission link before class on Tuesday, November 8<sup>th</sup>. Craft the hook (opening scene/sequence) for your feature length script. There is no required page length for this assignment, but the hook must clearly establish the genre, world of the story, and your voice as a writer.

A couple of things to keep in mind:

- Label potential triggers (racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material) in the header section of the assignment.
- Document must be saved as a PDF file
- 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
- Ask questions if you need help

### **Step Outline Rewrite (30% of final grade)**

The Step Outline Rewrite is worth a total of 30 points and must be submitted to the corresponding D2L submission link by 11:59pm on Tuesday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>. Use notes you received from the instructor, group workshops, and self-evaluation to craft the revision.

As a reminder, a feature length outline should have anywhere from 75 - 100 scenes. The length is largely dependent on the type of narrative (general rule of thumb is that there are less scenes for character-driven story/more scenes for plot driven material).

Please label potential triggers (racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material) in the header section of the assignment.

It is critical that you provide enough scenes to sustain the intended length of your narrative. For example, coming up with 40 scenes or less for a feature is simply not enough material

and will result in a significant reduction in your step outline grade. Please make a point to speak with me if you're planning to write an unconventional narrative that will require an unorthodox outline.

Each scene of your step outline will contain a slug line for the location and time of day. The scenes should be numbered as they will eventually appear in your screenplay followed by a brief description of what will transpire in that scene.

Example:

Scene 1: INT. DON CORELONE'S OFFICE - DAY  
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 Corelone 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 Corelone's daughter, is very matter-of-fact/business-like.

## 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.

## COVID-19 Health and Safety Precautions

The health and safety of everyone at DePaul depend on the cooperation of all who come to campus. By taking care of yourself, you protect the entire community. DePaul's COVID-19 response plans are based on the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Chicago Department of Public Health and the university's medical advisor from AMITA Health.

Mandatory protocols must be followed by DePaul students, faculty and staff at all times on both campuses <https://resources.depaul.edu/coronavirus/guidance/health-safety-practices/Pages/default.aspx>.

## Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. 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.

More information can be found at <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/academic-integrity/Pages/default.aspx>.

## 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>

## Respect for Diversity and Inclusion at DePaul University

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.

## 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: <http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332>

## 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.



## Emergency Plan

An emergency can occur at any time, suddenly and without warning. Proper planning is essential to minimize the impact of any emergency on the university community, operations, and facilities. [This link provides detailed information on Emergency Evacuation and Fire Alarm safety.](#) The University will use the DPU Alert to announce school closing or other emergencies. In the event of an emergency evacuation, the primary outdoor assembly area for CDM will be Grant Park (Southeast corner of Jackson and Michigan Ave).

## Students with Disabilities

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

Loop Campus - Lewis Center #1420 - (312) 362-8002

Lincoln Park Campus - Student Center #370 - (773) 325-1677

Students can also email the office at [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu)

Students who are registered with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact me privately to discuss how I may assist in facilitating the accommodations you will use in this course. This is best done early in the term. Our conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

## University Counseling Services

DePaul University Counseling Services (UCS) is committed to providing a range of culturally aware and sensitive clinical services to help currently enrolled DePaul students remove barriers to academic and personal success by addressing emotional, psychological, and interpersonal concerns through multiple treatment modalities. Services offered include: group counseling, individual counseling, couples counseling, crisis management, consultation, referrals, and telereach/outreach workshops. All services are currently being offered on a virtual, remote basis with no fees due to COVID-19. To connect with the counseling center, contact our main number at (773) 325-7779 during regular business hours (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm) to schedule an initial consultation, which is typically scheduled within 1-2 business days of your call.

If you need more immediate assistance or are in acute distress, you can call the main number during regular business hours and ask to speak with a counselor. If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. The Counseling Services staff has extensive experience with providing support services to individuals of varying social identities and backgrounds. Further, our counselors know that commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and anti-racism is an ongoing and open-ended journey and, as such, our counselors frequently and regularly engage in self-reflection and training opportunities to increase cultural awareness and to challenge one's own privileges and biases.

## 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. 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 |

## Copyright Statement

The materials provided by the instructor in this course are for the use of the students enrolled in the course. Copyrighted course materials may not be further disseminated.