

## **SCWR 101 Syllabus - Screenwriting for Majors - Winter Quarter 2023 - Brian Mellen**

**bmellen@cdm.depaul.edu**

**Office hours: W 1:30pm to 3:00pm - 14 E. Jackson Rm. 200B BY APPT. 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.

\* *Syllabus is subject to change*

### **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
- 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

**Course Management System:** D2L

### **Textbooks and printed resources:**

Tools of Screenwriting: A Writer's Guide to the Craft and Elements of a Screenplay.  
Howard, David, 1995. ISBN 13: 9780312119089

The Hollywood Standard: The Complete and Authoritative Guide to Script Format and Style.  
2nd edition. Riley, Christopher, 2009. ISBN 13: 9781932907636

### **Recommended Texts:**

Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting. Newly Revised & Updated.  
Field, Syd, 2005. ISBN: 978-0385339032

The Art of Dramatic Writing  
Egri, Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, 1972. ISBN: 978-0671213329

## Software for formatting a screenplay:

You will be required to use screenwriting software toward the end of the course. Final Draft is strongly recommended for those with a focus on screenwriting, producing and/or directing – The software is currently \$99.99 (regular price is \$129.99) with a student discount at:

<https://trial.finaldraft.com/edutrial/>

<https://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-12-edu.html>

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

[www.celtx.com](http://www.celtx.com)

## Drop Dates:

Sunday, Jan. 8 (11:59pm Deadline): Last day to add (or swap) classes  
Sunday, Jan. 15: Last day to drop classes with no penalty  
Tuesday, Jan. 17: Last day to select pass/fail option  
Sunday, Feb. 19: Last day to withdraw from classes

## Grading:

Attendance & Participation	10%
Quizzes	10%
Morning Pages/Journal	5%
First Draft of Screenplay	10%
Assignments	20%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Draft of Screenplay	30%

## Grading Scale:

A = 100-93, A- = 92-90, B+ = 89-87, B = 86-83, B- = 82- 80, C+ = 79-77, C = 76-73, C- = 72-70, D+ = 69-67, D = 66-63, 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

## Course Lectures/Reading Assignments:

Lecture presentations will occur weekly. The textbooks offer an opportunity for independent learning that supplements the lecture presentations. The instructor will use both the classroom and the textbooks. Lectures may introduce additional material not available in the readings, and the readings may explore concepts not mentioned in class. BOTH SOURCES ARE NEEDED.

## Student responsibilities:

Each student is responsible for their time management and for meeting the expectations in the syllabus. The instructor is not responsible for reminding students of assignment deadlines in class. In the event of an absence, it is the student's responsibility to contact the

instructor for an assignment sheet detailing any homework. If an assignment is listed on the syllabus you are still responsible for completing the assignment on time.

### **Deadlines:**

Late assignments will not be accepted for grading and written feedback will be given at the instructors discretion. You will not be eligible for an A in the class unless you turn in all assignments on time.

### **Attendance & Participation:**

This course demands class participation - attendance is mandatory. Students arriving more than 15 minutes late, or leaving before class is dismissed will be considered absent. You are allowed two (2) unexcused absences. After that, each successive absence will affect your Participation grade. Excessive tardiness will also be penalized.

### **Assignments:**

**\*There will be other minor assignments on top of what's listed below. Details will be given on D2L.**

#### ***Scene Assignments:***

Prior to drafting full screenplays, you will write 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.

#### ***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 7-10 minute (7-10 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:***

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.

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.

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

### ***Short Screenplay Rough Draft:***

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 7 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:***

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 7 pages, but should not exceed 10 pages.

**Examinations:**

Students who do not take exams during the regularly scheduled time will receive a failing grade for exams unless they have contacted the instructor in advance to arrange for a make-up exam.

**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](#).

**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.

**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  
Fax: (312)362-6544  
TTY: (773)325.7296

**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?>

### **Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism on assignments or cheating tests are serious offenses and earn the student a failing grade for class. There are no exceptions to the rule. If you are in doubt about the definitions of plagiarism, consult your student handbook.

### **Content Changes:**

Depending on time factors, the assignments projected for the term may require slight alteration or rescheduling.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

*\* Syllabus schedule is subject to change*

### **Week One 01/02 and 01/04**

Introduction to Course and Requirements, Screenwriting vs. Traditional Writing, What is a movie? Conflict

***Readings:*** Howard and Mabley pp. 1-39

**Assignment #1 (Due at 02/06):** Buy a notebook and start writing your morning pages. Write at least two pages a day, five days a week, from now until the midterm. These pages can be about anything. They don't have to be profound or particularly insightful for that matter. They don't even have to make sense - just write. I won't read what you write in the notebook (unless you want me to).

**Assignment #2 (Due 01/09):** Write about three different moments in your life or someone else's that could make a good starting point for a movie. Write about why you think each of these moments could make an interesting basis for a story in a movie. Devote at least a paragraph for each moment. Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Week Two 01/09 and 01/11**

Syd Field's Three Act Structure, Plot Points, Aristotelian Curve

***Readings:*** Howard and Mabley pp. 43-65, Riley pp. 1-11, 20-21

Assignment #3 (Due 01/18): Outline a feature film hitting all the major beats and plot points. Record the time into the movie that the major beats occur (the 10's).

Also, on a separate sheet, find (3) great character intros from produced screenplays and write them down. You don't need to write these yourself, you can just copy them from the screenplay. Make note of which movie they're from.

Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Quiz #1 Due 01/16**

### **Week Three 01/16 and 01/18**

MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY (01/16): NO CLASS

What defines character?

**Readings:** Howard and Mabley pp. 66-97, Riley - pp. 27-51

Assignment #4 (Due 01/23): Create a character. Write a character biography for the protagonist of your story. Be as specific as you can - the more details the better. Also, keep in mind, nothing is chiseled in stone.

Also, turn your three movie moments ideas into loglines. Include your loglines on your Assignment #3 document. You will share these ideas in class next week.

Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Quiz #2 Due 01/23**

### **Week Four 01/23 and 01/25**

Premise, Treatments, Screenplay Format

**Readings:** Riley - pp. 54-101

Assignment #5 (Due 01/30): Write a step outline for your story. You will present your outline to the class next week. Also have your logline for this story polished and ready to present in class. Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

Assignment #6 (Due 01/30): You will be assigned a few pages of ambiguous dialogue. Flesh out a story from this dialogue by clarifying what's happening through the screen direction. You will do this by creating a properly formatted script from this prewritten dialogue. Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Week Five 01/30 and 02/01**

Presentations/Discussion of Step Outlines, Review for Midterm, Screenplay Format Cont'd

**Readings:** Read assigned screenplay

Assignment #7 (Due 02/06): Two people arrive separately to a location of your choosing. One is concealing something in their clothing. The other has a secret. Write 2 different 3-4 page scenes using the proper screenplay format. Include a clear beginning middle and end to the scene (think of it as a very short film).

Choose 2 from the following genres:

- a. An Action film
- b. A Drama
- c. A Romantic Comedy
- d. A Mystery or Thriller

### **Week Six 02/06 and 02/08**

Midterm on 02/06

**Readings:** Riley - pp. 106-124

Assignment #8 (Due 02/13): Continue writing your screenplay. The first three to five pages are due next week. Bring five copies to class next week so you can have your script read to you by an assigned group in class. Must be uploaded to D2L as a .PDF. Hard copy not necessary. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

**Quiz #3 Due 02/13**

### **Week Seven 02/13 and 02/15**

Dialogue

FIRST THREE TO FIVE PAGES OF SCREENPLAY DUE 02/20

**Readings:** Riley - pp. 128-136

Assignment #9 (Due 02/27): Continue writing the first draft. First draft due next week. Must be uploaded to D2L as a .PDF. Hard copy not necessary. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Week Eight 02/20 and 02/22**

Scenes

FIRST DRAFT DUE 02/27

**Readings:** Riley - pp. 138-146

FIRST DRAFT (Due 02/27): Finish writing the first draft. Upload to D2L as .PDF only. Hard copy not necessary. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Week Nine 02/27 and 03/01**

INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

Meet one on one to discuss final screenplay.

Assignment #10 (Due 03/06): Read a screenplay that you find online. It should be a movie that is held in high regard would be ideal. Many screenplays can be found by a simple Google search or you can try looking for it on the "Simply Scripts" link found on D2L. It has to be a movie you've never seen. After reading the screenplay, watch the movie. You can watch the movie on streaming or wherever you can find it. Write one-page about your impressions on reading a screenplay and then watching the movie. Were there any differences between the screenplay and the movie? Was there anything that surprised you about the way the movie turned out? Upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

**Readings:** Riley - pp. 147-154

**Class Ten 03/06 and 03/08**

REVISING/REWRITING

Final scripts due in ONE WEEK.

Getting through writer's block.

Review of format.

**FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAYS ARE DUE March 13, 2023 by 11:59pm.**