

# DC 401 Writing the Short Screenplay

Winter 2013 | M 1:30-4:45 | Loop Campus

Instructor: Wendy Roderweiss

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Office hours: Monday, 12-1:30

NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

## Summary of Course and Course Goals:

This course focuses on the fundamentals and art of cinematic storytelling in the short format screenplay. Emphasis is placed on telling a story that relies on rising action and compelling characters. Students will explore the elements of classic three-act narratives as they pertain to the visual medium. Constructive analysis will be used in discussing produced scripts, weekly assignments, and group workshops to reveal the writer's unique voice and perspective.

The short script created for this course will be written with student production in mind - Limitations in terms of budget, cast, locations and special effects must be taken into consideration.

The following topics will be covered:

- \* Three act structure as applied to features and the short film
- \* In-depth study of plot, character, and dialogue
- \* Critical analysis of traditional narratives
- \* Establishing voice and tone
- \* Constructing definitive screen moments

Students will write a polished short film designed to be produced as the student's MFA thesis or other route of production. Students will workshop these scripts with their peers in order to produce the most polished draft possible.

A major goal for this course is collaboration. My intention is to build a “writers group” within our class to help foster everyone’s work and see it successfully executed during your tenure at DePaul.

## Required Textbooks and materials

*The Short Screenplay* by Dan Gurskis

*The Writer’s Journey* by Christopher Vogler

*The Screenplay* by Syd Field

In-class students: A blank journal book to write in (Standard comp book is fine)

## Grading

Class Attendance, Participation 10% (*Online students have specific requirements for participation, see syllabus and d2l*)

Daily Journal 10%

Book Reports/Forum 15%

Assignments 1-6 25%

First Draft of Screenplay 10%

2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of Screenplay 10%

Final Script 20%

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

#### Standards for Achievement:

##### Grade A:

Student performs in an outstanding way. Student exhibits achievement and craftsmanship in all work. Creative criteria is exceeded and student challenges him/herself in project development. Student exhibits commitment to expanding ideas, vocabulary and performance.

##### Grade B:

Student performs beyond the requirement of the project. Student exhibits above average progress and craftsmanship. A creative criterion is exceeded. Student exhibits above average interest in expanding idea, vocabulary, and performance.

##### Grade C:

Criteria of assignment is met, and all requirements are fulfilled. Student shows average quality work and minimum time and effort on projects. Student shows moderate interest.

##### Grade D:

Student performance is uneven and below average. Requirements for projects are only partially fulfilled. Minimal interest is shown and attendance, participation and involvement are inadequate.

##### Grade F

Student fails to meet minimum course requirements and shows little interest. Levels of participation and craftsmanship are extremely poor. Student's attendance/presence is inadequate.

#### **Requesting an incomplete grade:**

An incomplete grade may only be assigned to a student if the student has experienced an extenuating circumstance near the end of the term, the student is in good standing in the class, and the request is made in advance. This being said it is solely up to the discretion of the instructor to grant an incomplete.

**Attendance** – Classes will consist of lecture, screenings, discussion, and creative exercises. Attendance is mandatory. An absence is defined as not showing up for class, or arriving more than 15 minutes late, or missing any 15-minute period during class time. I take attendance every class. If you arrive less than 15 minutes late, and do not hear your name called, make sure you let me know you are present so I do not mark you absent. Any absences will result in a reduction of the attendance/participation grade. **Anyone who misses 3 classes will automatically drop a letter grade. Anyone who misses 4 classes will automatically fail.** However, if you are legitimately sick, I mean really sick, please stay home. We don't want your evil germs. Please email me at wroder@cdm.depaul.edu if you are going to miss class.

**Class Participation**—Along with showing up, you are expected to join in class discussions, critique other people's work, and participate in workshops. Remember, this is your class, you will get out of it what you put in it. **Also, be advised that many of the assignments that you write for this class, with the exception of your journals, will be read aloud.** My intention is not to

embarrass anyone, but rather, have a fostering and openly creative environment where people are comfortable sharing their work. Online students will have different requirements in order to fulfill this portion of their grades.

**Assignments and Exercises** – Class Work Assignments must be handed in on time. I will not accept late work. **Do not use class time to finalize your projects.** All assignments are due at the beginning of class, if you come in late with an assignment it will not be accepted. If it is an assignment that is to be uploaded it must be uploaded on time.

**D2L**-In an attempt to save some trees and cash, most assignments will be turned in via D2L. If you are unfamiliar with D2L please see me. In some cases, you must print and bring in an assignment. I will indicate in the syllabus how each assignment must be turned into me.

**Special Accommodations:** If you have any special considerations please see me.

**BACK UP YOUR WORK:** Failure of computer software and or Hardware will not be accepted as an extenuating circumstance for late projects or incomplete grades so back up your work daily.

**Critiques:** Due to limited class time, not everyone's work will get a full review during class. If you'd like more feedback, arrange to discuss your work with me during my office hours.

**Plagiarism** – Plagiarism on assignments or cheating on exams are serious offenses and earn the student a failing grade for the class. Please read the Academic Integrity Policy (AIP) at: <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/>

**Electronic devices**—Use of cell phones/laptops/tablets in the class is prohibited. Please turn your phone off before entering class. Mistakes will happen (to me too), but repeated failure to turn your phone off will result in a lowered grade for the class. Absolutely no texting in class! Unless you have a university verified need for a computer in class, please keep them in your bags.

**Course Lectures-** This course has a joint online section. All lectures will be recorded and available on the course home page on d2l. There will be a box on the left-hand side of the page that says COL Recordings.

**Book Reports/Discussion Forum** – You will have a series of reading assignments with an accompanying book report. This book report will consist of listing 20 items from the reading that will be germane to your work in this course or provoked thought about writing or storytelling. One-word responses are not acceptable. These are meant to be public and you will post them on D2L in the discussion forum. You must also comment on at least two posts for full credit. For online-only students, please articulately comment on at least four posts per week to earn class participation credit.

**Content Changes** – Depending on time factors, the assignments projected for the term may require slight alteration or rescheduling. I will contact you via email with any deviations from the syllabus. Please ensure that mail sent to the email address that you provided to the school is readily accessible.

Class 1 Monday 1/7

IN CLASS:

Introduction to the course and syllabus

What you like

Why we tell stories

Why we write

What to write about

Screenwriting vs. novels and plays

Final Script guidelines

Loglines

The Subject/ Premises

ASSIGNMENTS:

Daily Journal (10%): Start your journals. For in-class section, these must be hand written, in a notebook or journal book. For online students you must submit a word document via d2l. Write at least one page a day, every day, including weekends from now until the end of the quarter. Put the date and time on each page before you start writing. These pages can be about anything: your day, what you fed your dog, your annoying neighbor, the dream you had, how you felt when you were 7 and your best friends decided that you were bossy and didn't want to talk to you anymore, wait, that was me. You don't have to be profound or insightful, (but it's okay if you are). The idea here is to get you in the habit of writing. I will not read your pages. I will, however, scan them while I count the number of pages you produce. **THIS IS WORTH 10% OF YOUR GRADE** (a full letter grade).

DUE: Last day of class 3/11

FORMAT: Handwritten in a notebook or journal for in-class section (to be returned during the final exam class period) Typed into a word document and submitted via d2l for online section.

Assignment #1 (3%): Write 3 loglines for potential final short scripts for this class.

DUE: Monday 1/14 be prepared to pitch them to the class.

FORMAT: In class students: PRINTED and brought to class, also uploaded to D2L by class start into dropbox.

Online students—uploaded to dropbox AND posted on D2L discussion forum, you must comment on the posted loglines to earn participation credit.

WATCH: *Star Wars* (Episode IV-The Original) if you haven't seen it. Re-watch it if it has been a while.

READ: Chapters 1 & 2 Gurskis (The Short Screenplay)

Pages 3-20 Vogler (The Writer's Journey)

Chapters 1-5 Field (The Screenplay)

Book Report/Discussion #1 (3%): List 20 items from the reading that will be germane to your work in this course or provoked thought about writing or storytelling. One-word responses are not acceptable. These are meant to be public and you will post them on D2L in the discussion forum. You must also comment on at least two posts for full credit. For online-only students, please comment on at least four posts per week to earn class participation credit.

DUE: Monday 1/14

FORMAT: uploaded to D2L by class start

Class 2 Monday 1/14

**DUE: Assignment 1: Loglines, Book Report #1 on D2L discussion forum, comments on discussion forum, Online students loglines on discussion forum and comments made IN CLASS**

Read loglines and choose which story you will develop for your final project

What is a Screenplay?

Three act structure (features and shorts)

Plot points

Story and Character

Character Arcs

Build a character exercise

Character intro example

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

Assignment 2 (3%): 3-Act Structure--See D2L for assignment details

DUE: Monday 1/21

FORMAT: uploaded to D2L

Assignment 3 (3%): Finalize which logline you will be developing and write a distinctive character intro for your main character.

DUE: Monday 1/21

FORMAT: printed and brought to class, and uploaded to D2L

READ: Chapters 3 Gurskis (The Short Screenplay)

Pages 23-79 Vogler (The Writer's Journey)

Chapters 7-9 Field (The Screenplay)

Book Report/Discussion #2 (3%): List 20 items from the reading that will be germane to your work in this course or provoked thought about writing or storytelling. One-word responses are not acceptable. These are meant to be public and you will post them on D2L in the discussion forum. You must also comment on at least two posts for full credit. *For online-only students, please comment on at least four posts per week to earn class participation credit.*

DUE: Monday 1/21

FORMAT: uploaded to D2L by class start

Class 3 Monday 1/21

**DUE: Assignment 2: 3 Act Structure, Assignment #3 Main character intro, Book Report #2 plus comments**

IN CLASS:

Read Character intros

Developing the Narrative

Endings and Beginnings

Two Incidents

Treatments

Step Outlines

Plot Points review

Building the Story

ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 4 (4%): Character Bio, Craft a character bio for your protagonist. See description on D2L for details.

DUE: Monday 1/28

FORMAT: uploaded to D2L

READ: Chapters 5 Gurskis (The Short Screenplay)

Pages 83-132 Vogler (The Writer's Journey)

Chapters 12 Field (The Screenplay)

Book Report/Discussion #3 (3%): List 20 items from the reading that will be germane to your work in this course or provoked thought about writing or storytelling. One-word responses are not acceptable. These are meant to be public and you will post them on D2L in the discussion forum. You must also comment on at least two posts for full credit. *For online-only students, please comment on at least four posts per week to earn class participation credit.*

DUE: Monday 1/28

FORMAT: uploaded to D2L by class start

Class 4 Monday 1/28

**DUE: Assignment #4 Character Bio, Book Report #3 plus comments**

IN CLASS:

The Screenplay format

Screenwriting software

Scene

Sequence

Production focused ideas

ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 5 (4%): Write a step outline of your final project

DUE: Monday 2/4

FORMAT: In-class students- PRINTED and brought to class, ALSO Uploaded to D2L

*Online students, uploaded to D2L dropbox and posted on discussion forum. Comments on other loglines*

READ: Chapters 4 Gurskis (The Short Screenplay)

Pages 135-173 Vogler (The Writer's Journey)

Chapters 10 & 11 Field (The Screenplay)

Book Report/Discussion #4 (3%): List 20 items from the reading that will be germane to your work in this course or provoked thought about writing or storytelling. One-word responses are not acceptable. These are meant to be public and you will post them on D2L in the discussion forum. You must also comment on at least two posts for full credit. *For online-only students, please comment on at least four posts per week to earn class participation credit.*

DUE: Monday 2/4

FORMAT: uploaded to D2L by class start

Class 5 Monday 2/4

**DUE: Assignment 5- Step Outlines, Book Report #4 plus comments, comments on step outlines**

IN CLASS:

Presentation/Discussion of Step Outlines

Dialogue

Exposition

ASSIGNMENTS:

WRITE: First and second act of your script\*

DUE: Monday 2/11

FORMAT: CELTX document, Uploaded to D2L

\*I am asking for a volunteer to turn in a completed first draft for an in-class workshop on 2/11

READ: Pages 175-228 Vogler (The Writer's Journey)

Book Report/Discussion #5 (3%): List 20 items from the reading that will be germane to your work in this course or provoked thought about writing or storytelling. One-word responses are not acceptable. These are meant to be public and you will post them on D2L in the discussion forum.

You must also comment on at least two posts for full credit. *For online-only students, please comment on at least four posts per week to earn class participation credit.*

DUE: Monday 2/11

FORMAT: uploaded to D2L by class start

Class 6 Monday 2/11

**DUE: Book Report #5 plus comments, first and second act of your screenplay, volunteer's completed first draft**

IN CLASS:

In-depth discussion of A Writer's Journey

Critique of first draft—volunteer

ASSIGNMENTS: Assignment 6 (8%): Analyze a film listed on D2L using the Hero's Journey as a model and write a paper discussing the structure outlined in the book. (further details on d2l)

DUE: Monday 2/25

FORMAT: Uploaded to D2L

READ: Pages 231-291 Vogler (The Writer's Journey) for help with your paper

WRITE: Complete first draft of your script

DUE: Monday 2/18

FORMAT: CELTX document, NOT A PDF, Uploaded to D2L by 10:00AM—I will print them and make copies for you, but I need them uploaded early to do this.

Class 7 Monday 2/18

**DUE: Completed 1st drafts**

IN CLASS:

First draft workshop Pt 1

ASSIGNMENTS: Revise 1<sup>st</sup> Drafts

*Online Students: Complete written critique of first half of group's first drafts on d2l*

Class 8 Monday 2/25

**DUE: Hero paper, Online student critiques**

IN CLASS:

First draft workshop Pt 2

ASSIGNMENTS: Complete 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft

DUE: Monday 3/4

FORMAT: CELTX document, NOT A PDF, Uploaded to D2L by 10:00AM—I will print them and make copies for you, but I need them uploaded early to do this.

*Online Students: Complete written critique of second half of group's first drafts on d2l*

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Class 9 Monday 3/4

**DUE: Completed 2<sup>nd</sup> Drafts, Online student critiques**

IN CLASS: 2nd Draft Workshop I

ASSIGNMENTS: Revise 2nd Drafts

*Online Students: Complete written critique of all 2<sup>nd</sup> drafts*

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Class 10 Monday 3/11

**DUE: Journals, Any Extra Credit Assignments, Online student critiques**

IN CLASS:

2nd Draft Workshop II

ASSIGNMENTS: Complete 3<sup>rd</sup> Draft (Final)

DUE: Monday 3/18

FORMAT: CELTX document, Uploaded to D2L—If selected for in class critique please upload by 10am so I can make copies for the class.

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FINAL EXAM PERIOD Monday 3/18 2:45-5:00pm

**DUE: 3<sup>rd</sup>/POLISHED DRAFT OF FINAL SCRIPT**

3rd Drafts (20%) due at the beginning of the class period (uploaded to D2L)

2 of these will be read aloud in class, if selected for class reading, please upload a copy by 10am so I can make copies for class. **Attendance to this class is mandatory. If you do not attend class you will receive a 0 on your final draft! This draft is worth 20% of your grade.**