

SCREENWRITING FOR MAJORS – FALL 2013

DC 101 (Section 402)

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 11:50am to 1:20pm.

Room: CS&TC (CDM) 228

Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:00am to 11:50am, Wednesdays 2:00pm to 5:00pm, Thursdays 10:00am to 11:50am. (I am in and out of my office frequently during office hours so please let me know if you will be stopping by).

Office: CDM 616

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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. Students are expected to develop and write a short screenplay.

Prerequisites:

None.

Books:

Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting by Syd Field. Field, Random House, 2005.

ISBN: 978-0385339032.

Recommended Reading:

Save the Cat by Blake Snyder

Zen and the Art of Writing by Ray Bradbury

www.deadlinehollywood.com

Software:

Use of screenwriting software, such as Final Draft (if your parents will buy it for you) or Celtx (if you're on a budget) is required for later assignments in this course. A free download of Celtx can be obtained at www.cetlx.com.

Online Course Management System:

CoLWeb: <https://col.cdm.depaul.edu> Here you will find lecture slides, lecture videos, and any other relevant information you may need. This is where you will upload your assignments for this course. Login with your Campus Connect information.

Grading:

Class Participation: 25% (Attendance, contributions to discussions, etc)

Timely Completion of Writing Assignments (Homework): 40%

Final Script: 35%

THE SCHEDULE:

Thursday, September 12:

Personal Introductions. Go over the course and syllabus.

IN CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT: How did you get to school?

FOR NEXT CLASS: Come up with the title of your 1) Autobiography and 2) Epitaph. (Epitaph meaning a brief poem or other writing in praise of a deceased person).

READING: *Chapters 1-2 of Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting.*

Tuesday, September 17:

Discuss Autobiography/ Epitaph titles.

Where to start? Getting the narrative ball rolling.

FOR NEXT CLASS: Choose one of these three prompts and write a story no more than one page single-spaced.

“It started on that corner over there...”

“My mother and father always embarrassed me when...”

“It wasn't until I saw [INSERT FAMOUS PERSON/ ICON] in/ on [INSERT SOMETHING] that I knew...”

Thursday, September 19:

Share/ Discuss Stories. Be prepared to TELL your story, not read it aloud or recite it from memory.

Storytelling. What makes a good story? What bores us to tears?

FOR NEXT CLASS: Create 5 starter prompts of your own.

READING: *Chapters 3-5 of Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting.*

Tuesday, September 24:

Share/ Discuss story prompts and pick a “Class Favorite.”

IN CLASS WRITING EXERCISE: Using the “Class Favorite” prompt, take 5 minutes and start to tell a story based on that prompt. Don't worry about finishing. We'll share the stories and come up with a conclusion together.

Conclusions. Who is the writer?

FOR NEXT CLASS: THE 50 WORD STORY

Write 3 different stories of exactly 50 words. Not 49, not 51. Make sure you are telling a story, not describing a scene. It should have a beginning, middle, and end. Remember: a STORY is a person wanting something badly and having trouble getting it.

BAD EXAMPLE: *We see a room. A man enters. He is searching for something. Etc etc.*

GOOD EXAMPLE: *Ricky skips town searching for the perfect woman. He finds himself in Mexico, in love with a firecracker named Anna. Her father disapproves. Threats are made. Tears are shed. But her mama believes in love. Sneak Anna out late at night to make her a runaway bride. Happily ever after.*

Thursday, September 26:

Share/ Discuss 50 word stories.

More on Story. What makes a complete story?

IN CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT: The Importance of Memory. What do you remember about being a baby? The first day of school? Your first desk? Where did you hang your coat? What did your first teacher look like?

FOR NEXT CLASS: Choose one of the following prompts and write a one page story.

- *The best present you ever gave a sibling or parent.*
- *Who was the most frightening person in your childhood?*
- *Something you saw that you wish you had never seen.*

READING: Chapters 6-7 of *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*.

Tuesday, October 1:

Share/ Discuss stories. Be prepared to TELL your story, not read it aloud or recite it from memory.

From memory to experience. The character's change or arc.

FOR NEXT CLASS: Write 1 Page on your moment of greatest Pride and 1 Page on your moment of greatest Shame. OR, write 1 Page on your greatest Joy and 1 Page on your greatest Terror.

Thursday, October 3:

Share/ Discuss Stories. Be prepared to TELL your story, not read it aloud or recite it from memory.

The Character's Spine: the struggle between Want and Need.

READING: Chapters 8-9 of *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*.

Tuesday, October 8:

Finish sharing/ discussing Stories. Be prepared to TELL your story, not read it aloud or recite it from memory.

The Character's Spine: the struggle between Want and Need. (Part 2).

FOR NEXT CLASS: Write one 1 page story that is TRUE (actually happened) and one 1 page story that is FALSE (didn't happen). Without indicating which is which, staple them together and be prepared to hand them in at the start of next class. 1 page MAX, but ½ page is even better.

Thursday, October 10:

Read/ Discuss True and False Stories.

The Writer's Voice/ Fiction versus Nonfiction.

FOR NEXT Thursday (October 17): CHARACTER OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT aka **The Stalker Project.**

We can't always write simply from our own experience. For example, when writing on assignment for a studio, you will be writing stories that are not necessarily your own. Or sometimes we get "stuck" and need to observe the world around us for story ideas.

This week, your assignment is to go to a public place. Go somewhere off campus, somewhere interesting where you aren't just observing other students.

Sit and watch someone specific. Don't follow them if they leave, this isn't Stalking 101. Just stay put and observe someone new if need be.

Observe their movements, gestures, clothing, body language. But DO NOT WRITE ANYTHING DOWN.

When you get home, take a 3x5 notecard and write down as much as you can remember about this person on that card. Only write on one side.

Then take out a phone book, open to a page, find the first first name you see. Write it on the back. Turn to a new page and pick the first last name you see. Write it on the back as well.

Go out again at a different time and different location, and repeat the activity.

YOU WILL BRING TO CLASS: The 2 notecards with descriptions on one side, names on the other.

READING: Chapter 10 of Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting.

Tuesday, October 15:

Finish sharing and discussing True/ False stories. Answer questions about Character Observation Assignment. In-class viewing, time permitting.

Thursday, October 17:

IN CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Read over your cards and refresh your memory about your characters. Write about the following: What would Character 1 do to Character 2 that would or could provoke him to dramatic action? Secondly, what is the tragic secret that one of the characters would kill the other character if he knew?

Character, character, character!

FOR NEXT CLASS: We're going to begin transitioning into more specific screenwriting skills, beginning with a discussion of creating atmosphere. Write 3 Paragraphs. In each of them, a person (the same person) walks through a location (the same location). But in the First paragraph, we are in a horror movie. In the Second paragraph, we are in a romantic comedy. In the Third Paragraph we are in an action movie.

READING: Chapters 11-13 of Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting.

Tuesday, October 22:

Share/ Discuss Atmosphere Assignments.

"I just want something I can never have." Objectives and obstacles: the link between unfulfilled desires and tension. Keeping butts in the seats.

FOR NEXT CLASS: THE SEDUCTION SCENE.

3 Pages MAX! Write either of the following:

1. A scene in which someone attempts to seduce another person and the seducee is willing but the circumstance is all wrong. For example, there is a third party there--an old aunt, an ex-husband—or the place is wrong--they're at work, or a football game, or backstage before a performance.

2. A scene in which someone attempts to seduce another person and the circumstances are absolutely perfect --the mood, the time of day, the place are ideal--but the seducee is not willing.

In both cases the resolution of to the scene is up to you-- either the seducer succeeds or fails. Using skills you've developed, you must create memorable characters and a vivid circumstance for the scene. It should be clear what both people want.

You must also create a clear, and believable, set of obstacles for the seducer. The source of his or her problems, depending upon the scene you choose, is either the circumstance or the seducee. Successful fulfillment of this assignment depends upon your ability to make things increasingly difficult for the seducer.

Remember: good seductions happen indirectly. It should be clear what the seducer is after without him or her saying it directly. This is an exercise in having a character, or characters, say things without really saying them.

Questions that should be answered by the exercise:

Who are these two people? Are they the same age? Are they from similar walks of life? Is one of them-- either the seducer or the seducee-- more experienced than the other? A veteran of seductions?

*What does the seducer want? What is it about the person he or she's trying to seduce that excites him or her? Make us see it, feel it! (Seductions aren't always about sex--in *The Hustler*, Bert tries to seduce Eddie into playing for him. He's after money and is turned on by Eddie's talent.)*

If you're writing the scene where the seducee is willing--what is it about the seducer that's attractive to the person he or she's trying to seduce? Again, make us see it.

If you're writing the scene in which the seducee is unwilling--why is he or she not interested?

Is it something physical about the seducer? Too many muscles? Not enough hair? Money-- too rich? Not rich enough? Is it something the seducer is even aware of?

How have the characters changed?

Thursday, October 24:

Share/ Discuss The Seduction Scene.

FOR NEXT CLASS: CHARACTER/ ENVIRONMENT SCENES

Write the following three scenes. A character enters a specific place to meet a person three times:

1) The first time it is unfamiliar, mysterious to him/her. The scene ends when he/she greets the person.

2) The second time the place seems familiar, friendly--the greeting is a happy one. The scene ends with the greeting.

3) The third time the place is deserted. There should be a feeling of sadness. Nobody is waiting for him/her this time...

Know the character who enters. Create a situation for him/her, a story that is told in these three distinct scenes. The story occurs between these scenes. The way your character reacts to the environment will tell us what's happened. No dialogue. Visualize! Use mood, lighting, sound.

You can tell the story of a whole feature in these three short scenes!

(Think of Scrooge entering Marley's offices the first time as a young man, then sometime later, after he became a partner, then later still when he was all alone). If you include the right details, we can fill in the blanks on our own.

Questions that should be answered by the assignment:

Who is the character? How old? Why are they coming to the place? What do they expect to find?

What about the place? What is it? How does he/she perceive it?

In the second and third scenes--How has the place changed? How has the main character changed? More confident? Nervous? What is she doing there again?

WHAT IS THE STORY YOU HAVE TOLD? In other words, what's happened between the scenes? Can the other students or I figure it out?

READING: Chapters 14, 16 and 17 of Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting.

Tuesday, October 29:

Share/ Discuss Three Scene Stories.

IN CLASS VIEWING: Some well done short films.

GROUPS ASSIGNED. *Sorry gang, but some of you will have to write quickly. The advantage of going first is that you have much longer to rewrite the script for your final.*

FOR NEXT CLASS: STORY OUTLINES

Select one a scenario and write an outline for a short film. The story you're to tell should be about eight to fifteen minutes long, roughly six to eight scenes. It must be a cinematic story. Imagine how these kinds of stories happen, or might happen, in the worlds you know and draw upon those people and situations. Use your own life, memories, experiences!!! Fight the urge-- if you get it-- to work with material out of your realm, e.g., prisoners of war, commanders of space ships, etc.

The outline should be written in prose--not in screenplay format--and be one to three pages long.

Though you aren't writing an actual screenplay, remember that you are describing a story that will be filmed-- so think in scenes and use the tools you've learned thus far.

Give your outline a title and write so we can see, hear and feel it.

HANDOUT PROVIDED with Outline Prompts.

Thursday, October 31:

Share/ Discuss Story Outlines, Groups 1 and 2.

Tuesday, November 5:

Share/ Discuss Story Outlines, Groups 3 and 4.

FOR NEXT CLASS: Write a rough draft of your short screenplay based on one of your outlines.

Thursday, November 7:

WORKSHOP. Group 1 Scripts are read aloud and feedback is given.

Participation from everyone is key!

Tuesday, November 12:

WORKSHOP. Group 2 Scripts are read aloud and feedback is given.

Participation from everyone is key!

Thursday, November 14:

WORKSHOP. Group 3 Scripts are read aloud and feedback is given.

Participation from everyone is key!

Monday, November 19:

WORKSHOP. Group 4 Scripts are read aloud and feedback is given.

Participation from everyone is key!

FINAL PROJECT:

Turn in a final, revised, professional (NO TYPOS) draft of your short screenplay. DUE MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26 by 11:50am on ColWeb.

SCHOOL POLICIES:

Online Instructor Evaluation

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 two weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online at <https://mycti.cti.depaul.edu/mycti>

Email

Email is the primary means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. Students should be sure their email listed under "demographic information" at [CampusConnect](#) is correct.

Academic Integrity Policy

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>

Plagiarism

The university and school policy on plagiarism can be summarized as follows: Students in this course should be aware of the strong sanctions that can be imposed against someone guilty of plagiarism. If proven, a charge of plagiarism could result in an automatic F in the course and possible expulsion. The strongest of sanctions will be imposed on anyone who submits as his/her own work any assignment which has been prepared by someone else. If you have any questions or doubts about what plagiarism entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials be sure to consult the instructor.

Incomplete

An incomplete grade is given only for an exceptional reason such as a death in the family, a serious illness, etc. Any such reason must be documented. Any incomplete request must be made at least two weeks before the final, and approved by the Dean of the College of Computing and Digital Media. Any consequences resulting from a poor grade for the course will not be considered as valid reasons for such a request.

Resources for 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 either the PLuS Program (for LD, AD/HD) or The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at: Student Center, LPC, Suite #370 Phone number: (773)325.1677 Fax: (773)325.3720 TTY: (773)325.7296