

DC 101
SCREENWRITING FOR MAJORS
Winter 2014
Tuesday 1:30 – 4:45 PM

INSTRUCTOR: Gary Novak
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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. PREREQUISITE(S): None

REQUIRED TEXTS:

The Screenplay by Syd Field
Zen in the Art of Writing by Ray Bradbury

COURSE POLICIES:

-Attendance:

Each week's class consists of lectures and screenings; attendance is mandatory. For the purposes of this class an absence is defined as not showing up for class or showing up 15 minutes, or more, late for a class. All absences will result in a reduction of the attendance/participation grade.

- Assignments:

Reasonable deadlines are given for completion for each assignment. Consequently late assignments will not be accepted without prior consent of the instructor.

- 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. Make-up exams will be administered by the College according to its make-up exam schedule.

-Plagiarism:

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

-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.

-Content Changes:

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

-Sexual Harassment:

The policy as specified in the student handbook will be adhered to in this class.

GRADING:

Class attendance and participation	10%
Morning pages/Journal	10%
First Draft of Screenplay	10%
Assignments	20%
Final Exam	20%
Final Draft of Screenplay	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.

COURSE OUTLINE**WEEK ONE****INTRODUCTION TO COURSE AND REQUIREMENTS**

- Screenwriting vs. traditional writing (novels, plays, etc.).
- Why we need to tell stories.
- Why we write.

KEY TO CREATIVITY

- Right brain versus left brain
- Don't think, don't censor, just do.
- Morning Pages.
- Artist dates.

WRITING WHAT YOU KNOW

- Turning your life experiences into drama.
- Confronting who you are - goals, needs, and desires.
- One true sentence.

Read: Bradbury - Preface, Ch. 1, 2, 3

Assignment #1: Buy a notebook and start morning pages. Write at least two pages a day, everyday, from now until end of Week Six. 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); however, I will count the number of pages you write.

Assignment #2: Write about five incidents from your own life that you consider movie moments. This can be either an incident that seems like a scene from a movie or an incident that could be the idea for a movie.

WEEK TWO**PREMISE**

- Premise/Plot/Theme.
- The unifying element.
- Loglines

CHARACTER

- What defines character?
- Action and character.
- Behavior.
- Environment, as it relates to character.

Read: Field - Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Assignment #3: Writing from an Image. The details for this will be handed out and discussed in class.

Assignment #4: Create a character. Write a character biography for the potential protagonist of your story. Use the in-class discussion and handouts as a guide. Remember, the key to a dimensional character, write in the first person, and in complete sentences. Be as specific as you can – the more details the better. Also, keep in mind that nothing is chiseled in stone.

W E E K T H R E E

CONFLICT

- Cause and effect and obstacles.
- Change in character.

SCENES

- Defining goals of each scene.
- The function of each scene.
- Beats.

DIALOGUE

- Good and bad dialogue.
- Character voices.
- Ear training.

Read: Field - Ch. 10

Assignment #5: Scene Exercise. Write an action scene, a conflict scene, an event scene, and a beat scene. The details for these scenes will be handed out and discussed in class.

W E E K F O U R

STRUCTURE

- Beginning, middle and end.
- Plot points.
- The pulse of a script.
- The Aristotelian curve.

Read: Field - Ch. 6, 7, 8, 9

Assignment #6: Outline a feature film hitting all the major beats and plot points. Follow the format used in the example handed out in class. Record the time into the movie that the major beats occur (the 10's).

WEEK FIVE

SHORTS

- Writing the short.

WRITING IN VISUAL TERMS

- Metaphor.

TREATMENTS

- Step outlines.

Read: Field - Ch. 11, 12

Bradbury - Ch. 4

Assignment #7: Write a step outline for your story. You will present your outline to the class next week.

WEEK SIX

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION OF STEP OUTLINES

SCREENPLAY FORMAT

- The method to the madness.
- Script writing software.

Read: Field - Ch. 13, 14

Bradbury - Ch. 5

Assignment #8: Begin writing your screenplay. The first five pages are due next week.

WEEK SEVEN

FIRST FIVE PAGES OF SCREENPLAY DUE

- Bring six copies.

Read: Bradbury - Ch. 6, 7

Assignment #9: Continue writing the first draft.

WEEK EIGHT

FIRST FIFTEEN PAGES DUE

Read: Bradbury - Ch. 8, 9, 10

Assignment #10: Finish writing the first draft.

WEEK NINE

FIRST DRAFTS DUE

CRITIQUE OF FIRST DRAFTS

INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

- Meet one on one to discuss final screenplay.

WEEK TEN

REVISING/REWRITING

- Final scripts due in ONE WEEK.
- Getting through writer's block.
- Review of format.

EXAM REVIEW

WEEK ELEVEN

FINAL EXAM

FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAYS ARE DUE

- Your script must be submitted by 6:00 PM on Friday, March 21st.
- No exceptions unless arranged ahead of time.