

## INTRODUCTION TO TELEVISION WRITING – FALL 2014

DC 272 (401)

Wednesdays 1:30pm to 4:45pm

CDM (CS&TC) 222

Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA

Office Hours: Tuesday: 9:45am- 11:30am, Wednesdays: 11:30am- 1:30pm, Thursdays: 11:30am- 1:30pm, Fridays: 1:00pm- 2:00pm. (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

[ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The primary objective of this course is to learn how to write for television, for both network and cable, focusing on fiction and non-fiction TV programs including news, talk, documentaries, dramas and comedies. The course will assist students in improving their writing skills as well as help them understand the basic approaches and techniques in writing for television. **Prerequisites: DC 201.**

That's the course description you'll find online. However, in actuality, this course will be exclusively concerned with writing dramatic and comedic scripted television (as opposed to news, talk or documentary). **The objective of this course is to complete a sample “Spec Script” for an existing Television program, either Comedy or Drama.**

The instructor will mentor the students to ensure he brings out the voice of the student writer. At the same time he'll monitor the students' writing to make sure the voices of the characters are true to the show; the plot works to keep the story moving along; the action and dialogue adhere to the style of the show and are funny (when applicable); and the script is technically, grammatically and structurally correct and properly formatted.

Students will study shows, pitch story ideas, create beat sheets, write story outlines and complete a “spec” script for an existing network, cable or internet television series by the end of the course. The class will duplicate as much as possible the atmosphere of a “Writer's Room” on a television show during production, minus the free lunches and exhausting late nights. The instructor will fill the role of “Showrunner,” minus the 80 hour work weeks and gargantuan salary.

As with a real writing staff, the class will have the opportunity to offer constructive criticism of each other's work. They will also participate in group rewrites, where they will be expected to help improve the work of their classmates, both in terms of honing story and “punching-up” the comedy when applicable. A portion of each student's script will be read aloud at least once during the course in the equivalent of a “Table Read.” Polite discourse is expected at all times.

### REQUIREMENTS:

Actively participate in class discussions, read and critique your own and fellow students' work, complete all in-class assignments and complete all homework assignments. **Strict adherence to deadlines is expected.** (If you miss an assignment or class, you better have a good, (ideally) funny story as to why). Attendance is MANDATORY.

### ASSIGNMENTS:

All assignments must be typed and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work, you're responsible for its quality. All Scenes and Scripts must be in proper Screenwriting format.

(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 HIGHLY recommended. ([www.celtx.com](http://www.celtx.com))  
All assignments should include your name and the date of the assignment.

#### **A NOTE ABOUT EMAILS:**

Sign them please. I have no way of knowing who [frogdog68@freakzilla.org](mailto:frogdog68@freakzilla.org) is unless he or she signs the email. I'm always happy to answer any questions you might have.

#### **A NOTE ABOUT TALKING 'SMACK':**

Writer's are competitive. I'm not going to sit here and pretend we're all at the same skill level and will all get along famously. Nor am I going to pretend I don't know people are going to talk about each other's work in derogatory terms. But I don't want to see it. I don't want to hear about it. And it's absolutely forbidden in my classroom. If you feel the need to badmouth someone's work, please do so in PRIVATE. Note: **THE INTERNET IS NOT PRIVATE!** You'd be surprised who stumbles across your Twitter, Facebook or Blog. So let's please be respectful and remember we're all in this to become better writers.

That said, this is a workshop. And sometimes in a workshop, people lose fingers. Constructive criticism is expected. But cruelty and rudeness will not be tolerated.

#### **ONLINE COURSE MANAGEMEN SYSTEM:**

D2L: <https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home> Here students will find lecture slides, lecture videos, links to streams of the episodes for this course and any other relevant information they may need. This is where you will upload your assignments for this course. Login with Campus Connect information.

#### **GRADING:**

Show Breakdowns: 10%

Story Pitches: 10%

Story Beat Sheet: 15%

Story Outline: 20% (Midterm)

Final Script: 25% (Final)

Class Participation: 20% (Class participation encompasses not only attendance but also your active involvement in discussions).

#### **THE SCHEDULE:**

##### **Week 1: September 10**

Introductions. Who are you and why are you here? What have you written? What TV Shows do you like to watch? What TV Shows do you think you might want to write?

Lectures: TV Basics, How do we study a show?

Television screenings and analysis:

30 ROCK "When It Rains it Pours."

DAMAGES "Get Me A Lawyer."

#### **HOMEWORK:**

EVERYONE: Prepare a Breakdown for a Television Show you wish to write or may wish to write in this course. Watch AT LEAST THREE episodes of the show and "Beat them out" as we learned in class.

EMAIL [ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu) by SUNDAY, September 14 at 5:00pm just to let me know what show you are watching. I don't need the Breakdowns yet, I just need to know what we'll be discussing next class. (If you can't decide what show to write, that's fine, but you are still responsible for bringing your 3 Breakdowns to class and being prepared to discuss the show you watched).

Submit your completed Breakdowns to D2L by 1:30pm, Wednesday, September 17. Also bring a copy to class (or have an e-copy available) as we will be discussing everyone's show on Wednesday.

### **Week 2: September 17:**

Lecture: The Television Landscape and a discussion of Shows we'll write.

#### **Be prepared to talk about the show you watched.**

This is also an opportunity for students to familiarize themselves with other shows they may wish to write.

#### **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR HAVING A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF ALL SHOWS THE CLASS IS WRITING.**

What makes a good Spec Script? Writing someone else's characters while still displaying your own voice.

Screenings, if time permits.

### **GROUPS ASSIGNED:**

In order to make the work-flow in this course more manageable, we'll be splitting into groups. All students are expected to read everyone's work, your group assignment just determines your due dates.

### **HOMEWORK:**

GROUP 1: Write FIVE Story Pitches for the show you have chosen to write. From these ideas, your episode will grow. Upload the five pitches to D2L by 1:30pm on Wednesday, September 24. Be prepared to pitch your ideas to the class. These don't have to be 'great.' Remember, this is brainstorming and there are no bad ideas in brainstorming.

GROUP 2: Think about your pitches.

EVERYONE: Learn your show cold. Watch as many episodes as you can. A successful spec script demonstrates a keen understanding of a show. In order to know it, you have to watch it. Read scripts (provided by instructor).

### **Week 3: September 24:**

Story Pitches:

Group 1. Students will pitch their story ideas and receive feedback from their fellow students and the instructor.

Lectures: Characterization, Tension

### **HOMEWORK:**

GROUP 1: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to develop your pitches into a Beat Sheet.

GROUP 2: Write FIVE Story Pitches for the show you have chosen to write. From these ideas, your episode will grow. Upload the five pitches to D2L by 1:30pm on Wednesday, October 1. Be prepared to pitch your ideas to the class. These don't have to be 'great.' Remember, this is brainstorming and there are no bad ideas in brainstorming.

### **Week 4: October 1:**

Story Pitches:

Group 2. Students will pitch their story ideas and receive feedback from their fellow students and the instructor.

Lectures: TBD

#### HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: In the style of your Breakdowns of existing episodes, compose a BEAT SHEET for the episode you wish to write, expanding on the story you developed in your pitch. Remember, these are the absolute bare bones of the plot. BEAT SHEETS SHOULD NOT EXCEED 2 Pages. Upload your Beat Sheet to D2L by Saturday, October 4 at 5:00pm.

GROUP 2: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to develop your pitches into a Beat Sheet.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with your fellow students' Beat Sheets. Please READ THEM ALL and be prepared to discuss in class on Wednesday.

#### Week 5: October 8:

Workshop:

GROUP 1's Beat Sheets.

What's working? What needs work? How can we make the story stronger, more character driven? If it's a comedy, how can we make it funnier? If it's a drama, what can we do to up the tension, the stakes? Do the A and B stories intersect? Does this episode fit the show?

**NOTE: If the Professor gets the sense that students are not reading each other's work, he reserves the right to collect WRITTEN NOTES from every student on every single piece of writing submitted for class. Neither the Students nor the Professor want to have to do this, so please do the reading and come to class prepared to discuss it. 20% OF YOUR GRADE IS CLASS PARTICIPATION!**

Lectures: Outlines and the importance of outlining

#### HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to develop your Beat Sheet into an Outline.

GROUP 2: In the style of your Breakdowns of existing episodes, compose a BEAT SHEET for the episode you wish to write, expanding on the story you developed in your pitch. Remember, these are the absolute bare bones of the plot. BEAT SHEETS SHOULD NOT EXCEED 2 Pages. Upload your Beat Sheet to D2L by Saturday, October 11 at 5:00pm.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with your fellow students' Beat Sheets. Please READ THEM ALL and be prepared to discuss in class on Wednesday.

#### Week 6: October 15:

Workshop:

GROUP 2's Beat Sheets.

What's working? What needs work? How can we make the story stronger, more character driven? If it's a comedy, how can we make it funnier? If it's a drama, what can we do to up the tension, the stakes? Do the A and B stories intersect? Does this episode fit the show?

Lecture: TBD

#### HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Story Outlines. Using the Beat Sheet feedback from class, expand your Beat Sheet into an Outline. (Formatting will be discussed). Upload your Outline to D2L by SATURDAY, October 18 at

5:00pm.

GROUP 2: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to develop your Beat Sheet into an Outline.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with your fellow students' Outlines. Please READ THEM ALL and be prepared to discuss in class on Wednesday.

**Week 7: October 22:**

Workshop:

GROUP 1: Outlines.

**HOMEWORK:**

GROUP 1: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to expand your Outline into your Completed Script.

GROUP 2: Story Outlines. Using the Beat Sheet feedback from class, expand your Beat Sheet into an Outline. (Formatting will be discussed). Upload your Outline to D2L by SATURDAY, October 25 at 5:00pm.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with your fellow students' Outlines. Please READ THEM ALL and be prepared to discuss in class on Wednesday.

**Week 8: October 29**

Workshop:

GROUP 2: Outlines. Outlines, Group 2:

**HOMEWORK:**

GROUP 1: Upload your first 5-10 pages (Cold Open or Teaser), to D2L by 11:00am Wednesday, November 5.

GROUP 2: Get started on your script.

**Week 9: November 5:**

Table Read:

Group 1's Teasers and Cold Opens.

**HOMEWORK:**

GROUP 1: Your Final is your Completed Spec Script. Get writing!

GROUP 2: Upload your first 5-10 pages (Cold Open or Teaser), to D2L by 11:00am Wednesday, November 12.

**Week 10: November 12:**

Table Read:

Group 2's Teasers and Cold Opens.

**FINAL EXAM:**

Your completed SPEC SCRIPT.

**Your Final MUST be uploaded to D2L by Wednesday, November 19 at 5:00pm.**

## College Policies

### **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