

# DC 405 Topics in Screenwriting

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**When:** Thursday · 5:45pm - 9:00pm  
**Where:** 14 East Jackson RM 211 Loop Campus

**Instructor:** Matt Quinn · [mquinn@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:mquinn@cdm.depaul.edu) · 312-362-5807 · CDM RM 509  
**Office hours:** Tuesday 10:30am – 11:30am and Thursday 1:30pm – 5:30pm

## Summary of Course

Advanced study in screenwriting focusing on a specific genre each quarter such as: Science Fiction, Comedy, Action-Adventure, Nonfiction, etc. The topic this quarter is the art of scene writing.

This advanced course asks students to move beyond dated conventions in an effort to deconstruct the core elements of a scene: location, subject, conflict, and exposition. Through weekly lectures, writing exercises, and workshops we will examine a number of innovative screenwriting techniques to refine the writer's unique voice and enhance the commercial viability of their work.

## Learning Outcomes

- Students will understand the importance of individual scene work as a key component of successful screenwriting.
- Students will practice various storytelling techniques to improve their scene writing ability and enhance the commercial viability of their work.
- Students will refine their unique voice as a writer.

## Prerequisites

DC 501

## Grading

Class Attendance and Participation 10%

Scene Assignments 90%

*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.*

## Textbooks

- "The Hollywood Standard" by Christopher Riley ISBN-10: 1932907637 (Recommended)
- Additional readings provided by instructor

## Screenwriting Software

You will be required to use screenwriting software on a regular basis in this course. Final Draft is strongly recommended for those with a focus on screenwriting, producing and/or directing – The software is \$99 with a student discount at: <http://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-9-edu-verified.html>. You can also obtain a free download of the Celtx screenwriting program at: <https://www.celtx.com/index.html>

## Attendance

Attendance and participation is mandatory. An absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or arriving more than 10 minutes late to class, constitutes a reduction in your overall grade.

## In-Class Workshops

Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. To facilitate this, you will be participating in weekly small group workshop sessions that will enable you to showcase your scene assignments and the first draft of your short screenplay. Please refer to the course outline for specific workshop dates.

## D2L

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to: <https://login.depaul.edu/cas/login?service=https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/orgtools/CAS/Default.aspx> and enter using your campus connect logon and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, course outline, video lectures, discussion forums, weekly assignments, etc.

## Course Outline

### Week 1 – September 10<sup>th</sup>

Lecture: Course Intro, Elements of a Scene  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Storytelling)*

### Week 2 – September 17<sup>th</sup>

Workshop: Scene Assignment  
Lecture: Maximizing Dramatic Situations  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Conflict)*

### Week 3 – September 24<sup>th</sup>

Workshop: Scene Assignment  
Lecture: Shakespeare and Character  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Character)*

**Week 4 – October 1<sup>st</sup>**

Workshop: Scene Assignment  
Lecture: Plot Exposition vs. World Exposition  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Exposition)*

**Week 5 – October 8<sup>th</sup>**

Workshop: Scene Assignment  
Lecture: Visual Active Screenwriting  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Action)*

**Week 6 – October 15<sup>th</sup>**

Workshop: Scene Assignment  
Lecture: Dialogue  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Dialogue)*

**Week 7 – October 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Workshop Scene Assignment  
Lecture: Cause and Effect Storytelling  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Setup & Payoff)*

**Week 8 – November 29<sup>th</sup>**

Workshop: Scene Assignment  
Lecture: Fulfilling the Promise of Concept & Genre  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Genre)*

**Week 9 – November 5<sup>th</sup>**

Workshop: Scene Assignment  
Lecture: Refining the Writer's Voice  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment (Writer's Voice)*

**Week 10 – November 12<sup>th</sup>**

Workshop: Scene Assignment

**Week 11 – November 19<sup>th</sup>**

Workshop: Scene Assignment

## Assignments

### Scene Assignments (90% of final grade)

You will write a total of nine scene exercises throughout the quarter based on the screenwriting techniques covered in-class. Specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided after the lectures and will be critiqued in-class the following week. You are expected to bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Dropbox link on D2L. Each scene assignment is 10% of your final grade (90% in total).

*Starting Week 4: Students have the option of revising existing projects for the scene writing exercises. Please ensure the selected scene addresses the topic for the week.*

## Attitude

A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others when the instructor is speaking, mocking another's opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student issues.

## Civil Discourse

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## Changes to the Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

## Online Course Evaluations

Instructor and course evaluations provide valuable feedback that can improve teaching and learning. The greater the level of participation, the more useful the results. As students, you are in the unique position to view the instructor over time. Your comments about what works and what doesn't can help faculty build on the elements of the course that are strong and improve those that are weak. Isolated comments from students and instructors' peers may also be helpful, but evaluation results based on high response rates may be statistically reliable (believable). As you experience this course and material, think about how your learning is impacted. Your honest

opinions about your experience in and commitment to the course and your learning may help improve some components of the course for the next group of students. Positive comments also show the department chairs and college deans the commitment of instructors to the university and teaching evaluation results are one component used in annual performance reviews (including salary raises and promotion/tenure). The evaluation of the instructor and course provides you an opportunity to make your voice heard on an important issue – the quality of teaching at DePaul. Don't miss this opportunity to provide feedback!

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### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

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

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.

### **Withdrawal**

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system (<http://campusconnect.depaul.edu>). Withdrawals processed via this system are effective the day on which they are made. Simply ceasing to attend, or notifying the instructor, or nonpayment of tuition, does not constitute an official withdrawal from class and will result in academic as well as financial penalty.

### **Retroactive Withdrawal**

This policy exists to assist students for whom extenuating circumstances prevented them from meeting the withdrawal deadline. During their college career students may be allowed one medical/personal administrative withdrawal and one college office administrative withdrawal, each for one or more courses in a single term. Repeated requests will not be considered. Submitting an appeal for retroactive withdrawal does not guarantee approval.

College office appeals for CDM students must be submitted online via MyCDM.

The deadlines for submitting appeals are as follows:

Autumn Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent winter quarter  
 Winter Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent spring quarter  
 Spring Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter  
 Summer Terms: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

### Excused Absence

In order to petition for an excused absence, students who miss class due to illness or significant personal circumstances should complete the Absence Notification process through the Dean of Students office. The form can be accessed at <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/dos/forms.html>.

Students must submit supporting documentation alongside the form. The professor reserves the sole right whether to offer an excused absence and/or academic accommodations for an excused absence.

### Incomplete

An incomplete grade is a special, temporary grade that may be assigned by an instructor when unforeseeable circumstances prevent a student from completing course requirements by the end of the term and when otherwise the student had a record of satisfactory progress in the course. CDM policy

requires the student to initiate the request for incomplete grade before the end of the term in which the course is taken. Prior to submitting the incomplete request, the student must discuss the circumstances with the instructor. Students may initiate the incomplete request process in [MyCDM](#).

- All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval.
- If approved, students are required to complete all remaining course requirement independently in consultation with the instructor by the deadline indicated on the incomplete request form.
- By default, an incomplete grade will automatically change to a grade of F after two quarters have elapsed (excluding summer) unless another grade is recorded by the instructor.
- An incomplete grade does NOT grant the student permission to attend the same course in a future quarter.

### 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:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370

Phone number: (773)325.1677

Fax: (773)325.3720

TTY: (773)325.7296