

DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

DC 101-501, Screenwriting for Majors

Winter 2015-16, Tuesday 1:30PM – 4:45PM

14 East Jackson, room 209 at Loop Campus

Instructor: Brad Riddell, briddell@cim.depaul.edu

Office CDM 521 (243 S. Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60604)

Office Hours: T: 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Summary of Course and Outcomes

This course introduces digital cinema majors to scripted dramatic writing for media production. The topics covered include screenplay format, visual writing style, scene craft, story structure, character development, and dialogue. In addition to completing several writing assignments, students will develop and write one short screenplay.

Course Objectives

- Students will be able to employ standard screenplay format
- identify elements of scene craft, character development, and narrative structure
- demonstrate expanded visual writing skills
- apply work-flow process to their creative writing
- prepare original writing projects on a deadline
- analyze and assess their own work and that of their peers

Prerequisites

None

Textbooks and Printed Resources

"Tools of Screenwriting" by David Howard and Edward Mabley ISBN-10: 0312119089
(Required)

"The Hollywood Standard" by Christopher Riley ISBN-10: 1932907637 (Required)

Additional readings provided by instructor

Screenwriting Software

You will be required to use screenwriting software. Final Draft is strongly recommended for those with a serious career focus on screenwriting, producing and/or directing. The software is \$99 with a student discount at: <http://www.finaldraft.com/edu>.

You can also obtain a free download of the Celtx screenwriting program at:

<https://www.celtx.com/index.html>. Amazon Story Writer is available at:

<https://storywriter.amazon.com/>. **All assignments are to be saved in PDF.**

Course Management

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to:

<https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home> and enter using your campus connect username and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, materials, weekly assignments, etc.

Attendance

Attendance and participation are mandatory. An unexcused absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or arriving more than 10 minutes late, constitutes a reduction in your participation grade. Any assignments due on an absence day will be given a zero.

Grading Policy

Class attendance and participation: 10 points

Two Quizzes: 20 Points

Scene Assignments 30 points

Short Script Draft 1: 20 points

Short Script Draft 2: 20 points

Extra Credit: up to 5 total points available by rewriting one of your class assignments.

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 1**

Lecture: Course Intro, What is a Screenplay?

Assignment:

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: About Screenwriting and Basic Storytelling (3-40), Visuals (88-90), *The Hollywood Standard*: Forward, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide (through page 27)

Week 2

Lecture: Character Creation and Development

Workshop: *Mood and Atmosphere*

Assignment: *Preparation for a Date*

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Characterization (63-65), Planting and Payoff, Elements of the Future (pages 72-76), *The Hollywood Standard*: Shot Headings (29-62), Direction (63-80)

Week 3

Lecture: Scene Writing: Conflict & Goals, Stakes & Urgency

Workshop: *Preparation for a Date*

Assignment: *Interrogation*

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Protagonist, Conflict, Obstacles (43-49), Activity and Action (81-83), The Dramatic Scene (91-94), *The Hollywood Standard*: Dialogue (81-102)

Week 4

Lecture: Exposition

Workshop: *Interrogation*

Assignment: *Seduction*

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Exposition (60-62), *The Hollywood Standard*: Transitions, Punctuation (103-111)

Week 5

Quiz 1 in Class! Deliver *Seduction* Online

Lecture: Dialogue and Dramatic Irony

Assignment: *Wrongest Person*

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Dramatic Irony (68-70), Dialogue (84-87), *The Hollywood Standard*: Special Pages (131-139)

Week 6

Lecture: Documentary

Workshop: *Wrongest Person*

Assignment: *Short Documentary Treatment*

Reading: TBD

Week 7

Lecture: Writing the Short Script Part I

Workshop: *Short Documentary Treatment*

Assignment: *Three Loglines for Short Script*

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59), Outlining, Plausibility (76-80)

Week 8

Lecture: Writing the Short Script Part II

Workshop: Pitch Three Loglines for Short Script

Assignment: Step Outline

Week 9

Workshop: Step Outline

Assignment: Short Script Draft 1

Week 10

Lecture: Rewriting

Workshop Draft 1

Assignment: Short Script Draft 2. **Extra Credit is due.**

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Rewriting (95-97)

Week 11

Lecture: Going Forward in Film School

Quiz 2, Final Short Film Script is Due

Assignments

Weekly Assignments

You will write a total of six scene exercises throughout the quarter based on the topics we cover in class – specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided after the lectures. You are expected to bring a printed copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Discussion on D2L and Dropbox. Yes, you need to submit to both! Each scene assignment is 5% of your final grade (30% in total). You will be graded on:

- Style and Format
- Creative execution of the assignment within the given parameters
- Use of dramatic techniques presented in class and the readings

Please save files to your group dropbox as a PDF, and using your last name and the name of the assignment, i.e.: *Riddell Interrogation Scene.pdf*

Quizzes

Two quizzes, one at the midterm and one at the final, will cover topics drawn specifically from lectures and course readings. These will feature multiple choice, T/F, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer questions.

Short Script Draft I

You will submit a first draft of a short script that is to be no longer than 15 pages. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count - proofread your work, proofread it again, and then proofread it one more time just to be sure.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required.
- You must include a properly-formatted cover page.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - it may be a good idea to have a friend look over the script as well.
- Description should be lean - only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Develop a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Avoid exposition-heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually? Am I talking to the audience?"
- Don't wait until the last minute. It takes time to develop a solid narrative - you won't be able to do it in one night and achieve the grade you want.

Short Script Draft II

This is your final writing assignment. The final script is to be no longer than 12 pages.

Points to consider:

- The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort. Correcting typos and making small tweaks is not a rewrite.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops, and your own self-evaluation to craft your revised draft. Get outside opinions if you can.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count even more. Proofread again.

Extra Credit

You may rewrite one assignment from class, excluding short script material, for up to five additional points. Extra credit is due in the Dropbox before the Week 10 class.

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. Be truthful, but sensitive when giving notes. Be prepared to solve problems instead of just pointing them out. Personal attacks and disruptive actions will not be tolerated. Please refer to the course outline for specific workshop dates.

Laptops/Cell Phones:

We won't generally need to have laptops open in this class. But if they are, and I so much as suspect you of online activities not related to the task at hand, you will lose laptop privileges for the entire semester. Phones must be silenced and stowed.

Decorum and Civil Discourse:

We must respect each other, our collaboration and the work at hand. 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.

DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be Socially Responsible Leaders. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the

course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

Changes to 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!

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