

WRITING THE TV THESIS II – WINTER 2016 (This is the second of a two course sequence)  
DC 509 701

Tuesdays, 5:45pm to 9:00pm

14 East Jackson, Room 211

Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA

Office Hours: Mondays: 12:30pm to 1:30pm, Tuesdays: 10:50am to 11:50am and 4:15pm to 5:45pm.

Thursdays: 10:50am 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. I'm also available by appointment.

Office: CDM 616

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

Course Management System: D2L.

Prerequisites: DC 508 and timely completion of a Thesis Rough Draft

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Students will complete a show bible, pilot, and future episode of an original television concept. In a workshop environment, students will get extensive feedback from their instructor and peers. The thesis project is to serve as the culminating piece in the student's MFA screenwriting portfolio and must be approved by a Thesis Committee in order for a student to graduate. (This is the description for the two course series. This Quarter we'll be doing part two).

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

- Familiarization with getting and receiving notes.
- Exposure to the process of writing a spec script of an existing show
- Thorough, professional character and deadline driven story development
- Exposure to professional writing practices and pace
- Continued mastery of television storytelling style and narrative technique
- Fostering and maintaining the environment of a professional writers room
- Refining and advancing the practices of giving and receiving thoughtful, articulate criticism
- Consistent delivery of outstanding creative and analytical work

This class will, as closely as possible, mirror the real world dynamic between Writer and Development Executive with the Student in the role of Writer and the Instructor in the role of Development Executive, minus the contradictory notes and creativity-crippling fear of losing his job.

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 clear, the plot moves along with escalating tension, the themes ring true and the work is technically, structurally and grammatically correct and properly formatted. **We write like professionals in this class.**

A lot of this course will be Workshop format. We'll be doing our best to duplicate the atmosphere of a Writer's Room. 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 shaping concept but also honing story and tightening scenes.

## **COURSE OUTCOMES:**

### **Drama Thesis Packet:**

- Revised Pilot Script (50-65 pages)
- Revised Show Bible
- Beat Sheets for Three Future Episodes

### **Comedy Thesis Packet:**

- Revised Pilot Script (30-36 pages)
- Revised Show Bible
- Beat Sheets for Three Future Episodes
- Spec Script of an Original Episode of an Existing Show (30-36 pages)

**THIS IS ALL DUE MARCH 18, 2016.**

## **REQUIREMENTS:**

Actively participate in class discussions, read and critique your own and fellow students' work, complete all homework assignments. **Strict adherence to deadlines is expected.** Attendance is MANDATORY. This is a lot of work to do in 10 weeks. DO NOT FALL BEHIND!

## **ASSIGNMENTS:**

All work must be typed and submitted on D2L by the deadline. **This deadline will be Sunday nights at 6:00pm. LATE WORK WILL NOT BE READ IN CLASS!**

Students will receive an email Sunday nights with the reading for class on Tuesday. You are expected to READ ALL OF THE MATERIAL and be ready to discuss it in class on Tuesdays. **If the professor gets the sense students are not doing the reading, he reserves the right to demand written notes on everything.**

## **SPELLING, GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION:**

*You're* in *your* second year of an MFA program in writing. **There is NO EXCUSE for submitting work which contains spelling, grammatical or typographical errors.** *It's your* work, *you're* responsible for *its* clarity. The course policy on such errors is as follows:

- After the third spelling, grammatical or typographical error, your grade on the assignment is lowered a full letter grade.
- After the fifth spelling, grammatical or typographical error, your grade on the assignment is lowered two full letter grades.
- **After the eighth spelling, grammatical or typographical error, we stop reading your work and you forfeit the right to class feedback for that week.**

## **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, sometimes 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, not some wimpy poetry retreat. Sometimes in a workshop people lose fingers. That's just how you learn. Be hard on your classmates' writing and respect them when they're hard on yours. We're all in here to get better and you can't do that without a little constructive criticism. But cruelty and rudeness will not be tolerated. **Ideally, by the end of this course you'll be observant and analytical enough to never make a critique unless it's also accompanied by a suggested fix.**

## LASTLY:

By and large, you may say anything in this class, except one phrase. "You didn't get what I was going for." This phrase is the hallmark of young, defensive artists across all media and it's usually the first phrase they utter upon hearing criticism and suffering the pangs of an injured ego. However, it is a nonsense expression, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the relationship between writer and reader. If your work is muddled, vague or otherwise ineffective it is not the reader's responsibility to 'get it,' it is your responsibility to improve your writing. In writing, onus of clarity is on the creator, not the beholder. If I didn't get what you were going for it is because you did not take me there. When feedback comes, don't get defensive. Let your ego go, listen to what's being said, consider new approaches. **The first step to improving your writing is to take ownership of its shortcomings.**

## Grading:

ALL: Pitches for THREE to FIVE Future Episodes	100
ALL: Class Participation and Attendance	200
Comedy Pitches for Spec Stories	50
Comedy: Beat Sheet for Spec	50
Comedy: Outline for Spec	100
Comedy: Spec Cold Open and Act One	50
Comedy: Spec Act Two	50
Comedy: Spec Act Three	50
Comedy: Beat Sheets for THREE Future Episodes	150
Comedy: Rewritten Pilot Cold Open and Act One	50
Comedy: Rewritten Pilot Act Two	50
Comedy: Rewritten Pilot Act Three	100
Drama: Beat Sheet for New Ep 1	50
Drama: Beat Sheet for New Ep 2	50
Drama: Beat Sheet for New Ep 3	50
Drama: Rewritten Teaser	100
Drama: Rewritten Act One	100
Drama: Rewritten Act Two	100
Drama: Rewritten Act Three	100
Drama: Rewritten Act Four/ Finale	150

## THE SCHEDULE:

**Classes may contain lectures, screenings or guest speakers, but the bulk of our time will be spent in a workshop environment.**

## Before the First Class:

Comedy Writers: Five Pitches for Spec Episode of your series.

Everyone: Read and provide WRITTEN NOTES on your assigned pilot.

January 5

**Week One:**

On dealing with notes. A script note versus a premise note. Exchange of notes. Discussion of writing process. Outline of the plan for this quarter.

Discuss Sitcom Spec Episode Pitches.

Homework:

All: Pitches for THREE to FIVE future episodes.

Comedy: Beat Sheet for Spec Episode

January 12

**Week Two**

Discuss Pitches, Discuss Beat Sheets.

Homework:

Drama: Beat Sheet for first future episode.

Comedy: Outline for Spec Episode

January 19

**Week Three:**

Discuss Beat Sheets and Outlines.

Homework:

Drama: Beat Sheet for second future episode.

Comedy: Spec Cold Open and Act One

January 26

**Week Four**

Discuss Beat Sheets, Spec Cold Open and Act one.

Homework:

Drama: Beat Sheet for third future episode.

Comedy: Spec Act Two

February 2

**Week Five**

Discuss Beat Sheets, Spec Act Two.

Homework:

Drama: Rewritten Teasers

Comedy: Spec Act Three.

February 9

**Week Six**

Discuss Teasers, Discuss Spec Act Three

Homework:

Drama: Rewritten Act One

Comedy: Beat Sheets for THREE future Episodes, (pitched Week Two).

February 16

**Week Seven**

Discuss Rewritten Act One, discuss Beat Sheets for Future Episodes.

Homework:

Drama: Rewritten Act Two

Comedy: Rewritten Pilot Cold Open and Act One.

February 23

**Week Eight**

Discuss Rewritten Act Two and Pilot Cold Open and Act One.

Homework:

Drama: Rewritten Act Three

Comedy: Rewritten Pilot Act Two

March 1

**Week Nine**

Discuss Rewritten Act Three and Rewritten Pilot Act Two

Homework:

Drama: Rewritten Act Four

Comedy: Rewritten Act Three

March 8

**Week Ten**

Discuss Final Acts.

**March 18: Thesis Packets due to Committee by Midnight.**

**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 PLoS 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