

DC 101 - 601 Screenwriting for Majors

SPRING QUARTER

**Tuesday 1:30PM - 4:45PM**

Loop Campus, 14 E. Jackson Daley building, room 209

Instructor: Lee Madsen

Office hours - TBA

Email: [lmadsen3@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:lmadsen3@cdm.depaul.edu) (best way to reach me)

Course Management system: D2L

### **Summary of the course**

This course is an introduction to and overview of the elements of theme, plot, character, and dialogue in dramatic writing for cinema. Emphasis is placed on telling a story in terms of action and the reality of characters. The difference between the literary and visual medium is explored through individual writing projects and group analysis. Development of synopsis, treatment and drafts for a short theatrical screenplay: theme, plot, character, mise-en-scene and utilization of cinematic elements.

### **Goals for this course**

By the end of this course you will have a fundamental understanding of the structure of a typical Three-Act feature length screenplay, as well as be able to write a logline, and step outline for a short screenplay. You will also be introduced to visual storytelling through the screenplay form and will see how key incidents, story progressions, conflict and resolution and character arcs affect a film. Ultimately you will utilize these concepts to complete a 15 page screenplay for a short film.

### **Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will be able to explain, in well-written prose, what a

work of art is about and/or how it was produced.

2. Students will be able to comment on the relationship between form and content in a work.

3. Students will be able to assess the formal aspects of their subject and put those qualities into words, using, when appropriate, specialized vocabulary employed in class and readings.

4. Students will be able to contextualize a work of art. They will be able to do so with respect to other works of art in terms of defining its place within a broader style or genre. They will also be able to contextualize a work of art in terms of contemporaneous aesthetic, social, or political concerns, discussing how these might shape the work's reception and how that reception might differ amongst various peoples and historical periods.

### **How Learning Outcomes Will Be Met**

Through a series of lectures and discussions students will be introduced to the formal art of screenwriting. They will apply their knowledge in the crafting of a short screenplay that will be workshopped over the course of the term as well as a critical analysis of a script in its translation to the content of the on screen theatrical release.

### **Course Objectives - By the end of the term students will:**

Demonstrate an understanding of the fundamentals of effective storytelling. Demonstrate an understanding of the three act screenplay structure.

Write a complete short screenplay focusing on developing characters and creating tension.

**TEXTBOOKS** - "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

**Suggested Reading:**

*Zen in the Art of Writing* by Ray Bradbury

Screenplay by Syd Field

**Software needed:**

Celtx –free download or Final Draft (\$99 with student discount).

**Grading**

Class Attendance, Participation 15%

First Draft of Screenplay 10%

Midterm 15%

Assignments 1-6 30%

Final Script 30%

Extra credit assignments (if you need extra credit at the end of the quarter just ask me for it)

**Standards for Achievement:**

A = 100-93 A- = 92-90 B+ = 89-88 B = 87-83 B- = 82-80 C+ = 79-78 C=77-73C-=72-70 D+=69-68D=67-63 D- = 62-60 F = 59-0

Grade A:

Student performs in an outstanding way. Student exhibits achievement and craftsmanship in all work. Creative criteria is exceeded and student challenges him/ herself in project development. Student exhibits commitment to expanding ideas, vocabulary and performance.

Grade B:

Student performs beyond the requirement of the project. Student exhibits above average progress and craftsmanship. A creative

criterion is exceeded. Student exhibits above average interest in expanding idea, vocabulary, and performance.

Grade C:

Criteria of assignment is met, and all requirements are fulfilled. Student shows average quality work and minimum time and effort on projects. Student shows moderate interest.

Grade D:

Student performance is uneven and below average. Requirements for projects are only partially fulfilled. Minimal interest is shown and attendance, participation and involvement are inadequate.

Grade F

Student fails to meet minimum course requirements and shows no interest. Levels of participation and craftsmanship are extremely poor. Student's attendance is inadequate.

**Attendance** – Classes will consist of lecture, screenings, discussion, and creative exercises. Attendance is mandatory. An absence is defined as not showing up for class, or arriving more than 15 minutes late, or missing any 15 minute period during class time. I take attendance every class. If you arrive less than 15 minutes late, and do not hear your name called, make sure you let me know you are present so I do not mark you absent. Any absences will result in a reduction of the attendance/participation grade. **Anyone who misses 5 classes will automatically drop a letter grade. Anyone who misses 6 classes will automatically fail.** However, if you are legitimately sick, I mean really sick, please stay home. We don't want your evil germs. Please email me at [lmadsen3@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:lmadsen3@cdm.depaul.edu) if you are going to miss class.

**Class Participation**—Along with showing up, you are expected to join in class discussions, critique other people's work, and participate in workshops. Remember, this is your class, you will get out of it what you put in it. **Also, be advised that many of the assignments that you write for this class, with the**

**exception of your journals, will be read aloud.** My intention is not to embarrass anyone, but rather, have a fostering and openly creative environment where people are comfortable sharing their work.

**ON-LINE students** - Participation will be tracked through weekly discussion board posts, all on-line students must write their own response to the weekly question and respond to TWO CLASSMATES posts.

**Assignments and Exercises** – Class Work Assignments must be handed in on time. I will not accept late work. Do not use class time to finalize your projects. All assignments are due at the beginning of class, if you come in late with an assignment it will not be accepted. If it is an assignment that is to be uploaded it must be uploaded on time.

**D2L**-In an attempt to save some trees and cash, most assignments will be turned in via D2L. If you are unfamiliar with D2L please see me. In some cases, you must print and bring in an assignment. I will indicate in the syllabus how each assignment must be turned into me.

**ON-LINE Students** - Everything (assignments, midterm, discussion board posts and responses and journals) will be turned in or posted on D2L.

**Special Accommodations:** If you have any special considerations please see me.

**BACK UP YOUR WORK:** Failure of computer software and or Hardware will not be accepted as an extenuating circumstance for late projects or incomplete grades so back up your work daily.

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**Critiques:** Due to limited class time, not everyone's work will get a full review during class. If you'd like more feedback, arrange to discuss your work with me during my office hours.

**Cell Phones**—Use of cell phones in the class is prohibited. Please turn your phone off before entering class. Mistakes will happen (to me too), but repeated failure to turn your phone off will result in a lowered grade for the class. Absolutely no texting in class!

**Laptops**—No laptops in class. Unless you have a university verified need for a computer in class, please keep them in your bags.

**Course Lectures/Reading Assignments** – The assigned readings offer an opportunity for independent learning that supplements the lectures. Lectures will introduce material not available in the readings, and the readings will explore concepts not mentioned in class. It is not my intention to overwhelm you with reading, but rather to use the textbook as a way to support and reinforce the concepts we learn in class. I will also be adding supplemental readings throughout the quarter that are not outlined in the syllabus.

**Content Changes** – Depending on time factors, the assignments projected for the term may require slight alteration or rescheduling. I will contact you via email with any deviations from the syllabus. Please ensure that mail sent to the email address that you provided to the school is readily accessible.

## SCHEDULE

### Class 1 Tuesday March 29th

#### IN CLASS:

Introduction to the course and syllabus

What are your favorite movies/tv shows?

Why we tell stories. Why we write. What to write about

Screenwriting vs. novels and plays

Final Script guidelines

Intro to Loglines

\*20 minute break\*

What is a Screenplay?

Three act structure  
The Subject  
Plot points introduced

#### ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 1 (3%): Write 3 loglines for potential final short scripts for this class.

DUE: Tuesday April 5th - Be prepared to pitch them to the class.  
FORMAT: Typed, PRINTED and brought to class, also uploaded to D2L by class start

Assignment 2 (5%): 3-Act Structure--See D2L for assignment details  
DUE: April 12th  
FORMAT: Typed, uploaded to D2L

Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 3-40, 91-94, "The Hollywood Standard" Read Introduction – Page 27

### Class 2 Tuesday April 5th

**DUE: Assignment 1: Loglines, read aloud and pitch potential scripts to the class, Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 3-40, 91-94, "The Hollywood Standard" Read Introduction – Page 27**

#### IN CLASS:

Read loglines and choose which story you will develop for you final project \*20 minute break\*

Story and Character

Character Arcs

Build a character exercise

Character intro example

#### ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 3 (3%): Bring two (2) great character intros from produced screenplays. You don't need to write these, you just need to copy and paste them from a screenplay.

DUE: Tuesday April 12th - D2L & bring copy to class

FORMAT: Typed, printed and brought to class

Online script resources:

<http://www.script-o-rama.com/>

<http://www.sfy.ru/scripts.html?range=0>

<http://www.awesomefilm.com/>

<http://www.scriptfly.com/screenplays/index.shtml>

<http://www.simplyscripts.com/>

Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 46-49, 52-59, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 29-62

### Class 3 April 12th

**DUE: Assignment 2: Three Act Structure & Assignment 3: Character intros from produced screenplays, read aloud in class**

IN CLASS:

Read Character intros Endings and Beginnings Two Incidents

Watch Short Films

\*20 min break\* Treatments

Step Outlines

Plot Points review Building the Story

ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 4 (5%): Character Bio, Craft a character bio for your protagonist. See

description on D2L for details. Due April 19th on D2L.

Assignment 5 (6%): Write a step outline of your final project

DUE: Tuesday April 19th

FORMAT: Typed, PRINTED and brought to class, ALSO Uploaded to D2L

Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 41-42, 63-65



## Class 4 Tuesday April 19th

**DUE: Assignment 4 Character Bio & Assignment 5 Step Outline. DUE: Reading "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 41-42, 63-65**

IN CLASS:

Scene

Sequence

Presentation/Discussion of Step Outlines \*20 minute class break\*

Presentation/Discussion of Step Outlines

ASSIGNMENTS: Watch Short Films and choose a favorite for the class to watch. **Reading:** "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 60-62, 78-80, 81-83, 88-90, "The

Hollywood Standard" Pages 81-102

## Class 5 Tuesday April 26th

**DUE: Reading "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 60-62, 78-80, 81-83, 88-90, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 81-102**

IN CLASS:

Presentation/Discussion of Step Outlines. Watch short films.

**Reading:** "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 84-87, 68-75, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 81-113

## Class 6 Tuesday May 3rd

**DUE: Reading "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 84-87, 68-75, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 81-113**

IN CLASS:

Presentation/Discussion of Step Outlines The Screenplay format

Software Final Draft and Celtx

Watch Short Films

## Genre

ASSIGNMENTS: Assignment 6 (8%): Genre assignment—A man and a woman arrive separately to a bookstore. She is concealing something in her clothing. He has a secret. Write 2 different 3-5 page scenes using the proper screenplay format. Include a clear beginning middle and end to the scene (think of it as a very short film) Choose 2 from the following genres:

- a. An Action film
- b. A Drama
- c. A Romantic Comedy
- d. A Mystery or Thriller

DUE: Tuesday May 10th FORMAT: PDF Uploaded to D2L

## Class 7 Tuesday May 10th

**DUE: Assignment 6 - Genre scenes.**

IN CLASS:

Dialogue good and bad Efficiency of words

Good Exposition and bad. Table Read Genre Scenes. \*20 minute break\* Midterm Review

ASSIGNMENTS: Study for test. **Start writing your short film script. First 5 pages due May 17th**

**Reading:** "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 95-98, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 131-139

## Class 8 Tuesday May 17th

**Due: First 5 pages of your script. Reading Due: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 95-98, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 131-139**

IN CLASS: Midterm (15%) \*20minute break\*

Table Read Genre Scenes give feedback

Assignment: Continue writing your final short film screenplay (10%). First 10 pages Due Tuesday May 24th. UPLOAD YOUR PAGES TO YOU PEER FEEDBACK GROUP ON D2L DISCUSSION BOARD - GIVE FEEDBACK.

### Class 9 Tuesday May 24th

**Due: First 10 pages of your short film screenplay**

IN CLASS:

Table Read First 10 pages of short film scripts give feedback. One on One conferences with anyone who needs advice/help etc.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Continue to give feedback to you peer group on the discussion board. Complete your first draft of your short film script 15 pages (30%). FORMAT: CELTX PROJECT or FINAL DRAFT uploaded to D2L.

### Class 10 Tuesday May 31st

**Due: First Draft of your script.**

Assignments: Revise your script. FINAL DRAFT OF YOUR SCRIPT DUE JUNE 7TH

### Final Exam Tuesday JUNE 7th

**Final Drafts (30%) due at the beginning of the class period (uploaded to D2L)**

3 of these will be read aloud in class, if selected for class reading, please upload a copy by 11am so I can make copies for class.

**Attendance to this class is mandatory. If you do not attend class you will receive a 0 on your final draft! This draft is worth 25% of your grade. EXCEPTIONS: ON-LINE STUDENTS are not required to show up to the final exam class.**

## **Course Policies (from the university)**

### **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