

# DC 101-402 Screenwriting for Majors

**When:** Tuesday & Thursday · 11:50am - 1:20pm

**Where:** CDM RM 228 Loop Campus

**Instructor:** Josh Wolff · [jwolff4@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:jwolff4@cdm.depaul.edu) · Room 434 CDM Building

**Office hours:** M 10:55am-11:40am, Tu 10:55am-11:40am, W 11:00am-11:45am,  
Th 10:55am-11:40am

## Summary of Course

This course introduces digital cinema majors to dramatic writing for motion pictures. The topics covered include theme, plot, story structure, character, and dialogue. Emphasis is placed on telling a story in visual terms. Students are expected to develop and write a short screenplay.

## Learning Outcomes

- Students will develop a solid understanding of the relationship between character and story structure.
- Students will be able to identify the various narrative tools available to filmmakers in the writing and producing process.
- Students will develop a cinematic vocabulary with which to discuss films critically.

## Prerequisites

None

## Grading

Class Attendance & Participation	10%
Scene Assignments	30%
Step Outline	10%
Short Script Draft I	20%
Short Script Draft II	30%

*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 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)

## Screenwriting Software

You will be required to use screenwriting software toward the end of the 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>. Writer Duet is also free and available at: <https://www.writerduet.com>. All assignments are to be saved in PDF.

## Attendance

Attendance and participation is mandatory. An absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or arriving more than 15 minutes late to class, constitutes a reduction in your overall grade.

## D2L

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 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

(T = Tuesday, R = Thursday)

### Week 1

R. 9/8 Lecture: Course Intro, Cinematic Storytelling, Formatting

*Assignment: Scene Assignment 1*

*Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 3-40, 88-90, "The Hollywood Standard" Intro – Page 28*

### Week 2

T. 9/13 Workshop: Scene Assignment 1

*Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 43-45, 63-65, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 29 – 80*

R. 9/15 Lecture: Structure, Character

*Assignment: Scene Assignment 2*

### Week 3

T. 9/20 Workshop: Scene Assignment 2

*Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 46 – 49, 81 – 83, 91 – 94*

R. 9/22 Lecture: Conflict - Goals, Stakes & Urgency

*Assignment: Scene Assignment 3*

### Week 4

- T. 9/27 Workshop: Scene Assignment 3  
*Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 60 – 62, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 103 – 113*
- R. 9/29 Lecture: Plot & Theme  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment 4*

### Week 5

- T. 10/4 Workshop: Scene Assignment 4  
*Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 68 – 70, 84 – 87, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 81 – 102*
- R. 10/6 Lecture: Dialogue  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment 5*

### Week 6

- T. 10/11 Workshop: Scene Assignment 5  
*Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 49 – 59, 76 – 80, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 131 – 139*
- R. 10/13 Lecture: Layering and Details, Exposition  
*Assignment: Scene Assignment 6*

### Week 7

- T. 10/18 Workshop: Scene Assignment 6
- R. 10/20 Lecture: Writing the Short Script  
*Assignment: Step Outline*

### Week 8

- T. 10/25 Workshop: Step Outline
- R. 10/27 Lecture: Guest Lecture  
*Assignment: Short Script Draft I*

### Week 9

- T. 11/1 Workshop: Short Script Draft I
- R. 11/3 Workshop: Short Script Draft I  
*Assignment: Short Script Draft II*

## Week 10

- T. 11/8 Lecture: Common Missteps / Genre Writing  
*Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 95 – 97*
- R. 11/10 Lecture: Rewriting / Going Forward in Film School  
*Assignment: Short Script Draft II*

## Week 11

- T. 11/15 Course Summary, Going Forward in Film School  
***Short Script Draft II - Due Tuesday, November 22nd 11:30am***

## Assignments

### Scene Assignments (30% of Final Grade)

You will write a total of six scene exercises throughout the quarter based on the screenwriting conventions we cover in class – Specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided after the lectures. These exercises will typically be assigned on Thursday and will be critiqued in class the following Tuesday. You are expected to bring 3 copies of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a PDF copy to the corresponding Dropbox link on D2L. Each scene assignment is 5% of your final grade (30% in total).

### Step Outline (10% of Final Grade)

A step outline should feature every scene in your short screenplay. Each scene will contain a slug line for the location and time of day. The scenes should be numbered as they will eventually appear in your screenplay followed by a brief description of what will transpire in that scene.

Example:

Scene 1: INT. DON CORLEONE'S OFFICE - DAY

AMERIGO BONASERA, undertaker, tells DON VITO CORLEONE, the aging head of the successful Corleone crime family, the story of how his daughter was assaulted by two men. Don Corleone will help Amerigo deal with his problem in exchange for a favor in the future. The meeting, which is being held during the wedding of Corleone's daughter, is very matter-of-fact/business-like.

General Guidelines

- Use 12 pt. Courier New Font
- Make sure your scene descriptions are in present tense
- Use all CAPS when introducing a new character.
- Must be submitted as a PDF file

Please make a point to speak with me if you're planning to write an unconventional narrative that will require an unorthodox outline. You are expected to bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a PDF copy to the corresponding Dropbox link on D2L before class on Tuesday, October 25th.

### **Short Script Draft I (20% of Final Grade)**

You are expected to submit the first draft of your short screenplay to the corresponding D2L Dropbox link before class on Tuesday, November 1. A couple of things to keep in mind, as this assignment is 20% of your final grade:

- 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.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - It may be a good idea to have a friend/family member look over the script as well.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required. Refer to texts for the course, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.
- Action description should be lean - Only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Use your plot points as a guide.
- Avoid exposition-heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Your script must be at least 8 pages, but should not exceed 15 pages.
- Ask questions if you need help.
- 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.

### **Short Script Draft II (30% of Final Grade)**

You are expected to submit your revised short screenplay to the corresponding D2L Dropbox link no later than Tuesday, November 22nd by 11:30am. A couple of things to keep in mind, as this assignment is 30% of your final grade:

- The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort.
- You must include a cover page.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops and self-evaluation in order to craft your revised draft.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- 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. Refer to the textbook for this class, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.
- Your script must be at least 8 pages, but should not exceed 15 pages.

## **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.

## **Attitude**

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.

## **Civil Discourse**

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. I will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

## **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!

### **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 exceptional 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