

## **DC201 Introduction to Screenwriting**

Winter Quarter 2017

Tues/Thurs, 11:20-12:50 pm, STDC 330

Instructor: Kevin Endres

Office: JTR209 or STDC332

Office hours: 8:00-9:00am, Tu/W and by appointment

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### **Course Description**

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.

**Learning Domain Description** — DC 201 Introduction to Screenwriting is included in the Liberal Studies program as a course with credit in the Arts and Literature domain. Courses in the Arts and Literature domain ask students to extend their knowledge and experience of the arts while developing their critical and reflective abilities. In these courses, students interpret and analyze particular creative works, investigate the relations of form and meaning, and through critical and/or creative activity, come to better understand the original audience that witnessed a work of art and how its meaning and significance changes over time. These courses focus on works of art or literature, however the process of analysis may include social, cultural, and historical issues. Genres covered in this domain include literature, the visual arts, media arts, the performing arts, music, and theater.

### **Learning Objectives**

After successful completion of this course students will:

- have a fundamental understanding of the structure of a typical Three-Act feature length screenplay
- be able to write a logline and step outline for a short screenplay
- be introduced to visual storytelling through the screenplay form
- see how key incidents, story progressions, conflict and resolution, and character arcs affect a film

Learning objectives will be met through creative writing assignments and analysis of produced scripts. In addition, students will write and revise a 15 page screenplay, satisfying the Arts and Literature domain writing requirement.

### **Required Textbooks and materials**

*The Screenplay* by Syd Field ISBN-13: 978-0385339032  
A blank “journal” book to write in (5 x 8 is a good size)

**Suggested Reading:**

*Several Short Sentences About Writing* by Verlyn Klinkenborg  
*Zen in the Art of Writing* by Ray Bradbury  
*The Art of Dramatic Writing* by Lajos Egri

**Software needed:**

Celtx – free download or cloud account (or other screenwriting program)  
Writer Duet (browser based)

**Grading**

Attendance and participation 10%	A = 100-93 A- = 92-90
Daily Journal 10%	B+ = 89-88 B = 87-83
First Draft of Screenplay 10%	B- = 82-80 C+ = 79-78
Midterm 15%	C = 77-73 C- = 72-70
Assignments 1-6 30%	D+ = 69-68 D = 67-63
Final Script 25%	D- = 62-60 F = 59-0

**Standards for Achievement:**

**Grade A:**

Student performs in an outstanding way. Student exhibits achievement and craftsmanship in all work. Creative criteria are 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 ideas, vocabulary, and performance.

**Grade C:**

Criteria of assignment are 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 4 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 [kendres@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:kendres@cdm.depaul.edu) if you are going to miss class and make arrangements to have the absence documented by the Dean of Students Office.

**Class Participation**—Along with showing up, you are expected to join in class discussions, critique other people's work, and participate in workshops. We are a community. We're all here to support each other. Remember, this is your class, you will get out of it what you put in it.

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 to have a fostering and openly creative environment where people are comfortable sharing their work.

**Respect** — Please be respectful of everyone's opinions, tastes, and beliefs. We do not have to agree on everything but we should be able to discuss anything civilly. This is not the comments section on YouTube.

Please respect the films we'll watch and the scripts we'll read, some of which will have mature themes and situations. During screenings, please do not talk and keep all comments/observations to yourself.

**Assignments and Exercises** – Class work and 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 to D2L it must be uploaded on time. Dropboxes on D2L close automatically so you will not be able to turn work in late.

**D2L** - In an attempt to save some trees and cash, assignments will be turned in via D2L unless otherwise noted. If you are unfamiliar with D2L please see me. In some cases, you must print and bring in an assignment, which are noted on the syllabus.

**Special Accommodations:** If you need any special considerations please see me after class or send me an email before the start of the second class period.

**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. I recommend automatic backup services like BackBlaze or CrashPlan, though they are not required for this class.

**Cell Phones**—Use of cell phones in the class is prohibited. Please turn your phone off before entering class. Mistakes will happen 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. No exceptions.

**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. All updates to the syllabus will be announced on D2L, and updated syllabus files will be available for download there.

Last day to withdraw (without penalty): 1/15/2017

Last day to withdraw (with penalty): 2/19/2017

### Class 1 -- 1/3

#### IN CLASS:

Introduction to the course, syllabus, and each other

Why we tell stories and why we write

What to write about

Screenwriting vs. novels and plays

Final Script guidelines (briefly)

Intro to Loglines

Story game (if time)

#### ASSIGNMENTS:

Journal (10%): Start your journals. These must be handwritten, in a notebook or journal book. Write *at least one page a day*, every day, including weekends from now until the end of the quarter. Put the date and time on each page before you start writing.

These pages can be about anything: your day, what you fed your dog, your annoying neighbor, your script for this class, that dream you had, how you felt when you explained to your roommate that there is a “correct” way to stack dishes in the dish rack and then freaked out because you realized you were becoming your father, wait, that was me. You don’t have to be profound or insightful, (but it’s okay if you are). The idea here is to get you in the habit of writing. **I will not read your pages.** I will, however, scan them while I count the number of pages you produce. **THIS IS WORTH 10% OF YOUR GRADE** (a full letter grade).

DUE: Last day of class -- 3/9

FORMAT: *Handwritten* in a notebook or journal (to be returned at the end of the class period).

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

DUE: 1/10 -- be prepared to pitch them to the class.

FORMAT: Typed, **PRINTED** and brought to class, also uploaded to D2L by class start

WATCH: Star Wars (Episode IV--A New Hope--The Original Movie) if you haven’t seen it. Re-watch it if it has been a while. I will make the film available via ColTube ([coltube.cdm.depaul.edu](http://coltube.cdm.depaul.edu)).

READ: Chapters 1-3 of Syd Field

Class 2 -- 1/5

DUE: Reading

IN CLASS:

Story game (if missed 1/3)

What is a Screenplay?

Three act structure

The Subject

Plot points introduced

ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 2 (5%): 3-Act Structure--3 Act Structure breakdown. Watch one of the following movies (if you haven’t seen any before or if you haven’t seen any recently): Toy Story, Shrek, Indiana Jones, or Chinatown. They’re all available on [coltube.cdm.depaul.edu](http://coltube.cdm.depaul.edu). Identify the following: set-up, protagonist and super objective, antagonist, first plot point, main conflict, at least three obstacles, second plot point, resolution. Write 1-2 sentences explaining the set-up, main conflict, resolution, and supporting your choice for the first plot point and second plot point.

DUE: 1/12

FORMAT: Typed, uploaded to D2L

READ: Chapters 4-5 of Syd Field

Class 3 -- 1/10

DUE: Assignment 1: Loglines, read aloud and pitch potential scripts to the class,  
Reading

IN CLASS:

Read loglines and choose which story you will develop for your final project

Class 4 -- 1/12

DUE: Assignment 2: 3 Act Structure

IN CLASS:

Story and Character

Character Arcs

Build a character exercise

Character intro example

ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 3 (3%): Find 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: 1/17

FORMAT: Typed, **PRINTED** and brought to class, and uploaded to D2L

Online script resources:

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

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

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

Google

READ: Chapter 6-8 Field

READ: Assigned script excerpt

Class 5 -- 1/17

DUE: Assignment 3: Character intros from produced screenplays, read aloud in class

IN CLASS:

Read Character intros

Endings and Beginnings

Two Incidents

Watch The Lunch Date and discuss

ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 4 (5%): Character Bio, Craft a character bio for your protagonist. Write two to three pages, double spaced, creating your character's backstory. Anything that's important for you as the writer to know about the character is fair game. Who is he/she? How old? Where from? Aspirations? Job? Relationships? Embarrassing stories?

Traumas? Fears? Etc. Think carefully about this assignment. This is one of your best windows into your character's mind.

DUE 1/24

FORMAT: Typed, uploaded to D2L

READ: Chapters 9-11 Field

Class 6 -- 1/19

DUE: Reading

IN CLASS:

Treatments

Step Outlines

Plot Points review

Building the Story

ASSIGNMENTS:

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

DUE: 1/26

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

Class 7 -- 1/24

DUE: Assignment 4 Character Bio

DUE: Reading

IN CLASS:

Scenes

Sequences

ASSIGNMENTS: NONE

Class 8 -- 1/26

DUE: Assignment 5- Step Outlines due

IN CLASS:

Presentation/discussion of Step Outlines

Class 9 -- 1/31

DUE: Nothing

IN CLASS:

Finish presentation/discussion of Step Outlines

Short film screening and discussion if time allows

Class 10 -- 2/2

DUE: Nothing

IN CLASS:

The Screenplay format

Software Final Draft and Celtx (and WriterDuet, etc)

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 2-4 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: 2/16

FORMAT: PDF Uploaded to D2L

Class 11 -- 2/7

DUE: Nothing

IN CLASS:

Dialogue -- good and bad

Efficiency of words

Exposition -- good and bad

ASSIGNMENTS: Continue working on your Genre scenes

READ: Chapters 12-14 Field

Class 12 -- 2/9

IN CLASS:

Midterm Review

Watch short films, discuss

ASSIGNMENTS: study for the test.

Class 13 -- 2/14

DUE: Nothing



IN CLASS:  
Midterm (15%)

ASSIGNMENTS:

Begin writing your first draft of your final screenplays (10%). First 5 pages

DUE: 2/21

FORMAT: PDF, Uploaded to D2L

Class 14 -- 2/16

DUE: Assignment 6 Genre due

IN CLASS:

Business

-Copyright

-Pitching

-Development

Watch short film to inspire you

Sign up for one-on-one conferences

Volunteer for first table read

Class 15 -- 2/21

DUE: First 5 pages of your screenplay

IN CLASS:

Table read selected genre scenes, give feedback/criticism

ASSIGNMENTS:

Continue writing your final screenplays. Second 5 pages DUE 2/28

FORMAT: PDF, Uploaded to D2L

I am asking for one volunteer to upload their completed first draft before class on Monday for a sample table read and critique.

Class 16 -- 2/23

IN CLASS:

Table read a volunteer's first draft

ASSIGNMENTS:

Complete first draft of your screenplay DUE 3/2

Class 17 -- 2/28

Due: Second 5 pages of screenplay

One-on-one conferences

Class 18 -- 3/2

**DUE: First Drafts due-UPLOADED TO D2L NO LATER THAN 7AM (so I can save you all money by making copies for you)**

IN CLASS:

Table reading and critique of screenplays in groups

Please bring 6 copies of your script if you did not upload it by 7am.

ASSIGNMENTS: Revise first drafts

Class 19 -- 3/7

DUE: Nothing

IN CLASS:

Table reading and critique of screenplays in groups

ASSIGNMENTS: Revise first drafts, Journals due March 14th at noon

Class 20 -- 3/9

DUE: Journals

IN CLASS:

Table reading and critique of selected screenplays as a class

ASSIGNMENTS: Revise first drafts, into final drafts

DUE: 3/15 at 12:00pm (noon)

FORMAT: uploaded to D2L

**Final Draft due March 15th at 12:00pm (noon)--worth 25% of your grade**

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

#### **Online Course Evaluations**

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 three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

**Academic Policies**

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: [cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment](http://cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment).

**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: [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu).

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