

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY: SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

DC501 Foundations of Screenwriting **Autumn 2018**

Wednesday 5:45 - 9:00 PM
14EAS, 507 (Loop)

Instructor: Scott Myers

Office: CDM 403

Office Hours: Tu: 1:00-4:00PM

Phone: 312-362-1120

Email: smyers15@depaul.edu

Course Description:

Students begin their screenwriting journey with a strong foundation in the basic building blocks of solid, engaging storytelling. Students will mine their own lives in order to create memorable stories, characters, and settings. Additionally, students will learn basic screenwriting skills such as character development, constructing atmosphere, and the fundamental components of a scene. PREREQUISITE(S): None.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will understand and apply the principles of storytelling and screenwriting through texts, writing exercises, and assignments.
- Students will begin to analyze and apply the world around them in their stories.
- Students will understand and practice the principles of a creative writing workshop.
- Students will develop loglines and an outline for a short screenplay.
- Students will create a short, produceable screenplay.

Texts and Films:

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

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

Additional essays will be provided by the instructor.

Short films will be screened in class, but students may be required to view additional films outside of class.

Required Software:

Final Draft or comparable screenwriting software.

D2L:

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

<https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/orgtools/CAS/Default.aspx> 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, discussion forums, and weekly assignments.

Grading:

Attendance and Participation (participation includes discussions, workshops, Morning Pages, and Spark Journals): 20%

First Three Creative Assignments: 15%

Loglines: 5%

Outline/Treatment of Short: 15%

First Draft: 15%
Second Draft: 15%
Final Draft and Refined Pitch: 15%

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.

Class Outline:

Week One, Sept. 5th: Course Intro, Formatting, Foundations of Workshopping, Storytelling Basics, and Beginning to Develop Your Voice

Please bring *The Hollywood Standard* to Class!

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, from page ix through page 27.

Creative Assignment I: (Storytelling)

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class.

Week Two, September 12th: Workshopping (AGAIN) and Conflict and Characters

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 28 and 29; 43 through 54; 63 through 76; 78 through 83.

First Workshop: Storytelling

Creative Assignment II: (Conflict and Characters)

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class.

Week Three, September 19th: Visual Storytelling and Dialogue

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 30 through 39; 60 through 62; 84 through 90.

Second Workshop: Conflict and Character

Creative Assignment III: (Visual Storytelling and Dialogue)

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class.

Week Four, September 26th: Putting it All Together: Writing the Dramatic Scene/What is a Sequence/Writing the Short Film I (including loglines)

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 91 through 94.

Third Workshop: Visual Storytelling/Dialogue

Assignment: THREE LOGLINES for Short Films Due.

Week Five, October 3rd: Writing the Short Film II (including step outlines and treatments)

Fourth Workshop: Pitch Loglines

Assignment: STEP OUTLINES or TREATMENTS for short films Due. .

Week Six, October 10th: Workshopping/The Professional Arena (Writers Rooms, Pitch Meetings, Meet and Greets, Producers and Directors, etc)/Rewriting /What To Do with All of These Notes

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 76 through 78; 55 through 59.

Fifth Workshop: STEP OUTLINES or TREATMENTS for short films

Assignment - First Draft/Revision of Treatment/Character Development Due - will be decided by professor

Week Seven, October 17th: INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH ME

Assignment: FIRST SET of Scripts Due (Half of the Class)

Week Eight, October 24th: Writing the Feature Film (Part I): Breaking Down the Beats

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 95 through 97. **Short Scripts.**

Sixth Workshop: FIRST SET of Scripts (Half of Class)

Assignment: SECOND SET of Scripts Due (Other Half of Class)

Week Nine, October 31st: Writing the Feature Film (Part II): Sequences

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 95 through 97.

Seventh Workshop: First Half of Short Films Workshopped

Workshop: SECOND SET of Scripts (Other Half of Class)

Assignment: ALL SECOND DRAFTS DUE

Week Ten, November 7th:

Eighth Workshop: ALL SECOND DRAFTS

Assignment: Final Drafts of Short Films and Refined Pitches Due by Wednesday, November 14th at the beginning of class.

Week Eleven: FINAL, November 14th: Refined Pitches in class and Final Scripts Submitted

Assignments:

Late assignments will not be accepted without the prior consent of the instructor and may result in a reduction in the student's grade.

Three Creative Assignments (15% of final grade)

These exercises will be based on the screenwriting conventions we cover in class. Specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided after the lectures and will be critiqued in class the following Monday. You are expected to bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L. Each assignment is 5% of your final grade (15% in total).

Loglines for Short Script (5% of final grade)

Develop three premise ideas for your short film. You will eventually develop one of these ideas into a short screenplay. Each premise should include character (protagonist), conflict (what is the central conflict of the narrative?) and a sense of resolution. Be mindful of the aim and limitations of the short film medium. Please bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L.

Outline or Treatment of Short Script (15%)

Taking your chosen idea, please develop a scene-by-scene outline for your short film. Use your plot points! Be ready to pitch the document in class. Please bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L.

Short Script Draft I (15% of final grade)

A few things to keep in mind as you write your scripts:

- 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 6 pages (not including title page), but should not exceed 10 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.

Please bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L.

Rewrite of Short Script (15% of final grade)

A few things to keep in mind as you REWRITE your scripts:

- The rewrite of your script be a marked improvement over your first draft.
- 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 6 pages (not including the title page), but should not exceed 10 pages.

Portfolio and Final Pitch Due (15% of your final grade)

Workshops, Attendance, and Participation (20% of your final grade):

Attendance

Attendance and participation is mandatory. An absence, which is defined as not showing up for class or arriving more than 10 minutes late to class, constitutes a reduction on your overall grade.

Participation

You may be called upon to discuss various topics on screenwriting and storytelling during class and discussions may develop throughout the course online, with which you are required to participate. Please

be prepared having read the texts and screened the assigned films. Also, spark journals and morning pages will be discussed 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 assignments and the first draft of your short screenplay. Please be sure to adhere to the following workshop guidelines.

Workshop Guidelines

- First and foremost, a workshop is about the piece of writing, not the writer. Both the writer and those critiquing the piece need to keep in mind that the goal is to make the writing the best it possibly can be.
- Workshops are never destructive. They are constructive. Writing is never “bad.” The writing is addressed so that it can get stronger.
- We will always start with something that is working in the piece.
- Then we will go to the aspects that are not yet fully developed or that are not quite working yet.
- The writer must stay quiet during the workshopping of her or his piece.
- If the majority of the readers agree on a particular element of the piece that is working or not working, listen. If the readers are completely divided, it simply may just be a matter of opinion.
- The writer should always listen, but ultimately must trust his or her gut. The writer’s name will be on the page when all is said and done.

Creative Subject Matter

As this is a creative writing course, controversial subject matter may enter into the conversation. Students should expect to read, hear, and participate in discussions about some stories which include varied subject matter including sex, drugs, alcohol, violence, politics, religion, and so forth. Students have the right to express themselves artistically in their writing and address challenging issues.

If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for personal reasons, you may be excused for the remainder of that class without penalty. Inclusion of individuals from the class, or direct personal attacks on members of the class will not be tolerated in course material. If you feel you are being individually targeted by material written or discussed in class, please inform the instructor as soon as possible.

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

Laptops/Cell Phones

On your honor as a DePaul University student and as a creative individual who aspires to learn the writing craft, you will not stray into any form of social media during class – except for classroom breaks.

Phones must be silenced and stowed unless needed for course work.

Office Hours and One On One Meetings

TUE 1:00-4:00PM in CDM 403. Drop by or schedule a meeting. I am happy to talk with you about the course content or anything related to the movie and TV business, screenwriting, writing in general, career considerations, etc.

In addition, we will schedule a **one on one meeting** with each student to discuss your story and any issues you may be having with the story development process.

Additional Policies and Information:

Withdrawal

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system at <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 on my.cdm.depaul.edu/.

- 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.

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 the professor. Plagiarism will earn you an immediate F in this course.

Alterations

The professor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at any time. Students will be apprised of any and all changes with clear instructions should they occur.

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.

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.

Lewis Center 1420,
25 East Jackson Blvd.
Phone number: (312)362-8002
TTY: (773)325.7296

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](#) or via a mobile device in class during the Week 9 session.