

WRITING THE TELEVISION SPEC SCRIPT – Winter 2022

SCWR 451 (Section 802)

Thursdays 5:45pm to 9:00pm

14 East Jackson, Room 207

Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA

Office Hours: Wednesdays: 10:45am to 12:15pm (Zoom), Thursdays: 2:45pm to 5:45pm (Loop). **Please make an appointment.**

Office(s): Loop: CDM 616

ndewitt@depaul.edu

Course Management System: D2L.

ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this class, students will learn the basic teleplay structures for both half-hour and hour-long television shows. Students will choose an existing show and write a spec episode, practicing the skills of matching character voice, structure, and tone. This course is repeatable.

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 Network Executive with the Student in the role of Writer and the Instructor in the role of Network 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 and show being scripted 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 and table reads, 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.

REQUIREMENTS:

Actively participate in class discussions, read and critique your own and fellow students' work, complete all in-class assignments and complete all homework assignments. **Strict adherence to deadlines is expected.** Attendance is mandatory.

ASSIGNMENTS:

All assignments must be typed and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work, you're responsible for its quality. All Scenes and Scripts must be in proper Screenwriting format. Use of screenwriting software such as Final Draft is highly recommended. All assignments should include your name and the date of the assignment.

Creative work is due Tuesdays at 5am.

A COUPLE OF NOTES ABOUT EMAILS:

- Please sign your emails.
- Please do not send materials via email unless they are requested by the instructor.

ONLINE COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

D2L: <https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home> Here students will find lecture slides, lecture videos, links to streams of the episodes for this course and any other relevant information they may need. This is where you will upload your assignments for this course. Login with Campus Connect information.

GRADING:

The course is out of 1,000 possible points.

Show Breakdowns: 100

Story Pitch 1: 40

Story Pitch 2: 60

Beat Sheet 1: 60

Beat Sheet 2: 90

Story Outline: 200

Final Script: 250

Class Participation: 200 (Class participation includes attendance, active involvement in discussions and the submission of your script pages on time for the class to read in weeks 9 and 10).

Grading Scale:

A: 92-100%; A-: 90-91.9%

B+: 88-89.9% B: 82-87.9%; B-: 80-81.9%

C+: 78-79.9%; C: 72-77.9%; C-: 70-71.9%

D+: 68-69%; D: 62-67.9%; Below 62% is an F

Add/ Drop dates can be found here: <https://academics.depaul.edu/calendar/Pages/default.aspx>

THE SCHEDULE:

This course is going to be hybrid for the first two weeks. During weeks 1 and 2, we will meet via Zoom during our scheduled class meeting time (Thursdays at 5:45pm) to introduce ourselves and go over some TV basics in week one, then talk about the shows we think we're going to write in week two. The assigned viewing for weeks one and two will be completed by students on their own time asynchronously. Hopefully in week three we will meet in person; however, in the event we remain online, the course will function largely as described above.

January 6

Class 1:

Introductions. Who are you and why are you here? What have you written? What TV Shows do you like to watch? What TV Shows do you think you might want to write?

Lectures: TV Basics, How do we study a show?

Screenings:

30 ROCK "When It Rains it Pours." (Season 5, Episode 2, Netflix, for sale)

LAW & ORDER: SVU "R.A.W." (Season 7, Episode 6, Peacock, for sale)

HOMEWORK:

Email: Email me the name of the show you think you want to spec by 5pm Tuesday, January 11. (You will be able to change your show if you want to).

Assignment: Three Breakdowns for a show you think you want to write. Format will be discussed.

Due before next class period.

January 13:

Class 2:

Be prepared to talk about the show you watched. This is also an opportunity for students to familiarize themselves with other shows they may wish to write. Students are responsible for having a working knowledge of all shows the class is writing.

Lecture: The Television Landscape and a discussion of Shows we'll write. What makes a good Spec Script? Writing someone else's characters while still displaying your own voice.

Screenings: TBD. (We will try to watch all the shows being written in class so folks have some context for giving feedback).

HOMEWORK:

Five story pitches. Be prepared to pitch your ideas to the class. These don't have to be 'great.'

Remember, this is brainstorming and there are no bad ideas in brainstorming.

Learn your show cold. Watch as many episodes as you can. A successful spec script demonstrates a keen understanding of a show. In order to know it, you have to watch it. Read scripts (provided by instructor).

January 20:

Class 3:

Story Pitches: Students will pitch story ideas and receive feedback from their fellow students and the instructor.

Lectures: Characterization, Tension

Screenings: TBD

Maybe a Zoom guest.

HOMEWORK:

Five Complete pitches. Revise, combine and otherwise improve your pitches. Elaborate on the three that are your favorite and really flush them out in a paragraph or two.

January 27:

Class 4:

Complete pitches. Students will pitch their more complete story ideas and receive feedback from their fellow students and the instructor.

Lectures: TBD

Screenings: TBD

Maybe a Zoom guest.

HOMEWORK:

Beat Sheets. Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed.

You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

February 3:

Class 5:

Workshop: Beat Sheets.

NOTE: If the Professor gets the sense that students are not reading each other's work, he reserves the right to collect WRITTEN NOTES from every student on every single piece of writing submitted for class.

Lectures: Outlines and the importance of outlining.

Maybe a Zoom guest.

HOMEWORK:

Revised Beat Sheets. Incorporate the feedback from class and your own improvements to really perfect your beat sheet. Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed.

You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

February 10:

Class 6:

Workshop: Revised Beat Sheets. Students will be split into 2 groups in order to manage the assigned reading.

Lecture: TBD

Maybe a Zoom guest.

HOMEWORK:

Story Outlines. Group 1, your story outlines are due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed. Group 2, you'll be submitting next week.

You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

February 17:

Class 7:

Workshop: Group 1 Outlines

Lecture: TBD

Maybe a Zoom guest

HOMEWORK:

Story Outlines. Group 2, your story outlines are due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed. Group 1, you'll be submitting pages next week.

You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

February 24:

Class 8:

Workshop: Group 2 Outlines

Lecture: Script Formatting

Maybe a Zoom guest

HOMEWORK:

Group 1 pages: Teaser or Cold Open plus Act one (9-18 pages depending on the show). Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed. Group 2, you'll submit pages next week.

You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

March 3:

Class 9:

Table Read: Group 1 Pages.

HOMEWORK:

Group 2 pages: Teaser or Cold Open plus Act one (9-18 pages depending on the show). Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed. Group 1, go to script.

You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

March 10:

Class 10:

Table Read: Group 2 Pages.

FINAL PROJECT:

Your completed SPEC SCRIPT.

Your Final MUST be uploaded to D2L by Thursday, March 17, 2022 at the end of the day.

College Policies

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.

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

Fax: (312)362-6544

TTY: (773)325.7296