

DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

SCWR 501 551: Writing for Film Thesis / Writing for TV Thesis

Fall Quarter 2022

Tuesdays, 5:45 – 9:00PM, 14 East Jackson, #206

Professor Fatou Samba: fsamba@depaul.edu

Office Hours: **Zoom Only**. Tuesdays 3:45PM-5:15PM, Wednesdays 2:00pm-3:30pm, by appointment only

Description

In this course, students complete the first draft of their MFA thesis project feature length film screenplay or original TV pilot script which they began developing in SCWR 500 / 550. The thesis project is to serve as the culminating piece in the student's MFA screenwriting portfolio and must be approved by a thesis committee in order for a student to graduate.

Objectives

- Set realistic goals and meet submission deadlines
- Engage in constructive critiques while workshopping each other's script pages
- Learn specific aspects of the screenwriting and TV writing craft
- Become familiar with contemporary screenplay and TV writing style
- Practice visual storytelling

Outcomes

- A 90+ page feature length original screenplay
- Or an original half-hour or one-hour TV pilot script
- TV writers will also create a series pitch deck

Prerequisites

SCWR 500 or SCWR 550

Course Management

This course is managed on **D2L**. There students will find announcements, reading and writing assignments, discussion boards, and additional materials.

The class will be divided into three groups (1, 2, 3). Every third week, each group's feature film writers will be responsible for presenting **2 sequences** (approximately 20-30 pages) for in-class workshopping. Writers working on TV pilot scripts will need to present 1-2 acts (10-25 pages) per workshop session.

We will **not** read these pages in class. Instead, each student will read the scripts for that week at home. **COME TO CLASS PREPARED TO PROVIDE DETAILED AND THOUGHTFUL FEEDBACK ON EACH SCRIPT.** Failure to read any of your classmates' pages will result in a reduction of your participation grade. Instructor feedback will consist of comments in class and verbal/written notes on D2L, when applicable.

Weekly writing assignments are due by **Midnight Saturday**. Upload to the appropriate Submissions folder and Discussion forum D2L site. Proper screenwriting software is required. Remember to save as PDF.

MAKE SURE YOU PROOFREAD, SPELLCHECK, AND GRAMMAR-CHECK YOUR PAGES.

Course Outline

WEEK 1, September 13:

Course overview and syllabus review, Discussion: Where are you with your story, plus the process moving forward, Group assignments: Groups 1, 2, and 3.

Guest Speaker: Jonathan Stokes

Watch at least 2 or 3 of the short videos in his series (on D2L) before class and come prepared to ask one good question.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Arrival* (Film), *Maid* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 1):

Film – Act One (SQ1, SQ2)

TV (1-hour) – Opening, Act One, and Act Two

TV (1/2-hour) – Teaser and Act One

Upload to submissions folder and discussions board.

Due: Saturday September 17 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

WEEK 2, September 20: In-class workshop: Group 1's pages.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Deadpool* (Film), *Insecure* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 2):

Film – Act One (SQ1, SQ2)

TV (1-hour) – Opening, Act One, and Act Two

TV (1/2-hour) – Teaser and Act One.

Upload to submissions folder and discussions board.

Due: Saturday, September 24 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

WEEK 3, September 27: In-class workshop: Group 2's pages.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Parasite* (Film), *Scandal* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 3):

Film – Act One (SQ1, SQ2)

TV (1-hour) – Opening, Act One, and Act Two

TV (1/2-hour) – Teaser and Act One

Upload to submissions folder and discussions board.

Due: Saturday October 1 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

WEEK 4, October 4: In-class workshop: Group 3's pages.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Nomadland* (Film), *Never Have I Ever* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 1):

Film – Act Two part A (SQ3, SQ4)

TV (1- hour) – Act Three

TV (1/2-hour) – Act Two

Due Saturday, October 8 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

WEEK 5, October 11: In-class workshop: Group 1's pages.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Get Out* (Film), *The Handmaid's Tale* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 2):

Film – Act Two part A (SQ3, SQ4)

TV (1- hour) – Act Three

TV (1/2-hour) – Act Two

Due: Saturday, October 15 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

WEEK 6, October 18: In-class workshop: Group 2's pages.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Booksmart* (Film), *Ted Lasso* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 3):

Film – Act Two part A (SQ3, SQ4)

TV (1- hour) – Act Three

TV (1/2-hour) – Act Two

Due: Saturday, October 22 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

WEEK 7, October 25: In-class workshop: Group 3's pages.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Moonlight* (Film), *Killing Eve* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 1):

Film – Act Two Part B (SQ5, SQ6)

TV (1- hour) – Act Four & Five, if applicable

TV (1/2-hour) – Act Three & Tag

Due: Saturday, October 29 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

WEEK 8, November 1: In-class workshop: Group 1's pages.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Logan* (Film), *Barry* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 2):

Film – Act Two Part B (SQ5, SQ6)

TV (1- hour) – Act Four & Five, if applicable

TV (1/2-hour) – Act Three & Tag

Due: Saturday, November 5 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

WEEK 9, November 8: In-class workshop: Group 2's pages.

Homework:

- Reading Assignment: *Jojo Rabbit* (film), *Mare of Easttown* – pilot (TV)
- Writing Assignment (Group 3):

Film – Act Two Part B (SQ5, SQ6)

TV (1- hour) – Act Four & Five, if applicable

TV (1/2-hour) – Act Three & Tag

Due: Saturday, November 12 by 11:59pm. Read their pages before next class.

We will set aside 20 minutes for course evaluations in class this week. You may complete the evaluation on a laptop or mobile device (details later).

WEEK 10, November 15: In-class workshop: Group 3's pages.

Homework:

- Writing Assignment: Groups 1, 2, and 3. Revise final script.
- Series Bibles (TV)

Revised final script and series bibles due in your D2L Submission Folder by 5PM, November 25.

Note: This draft is due to committee members on that date and time.

Grading

15%: Class participation and workshop feedback

15%: Opening, Act One, Act Two (1-Hour), Tease, Act One (1/2-Hour), Act One (Film)

15%: Act Three, Act Four, Act Five (1-Hour), Acts Two, Three, Tag (1/2-Hour), Act Two Part A (Film)

15%: Series Pitch Bible (TV), Act Two Part B (Film)

40%: Final Revised Script (including SQ7, SQ8 – Film)

Late work will not be accepted without a legitimate excuse communicated to the instructor in a timely fashion.

These values are minimums for each grade:

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|----|-----|----|------|
| A | =92 | C+ | =77 |
| A- | =90 | C | =74 |
| B+ | =87 | C- | = 70 |

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|----|-----|-----|-----|
| B. | =84 | D+. | =69 |
| B- | =80 | D | =65 |

A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work.

Screenwriting assignments must demonstrate professionalism and investment in the material, showcase techniques and ideas discussed in class, offer a unique take with a clear voice, and present a proper grasp of grammar, format and style.

Late work will not be accepted without a legitimate excuse communicated to the instructor in a timely fashion.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Each unexcused absence beyond the first equates to a loss of ten points from the student's final score. Three unexcused absences result in automatic course failure.

Excused Absence

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.

In-Class Workshops

By enrolling in this course, you agree to share your ideas and writings with the professor and other students in the class. You must acquire express written consent from any writer in the class should you wish to share their work with someone who is not enrolled in this course. Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. We must respect each other, our collaboration, and the work at hand. Be truthful, but sensitive when giving notes. Be prepared to solve problems instead of just pointing them out.

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. They should be taking notes.
- 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.

Content and Trigger Warnings

This course recognizes that to engage with media is to engage with historic and ongoing problematic representation, as well as the ways that harmful representation impacts students in different ways. Therefore, any course content displaying racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material will be made known in writing (*or wherever the professor plans to put those warnings, such as on the modules, via the newsfeed, or via email, etc.*) prior to the viewings, so that students may make informed decisions about their mental and emotional health and well-being. Students may inform the professor of any material that they cannot engage with to find a suitable alternative.

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

I will trust that 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.

COVID-19 Health & Safety Precautions

Keeping our DePaul community safe is of utmost importance in the pandemic:

1) Masks are not required in indoor spaces on campus. However, DePaul will continue to be a mask-friendly campus and wearing a mask will be highly recommended for all indoor spaces. If you are joining a meeting or gathering and a participant asks you to wear a mask, please do so. If you need one, masks are available at a limited number of first-floor desk areas near building entrances.

(3) keep current with your COVID-19 vaccinations or exemptions;

(4) stay home if sick;

(5) participate in any required COVID-19 testing;

(6) complete the online Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus training; and

(7) abide by the City of Chicago Emergency Travel Advisory. By doing these things, we are Taking Care of DePaul, Together.

The recommendations may change as local, state, and federal guidelines evolve. Students who have a medical reason for not complying with any requirements should register with DePaul's Center for Student with Disabilities (CSD).

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

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.

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 Class 9 session.

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.

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:

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|-----------------|--|
| 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 |

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.

Changes to 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 students will be notified via email.