

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY: SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

SCWR 250-401 Introduction to Television Writing

Fall 2023

Wednesdays 1:30pm-4:45pm

14 E. Jackson, Room 211 (Loop)

Instructor: Fatou Samba

Office Hours (ONLINE ONLY):

Tuesdays 1:30pm-6:00pm - <https://depaul.zoom.us/j/98328472271>

Drop-ins won't be available. Please schedule a Zoom meeting with me in Blue Star or by email to meet during my office hours, or by appointment.

Email: fsamba@depaul.edu

Course Description:

This course focuses on writing the sitcom and one-hour drama television formats. Students will examine the conventions of serialized and procedural series and will learn how the collaborative dynamic of the writer's room impacts story. The lectures and workshop provide a foundation of what it takes to be a professional staff writer and culminate in crafting a spec episode of a current television series.

Prerequisites: SCWR 100 or SCWR 101

Course Outcomes: Episodic outline, spec script for an existing series

Learning Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- create a spec script for an existing television series that captures the tone and tenor of the show
- recognize the different formats for television
- employ standard format for the chosen television series
- identify elements of scene craft, character development, and narrative structure
- apply a work-flow process to their creative writing
- revise their writing based on feedback from the professor and their peers
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

Required Textbooks:

- None
- Any other required supplementary reading materials such as television scripts or other documents will be posted on D2L.

Required Software:

Final Draft is the industry standard and is highly recommended. A student discount can be found here: [Final Draft - Educational Discount](#)

All assignments are to be saved in PDF!

Online Streaming Services:

For the first few weeks, you will watch a number of television pilots based on the weekly lectures. As such, you are required to have access to [Netflix and Hulu](#). If you aren't already subscribed, sign up here: www.netflix.com & www.hulu.com

- You are required to watch the assigned episodes even if you've watched them before. There are two reasons for this:
 - 1: The point of the screenings is to *analyze*, something we rarely do when just watching TV for fun. As such, I want you to watch the episode through an analytical lens, keeping in mind the standards and practices you've learned that week.
 - 2: The episode should be fresh in your mind to ensure you're able to properly participate in the post-screening discussions.
- I highly encourage you to take notes, either while watching or directly after.

Course Schedule:

AT HOME SCREENING: Modern Family: Pilot (Hulu)

Watch this episode BEFORE our first class Wednesday 9/6.

**WEEK 1
SEPTEMBER 6**

Introductions: Who am I? Who are you? What are you watching right now? Favorite shows. What show(s) are you considering writing a spec script for? Syllabus Overview.

LECTURE: The Spec Episode, Spec Dos and Don'ts, TV Basics (D2L)

TABLE READ: *Modern Family* Spec Episode

HOMEWORK:

SCREENING & ANALYSIS:

Ramy: Pilot - “Between the Toes” (Hulu)

Grey’s Anatomy: Pilot - “A Hard Day’s Night” (Netflix)

Respond to the prompts on the corresponding discussions board.

Decide what show you want to spec and write your name, the name of the series, and where it can currently be streamed in the Google Sheet provided on D2L by **Tuesday 9/12 at 5:00PM**.

WEEK 2**SEPTEMBER 13**

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION: *Ramy & Grey’s Anatomy*

LECTURE: Plot & Story, Finding Your Stories

SCREENING & SPEC TABLE READ: *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

HOMEWORK:

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: *Sex Education*: Episode 1 (Netflix)

Respond to the prompts on the corresponding discussions board.

SERIES OVERVIEW: Write an overview of your chosen series and prepare a 5-10-minute pitch to the class based on this overview. You do NOT have to decide what your episode is going to be about yet. The point is to simply introduce the show and the characters to people who may not be familiar with it. (example provided on D2L)

Upload your written overview to the Submissions Folder AND the Discussions Board.

PILOT BREAKDOWN: Write a Pilot Breakdown of your chosen series (example provided on D2L).

WEEK 3**SEPTEMBER 20**

WORKSHOP: 5-10-minute pitches of chosen TV series

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION: *Sex Education*

LECTURE: Loglines

SCREENING & DISCUSSION: *Abbott Elementary*: Pilot

HOMEWORK:

Write 3-5 loglines for different episode ideas you may want to write for your chosen series. Be prepared to pitch them to the class. Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussion Board.

2nd Episode Breakdown of chosen series.

**WEEK 4
SEPTEMBER 27**

WORKSHOP: Logline Pitches

LECTURE: Story Structure, Beat Sheets

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: *Breaking Bad*: Pilot

HOMEWORK:

Create a Beat Sheet for your episode. Upload to Submissions Folder.

DUE: TUESDAY October 3rd at 1:30pm

3rd Episode Breakdown of chosen series

**WEEK 5
OCTOBER 4**

Zoom Session: Individual meetings with me

Come prepared to discuss your beat sheet and your episode overall.

HOMEWORK:

RECORDED LECTURE: Outlines (on D2L)

READING: David Mamet (on D2L) (Do the reading before you begin work on your outline)

Develop your Beat Sheet into an Outline. Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussion Board.

**WEEK 6
OCTOBER 11**

WORKSHOP: Outlines (in groups)

HOMEWORK:

Start working on writing your episode. You don't need to submit these pages, but I recommend getting a head start before your Teaser and Act 1 are due in two weeks.

Watch/read an episode of your group members' shows by Wednesday OCT 25th!

**WEEK 7
OCTOBER 18**

No class! Use this time to write your episode.

HOMEWORK:

Write Act One of your episode. Cast all readers BEFORE class, including the reader of the scene direction. Feel free to write cast assignments on the discussions board when you post your pages.

Upload to Submissions Folder & Discussions Board.

Watch/read an episode of your group members' shows by next week!

**WEEK 8
OCTOBER 25**

WORKSHOP: Table read Act One (in groups)

HOMEWORK:

Write Act Two of your episode. Cast all readers BEFORE class, including the reader of the scene direction. Feel free to write cast assignments on the discussions board when you post your pages.

Upload to Submissions Folder & Discussions Board.

**WEEK 9
NOVEMBER 1**

WORKSHOP: Table read Act Two (in groups)

HOMEWORK:

Write Act Three of your episode. Cast all readers BEFORE class, including the reader of the scene direction. Feel free to write cast assignments on the discussions board when you post your pages.

Upload to Submissions Folder & Discussions Board.

WEEK 10
NOVEMBER 8

WORKSHOP: Table read Act Three.

HOMEWORK:

Revise & complete your episode based on feedback from myself, the class, and your own critique. This includes Acts 4 & 5 for applicable shows.

Upload the entire Spec Episode to Submissions Folder only.

WEEK 11
NOVEMBER 15

No Class! All SPEC SCRIPTS DUE at **1:30pm**

Your script must meet the minimum page requirement for an episode of the show you're writing. That means that if your show is 30 minutes, you should have AT LEAST 30 pages as 1 page roughly equals 1 minute of screentime. You won't be penalized for writing an episode that's too long, but an episode that's too short will result in a reduction of your grade.

The script should also be free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work; you're responsible for its quality.

Alterations:

The syllabus is subject to change. You will be notified of any such changes. Be sure to check D2L and emails frequently for the latest updates.

Grading:

Show breakdowns: 15%, Series overview and pitch: 10%, Loglines: 5%, Beat Sheet: 10%, Outline: 15%, Final script: 30%, Class Attendance & Participation: 15%

Grading Rubric:

A	95-100	C	73-76
A-	90-94	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	0-60

COURSE MANAGEMENT

Covid-19 Health and Safety Precautions

- 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.
- 2) 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) Stay home if sick
- 4) Keep current with your COVID-19 vaccinations or exemptions
- 5) If you test positive for COVID-19, follow all isolation guidance, including wearing a face mask.

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).

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 username and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, materials, weekly assignments, etc.

Attendance:

Attendance and participation are mandatory. An unexcused absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or individual meetings, constitutes a reduction in your participation grade.

Missing 3 or more sessions will result in an automatic failure in the class.

If you have to miss a class, inform me in advance. Letting me know in advance does not automatically excuse an absence, but it is the only way to present your case. If you fail to communicate to explain an absence, it will not be excused.

In order to petition for an excused absence, students who miss sessions 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.

Participation:

At this level students should be interested in the subject of the class. The only way to see this is through asking questions, participating in class discussions, or adding constructive comments to

other student's presentations and works. Feedback is an essential part of the class, and it's the only way for you to learn and grow as a writer. Students who don't provide feedback on their classmates' work can't expect to receive feedback on theirs. Failure to participate will result in a reduction of your grade.

Assignments:

All assignments for this course must be typed, free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work; you're responsible for its quality.

Assignments must be submitted on D2L and saved as PDF. Assignments not saved as PDF will receive a reduction in points, and you will be asked to reupload it correctly.

Assignments will be treated like absences, meaning that without **prior approval** and a **documented reason** for missing the deadline, late work will result in a reduction of your grade. Any assignment submitted a day or more late will not be accepted and automatically receive zero points. To avoid this, I suggest not waiting until the last minute to upload your homework. Be sure that you're also submitting the correct assignment. If for some reason D2L is giving you a hard time uploading, email it to me instead.

That said, I can be flexible about this as long as you communicate with me about how and when you will fulfill the requirements for any late assignments. If you need an extension on an assignment let me know BEFORE the deadline, and I will work with you.

Workshops:

By enrolling in this course, you agree to share your ideas and writings with the professor and other students in the class. That means that you must submit your assignments on time so other students may read and critique them in class. It also means that you have to participate in session discussions of your classmates' work that entails enthusiastic participation and offering constructive criticism. Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. If you are not willing to do this, reconsider taking this course.

You must acquire express written consent from any writer in the class should you wish to share his/her work with someone who is not enrolled in this course. 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 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.

Inclusivity Statement:

We are committed to the presence and contributions of all persons regardless of age, culture, abilities, bodies, ethnic origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, nationality, race, religion, or socioeconomic status. We believe that prejudice, oppression, and discrimination are detrimental to the growth of a rich and vibrant learning community. We believe that learning communities are filled with diverse participants, and that supporting the visibility of such diversity enhances the experiences of all community members. As such, this class environment values inclusiveness and the maintenance of a safe and accountable space for all participants.

Maintaining a safe and accountable environment means that we commit to treating each other with respect and care. It also means that it's understandable to make mistakes, and that we hold each other and ourselves accountable as we grow, by acknowledging and appreciating the diversity of voices and experiences within our community and commit to ensuring that all are welcome in this learning classroom. We have in this space a boundary for language and behavior that steps on, infringes on, and or specifically harms the mental and emotional wellbeing of all

participants in this class (students and teachers) and when such things appear, we will stop, when able, to address.

To report a concern about another student's conduct: <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/student-life/student-conduct/Pages/default.aspx>

To report a concern about faculty conduct: <https://offices.depaul.edu/human-resources/employee-relations/equal-opportunity/Pages/Discrimination-and-Harassment.aspx>

Students can also contact the Dean of Students Office with any concerns. <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/dos.aspx>

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. But know this: plagiarism will earn you an F in this course.

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 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.

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.

Phone number: (312)362-8002

TTY: (773)325.7296

Preferred Name & Gender Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the quarter so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal need. For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy:

<https://offices.depaul.edu/secretary/policies-procedures/policies/Pages/default.aspx>

Resources for Students in Need of Support

Safety and Mental health safety are important. If you find yourself in a state of distress, depression, or unsafe circumstances, please make use of any of the following resources should you seek counseling.

Depaul Student Counseling

Full time and Part time DePaul students may schedule appointments with the University Counseling Service Info here: <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/support-services/counseling/Pages/default.aspx>

The front desk staff is working remotely and will answer your call directly. If they are taking another call, please leave a message and your call will be returned within a business day. **If you would like to be contacted by a counselor please call (773) 325-7779 or (312) 362-6923.**

Office of Health Promotion and Wellness

Health Promotion and Wellness (HPW) provides holistic education, support and resources for individuals to establish and sustain long-term, healthy behaviors. In light of the COVID-19 impact on the University, the Office of Health Promotion and Wellness programs and services remain open and can be accessible to students remotely. Students can meet with a staff member via Zoom. Appointments can be requested by calling 773-325-7129 or [completing this online intake form](#).

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!