

DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

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

Fall Quarter 2023

Tuesdays, 5:45 – 9:00PM, CDM 723

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312-362-1120

Office Hours: **Online Only**. MOM 11:00AM-2:00PM (Zoom), 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

Textbook

The Protagonist's Journey: An Introduction to Character-Driven Screenwriting and Storytelling (Palgrave Macmillan)

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

Each student in that week's group will select other students as 'actors' for a table reading of the writer's pages.

!!! HAVE YOUR CAST LIST PREPARED BEFORE YOU COME TO CLASS !!!

Students are responsible for uploading writing assignments to their D2L Submission folder and Discussion forum. This must be done by class time when they are scheduled to read.

Instructor feedback will consist of comments in class and a one-on-one Zoom meeting. In the event we do not get to a student's pages in class or they miss a class with an excused absence, we will set a time for the student to do a Zoom call with the instructor: The student will read their pages aloud and the instructor will provide feedback at that time.

All written assignments must be typed with pages numbered. Title page:

Your Name

Course Number

Date

Writing Assignment: [Name of assignment]

Format: PDF.

Weekly writing assignments are due by **Midnight Sunday**. Upload to the appropriate Submissions folder and Discussion forum on the D2L site.

Screenwriting software: Final Draft, Fade In, or Movie Magic Screenwriter.

!!! MAKE SURE YOU PROOFREAD, SPELLCHECK, AND GRAMMAR-CHECK YOUR PAGES BEFORE UPLOADING TO THE D2L SITE!!!

Course Outline

WEEK 1, September 12: Course overview and syllabus review; Discussion: Where are you with your story, plus the process moving forward; Lecture: Format, Style, Scene-Writing, and Transitions; Group assignments: Groups A, B, and C.

- Reading Assignment: *Arrival* (Film), *Breaking Bad* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 1: The Protagonist's Journey

- Writing Assignment: Group A: Film – Act One (SQ1, SQ2) / TV (1-hour) – Opening, Act One, and Act Two / TV (1/2-hour) – Tease and Act One. **Due Sunday, September 17 by Midnight.**

WEEK 2, September 19: In-class table read and workshop: **Group A's pages.**

- Reading Assignment: *Deadpool* (Film), *Only Murders in the Building* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 3: Disunity
- Writing Assignment: Group B: Film – Act One (SQ1, SQ2) / TV (1-hour) – Opening, Act One, and Act Two / TV (1/2-hour) – Tease and Act One. **Due Sunday, September 24 by Midnight.**

WEEK 3, September 26: In-class table read and workshop: **Group B's pages.**

- Reading Assignment: *Parasite* (Film), *Empire* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 4: Deconstruction
- Writing Assignment: Group C: Film – Act One (SQ1, SQ2) / TV (1-hour) – Opening, Act One, and Act Two. **Due Sunday, October 1 by Midnight.**

WEEK 4, October 3 [ZOOM]: In-class table read and workshop: **Group C's pages.**

- Reading Assignment: *Nomadland* (Film), *Never Have I Ever* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 5: Reconstruction
- Writing Assignment: Group A: Film – Act Two Part A (SQ3, SQ4) / TV (1-hour) – Act Three, Act Four, and Act Five / TV (1/2-hour) – Act Two, Act Three, Tag. **Due Sunday, October 8 by Midnight.**

WEEK 5, October 10: In-class table read and workshop: **Group A's pages.**

- Reading Assignment: *Get Out* (Film), *The Handmaid's Tale* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 6: Unity
- Writing Assignment: Group B: Film – Act Two Part A (SQ3, SQ4) / TV (1-hour) – Act Three, Act Four, and Act Five / TV (1/2-hour) – Act Two, Act Three, Tag. **Due Sunday, October 15 by Midnight.**

WEEK 6, October 17: In-class table read and workshop: **Group B's pages.**

- Reading Assignment: *CODA* (Film), *Ted Lasso* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 9: Nemesis
- Writing Assignment: Group C: Film – Act Two Part A (SQ3, SQ4) / TV (1-hour) – Act Three, Act Four, and Act Five. **Due Sunday, October 22 by Midnight.**

WEEK 7, October 24: In-class table read and workshop: **Group C's pages.**

- Reading Assignment: *Moonlight* (Film), *Killing Eve* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 10: Attractor
- Writing Assignment: Group A: Film – Act Two Part B (SQ5, SQ6) / TV (1/2-hour and 1-hour) – Series Pitch Deck. **Due Sunday, October 29 by Midnight.**

WEEK 8, October 31: In-class table read and workshop: **Group A's pages (Film).**Review: **Group A's series pitch decks (TV).**

- Reading Assignment: *Nightmare Alley* (Film), *The Bear* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 11: Mentor
- Writing Assignment: Group B: Film – Act Two Part B (SQ5, SQ6) / TV (1/2-hour and 1-hour) – Series Pitch Deck. **Due Sunday, November 5 by Midnight.**

WEEK 9, November 7: In-class table read and workshop: **Group B's pages (Film).**Review: **Group B's series pitch decks (TV).**

- Reading Assignment: *Jojo Rabbit* (film), *Mare of Easttown* – pilot (TV)
- Textbook: Chapter 12: Trickster
- Writing Assignment: Group C: Film – Act Two Part B (SQ5, SQ6) / TV (1-hour) – Series Pitch Deck. **Due Sunday, November 12 by Midnight.**

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 14: In-class table read and workshop: **Group C's pages (Film).** Review: **Group C's series pitch decks (TV).** Lecture: Script Polish and Edit.

- Textbook: Chapter 14: Character Map
- Writing Assignment: Groups A, B, and C: Revise final script.

Revised final script due in your D2L Submission Folder by 5PM, November 22.

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

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

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:

A	= 93	C+	= 77
A-	= 90	C	= 74
B+	= 87	C-	= 70
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.

Participation

This class is a workshop. That means you are expected to focus on each writer's assignments, assess what works and what – in your opinion – needs work, express your thoughts, and come up with suggestions to improve scenes.

Even when your scene is not being reviewed in class, you must participate in workshop discussions. This is not only part of your grade, but also a way to develop your critical analytical skills.

Students are also expected to provide feedback for their group's scenes in the weekly Discussion group forums.

Both in-class and Discussion group feedback are considered to be part of each student's participation grade.

For more, see separate post on the D2L site called **Constructive Critique**.

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.

Creative Subject Matter

The films, shows, clips, readings, lectures, student work, and class discussions in this course may engage deeply with potentially sensitive or traumatizing material, such as: violence, sexual assault/rape, sexism, racism, police brutality, transphobia, homophobia, abuse, suicide, blood, and body-shaming among other issues.

I will note especially graphic/intense content that intend to present and will do my best to foster a classroom environment in which we can relate safely, courageously, compassionately, and contemplatively with difficult and important content each week.

In that spirit, I ask that you label potential triggers in your written work submitted on D2L, and then again before we read aloud or discuss that work in class.

If you would like more specific or personalized triggers identified throughout the course (especially ones not named above), e-mail me and I will do my best to flag them for you.

If you believe any piece of course content may be potentially triggering to you, I will happily search for replacement material that you may view or read instead.

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.

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 honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the quarter so I may make appropriate changes to my records. Please also note 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](#).

Screenwriting Policy On the use of AI

The screenwriting program at DePaul is committed to fostering the unique voices and perspectives of up-and-coming screenwriters, as evidenced by our motto: "learn your craft, find your voice, make your mark." Writers should be aware that AI (generative artificial intelligence) is a tool and only a tool. It does not create; it aggregates and repurposes previously published content. As such, AI may facilitate the story development process, but cannot replace what each individual writer brings to a story: their distinctive point of view and voice. We understand that students may wish to use AI tools to aid in the development and early drafts of screenplays and screenwriting assignments. To do so with academic integrity, students must understand and adhere to the following:

- Developing ideas, creative problem-solving, honing one's voice, and engaging in

rewriting are at the core of the writing process, and the use of AI is not a replacement for enhancing these fundamental skills.

- Acknowledge your use of AI. For any assignment that you complete using AI, you must include a paragraph that explains 1) what AI tool you used, 2) what prompts you used, and 3) a clear explanation of how it helped you engage in the writing process.
- AI-assisted work may be accepted as part of the development of any project (including story ideation, character development, world-building, basic outlining, etc.), but the entirety of your screenplay/writing assignment must be authored by you.
- AI makes mistakes. You are responsible for any errors or omissions made by the AI tool.
- Failure to adhere to these guidelines will be considered a violation of DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy.

Students with Disabilities

DePaul Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling them to access accommodations and support services to assist with their success. There are two office locations: Loop Campus (312) 362-8002 , Lincoln Park Campus (773) 325-1677. Email: csd@depaul.edu.

Students who register with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact Dr. Gregory Moorhead, Director of the Center, privately to discuss how he may assist in facilitating the accommodations to be used in a course. This is best done early in the term. The conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Please [click here](#) for Services and Contact Information.

Academic Support Resources

A complete listing of student support resources can be found under Content on the class D2L page.

Emergency Plan

An emergency can occur at any time, suddenly and without warning. Proper planning is essential to minimize the impact of any emergency on the university community, operations, and facilities. [This link provides detailed information on Emergency Evacuation and Fire Alarm safety](#). The University will use the DPU Alert to announce school closing or other emergencies. In the event of an emergency evacuation, the primary outdoor assembly area for CDM will be Grant Park (Southeast corner of Jackson and Michigan Ave).

COVID Policies

Currently, 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.

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 [here](#).

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found [here](#). The university and school policy on plagiarism can be summarized as follows: students in this course should be aware of the strong sanctions that can be imposed against someone guilty of plagiarism. If proven, a charge of plagiarism could result in an automatic F in the course and possible expulsion. The strongest of sanctions will be imposed on anyone who submits as his/her own work any assignment which has been prepared by someone else. If you have any questions or doubts about what plagiarism entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials be sure to consult the instructor.

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

Attendance

Students are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Each unexcused absence 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.

Withdrawal

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the [Campus Connection system](#). 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

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.

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 work 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 your instructor to teaching, and these evaluation results are one component used in performance reviews (including salary raises and promotion/tenure). The evaluation of the instructor and course provides you an opportunity to make your voice heard regarding the quality of teaching at DePaul.

DePaul University's Land Acknowledgement

At DePaul University, we acknowledge that we live and work on traditional Native lands that are home to well over one hundred different tribal nations. We extend our respect to all of them, including the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Odawa nations, who signed the Treaty of Chicago in 1821 and 1833. We also recognize the Ho-Chunk, Myaamia, Menominee, Illinois Confederacy, and Peoria people who also maintained relationships with this land.

We acknowledge that these sacred homelands were ruptured by the European invasion of the Americas. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI promulgated the Doctrine of Discovery, which seized Native lands and resources with impunity. This doctrine has been used by countries throughout the Americas, including the U.S., to legitimize colonial policies of displacement and genocide toward Native peoples and to justify colonial legacies of white superiority and global capitalism.

We appreciate that today Chicago is home to the sixth-largest urban Native population in the United States. We further recognize and support the enduring presence of Native peoples among our faculty, staff, and student body. And in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, we reaffirm our commitment, both as an institution and as individuals, to help make our community and our society a more equitable, welcoming, and just place for all.

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.

Copyright Statement

The materials provided by the instructor in this course are for the use of the students enrolled in the course. Copyrighted course materials may not be further disseminated.