

SCREENWRITING FOR MAJORS (WINTER 2014)

DC 101 (Section 502)

Mondays and Wednesdays: 11:50 am – 1:20 pm

Room: #801 (14 E. Jackson)

Instructor: Christopher Parrish

Office Hours: Mondays, 1:45 – 4:45pm

Office: CDM434

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Course Description: Screenwriting for Majors introduces Digital Cinema Majors to narrative writing for motion pictures. Topics covered over the course include theme, plot, story structure, character and dialogue. An emphasis is placed upon creating a story in visual terms. Students are expected to develop and execute a screenplay for a short subject motion picture.

Prerequisites: None.

Books:

Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting by Syd Field. (Required)

Save the Cat! by Blake Snyder. (Strongly Recommended Reading)

Zen in the Art of Writing by Ray Bradbury. (Recommended Reading)

Software:

You will be required to use screenwriting software toward the end of the course. Final Draft is strongly recommended for any student with a focus on screenwriting, producing and/or directing. With a student discount, the software is about \$99 at <http://www.finaldraft.com/> (Deals may vary.)

You can also obtain a free download of the Celtx screenwriting program at <https://www.celtx.com/index.html>. (Word of warning, Celtx is notorious for having bugs with its software.)

Online Course Management System:

For this course, we will be using D2L at <https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home>.

At this site, you will find the syllabus, upload your homework assignments, as well as find other information and materials pertinent to the course. **DO NOT EMAIL YOUR ASSIGNMENTS TO ME.** Unless otherwise instructed, **ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE TO BE SUBMITTED ON D2L.**

Grading:

Class Participation: 10%

Journaling: 10%

Writing Assignments: 40%

First Half of Screenplay: 20%

Final Assignment – Complete Draft of Screenplay: 20%

COURSE POLICIES:

Attendance:

Each week's class consists of lectures. Your attendance is mandatory. For the purposes of this class, an absence is defined as either not showing up for class or showing up 15 minutes after class has begun. All absences will result in a reduction of the attendance/participation grade.

Assignments:

Reading assignments must be completed by the date to which they are assigned in the syllabus. Reasonable deadlines are given for completion for each assignment. Consequently late assignments will not be accepted.

(Late assignment = F)

Exceptions:

A.) **Medical emergency.** You must contact me within 24 hours of the assignment due date and submit support documents within 48 hours of the assignment due date.

B.) **Personal emergency.** If you miss an assignment deadline because of any other reason besides a medical one, you must submit compelling evidence supporting your excuse within 24 hours of the assignment due date.

Examinations:

There are no exams given in this course. You will be graded on your written work and class participation.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism on assignments is a serious offense and earns the student a failing grade for the class. There are no exceptions to this rule. If you are in doubt about the definition of plagiarism, consult your student handbook.

Course Lectures/Reading Assignments:

Lecture presentations will occur weekly. The textbooks offer an opportunity for independent learning that supplements the lecture presentations. The instructor will use both the classroom and the textbooks. Lectures may introduce additional material not available in the readings, and the readings may explore concepts not mentioned in class. BOTH SOURCES ARE NEEDED.

Content Changes:

Depending on time factors, the assignments projected for the term may require alteration or rescheduling, as well as the lectures.

Your Writing Journal's progress will be reviewed periodically:

It is your responsibility to keep writing in your writing journal, and demonstrate a productive engagement with the writing process. If you do

not turn it in when it is due in class, you will not receive credit for this portion.

Only original stories are allowed:

No adaptations of plays, stories or books, unless you prove you are the sole author.

Stories should be narrative fiction:

No documentaries, television specs, soaps, music videos, video games, or interactive media.

Please bring either your laptop or something to take notes with for each class.

Some written assignments must be uploaded as a PDF, as well as require hard copy (Instructor will give students instructions on how to submit per assignment.) Screenplays must be completed in screenplay format as PDF.

Assignments that do not require screenplay format should be **typed and double-spaced**. All assignments are due at the beginning of class, in paper form. **Always bring multiple copies of your work to class for reading out loud.**

Sexual Harassment:

The policy as specified in the student handbook will be adhered to in this class.

Incomplete

An incomplete grade is given only for an exceptional reason such as a death in the family, a serious illness, etc. Any such reason must be documented. Any incomplete request must be made at least two weeks before the final, and approved by the Dean of the College of Computing and Digital Media. Any consequences resulting from a poor grade for the course will not be considered as valid reasons for such a request.

Resources for 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 either the PLoS Program (for LD, AD/HD) or The Office for Students with

Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at: Student Center, LPC, Suite #370
Phone number: (773)325.1677 Fax: (773)325.3720 TTY: (773)325.7296

Course Schedule:

Class 1:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: (2 Minute Life Stories) Personal Introductions. Meet your Classmates and Instructor. What movies do you love? What movies do you hate? Why?

Writing Assignments:

1.) Buy a notebook and begin your daily pages starting today. From now until week ten, you will write a minimum of two pages in your journal every day. These pages can be absolutely anything you want (diary entries, letters to friends, lists, cartoons, graphic novel manuscript, anything.) I won't read what you write in your notebook (unless you ask me to do so.) I will only check your page count and dates of your journal entries.

2.) Your life story is being made into a movie. Describe the poster (movie title, tagline, describe the artwork.) – or – create it and post on D2L as a PDF.

Class 2:

LECTURE: Basics Elements of Screenwriting: What does a screenplay look like? How long is the average Hollywood screenplay? What are the elements (scene headers, characters, dialogue, action, description, transitions.)

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Sharing our life story movie posters.

Reading Assignment: (Chapters 1 - 2) *Screenplay: Syd Field*

Class 3:

LECTURE: What is a logline? What should it contain? What should it convey? How long should it be?

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Name that DVR Logline Game: The class will separate into different groups and guess the title of the movie based on the logline.

Writing Assignments:

- 1.) Ludicrous Loglines. Come up with three loglines (30 words or less each) and a title for a movie (the more outrageous the better.) All original work. No sequels or remakes.

- 2.) Choose one of your three loglines and write the first page of the script in traditional Hollywood screenplay format.

Class 4:

LECTURE: 3 Act Story Structure aka The Story Stew. What is a Motion Picture Treatment?

Inciting Incidents and Antagonists.

Share / Discuss Loglines and Page Ones with class.

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Breaking into groups, the class will pick a logline, collaborate for ten minutes and present the idea incorporating an inciting incident and an antagonist in a three act structure.

Writing Assignment: Write a Motion Picture Treatment in 150 words. Include a title, your protagonist, your antagonist, your central conflict and resolution.

Reading Assignment: (Chapters 3 – 5) *Screenplay: Syd Field*

Class 5:

LECTURE: Characters. What makes us gravitate toward them? What repels us?

Sympathetic protagonists, dimensional villains, love interests, sidekicks and anti-heroes.

The value of Backstory.

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Share/Discuss your 150 word Motion Picture Treatments.

Writing Assignment: Stranger Character Backstory. On your way home tonight, choose a random stranger (not a fellow DePaul student) and create a backstory for them. Have that person on his or her way to the most important moment in their lives or have them just coming from it. You have complete freedom. It can be an ordinary person or make them a serial killing extra-terrestrial or anything in between (keep it under 150 words.)

Reading Assignment: (Chapters 6 – 7) *Screenplay: Syd Field*

Class 6:

LECTURE: Character arcs and story arcs. One stimulates our feelings, the other stimulates our intellect.

IN CLASS ACTIVITY #1: Share your Stranger Character Backstories with the class.

IN CLASS ACTIVITY #2: Mix and Match Stranger Characters. Break into groups and choose at least two characters from your group and put together a pitch for a movie featuring them in leading roles. Hero & Villain. Buddy Comedy Leads. Romantic Leads. Rivals. Anything you like.

Writing Assignment: Using the Hollywood screenwriting format, write a 2 page scene depicting your group's two chosen Stranger characters interacting with one another. (They don't actually have to be strangers to one another.)

Class 7:

LECTURE: Pitching a Motion Picture. Concept. Set pieces. Plot points. Act breaks. Character arcs. Leave Behind.

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Breaking into groups of three, pitch a mainstream Hollywood movie you've all seen to the audience in five minutes incorporating the protagonist, antagonist, love interest (if any), central conflict, obstacles, significant supporting character, three act story structure and resolution.

Reading Assignment: (Chapters 8-9) *Screenplay: Syd Field*

Class 8:

LECTURE: Dialogue and Methods of Conveying Character (attitude, mood, accent, slang, poor / eloquent use of language, profanity or lack of it, catchphrases, how they argue, verbal diarrhea & the strong silent type)

More Dialogue Methods:

(brutal truths & putdowns, flip flopping, the contradiction, disproportionate responses, volume and the bad comedy trick)

What's a punch up and why do I want one?

Condensing - it's not just for milk

End on a punchline or dramatic punch

Reality check (is it true to that universe and character)

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Irate Character Voicemail - Each student will pick the name of a random famous movie character and leave an angry 1 minute voicemail message to another character from that movie (Bad impressions are encouraged. No impressions are fine, too. It's all about capturing the characters' voices.)

Writing Assignments:

- 1.) Write a 250 word monologue, as yourself, describing a funny or frightening **TRUE** story that has happened to you
- 2.) Write (3) potential loglines for your motion picture short subject screenplay Final Project.

Class 9:

LECTURE: What is the difference between a Treatment and an Outline? What purposes do they serve?

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: In class readings and discussions of monologues.

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: In class readings and discussions of loglines for your Final Project screenplay.

Writing Assignment: Write a Treatment for the Motion Picture Short Subject Screenplay (1 - 2 pages, double-spaced.)

Reading Assignment: (Chapter 10) *Screenplay: Syd Field*

Class 10:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Readings and Discussions of Motion Picture Treatments.

Reading Assignment: (Chapter 11) *Screenplay: Syd Field*

Class 11:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Continued Readings and Discussions of Motion Picture Treatments.

Reading Assignment: (Chapter 12) *Screenplay: Syd Field*

Class 12:

Motion Picture Short Subjects. What's the point of these things, anyway? Springboards for Features Length Motion Pictures (Napoleon Dynamite, Slingblade, 12 Monkeys, THX-1138.)

Viewing: Short Subject TBD.

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: In class analysis and dissection of short subject.

Reading Assignment: (Chapter 13) *Screenplay: Syd Field*

Writing Assignment: Write an Outline for the Motion Picture Short Subject Screenplay (3 - 4 pages, double-spaced)

Class 13:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Readings and Discussions of Story Outlines for Group 1.

Class 14:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Readings and Discussions of Story Outlines for Group 2.

Class 15:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Readings and Discussions of Story Outlines for Group 3.

Class 16:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Readings and Discussions of Story Outlines for Group 4.

Writing Assignment: First-half of Motion Picture Short Subject Screenplay (10 - 12 pages)

Class 17:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Table Read of Group 1 screenplays (First Half.)
Feedback session to follow. Class participation is mandatory.

Class 18:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Table Read of Group 2 screenplays (First Half.)
Feedback session to follow. Class participation is mandatory.

Class 19:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Table Read of Group 3 screenplays (First Half.)
Feedback session to follow. Class participation is mandatory.

Class 20:

IN CLASS ACTIVITY: Table Read of Group 4 screenplays (First Half.)
Feedback session to follow. Class participation is mandatory.

Final Assignment:

COMPLETED FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAY:

Turn in your final, revised and completed draft of your short subject screenplay. **DUE ONE WEEK FROM CLASS 20. NO EXTENSIONS!**