
DC 101

Screenwriting for Majors

(Fall 2014 - 15)

CDM 00206 Loop Campus
(W 5:45 PM – 9:00PM)

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Office Hours: Thur 10 am -1pm

Overview

This course introduces digital cinema majors to dramatic writing for motion pictures. The topics covered include theme, plot, story structure, character, and dialogue. Emphasis is placed on telling a story in visual terms. Students are expected to develop and write a short screenplay.

PREREQUISITES: None

Course Objectives

1. To improve storytelling skills.
2. To learn proper screenplay formatting and style.
3. To develop a fundamental understanding of the dramatic scene.
4. To improve screenwriting skills in the areas of dialogue, plotting, character, and direction.

Course Goal

To write a short screenplay of ten pages or less.

Textbooks

"The Tools of Screenwriting" by David Howard & Edwin Mabley

"The Hollywood Standard" by Christopher Riley

Screenwriting Software

You will be required to use screenwriting software. Final Draft is strongly recommended for those with a serious career focus on screenwriting, producing and/or directing. The software is \$99 with a student discount at: <http://www.finaldraft.com/>. You can also obtain a free download of the Celtx screenwriting program at: <https://www.celtx.com/index.html>. All assignments are to be saved as PDF.

Class Schedule

NOTE: This schedule is subject to change. Please consult class calendar and Professor emails for the most up to date schedule for student postings, readings, assignments, and all-due dates.

Week 1 (9/10)

Introduction to course and each other. Students will discuss their favorite films and what their interests are in the industry.

Class Lecture: Format & Style – Storytelling vs. Writing.

Shorts Screening (time permitting).

Homework: Scene Assignment 1 (50 Words, Visuals).

Reading:

“The Tools of Screenwriting” Pages 3-40, 88-90,

“The Hollywood Standard” Read Introduction – Page 27. Professor handouts.

Week 2 (9/17)

Workshop: Scene Assignment 1.

Class Lecture: Format & Style - Characterization, Protagonist & Objective.

Shorts Screening (time permitting).

Homework: Scene Writing Assignment 2 (True or False, Character).

Reading:

“The Tools of Screenwriting” Pages 63-65, 43-45,

“The Hollywood Standard” Pages 29-62. Professor handouts.

Week 3 (9/24)

Workshop: Scene Assignment 2.

Class Lecture: Format & Style - Conflict & Goals, Stakes & Urgency

Shorts Screening (time permitting).

Homework: Scene Writing Assignment 3 (Conflict)

Reading:

"The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 46-49, 52-54, 81-83, 91-94.

"The Hollywood Standard" Pages 63 -102. Professor handouts.

Week 4 (10/1)

Workshop: Scene Writing Assignment 3.

Class Lecture: Exposition, Planting, Payoff.

Shorts Screening (time permitting).

Homework: Scene Writing Assignment 4 (Seduction).

Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 49-51, 55-62, 72-76, 78-80, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 103-111. Professor handouts.

Week 5 (10/8)

Workshop: Scene Writing Assignment 4.

Class Lecture: Dialogue and Dramatic Irony.

Shorts Screening (time permitting).

Homework: Scene Writing Assignment 5 (Wrongest Person).

Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 68-71, 84-87, "The Hollywood Standard" Pages 131-139. Professor handouts.

Week 6 (10/15)

Workshop: Scene Writing Assignment 5.

Class Lecture: Genre Writing

Shorts Screening (time permitting).

Homework: Scene Writing Assignment 6 (Genre Writing).

Reading: Professor handouts.

Week 7 (10/22)

Workshop: Scene Writing Assignment 6.

Class Lecture: Writing the Short Script Part 1

Shorts Screening (time permitting).

Homework: Three loglines for Short Script.

Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 76-78, Professor handouts.

Week 8 (10/29)

Workshop: Pitch Three Loglines for Short Script.

Class Lecture: Writing the Short Script Part II

Shorts Screening (time permitting).

Homework: Short Script Draft I.

Week 9 (11/5)

Workshop: Short Script Draft 1.

Homework: Rewrite Plan.

Reading: "The Tools of Screenwriting" Pages 95-97, Professor handouts.

Week 10 (11/12)

Workshop: Rewrite Plan.

Class Lecture: Common Missteps & Rewriting Part 1.

Homework: Short Script Draft II

Professor handouts.

Week 11 (11/19)

Final Short Film Script Due!!!!

Evaluation Writing Track

Class attendance and participation: 10 points

Midterm Quiz: 20 Points

Scene Assignments 30 points

Short Script Draft 1: 20 points

Short Script Draft 2: 20 points

Assignments

Scene Assignments

You will write numerous scene exercises throughout the quarter based on the topics we cover in class – specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided after the lectures. These exercises will typically be assigned during class and will be work shopped in class the following week. You are expected to bring a printed copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Dropbox link on D2L. The scene assignment will make up 30% in total).

You will be graded on:

- Style and Format
- Creative execution of the assignment within the given parameters
- Use of dramatic techniques presented in class and the readings
- Please save files to your group dropbox as a PDF, and using your last name and the name of the assignment, i.e.: *Riddell Interrogation Scene.pdf*

Midterm Quiz

The midterm Quiz will cover topics drawn specifically from lectures and course readings. These will feature multiple choice, T/F, fill-in-the-blank, and short screenwriting tasks.

Short Script Draft I

You will submit a first draft of a short script that is to be no longer than 10 pages. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count - proofread your work, proofread it again, and then proofread it one more time just to be sure.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required.
- You must include a properly-formatted cover page.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - it may be a good idea to have a friend look over the script as well.

- Action description should be lean - only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Develop a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Avoid exposition-heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Don't wait until the last minute. It takes time to develop a solid narrative - you won't be able to do it in one night and achieve the grade you want.
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Short Script Draft II

This is your final writing assignment. The final script is to be no longer than 10 pages. Points to consider:

- The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort. Correcting typos and making small tweaks is not a rewrite.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops, and your own self-evaluation to craft your revised draft. Get outside opinions if you can.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count even more. Proofread again.

In-Class Workshops

Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. To facilitate this, you will be participating in weekly small group workshop sessions that will enable you to showcase your scene assignments and the first draft of your short screenplay. Be truthful, but sensitive when giving notes. Be prepared to solve problems instead of just pointing them out. Personal attacks and disruptive actions will not be tolerated. Please refer to the course outline for specific workshop dates.

Course Policies

Attendance: Classroom attendance is MANDATORY. More than one "excused" absence (doctor's note, Blackhawk game, etc.) will result in a lowering of grade per each absence.

Deadlines: Strict Adherence to deadlines is expected. A workshop cannot function if the writers miss their deadlines for posting material. Material posted late will result in a negative grade for the particular assignment.

School policies:

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 sent via email.

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!

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>.

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.

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:

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

Excused Absence

In order 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.

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.

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:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370

Phone number: (773)325.1677

Fax: (773)325.3720

TTY: (773)325.7296

Class Discussion: Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the day's topic. Participation allows the instructor to "hear" the student's voice when grading papers. Secondly, students will be called upon by the instructor to offer comments related to the reading assignments. Students must keep up with the reading to participate in class discussion.

Attitude: A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others when the instructor is speaking, mocking another's opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student issues.

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.

Cell Phones/On Call: If you bring a cell phone to class, it must be off or set to a silent mode. Should you need to answer a call during class, students must leave the room in an undistruptive manner. Out of respect to fellow students and the professor, texting is never allowable in class. If you are required to be on call as part of your job, please advise me at the start of the course.