

## **WRITING THE TELEVISION SPEC SCRIPT**

DC 400-801

TUESDAYS (5:45 – 9:00)

Lewis Bldg. #1108

Instructor: Christopher Parrish

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00 – 2:30

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In this class, students will learn the basic teleplay structures for both half-hour and hour-long television shows. Students will choose an existing show and write a spec episode, practicing the skills of matching character voice, structure, and tone.

#### **PREREQUISITE(S):**

DC 101: Screenwriting for Majors

DC 201: Introduction to Screenwriting

-or-

DC 501: Storytelling for the Screenwriter

To be specific, there are two main parts to this course – A.) learning the overall structure, format, style, tone and dialogue of various current, primetime network television shows, with an emphasis on situation comedies and one-hour dramas and B.) **Completing an individual spec episode of an existing primetime situation comedy or one-hour drama currently on-the-air**, including the complete first draft of a teleplay, an outline and a “beat sheet.”

The instructor will guide students on how to strike the delicate balance between writing an episode that embodies the characters, structure, tone, and dialogue of an existing show while expressing the student’s own creative voice, point of view and style.

The class will survey programs and scripts of various types, including single-camera sitcom, multi-camera sitcom, one-hour drama and animation. They will verbally pitch plot ideas of episodes for their favorite show to their peers and instructor. Like professional screenwriters working on an actual series, student writers will go through the entire process within our mock “Writer’s Room” and take turns as the designated “Showrunner.” As the course progresses, students will engage in their own “punch-up” sessions.

Over the course, each student will have their teleplay or script read aloud in class by “casting” their classmates in the roles for a “Table Reading.”

Constructive criticism and active participation is mandatory, as is assigned homework.

Students will also have the opportunity for a classroom Q&A (via Skype) with Hollywood professionals who have written for and/or been involved with primetime network sitcoms and/or hour-long dramas.

### **REQUIREMENTS:**

No writer improves without receiving feedback on his or her work. You and your classmates will engage in an unofficial and mutually beneficial contract with one another by reading each other's work and giving respectful and constructive criticism. Class participation is 20% of your grade.

### **DEADLINES:**

Just as if you have been hired to write on assignment for a television series, **MEETING YOUR DEADLINE IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL**. Without a valid medical excuse or legitimate family emergency, assignments must be turned in on time or no points will be awarded for your work.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

**All written assignments (scripts, treatments, outlines, beat sheets, etc.) must be typed in 12 pt. Courier font in a pdf file and posted on D2L.** Scripts should also be free of spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors, unless the dialogue or storyline otherwise calls for it. All scripts and scenes are to be done in proper screenwriting format. Most professionals use Final Draft but it is not required for the course. **Please make certain all assignments include your name, the course title and number and the date of the assignment due.**

### **EMAILS:**

Please sign your first and last name with every email you send. I check my email every day and will have a response for you within 24 hours. **My email is cparris6@cdm.depaul.edu**

### **THE NO, ZILCH AND ABSOLUTE ZERO TOLORANCE POLICY ABOUT NEGATIVE CRITICISM:**

When new and aspiring writers share their work with others, it can be an emotionally charged situation leaving the writer feeling very vulnerable. Throughout your screenwriting careers, you will inevitably receive catty, insulting, idiotic and nonproductive criticism of your work. However, in

our classroom, absolutely none of it will be tolerated. If and when there is something you dislike about a classmate's writing (and you will), it is your obligation to express it. But more importantly, it is your responsibility to express why it is you think so respectfully, and ideally, suggest a way to fix it. At the same time, the person receiving constructive criticism from their peers will do so in a polite, non-defensive and professional manner.

### **GRADE BREAKDOWN:**

Series Pitch of Your Chosen Show: 10%

Your Episode Loglines: 5%

Your Beat Sheet: 10%

Your Episode Outline: 20%

Cold Open / Act One of Script: 15%

Completed Script: 25%

Class Participation: 15%

### Course Calendar:

**Week #1:** Introductions, Syllabus Overview

A very brief rundown on how TV shows are written, produced and staffed.

Why you need to write a TV spec to break into the business.

What shows to avoid when writing a spec script. What shows to consider.

What is the shelf life of your spec script in Hollywood?

### Breaking it all down: TV EPISODE DISSECTIONS

What are the beats?

Structure. How many acts in a sitcom and a drama?

Is there an average number of scenes?

Act breaks. When do they come?

What about an animation script?

How long should my script be?

How long should my scenes be?

Storylines and running gags.

For your viewing and deconstructing pleasure:

Everybody Loves Raymond: "A Date for Peter" Written by Mike Royce.

Star Trek: Enterprise "Carbon Creek" Written by Chris Black.

(\*\*Episodes are subject to change\*\*)

Homework Assignment: Prepare a 5 - 10 minute pitch of the series from which you will be writing your episode.

### **Week #2:** Loglines

What's so important about a logline? What should they include?

Classroom Activity #1: Series Pitches

Classroom Activity #2: Name That Episode Logline Game

Homework Assignment: Come up with 10 episode ideas and write them out as loglines

**Week #3:** Characters

Types of characters. Exploring the psychology of your characters and their relationships.

Homework Assignment: -TBD-

**Week #4:** Theme, Tone & Settings

What are popular themes of shows and how do their creators' make them their own? Exploration and consistency of tone. Popular settings and why these locales are repeatedly used.

Homework Assignment:

Group A - Beatsheet Due Next Week

Group B - Beatsheet Due in 2 Weeks

**Week #5:**

Group A - Table Read (Beatsheet) and Notes Session.

Homework Assignment:

Group B - Beatsheet Due Next Week

Group A - Outline Due in 2 Weeks

**Week #6:**

Group B - Table Read (Beatsheet) and Notes Session.

Homework Assignment:

Group A - Outline Due Next Week

Group B - Outline Due in 2 Weeks

**Week #7:**

Group A - Table Read (Outline) and Notes Session.

Homework Assignment:

Group B - Outline Due Next Week

Group A - Cold Open and Act One due in 2 weeks

**Week #8:** Group B – Table Read (Outline) and Notes Session.

Homework Assignment:

Group A – Write Cold Open and Act One due next week

Group B – Cold Open and Act One due in 2 weeks

**Week #9:**

Group A – Table Read (Cold Open & Act One) and Notes Session.

Homework Assignment:

Group B – Write Cold Open and Act One due next week.

Entire script due in 2 weeks (Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>.)

**Week #10:** Group B – Table Read (Cold Open & Act One) and Notes Session.

Homework Assignment: **Complete script. Due on Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup> by 11:59 PM CST. NO EXCEPTIONS. LATE WORK WILL NOT BE GRADED OR ACCEPTED.**

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 your professor.

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](http://cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment).

College Policies:

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 Campus Connect.

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](mailto:csd@depaul.edu).

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