

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY: SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

DC501: Foundations of Screenwriting

Autumn 2017- 2018

Monday 5:45 - 9:00 PM

14EAS, 507 (Loop)

Instructor: Anna Hozian

Office: CDM 463

Office Hours: Wed: 2:00-5:00PM

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Course Description:

Students begin their screenwriting journey with a strong foundation in the basic building blocks of solid, engaging storytelling. Students will mine their own lives in order to create memorable stories, characters, and settings. Additionally, students will learn basic screenwriting skills such as character development, constructing atmosphere, and the fundamental components of a scene. PREREQUISITE(S): None.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will understand and apply the principles of storytelling and screenwriting through texts, writing exercises, and assignments.
- Students will begin to analyze and apply the world around them in their stories.
- Students will understand and practice the principles of a creative writing workshop.
- Students will develop loglines and an outline for a short screenplay.
- Students will create a short, produceable screenplay.

Texts and Films:

***Tools of Screenwriting* by David Howard and Edward Mabley ISBN-10: 0312119089 (Required)**

***The Hollywood Standard* by Christopher Riley ISBN-10: 1932907637 (Required)**

Additional essays will be provided by the instructor.

Short films will be screened in class, but students may be required to view additional films outside of class.

Required Software:

Final Draft or comparable screenwriting software.

D2L:

You will be using D2L in this course. To log on, go to:

<https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/orgtools/CAS/Default.aspx> and enter using your campus connect logon and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, course outline, discussion forums, and weekly assignments.

Grading:

Attendance and Participation (participation includes discussions, workshops, Morning Pages, and Spark Journals): 20%
First Three Creative Assignments: 15%
Loglines: 5%
Treatment or Step Outline: 15%
Additional Story Development and Script Drafts: 30%
Final Draft and Refined Pitch: 15%

A= 100-93, A-=92-90, B+=89-88, B=87-83, B-=82-80, C+=79-78, C=77-73, C-=72-70, D+=69-68, D=67-63, D-=62-60, F=59-0. A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work.

Class Outline:

Week One, Sept. 6th: Course Intro, Formatting, Foundations of Workshopping, Storytelling Basics, and Beginning to Develop Your Voice

Please bring *The Hollywood Standard* to Class!

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, from page ix through page 27.

Creative Assignment I: (Storytelling)

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class.

Week Two, September 13th: Workshopping (AGAIN) and Conflict and Characters

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 28 and 29; 43 through 54; 63 through 76; 78 through 83.

First Workshop: Storytelling

Creative Assignment II: (Conflict and Characters)

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class.

Week Three, September 20th: Visual Storytelling and Dialogue

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 30 through 39; 60 through 62; 84 through 90.

Second Workshop: Conflict and Character

Creative Assignment III: (Visual Storytelling and Dialogue)

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class.

Week Four, September 27th: Putting it All Together: Writing the Dramatic Scene/What is a Sequence/Writing the Short Film I (including loglines)

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 91 through 94.

Third Workshop: Visual Storytelling/Dialogue

Assignment: THREE LOGLINES for Short Films Due.

Week Five, October 4th: Writing the Short Film II (including step outlines and treatments)

Fourth Workshop: Pitch Loglines

Assignment: STEP OUTLINES or TREATMENTS for short films Due. .

Week Six, October 11th: Workshopping/The Professional Arena (Writers Rooms, Pitch Meetings, Meet and Greets, Producers and Directors, etc)/Rewriting /What To Do with All of These Notes

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 76 through 78; 55 through 59.

Fifth Workshop: STEP OUTLINES or TREATMENTS for short films

Assignment - First Draft/Revision of Treatment/Character Development Due - will be decided by professor

Week Seven, October 18th: INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH ME

Assignment: FIRST SET of Scripts Due (Half of the Class)

Week Eight, October 25th: Writing the Feature Film (Part I): Breaking Down the Beats

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 95 through 97. Short Scripts.

Sixth Workshop: FIRST SET of Scripts (Half of Class)

Assignment: SECOND SET of Scripts Due (Other Half of Class)

Week Nine, November 1st: Writing the Feature Film (Part II): Sequences

Read: *Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 95 through 97.

Seventh Workshop: First Half of Short Films Workshopped

Workshop: SECOND SET of Scripts (Other Half of Class)

Assignment: ALL REVISED DRAFTS DUE

Week Ten, November 8th:

Eighth Workshop: ALL REVISED DRAFTS DUE

Assignment: Final Drafts of Short Films and Refined Pitches Due by Wednesday, November 15th at the beginning of class.

Week Eleven: FINAL, November 15th: Refined Pitches in class and Final Scripts Submitted

Assignments:

Late assignments will not be accepted without the prior consent of the instructor and may result in a reduction in the student's grade.

Three Creative Assignments (15% of final grade)

These exercises will be based on the screenwriting conventions we cover in class. Specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided after the lectures and will be critiqued in class the following Monday. You are expected to bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L. Each assignment is 5% of your final grade (15% in total).

Loglines for Short Script (5% of final grade)

Develop three premise ideas for your short film. You will eventually develop one of these ideas into a short screenplay. Each premise should include character (protagonist), conflict (what is the central conflict of the narrative?) and a sense of resolution. Be mindful of the aim and limitations of the short film medium. Please bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L.

Outline or Treatment of Short Script (15%)

Taking your chosen idea, please develop a scene-by-scene outline for your short film. Use your plot points! Be ready to pitch the document in class. Please bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L.

Short Script Draft I (15% of final grade)

A few things to keep in mind as you write your scripts:

- 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.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - It may be a good idea to have a friend/family member look over the script as well.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required. Refer to texts for the course, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.

- Action description should be lean - Only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Use your plot points as a guide.
- Avoid exposition heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Your script must be at least 6 pages (not including title page), but should not exceed 10 pages.
- Ask questions if you need help.
- 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.

Please bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L.

Rewrite of Short Script (15% of final grade)

A few things to keep in mind as you REWRITE your scripts:

- The rewrite of your script be a marked improvement over your first draft.
- You must include a cover page.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops and self-evaluation in order to craft your revised draft.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- 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. Refer to the textbook for this class, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.
- Your script must be at least 6 pages (not including the title page), but should not exceed 10 pages.

Portfolio and Final Pitch Due (15% of your final grade)

Workshops, Attendance, and Participation (20% of your final grade):

Attendance

Attendance and participation is mandatory. An absence, which is defined as not showing up for class or arriving more than 10 minutes late to class, constitutes a reduction on your overall grade.

Participation

You may be called upon to discuss various topics on screenwriting and storytelling during class and discussions may develop throughout the course online, with which you are required to participate. Please be prepared having read the texts and screened the assigned films. Also, spark journals and morning pages will be discussed 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 assignments and the first draft of your short screenplay. Please be sure to adhere to the following workshop guidelines.

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.
- 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.

Additional Policies and Information:

Attitude and Civil Discourse

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.

Changes to the 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 at <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:

- 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

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 on my.cdm.depaul.edu/.

- 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

<http://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx>.

SCA Screenwriting Grading Rubric

| | UNSATISFACTORY | COMPETENT | PROFICIENT | DISTINGUISHED |
|-----------|--|---|---|---|
| CONCEPT | Does not possess a concept that can support the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot | Contains a practical, yet ultimately derivative concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot | Contains an original and viable concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot | Contains a cinematically innovative and viable concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot |
| CHARACTER | Lacks developed character(s) that consistently struggle to evoke empathy and/or intrigue, dialogue has little distinction of character and purpose | Presents common archetypal character(s), dialogue is often on-the-nose, yet passable | Presents well-developed and active character(s) that evoke empathy and/or intrigue, dialogue is paced appropriately and serviceable throughout | Presents complex, original, and active character(s) that garner empathy and/or intrigue from the onset, dialogue is routinely efficient and organic to the world of the story |
| PLOT | Fails to develop a discernable set-up, through-line, and resolution | The set-up, through-line, and resolution is evident, but largely by-the-numbers | There is a serviceable set-up, through-line, and resolution | There is an interesting set-up, compelling through-line, and satisfying resolution |
| MARKET | Struggles to grasp the basic conventions of the intended genre(s) and does not appeal to the target audience | Follows the basic conventions of the intended genre(s) – labors to draw target audience | Follows the conventions of the intended genre(s) – appeals to the target audience | Follows and elevates the conventions of the intended genre(s) – resonates with the target audience |
| TECHNICAL | Consistently lacks understanding of industry standard script format – spelling and grammar errors throughout, action description struggles to capture what can be seen or heard on-screen, and/or fails to meet the required page length for the intended format | Displays some understanding of industry standard script format – few spelling and grammar errors, action description is serviceable, and meets the required page length for the intended format | Displays an understanding of industry standard script format – free from spelling and grammar errors, action description reveals only what can be seen or heard on-screen, and meets the required page length for the intended format | Displays a mastery of industry standard script format – free from spelling and grammar errors, action description showcases the writer's unique voice, and meets the required page length for the intended format |