

WRITING THE TELEVISION SPEC SCRIPT – Winter 2019

DC 400 (801)

Thursdays 5:45pm to 9:00pm

14 East Jackson, Room 802

Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA

Office Hours: Mondays: Noon to 1:30pm, 4:45pm to 5:45pm, Thursdays: 3:30pm to 5:45pm.. (I am in and out of my office frequently during office hours so please let me know if you will be stopping by).

Office: CDM 616

ndewitt@depaul.edu

Course Management System: D2L.

ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu

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.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Familiarization with getting and receiving notes.
- Exposure to the process of writing a spec script of an existing show
- Thorough, professional character and deadline driven story development
- Exposure to professional writing practices and pace
- Continued mastery of television storytelling style and narrative technique
- Fostering and maintaining the environment of a professional writers room
- Refining and advancing the practices of giving and receiving thoughtful, articulate criticism
- Consistent delivery of outstanding creative and analytical work

This class will, as closely as possible, mirror the real world dynamic between Writer and Network Executive with the Student in the role of Writer and the Instructor in the role of Network Executive, minus the contradictory notes and creativity-crippling fear of losing his job.

The instructor will mentor the students to ensure he brings out the voice of the student writer. At the same time, he'll monitor the students' writing to make sure the voices of the characters and show being scripted are clear, the plot moves along with escalating tension, the themes ring true and the work is technically, structurally and grammatically correct and properly formatted. **We write like professionals in this class.**

A lot of this course will be Workshop format. We'll be doing our best to duplicate the atmosphere of a Writer's Room. As with a real writing staff, the class will have the opportunity to offer constructive criticism of each other's work. They will also participate in group rewrites and table reads, where they will be expected to help improve the work of their classmates, both in terms of shaping concept but also honing story and tightening scenes.

REQUIREMENTS:

Actively participate in class discussions, read and critique your own and fellow students' work, complete all in-class assignments and complete all homework assignments. **Strict adherence to deadlines is expected.** Attendance is MANDATORY.

ASSIGNMENTS:

All assignments must be typed and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work, you're responsible for its quality. All Scenes and Scripts must be in proper Screenwriting format. Use of screenwriting software such as Final Draft is highly recommended. All assignments should include your name and the date of the assignment.

Creative work is due Tuesdays at 5am.

A COUPLE OF NOTES ABOUT EMAILS:

- Please sign your emails.
- Please do not send materials via email unless they are requested by the instructor.

A NOTE ABOUT TALKING 'SMACK':

Writer's are competitive. I'm not going to sit here and pretend we're all at the same skill level and will all get along famously. Nor am I going to pretend I don't know people are going to talk about each other's work in derogatory terms. But I don't want to see it. I don't want to hear about it. And it's absolutely forbidden in my classroom. If you feel the need to badmouth someone's work, please do so in PRIVATE. Note: **THE INTERNET IS NOT PRIVATE!** You'd be surprised who stumbles across your Twitter, Facebook or Blog. So let's please be respectful and remember we're all in this to become better writers.

That said, this is a workshop. And sometimes in a workshop, people lose fingers. Constructive criticism is expected. But cruelty and rudeness will not be tolerated.

ONLINE COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

D2L: <https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home> Here students will find lecture slides, lecture videos, links to streams of the episodes for this course and any other relevant information they may need. This is where you will upload your assignments for this course. Login with Campus Connect information.

GRADING:

The course is out of 1,000 possible points.

Show Breakdowns: 100

Story Pitches: 100

Story Beat Sheet: 150

Story Outline: 200 (Midterm)

Final Script: 250 (Final)

Class Participation: 200 (Class participation encompasses not only attendance but also your active involvement in discussions).

Grading Scale:

A: 93.5-100%; A-: 92.5-93.49%

B+: 89.5-92.49%; B: 83.5-89.49%; B-: 82.5-83.49%

C+: 79.5-82.49%; C: 73.5-79.49%; C-: 72.5-73.49%

D+: 69.5-72.49%; D: 63.5-69.49%; Below 63.5% is an F

Add/ Drop dates can be found here: <https://academics.depaul.edu/calendar/Pages/default.aspx>

THE SCHEDULE:

January 10

Class 1:

Introductions. Who are you and why are you here? What have you written? What TV Shows do you like to watch? What TV Shows do you think you might want to write?

Lectures: TV Basics, How do we study a show?

Screenings:

30 ROCK "When It Rains it Pours."

DAMAGES "Get Me A Lawyer."

HOMEWORK:

Email: Email me the name of the show you think you want to spec by 5pm Tuesday, January 15

Assignment: Three Breakdowns for a show you think you want to write. Format will be discussed.

Due before next class period.

January 17:

Class 2:

Be prepared to talk about the show you watched. This is also an opportunity for students to familiarize themselves with other shows they may wish to write. Students are responsible for having a working knowledge of all shows the class is writing.

Groups Assigned. In order to make the work-flow in this course more manageable, we'll be splitting into groups. All students are expected to read everyone's work, your group assignment just determines the due dates for your creative submissions.

Lecture: The Television Landscape and a discussion of Shows we'll write. What makes a good Spec Script? Writing someone else's characters while still displaying your own voice.

Screenings: TBD.

HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Five story pitches. Be prepared to pitch your ideas to the class. These don't have to be 'great.' Remember, this is brainstorming and there are no bad ideas in brainstorming.

GROUP 2: Think about your pitches.

EVERYONE: Learn your show cold. Watch as many episodes as you can. A successful spec script demonstrates a keen understanding of a show. In order to know it, you have to watch it. Read scripts (provided by instructor).

January 24:

Class 3:

Story Pitches: Group 1. Students will pitch story ideas and receive feedback from their fellow students and the instructor.

Lectures: Characterization, Tension

Screenings: TBD

Maybe a Skype guest.

HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to develop your pitches into a Beat Sheet.

GROUP 2: Five story pitches. Be prepared to pitch your ideas to the class. These don't have to be 'great.' Remember, this is brainstorming and there are no bad ideas in brainstorming.

January 31:

Class 4:

Story Pitches: Group 2. Students will pitch their story ideas and receive feedback from their fellow students and the instructor.

Lectures: TBD

Screenings: TBD

Maybe a Skype guest.

HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Beat Sheets. Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed.

GROUP 2: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to develop your pitches into a Beat Sheet.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

February 7:

Class 5:

Workshop: Group 1's Beat Sheets.

NOTE: If the Professor gets the sense that students are not reading each other's work, he reserves the right to collect WRITTEN NOTES from every student on every single piece of writing submitted for class. Neither the Students nor the Professor want to have to do this, so please do the reading and come to class prepared to discuss it.

Lectures: Outlines and the importance of outlining.

Maybe a Skype guest.

HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to develop your Beat Sheet into an Outline.

GROUP 2: Beat Sheets. Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

February 14:

Class 6:

Workshop: Group 2's Beat Sheets.

Lecture: TBD

Maybe a Skype guest.

HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Story Outlines. Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed.

GROUP 2: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor as you work to develop your Beat Sheet into an Outline.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

February 21:

Class 7:

Workshop: Group 1 Outlines.

Lecture: Script Formatting

HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Digest Feedback from the class and Instructor, go to script.

GROUP 2: Story Outlines. Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

February 28:

Class 8:

Workshop: Group 2 Outlines.

Lecture: TBD

Maybe a Skype guest

HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: First 15 pages. Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed.

GROUP 2: Get started on your script.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

March 7:

Class 9:

Table Read: Group 1 pages.

HOMEWORK:

GROUP 1: Your Final is your Completed Spec Script. Get writing!

GROUP 2: First 15 pages. Due 5am Tuesday morning before next class. Format will be discussed.

EVERYONE: You will receive an email from me with the assigned reading Tuesday morning. Please read everything and be prepared to discuss in class Thursday night.

March 14:

Class 10:

Table Read: Group 2 pages.

FINAL PROJECT:

Your completed SPEC SCRIPT.

Your Final MUST be uploaded to D2L by Thursday, March 14 at 5:00pm.

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 [CampusConnect](#).

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 with 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.

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.

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.

Phone number: (312)362-8002

Fax: (312)362-6544

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