

**SCWR 400**  
**FOUNDATIONS OF SCREENWRITING**  
**AUTUMN 2019 – 2020**  
**Monday 5:45 – 9:00 PM**

**INSTRUCTOR: Gary Novak**  
**Office: CDM 405**  
**Office Hours: Wed. 4:00 - 5:30 pm**  
**Phone: 312-362-7200**  
**E-mail: gnovak@depaul.edu**

### **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. Prerequisites: None

### **COURSE OUTCOMES:**

In addition to completing several writing assignments, students are expected to develop, outline, and write a short screenplay.

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- employ standard screenplay format
- identify elements of scene craft, character development, and narrative structure
- demonstrate expanded visual writing skills
- apply a work-flow process to their creative writing
- produce original writing projects on a deadline
- assess their own work and that of their peers

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### **REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:**

*The Tools of Screenwriting* by David Howard and Edward Mabley ISBN-10: 0312119089  
*The Hollywood Standard* by Christopher Riley ISBN-10: 1932907637

### **REQUIRED SOFTWARE:**

Final Draft or comparable screenwriting software such as Celtx, Highland (only for Mac), and Fade In.

### **COURSE POLICIES:**

#### **-Attendance:**

Each week's class consists of lectures and screenings; attendance is mandatory. For the purposes of this class an absence is defined as not showing up for class or showing up 15 minutes, or more, late for a class. All absences will result in a reduction of the attendance/participation grade.

#### **- Assignments:**

Reasonable deadlines are given for completion for each assignment. Consequently late assignments will not be accepted without prior consent of the instructor.

**-Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism on assignments or cheating on tests are serious offenses and earn the student a failing grade for the class. There are no exceptions to this rule. If you are in doubt about the definitions 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 slight alteration or rescheduling.

**-Sexual Harassment:**

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

**-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.

**GRADING:**

Class attendance and participation	10%
Morning pages/Journal	10%
First Draft of Screenplay	10%
Second Draft of Screenplay	10%
Assignments	30%
Final Screenplay	30%

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.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### WEEK ONE

#### INTRODUCTION TO COURSE AND REQUIREMENTS

- Screenwriting vs. traditional writing (novels, plays, etc.).
- Why we need to tell stories.
- Why we write.

#### KEY TO CREATIVITY

- Right brain versus left brain
- Don't think, don't censor, just do.
- Morning Pages.
- Artist dates.

#### WRITING WHAT YOU KNOW

- Turning your life experiences into drama.
- Confronting who you are - goals, needs, and desires.
- One true sentence.

**Read: Howard – Introduction, Pages 1 - 17**

**Assignment #1:** Buy a notebook and start morning pages. Write at least two pages a day, everyday, from now until Week Five. These pages can be about anything. They don't have to be profound or particularly insightful; for that matter, they don't even have to make sense – just write. I won't read what you write in the notebook (unless you want me to); however, I will count the number of pages you write each week.

**Assignment #2:** Write about five incidents from your own life that you consider movie moments. This can be either an incident that seems like a scene from a movie or an incident that could be the idea for a movie.

### WEEK TWO

#### CHARACTER

- What defines character?
- Action and character.
- Behavior.
- Environment, as it relates to character.

**Read: Howard – Pages 19 - 65**

**Assignment #3:** Writing from an Image. The details for this will be handed out and discussed in class.

**Assignment #4:** Create a character. Write a character biography for the potential protagonist of your story. Use the in-class discussion and handouts as a guide. Remember, the key to a dimensional character, write in the first person, and in complete sentences. Be as specific as you can – the more details the better. Also, keep in mind that nothing is chiseled in stone.

### WEEK THREE

#### CONFLICT

- Cause and effect and obstacles.
- Change in character.

## SCENES

- Defining goals of each scene.
- The function of each scene.
- Beats.

## DIALOGUE

- Good and bad dialogue.
- Character voices.
- Ear training.

**Read: Howard – Pages 66 - 94**

**Assignment #5:** Scene Exercise. The details for these scenes will be handed out and discussed in class.

**WEEK FOUR**

## STRUCTURE

- Beginning, middle and end.
- Plot points.
- The pulse of a script.
- The Aristotelian curve.

## TREATMENTS

- Step outlines.
- Formats.
- Polishing.

## SHORTS

- Writing the short

**Assignment #6:** Write a step outline for your story. You will present your outline to the class next week.

**WEEK FIVE**

## PREMISE

- Premise/Plot/Theme.
- The unifying element.
- Loglines

## WRITING IN VISUAL TERMS

- Metaphor

## PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION OF STEP OUTLINES

**Assignment #7:** Begin writing your screenplay. The first ten pages are due next week.

**WEEK SIX**

## FIRST TEN PAGES OF SCREENPLAY DUE

## TABLE READ PAGES

**Assignment #8:** Continue writing the first draft.

## **WEEK SEVEN**

FIRST DRAFTS DUE

REVISING/REWRITING

- Getting through writer's block.
- Review of format

## **WEEK EIGHT**

CRITIQUE OF FIRST DRAFTS

**Assignment #9:** Begin writing the second draft.

## **WEEK NINE**

SECOND DRAFTS DUE

## **WEEK TEN**

CRITIQUE OF SECOND DRAFTS

**Assignment #10:** Begin writing the final draft.

## **WEEK ELEVEN**

FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAYS ARE DUE

- Your script must be submitted by the start of the scheduled Final Exam time.

## **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 Instructor Evaluation:**

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.

**- Email:**

Email is the primary means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. Students should be sure their email listed under "demographic information" at Campus Connect is correct.

**- 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 <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>.

**- 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 the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at:

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.  
Phone number: (312)362-8002  
Fax: (312)362-6544  
TTY: (773)325.7296