

DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

SCWR 101-501: Screenwriting for Majors

Winter, 2020

Tuesday 1:30-4:45 PM, 14 East Jackson room 209

Professor Brad Riddell: brad.riddell@depaul.edu, 312-362-5212

Office Hours: Tues./Thurs. 10 AM – 1PM in CDM 521 and by appointment

Description:

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.

Course Outcomes:

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

Learning Objectives:

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
- revise their writing based on feedback from the professor and their peers
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

Textbooks and Printed Resources

"Tools of Screenwriting" by David Howard & Ed Mabley ISBN-10: 0312119089 (**Required**)

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

Additional readings provided by instructor.

Screenwriting Software:

You will be required to use screenwriting software. FINAL DRAFT, FADE IN, HIGHLAND, WRITER'S DUET, and CELTX are options. There are Google Doc and Word templates, but they are terrible and will cause you more trouble than they are worth. You will be asked to bring a printed copy to class. **All assignments are delivered in PDF.**

Course Management:

This course is housed and managed on **D2L**. There you will find course news, reading materials, and discussion boards for posting assignments and holding conversations. The *Checklist* will be utilized in order to help you stay abreast with this syllabus.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: January 7

- LECTURE: What is a Screenplay + Visual Storytelling
- ASSIGNMENT: Mood and Atmosphere Scenes

Week 2: January 14

- LECTURE: Character Development
- WORKSHOP: Mood & Atmosphere Scenes
- READING:
 - *Tools of Screenwriting*: About Screenwriting and Basic Storytelling (3-40), Characterization (63-65), Planting & Payoff, Elements of the Future (pages 72-76), Visuals (88-90)
 - *The Hollywood Standard*: Forward, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide (through page 27), Shot Headings (29-62), Direction (63-80)
- ASSIGNMENT: Preparation for a Date Scene

Week 3: January 21

- LECTURE: Writing Scenes with Conflict, Goals, Stakes, and Urgency
- WORKSHOP: Preparation for a Date
- READING:
 - *Tools of Screenwriting*: Protagonist, Conflict, Obstacles (43-49), Activity & Action (81-83), Dramatic Irony (68-70), Dramatic Scene (91-94), Exposition (60-62)
 - *Script Frenzy*, Mamet (on D2L)
- ASSIGNMENT: Interrogation Scene

Week 4: January 28

- LECTURE: Dialogue
- WORKSHOP: Interrogation Scene
- READING:
 - *Tools of Screenwriting*: Dialogue (84-87)
 - *The Hollywood Standard*: Dialogue (81-102), Transitions, Punctuation (103-111) Special Pages (131-139)
- ASSIGNMENT: Seduction Scene, Prepare for Midterm

Week 5: February 4

- **Midterm Test in Class.**
- LECTURE: Process and Professionalism
- WORKSHOP: Seduction Scene
- ASSIGNMENT: Three Pitches + Loglines for Short Screenplays

Week 6: February 11

- LECTURE: Writing the Short Script Part I
- WORKSHOP: Short Script Pitches + Loglines
- READING:
 - *Tools of Screenwriting*: Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59), Outlining, Plausibility (76-80)
- ASSIGNMENT: Step Outline for Short Screenplay

Week 7: February 18

- LECTURE: Writing the Short Script Part II
- WORKSHOP: Short Script Outlines
- READING: N/A
- ASSIGNMENT: Revised Outline for Short Screenplay

Week 8: February 25

- LECTURE: The First Draft
- WORKSHOP: Revised Outlines
- READING:
 - Short Screenplays Posted on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT: First Draft of Short Screenplay

Week 9: March 3

- LECTURE: Rewriting
- WORKSHOP: First Drafts of Short Scripts
- READING:
 - *The War of Art* on D2L
 - *Tools of Screenwriting*: Rewriting (95-97)
- ASSIGNMENT: Revise Short Scripts

Week 10: March 10

LECTURE: Working as a Writer and With Writers
 WORKSHOP: Revised Short Scripts

Week 11: March 17 @ 2:30 PM

Final Test + Delivery of Final Short Screenplay

Assignments

Scene Assignments

You will write a total of five scene exercises throughout the quarter based on the topics we cover in class – specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided on D2L. You are expected to bring a printed copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding discussion board.

Each scene assignment is 5% of your final grade (25% in total). Please save files as a PDF, and use your last name and the name of the assignment:

YourNameInterrogationScene.pdf

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

Quizzes

Two quizzes, one at the midterm and one at the final, will cover topics drawn specifically from lectures and course readings. **The midterm covers *The Hollywood Standard*, the final covers *The Tools of Screenwriting*.** These will feature multiple choice, T/F, fill-in-the-blank, and short screenwriting tasks.

Short Script First Draft

You will submit two drafts of a short script that is to be no longer than 12 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.

Short Script Second Draft

The final script is to be no longer than 12 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.

Short Script Final Draft

This draft should be 12 pages or less, error-free, ready to shoot, and have addressed all issues discussed in class. It should represent your very best effort.

Grading Policy

Class participation: 10 points
 Two Tests: 20 Points
 Scene Assignments: 25 Points
 Short Script Draft 1: 10 points
 Short Script Draft 2: 15 points
 Final Script Draft: 20 Points

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, F is substantially unsatisfactory. **Late work is rarely accepted.**

Attendance:

Absent students forfeit both their participation and assignment grade for the first two classes they miss (6 points or 6% of the final grade for each absence). **Three absences will constitute course failure.** Tardiness may result in the loss of participation points.

Creative Subject Matter:

As this is a creative writing class, controversial subject matter may make its way into the conversation. Students have every right to express themselves artistically in their writing and address challenging issues so long as the work does not glorify hate of any kind. If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for personal reasons, you may be excused from the remainder of that class without penalty. Inclusion of individuals from the class will not be tolerated in submitted material.

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.

Decorum and 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.

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 students will be notified 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:

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 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