

SCWR 101-201: Screenwriting for Majors

Winter Quarter 2021

Mondays, 1:00pm - 4:15pm

Location: Online

Instructor Information:

Jen Ellison

Contact me through the messaging portal on D2L

Office Hours: Thursdays, 1:30pm - 3:30pm (Zoom link on D2L)

Summary of Course:

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. Students are expected to develop and write a short screenplay.

Prerequisites:

None

Course Outcomes:

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

Learning Outcomes:

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
- Pitch an original writing project
- Revise writing based on feedback from the professor and peers
- Evaluate the work of peers and formulate constructive feedback

Required Textbooks:

Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley [ISBN-10: 0312119089]

The Hollywood Standard by Christopher Riley [ISBN-10: 1932907637]

Additional required readings will be provided via D2L in PDF format.

Screenwriting Software:

You are required to use screenwriting software in this course. Students interested in continuing to develop their screenwriting skills beyond this course may consider purchasing the industry standard Final Draft (available to students at a discounted \$129.99 at the [Final Draft Website](#). Click “Products” dropdown menu and go to “Final Draft Educational”). Free options for screenwriting software include Writerduet (writerduet.com), Celtx (celtx.com).

HOW THE CLASS WILL BE RUN

D2L

This course is housed and managed on D2L exclusively. There, students will find announcements, reading and writing assignments, discussion forums, Zoom links, and additional class materials.

Zoom

Every week we will meet via Zoom. In order to avoid Zoom fatigue, classes will rarely run the full 3 hours and 15 minutes. That said, these meetings are required. If you are unable to participate for any reason, please let me know ASAP. I will also be running office hours through Zoom.

Pre-recorded Lectures

Some lectures might be pre-recorded. In this way, you can engage with the material at your own pace. I will often discuss upcoming assignments and reference other resources that will help you. Knowledge Check quizzes will also reference the information in these lectures.

Messaging

All messages regarding this class will come through D2L. Be sure to check your messages frequently.

Grading Scale:

A=93-100%, A- =90-92%, B+ =87-89%, B =84-86%, B- =80-83%, C+ =77-79%, C =74-76%, C- =70-73%, D+ =67-69, D =60-66%

Assignments:

Title	Point Value	Due Date
Scene Writing: Character Profile & Entrance	5 points	DUE: January 11 @ 9:00am
Scene Writing: Mood & Atmosphere	5 points	DUE: January 25 @ 9:00am
Scene Writing: Preparation & Aftermath	5 points	DUE: February 1 @ 9:00am
Scene Writing: Interrogation	5 points	DUE: February 8 @ 9:00am
Concepts/Loglines	5 points	DUE: February 15 @ 9:00am
Draft Pages (Step Outline/One Scene)	10 points	DUE: February 22 @ 9:00am
First Draft Screenplay	15 points	DUE: March 8 @ 9:00am
Final Draft Screenplay	20 points	DUE: March 19 @ 11:59pm
Knowledge Check Quizzes	15 points	Over course of term
Attendance/ Participation	15 points	Over course of term
TOTAL	100 points possible	

All assignments must be typed in screenplay format with pages numbered, and shall include a title page. Choose screenwriting software that works for you and find tutorials online. You are responsible for learning how to use your software properly. All assignments must be submitted in PDF format via D2L.

Scene Writing Exercises:

Prior to drafting full screenplays, you will complete a total of four scene exercises 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 submissions folder.

Please save files as a PDF, and use your last name and the name of the assignment:

YourNameTitleofAssignmentScene.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
1. For the first scene writing exercise, Character Profile & Entrance, you will write one 250 - 300 word description of your character and one scene in which your character enters for the story for the first time.
 2. For the second scene writing exercise, Mood & Atmosphere, you will write 3 sample scenes focusing on the visual and aural presentation of a single space in differing genres.
 3. For the third scene writing exercise, Preparation & Aftermath, you will write a pair of scenes showing a character preparing for an event and then returning from that event. This assignment will force you to tell a story visually and to convey information about events without showing those events.
 4. For the fourth writing exercise, Interrogation/Interview, you will write a scene in which a detective (not necessarily a professional cop or PI, but someone investigating something with high relative stakes) interrogates someone who has something to hide.

Concepts/Loglines:

You will expand, in writing, on at least 2 original, narrative film concepts (i.e. no experimental or non-narrative films) for an approximately 10-minute short film you could ideally produce at DePaul. You will develop one concept into a full screenplay throughout the rest of the quarter.

For each proposed film concept, you will include:

1. a single sentence logline relating the core concept of the narrative (in present tense), and
2. a minimum of one written paragraph indicating the following information about the proposed film: who the protagonist is, the source/potential of conflict in the story, the film's genre classification (comedy, horror, action, thriller, etc), and any other details necessary to clearly convey your concept.

Files must be uploaded to the corresponding D2L Submissions Folder in PDF by the date listed above.

Draft Pages (Step Outline/One Scene):

This assignment is comprised of two parts:

1. You will expand your film concept into a Step Outline written in your chosen screenwriting software. This step outline will elaborate on the content of every scene in your film and must include an ending, even if that ending is likely to change in the future.
2. You will choose one scene from your Step Outline for which you plan to include a significant exchange of dialogue and develop that scene fully, dialogue and all.

[Note: You may of course include dialogue in other scenes, but only one scene needs to be written in its entirety with dialogue.]

The style and formatting of your scene must adhere to the guidelines specified in The Hollywood Standard (i.e. written in present tense, proper indentation for dialogue, etc.).

All Draft Pages files must be uploaded to the appropriate D2L Submissions Folder in PDF format by the due date listed above.

First Draft Screenplay:

First fully formatted 10-12 page draft (not a rough draft - must be proofread and spell checked) must be uploaded to the appropriate D2L Submissions Folder in PDF format by the due date listed above.

Final Draft Screenplay:

Your completed, 8-10 page screenplay must be uploaded to the appropriate D2L Submissions Folder in PDF format by due date listed above. Scripts must adhere to the guidelines specified in The Hollywood Standard.

Knowledge Checks:

These are short online quizzes throughout the term. They will assess your knowledge of class texts (The Hollywood Standard, Tools of Screenwriting).

Outside Screenings:

Students are required to view two feature films (Moonstruck (1987) and Get Out (2018)) outside of class for participation in lecture/discussion presentations throughout the quarter. Screenings must be completed on your own time by the date listed in the course schedule.

These films will be made available to you on ColTube (if you have other, more convenient, streaming methods, you may use those) Even if you've seen them before, you must watch them again.

[DISCLAIMER: Assigned features include adult language, violence, & sexual content.]

Class Policies

Attendance/Participation:

Each week's class consists of a combination of lectures, workshops, screenings, and class discussions and/or group exercises. Attendance is mandatory and participation in all discussions and exercises is expected. I assess both the quality and quantity of participation in class to elevate collective learning. Group exercises may require outside preparation be completed and students will receive ample notice. Students who are absent obviously cannot participate in class.

For the purposes of this class, an absence is defined as not showing up for class, leaving camera off, or showing up 15 minutes late. All absences will result in a deduction of 1 point from your overall Attendance/Participation grade; if you are absent more than three times, you fail the course.

(Note: Excused absences may be obtained from the Dean of Students Offices under certain circumstances and given the proper documentation.)

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 and violence 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.

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.

Late Work:

Assignments must be completed and uploaded to D2L in PDF format and quizzes completed by the date and time specified in the Class Schedule. Late written work will receive a 20% grade deduction for each day it is submitted late. Midterms and Final Draft Screenplays, however, must be turned in by the assigned due date/time (the Final Draft deadline marks the official end of the course). Printed submissions or submissions by email will not be accepted. I also suggest backing up work with a Cloud file storage service, as computers crash.

Technology Statement:

Zoom is a challenging platform, to say the least. However, it is important that you are able to remain focused, giving your eyes and ears to workshops, in-class writing assignments, and lectures. If you need assistance, please feel free to contact me.

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 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.

If the instructor finds a student has violated the Academic Integrity Policy/plagiarized their work, the student will fail the course, receiving an automatic F grade. (Note: Turnitin is used to check the originality of submissions on D2L.) Actions taken by the instructor in this regard do not preclude the university from taking further action, including dismissal from the university. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could also result in criminal or civil prosecution.

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>

IMPORTANT DATES:

Jan. 10 - Last day to add/swap classes
Jan. 17 - Last day to drop classes with no penalty,
Jan. 19 - Last day to select pass/fail option
Feb. 21- Last day to withdraw from classes, receiving a grade of “W”

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
TTY: (773)325.7296

Class Schedule Week by Week:

WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION

Lecture: Course Introduction & Orientation, Format, Character
Assignment: Read The Hollywood Standard (Ch. 1), Tools of Screenwriting (3-45)
Assignment: Character Profile & Entrance
Assignment: Read/Watch Moonstruck & Get Out

****BE SURE TO OBTAIN SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE BEFORE WEEK 2**

WEEK TWO: MOOD & ATMOSPHERE

Workshop: Character & Entrance
Lecture: World of the Screenplay, Mood and Atmosphere
Assignment: Read The Hollywood Standard (Ch. 2-5), Tools of Screenwriting (46-65)
Assignment: Mood & Atmosphere

*****WEEK THREE: MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY (NO CLASS)*****

WEEK FOUR: PREPARATION & AFTERMATH

Workshop: Mood & Atmosphere
Lecture: Preparation & Aftermath
Assignment: Read The Hollywood Standard (Ch. 6-8), Tools of Screenwriting (66-81)

Assignment: Preparation & Aftermath

WEEK FIVE: DIALOGUE

Workshop: Preparation & Aftermath

Lecture: Dialogue

Assignment: Read The Hollywood Standard (Ch. 9-12), Tools of Screenwriting (81-97)

Assignment: Interrogation/Interview

WEEK SIX: CONCEPT & LOGLINE

Workshop: Interrogation/Interview

Lecture: Concepts & Loglines

Assignment: Read The Hollywood Standard (Ch. 13-14)

Assignment: Concept/Logline

WEEK SEVEN: STEP OUTLINE & DRAFT PAGES

Workshop: Concept/Logline

Lecture: Step Outline

Assignment: Step outline & 5 draft pages

WEEK EIGHT & NINE: FIRST DRAFT

Workshop: Step outline & 5 draft pages

Lecture: First Draft

Assignment: Complete First Draft

WEEK TEN: FINAL DRAFT

Workshop: First Draft

Lecture: Final Draft

Assignment: Final Draft of Short 10-12 page screenplay

*****FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAY DUE ON D2L*****