

# Introduction to Screenwriting - Spring '12 Syllabus

Thursday 7pm – 9:45pm

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## COURSE MATERIALS:

TEXTS: “The Tools of Screenwriting”, David Howard & Edward Mabley  
“Making a Good Script Great”, Linda Seger

SOFTWARE: Final Draft is highly recommended for this course – as it is the industry standard. However, the steep price may dissuade you. There are several other screenwriting programs out there including some free ones like Celtx (<http://celtx.com/index.html>).

Please Note: If you do get Final Draft, you do not need Final Draft AV for the purposes of this class.

## Course Description:

This course will introduce you to feature film screenwriting. We will explore the basic theory and formal aspects of story structure, character development, use of conflict, scene writing and dialogue. We will then apply these basic dramatic principles to the development of your own original material.

Since much of the work of screenwriting is done before the actual drafting, this class will focus on the process of screenwriting: from the initial premise, through character exploration, to treatments and step-outlines, then writing your first draft. With the help of your peers in workshop, you will leave this course with a solid understanding of the fundamentals of screenwriting.

ALSO NOTE: the craft of screenwriting is learned through the critical examination of other screenplays and films, i.e.: we read screenplays in order to write screenplays. Just because you’ve seen the movie doesn’t mean it’s the same as the script. Screenplays are often used as blueprints for the films. As a result, if you don’t read the script you are robbing yourself of learning how a writer communicates what she intends to be onscreen.

## MECHANICS

**Writing Requirements:** By the end of the course, each student will have a completed treatment, step-outline, and completed first draft of a feature-length screenplay.

**Film Analysis:** Each student will compose a filmography – a list of films/scripts relevant to their own project. Students will analyze at least one film from their filmography, focusing on character or plot.

Note: Film analysis is one of the greatest tools available to a screenwriter. It's strongly recommended that students continue to write analysis throughout the semester.

**Assignments and Readings:** All readings and assignments will be in your books or posted online.

**Due Dates: Workshop assignments are to be brought to class or posted to eLearning on the dates indicate.**

If there is ever confusing contact the professor for clarification.

Assignments must be typewritten. Must be 12 point courier. Must be in the proper format. Must be page-numbered. Most programs will properly format for you, but it is your responsibility to make sure your screenplay is correctly formatted.

**No late work will be accepted.** Each assignment should be treated like a submission to a producer or agent, and thus should look professional: properly formatted and error-free.

### **ATTENDANCE:**

We have a lot to cover in this course – if you miss a single class (or are late to class) you'll miss something of great value. If absent or late, you are responsible for what was covered in class, including assignments: please contact two fellow students before resorting to the instructor.

You are expected to attend all lectures. Life happens sometimes, so you are allowed two absences. I don't require any notes or proof of emergency (I trust you have good reason). On the third absence you will receive one letter grade off. After a fourth, I recommend dropping the course. If you have extreme special circumstances, such as a heart operation or you are a nuclear physicist and are needed to avert a global catastrophe, then I suggest you make arrangements ahead of time with me for proper accommodations. You are expected to be proactive. After the fact excuses are not admissible.

### **RULES OF CRITICISM:**

- Don't hold back. If something has problems, it has problems. Say so. However...
- Negative comments are a lot easier to make than positive ones. So, no matter how constructive your criticism is, try to match it with a compliment somewhere else.
- Identifying problems isn't enough -- also identify possible solutions. Don't simply say that a character or a scene doesn't work for you. Say why it doesn't, then tell us what changes to the character or scene would make it work for you.

- With regard to criticism of your own work: start developing a thick skin. Remember that your instructors and classmates are commenting on your scripts, not on you. Use their criticism to become a better writer.

**GRADING:**

In evaluating your work, I try to assess what's been learned and if it's reflected in your writing, i.e.: have you demonstrated an understanding of the dramatic concepts discussed in class, and is that understanding reflected in your own creative work? Your final grade will reflect the quality and sincerity of your efforts in this class.

Equally important is the level and quality of participation in class, as reflected by contribution to workshop.

There will be no tests or final exam. Grades will be determined on a 100-point scale:

<b>Screenplay:</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>--Including all development assignments</b>	
<b>Class Participation:</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Other Assignments:</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Growth:</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>--This is based on how well you have synthesized and applied what has been discussed in class. The quality of your work should improve.</b>	

## SYLLABUS – Spring 2012

**This syllabus is subject to change.**

Jan. 19

### **The Principles of Dramatic Writing**

- Introduction to Screenwriting
- The Basics: Character, Story, Structure
- The Premise: Story Spine

Jan. 26

### **Finding the Story**

- How to Format a Script
- How to Write a Short Outline

Workshop: Premises

Due: 3-5 Premises

Reading: Seger chp. 1, 7  
Howard p. 1-39

Feb. 2

### **Three Act Structure: Putting It All Together**

- “The Godfather”: Beginnings, Middles, and Ends
- Treatment: 5 Key Moments

Workshop: Short Outlines

Due: Short Outlines – Post to Blackboard Mon. Jan. 30<sup>th</sup>  
\*Bring notes for your classmates to every workshop.

Reading: “The Godfather”  
Seger Chp. 2

Feb. 9

### **Exploring Character**

- “Schindler's List”: Dramatizing Character
- Proper Script Formatting

Reading: “Schindler’s List”  
Seger chp. 9-12  
Howard p. 41-76

Due: Treatments

Feb. 16

### **Exposition**

- How to write a Step Outline

Workshop: Treatments – Divide into groups for peer feedback

Reading: McKee Chp. 15

Due: Formatting Exercise

Feb. 23

### **“Rosemary’s Baby”: Three Act Structure**

- Filmography, Character Interviews

Workshop: Formatting

Reading: “Rosemary’s Baby”

Due: Step Outline

- Mar. 1 **Scenes: Form and Function**
- “The 6<sup>th</sup> Sense”: The Role of Conflict Dialogue & Descriptives
  - Option “C”
  - Film Analysis Character & Plot
- Reading: “The 6<sup>th</sup> Sense”  
 Seger Chp. 5  
 Howard p. 76-94
- Workshop: Step Outline – Divide into groups for peer feedback  
 Due: Filmography, 2 Character Interviews
- Mar. 8 **Structure and Meaning**
- Idea vs. Counter Idea
  - How to write a Step Outline
- Workshop: Group A: Pgs. 1-15, submitted to Blackboard Monday Mar. 5  
 Reading: McKee Chp. 6  
 Due: Group A: Pgs. 1-15 submits to eLearning Monday Mar. 5.  
 Group B: Film Analysis
- Mar. 15 **SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**
- Mar. 22 **“Unforgiven”: Dominoes Falling**
- Workshop: Group B: Pgs. 1-30  
 Reading: “Unforgiven”  
 Due: Group A: 15-45  
 Group B: Post Pgs. 1-30 to eLearning by March 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Mar. 29 **Act I & The First Draft**
- Workshop: Group A: Pgs. 15-45  
 Due: Group A: Film Analysis  
 Group B: Pgs. 30-45  
 \*Every week from here on out each group should be producing new pages.
- Apr. 5 **“Network” – Dialogue Done Right**
- Workshop: Group B: Pgs. 30-45  
 Due: Group A: Pgs. 45-60  
 Group B: Write
- Apr. 12 **“Thelma & Louise” – Art and Subtlety**
- Workshop: Group A: Pgs. 45-60  
 Due: Group A: Write  
 Group B: Pgs. 45-60

- Apr. 19                                   **“Fisher King” – The Emotional Barometer**  
Workshop: Group B: Pgs. 45-60  
Due: Group A: Pgs. 60-75  
Group B: Write
- Apr. 26                                   **“Mystic River”: Resolution Thru Character**  
Workshop: Group A: Pgs. 60-75  
Due: Group A: Write  
Group B: Pgs. 60-75
- May 3                                      **“Pulp Fiction”: Ends, Beginnings, Middles**  
Workshop: Group B: Pgs. 60-75  
Group A: Write
- May 10                                    **\*Turn in up to page 90 or as close to complete as possible.**

## **OFFICIAL UT DALLAS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **Field Trip Policies, Off-Campus Instruction and Course Activities**

Off-campus, out-of-state, and foreign instruction and activities are subject to state law and University policies and procedures regarding travel and risk-related activities.

Information regarding these rules and regulations may be found at [http://www.utdallas.edu/BusinessAffairs/Travel\\_Risk\\_Activities.htm](http://www.utdallas.edu/BusinessAffairs/Travel_Risk_Activities.htm). Additional information is available from the office of the school dean.

### **Student Conduct and Discipline**

The University of Texas System and The University of Texas at Dallas have rules and regulations for the orderly and efficient conduct of their business. It is the responsibility of each student and each student organization to be knowledgeable about the rules and regulations which govern student conduct and activities. General information on student conduct and discipline is contained in the UT Dallas printed publication, *A to Z Guide*, which is available to all registered students each academic year.

The University of Texas at Dallas administers student discipline within the procedures of recognized and established due process. Procedures are defined and

described in the *Rules and Regulations, Series 50000*, Board of Regents, The University of Texas System, and in *Title V, Rules on Student Services and Activities* of the university's *Handbook of Operating Procedures*. Copies of these rules and regulations are available to students in the Office of the Dean of Students, where staff members are available to assist students in interpreting the rules and regulations (SU 1.602, 972/883-6391) and online at <http://www.utdallas.edu/judicialaffairs/UTDJudicialAffairs-HOPV.html>.

A student at the university neither loses the rights nor escapes the responsibilities of citizenship. He or she is expected to obey federal, state, and local laws as well as the Regents' Rules, university regulations, and administrative rules. Students are subject to discipline for violating the standards of conduct whether such conduct takes place on or off campus, or whether civil or criminal penalties are also imposed for such conduct.

[Added July 2010] Students are expected to be attentive during class and to participate actively in group activities. Students are expected to listen respectfully to faculty and to other students who are speaking. Racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ageism, and other forms of bigotry are inappropriate to express in class. Classes may discuss issues that require sensitivity and maturity. Disruptive students will be asked to leave and may be subject to disciplinary action.

### **Academic Integrity**

The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Because the value of an academic degree depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student for that degree, it is imperative that a student demonstrate a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work.

*Scholastic Dishonesty:* Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, submitting for credit any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, or any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

Plagiarism, especially from the web, from portions of papers for other classes, and from any other source, is unacceptable and will be dealt with under the university's policy on plagiarism (see general catalog for details). This course will use the resources of *turnitin.com*, which searches the web for possible plagiarism and is over 90% effective.

### **Copyright Notice**

The copyright law of the United States (*Title 17, United States Code*) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials, including music and software. Copying, displaying, reproducing, or distributing copyrighted works may infringe upon the copyright owner's rights and such infringement is subject to appropriate disciplinary action as well as criminal penalties provided by federal law. Usage of such material is only appropriate when that usage constitutes "fair use" under the Copyright Act. As a UT Dallas student, you are required to follow the institution's copyright policy ([Policy Memorandum 84-1.3-46](#)). For more information about the fair use exemption, see <http://copyright.lib.utexas.edu/copypol2.html>.

### **Email Use**

The University of Texas at Dallas recognizes the value and efficiency of communication between faculty/staff and students through electronic mail. At the same time, email raises some issues concerning security and the identity of each individual in an email exchange. The university encourages all official student email correspondence be sent only to a student's UT Dallas email address and that faculty and staff consider email from students official only if it originates from a UT Dallas student account. This allows the university to maintain a high degree of confidence in the identity of all individuals corresponding and the security of the transmitted information. UT Dallas furnishes each student with a free email account that is to be used in all communication with university personnel. The Department of Information Resources at UT Dallas provides a method for students to have their UT Dallas mail forwarded to other accounts.

### **Class Attendance**

Regular and punctual class attendance is expected. Students who fail to attend class regularly are inviting scholastic difficulty. Absences may lower a student's grade where class attendance and class participation are deemed essential by the instructor. In some courses, instructors may have special attendance requirements; these should be made known to students during the first week of classes.

### **Withdrawal from Class**

The administration of this institution has set deadlines for withdrawal from any college-level courses. These dates and times are published in that semester's course inventory and in the academic calendar. Administration procedures must be followed. It is the student's responsibility to handle withdrawal requirements from any class. In other words, a professor or other instructor cannot drop or withdraw any student. You must do the proper paperwork to ensure that you will not receive a final grade of "F" in a course if you choose not to attend the class once you are enrolled.



## **Student Grievance Procedures**

Procedures for student grievances are found in *Title V, Rules on Student Services and Activities*, of the university's *Handbook of Operating Procedures*.

In attempting to resolve any student grievance regarding grades, evaluations, or other fulfillments of academic responsibility, it is the obligation of the student first to make a serious effort to resolve the matter with the instructor, supervisor, administrator, or committee with whom the grievance originates (hereafter called "the respondent"). Individual faculty members retain primary responsibility for assigning grades and evaluations. If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, the grievance must be submitted in writing to the respondent with a copy of the respondent's School Dean. If the matter is not resolved by the written response provided by the respondent, the student may submit a written appeal to the School Dean. If the grievance is not resolved by the School Dean's decision, the student may make a written appeal to the Dean of Graduate or Undergraduate Education, and the dean will appoint and convene an Academic Appeals Panel. The decision of the Academic Appeals Panel is final. The results of the academic appeals process will be distributed to all involved parties.

Copies of these rules and regulations are available to students in the Office of the Dean of Students, where staff members are available to assist students in interpreting the rules and regulations.

## **Incomplete Grade Policy**

As per university policy, incomplete grades will be granted only for work unavoidably missed at the semester's end and only if 70% of the course work has been completed. An incomplete grade must be resolved within eight (8) weeks from the first day of the subsequent long semester. If the required work to complete the course and to remove the incomplete grade is not submitted by the specified deadline, the incomplete grade is changed automatically to a grade of F.

## **Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA)**

UT Dallas is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for students with documented disabilities to all University courses and programs. Any student with a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability, which affects his/her academic performance, is eligible for services. If you need classroom accommodations, please make an appointment with the Office of Student AccessAbility at: SSB 3.200 (3rd Floor in SSB), 972-883-2098. Office hours are Monday – Thursday, 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., Friday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Evening appointments are available by request. <http://www.utdallas.edu/studentaccess/>

OSA provides registered students with an accommodation letter to present to faculty members. The letter verifies that the student is qualified to receive certain accommodations. The accommodation letter should be presented to instructors of each course at the beginning of the semester. The approved accommodations should be discussed at that time. It is the student's responsibility to notify his/her professor of their needs.

The University of Texas at Dallas is proud to be an educational institution that welcomes and supports a diverse student body.

### **Religious Holy Days**

The University of Texas at Dallas will excuse a student from class or other required activities for the travel to and observance of a religious holy day for a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property tax under Section 11.20, Tax Code, *Texas Code Annotated*.

The student is encouraged to notify the instructor or activity sponsor as soon as possible regarding the absence, preferably in advance of the assignment. The student, so excused, will be allowed to take the exam or complete the assignment within a reasonable time after the absence: a period equal to the length of the absence, up to a maximum of one week. A student who notifies the instructor and completes any missed exam or assignment may not be penalized for the absence. A student who fails to complete the exam or assignment within the prescribed period may receive a failing grade for that exam or assignment.

If a student or an instructor disagrees about the nature of the absence [i.e., for the purpose of observing a religious holy day] or if there is similar disagreement about whether the student has been given a reasonable time to complete any missed assignments or examinations, either the student or the instructor may request a ruling from the chief executive officer of the institution, or his or her designee. The chief executive officer or designee must take into account the legislative intent of *TEC 51.911(b)*, and the student and instructor will abide by the decision of the chief executive officer or designee.

### **Avoiding Plagiarism**

[Adapted from Duke University's guidelines for writers; added July 2010]

*Take time to make careful choices among--and learn to use--the research tools available to you. You will probably find that your favorite web search engine is not adequate by itself for college-level research. Consult with your professor or a librarian. You may need to use specialized research tools, some of which may require learning new searching techniques.*

*Expect to make trips to the library.* While you can access many of the library's resources from your home computer, you may find that you need to make several trips to use materials or research tools that are not accessible remotely. Of course, you will be seeking the best information, not settling for sources simply because they happen to be available online.

*Allow time for gathering materials* that are not available at UT Dallas. The InterLibrary Loan Office can borrow articles and books from other libraries, but this process takes additional time.

*Allow time for reading,* rereading, absorbing information, taking notes, synthesizing, and revising your research strategy or conducting additional research as new questions arise.

*Sloppy note-taking increases the risk that you will unintentionally plagiarize.* Unless you have taken note carefully, it may be hard to tell whether you copied certain passages exactly, paraphrased them, or wrote them yourself. This is especially problematic when using electronic source materials, since they can so easily be copied and pasted into your own document.

*Identify words that you copy directly* from a source by placing quotation marks around them, typing them in a different color, or highlighting them. (Do this immediately as you are making your notes. Don't expect to remember days or weeks later what phrases you copied directly.) Make sure to indicate the exact beginning and end of the quoted passage. Copy the wording, punctuation and spelling exactly as it appears in the original.

*Jot down the page number and author or title* of the source each time you make a note, even if you are not quoting directly but are only paraphrasing.

*Keep a working bibliography* of your sources so that you can go back to them easily when it's time to double-check the accuracy of your notes. If you do this faithfully during the note-taking phase, you will have no trouble completing the "works cited" section of your paper later on.

*Keep a research log.* As you search databases and consult reference books, keep track of what search terms and databases you used and the call numbers and URLs of information sources. This will help if you need to refine your research strategy, locate a source a second time, or show your professor what works you consulted in the process of completing the project.

*You must cite direct quotes.*

*You must cite paraphrases.* Paraphrasing is rewriting a passage or block of text in your own words. If you paraphrase, you must still cite the original source of the idea.

*You must cite ideas* given to you in a conversation, in correspondence, or over email.

*You must cite sayings or quotations that are not familiar, or facts that are not "common knowledge."* However, it is not necessary to cite a source if you are repeating a well known quote or familiar proverb. Common knowledge is something that is widely known. For example, it is widely known that Bill Clinton served two terms as president; it would not be necessary to cite a source for this fact.

*These types of sources should be cited as well. Printed sources:* Books, parts of books, magazine or journal articles, newspaper articles, letters, diaries, public or private documents; *Electronic sources:* Web pages, articles from e-journals, newsgroup postings, graphics, email messages, software, databases; *Images:* Works of art, illustrations, cartoons, tables, charts, graphs; *Recorded or spoken material:* Course lectures, films, videos, TV or radio broadcasts, interviews, public speeches, conversations.

### **Resources to Help You Succeed**

The GEMS Center (located within the Conference Center) provides a wide array of free academic support and enhancement for UT Dallas undergraduate students. Offerings include, but are not limited to, a Math Lab and Writing Center, Peer Tutoring (with a focus on science, technology, engineering and math courses), test review sessions, and academic success coaching. The current menu of services, schedules, and contact information is posted on the GEMS website: <http://www.utdallas.edu/ossa/gems/>. [Added July 2010]