

Creating Movie Scripts – HUAS 6352

Fall '16 Syllabus

Tuesday 4pm – 6:45pm

FN 2.204

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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 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 WriterDuet (<https://writerduet.com>).

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

In order to cogently participate in class you will need to watch the films we are talking about. All of the films listed in this course will be available to rent online. This is part of the expense of the class. Amazon allows movie rentals, as does YouTube.

Check these sites below for other possible resources:

<http://www.canistream.it>

<https://www.justwatch.com/us>

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 feature 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 short outline, step-outline, and completed first act or more 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 posted to eLearning on the dates indicated.

If you have questions 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:

The main pedagogical tool of this course is the workshop. Missing class means you are missing this essential component of the course and will be factored into your grade. We have a lot to cover – 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. After the fact excuses are not admissible.

NOTE: If you miss your workshop day you will only get 25% credit on that assignment in addition to any absent penalties.

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:

Assignment	Percentage of Total
Treatment:	5%
Outline:	5%
Pgs 1 – 15:	10%
Rewrite Pgs. 1 – 15:	5%
Pgs 15 – 30:	10%
Rewrite Pgs. 15-30:	5%
Pgs 30 – 45:	10%
Pgs 45 – 60:	10%
Pgd. 60-75:	10%
Other Assignments:	10%
Final:	10%
Participation:	10%

SYLLABUS

This syllabus is subject to change.

Week	Date	
1	23-Aug	Principles of Dramatic Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Screenwriting • The Basics: Character, Story, Structure • The Premise: Story Spine Assignment: 3-5 Premises *Upload all assignments to discussion threads on eLearning
2	30-Aug	Three Act Structure: Putting It All Together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Godfather”: Beginnings, Middles, and Ends • 5 Key Moments • How to do a Film Analysis Workshop: Premises DUE: 3-5 Premises Seger chp. 1, 2, 8, & 10 Howard p. 1-39 Read & Watch – “The Godfather” *All reading not in your books will be on eLearning
3	6-Sep	Scene building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The 6th Sense” and Scene Structure • How to Write an Treatment DUE: Read & Watch - “The 6 th Sense” Howard p. 40-97 Seger Chp. 5-7 Film Analysis
4	13-Sep	Formatting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper Technique • Final Draft, WriterDuet Demo • Formatting Assignment Exploring Character - “Schindler's List”: Dramatizing Character DUE: Treatment Read & Watch “Schindler’s List”
5	20-Sep	Workshop: Treatment & Formatting DUE: Trottier - book III (Formatting - stop at p.208) Formatting Assignment Read Treatments Seger Chp. 10-12

6	27-Sep	Workshop: Outline DUE: Outlines (post to eLearning and bring copies to read in class) Seeger Chp. 3-4
7	4-Oct	“Unforgiven”: Dominoes Falling Workshop: Group 1 pgs. 1-15 Character Interviews DUE: Read & Watch “Unforgiven” Act I Pgs. 1-15 Seeger Chp. 9, 13
8	11-Oct	Workshop: Group 2 pgs. 1-15 DUE: Character Interviews
9	18-Oct	Workshop: Group 1 pgs. 15-30 DUE: Outline rewrite Act I Act I pgs. 15-30
10	25-Oct	Workshop: Group 2 pgs. 15-30 DUE: Rewrite 1-15
11	1-Nov	Workshop: Pgs. 15-30 DUE: Rewrite pgs. 15-30
12	8-Nov	Monomyth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hero’s Journey • Matrix Workshop: Group 1 pgs. 30-45 DUE: Act I rewrite synopsis Pgs. 30-45
13	15-Nov	Workshop: Group 2 pgs. 30-45 DUE: Pgs. 45-60
14	22-Nov	Workshop: Pgs. 45-60 DUE: Read pgs. 45-60
15	29-Nov	Fall Break
16	6-Dec	Alternative Poetics – Ends, Middles, and Beginnings Workshop: 60-75 DUE: Pgs. 60-75

17	13-Dec	No Class DUE: Final: Rewrites II & Pgs. 75-90
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Please review the official UT Dallas Policies and Procedures online:

<http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>