

Creating Television Scripts - Spring '17 Syllabus

Wednesday, 4pm – 6:45pm

RM – JO 3.536

Noah Zisman

noahz@utdallas.edu

Phone: TBA

Office Hours: By appointment

Office: ATC 1.505

COURSE MATERIALS:

TEXTS: “The TV Writer’s Workbook” – Ellen Sandler
“Writing the TV Drama Series” – Pamela Douglas

These will be available at Off Campus Bookstore: <http://www.offcampusbooks.com/home.php>

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:

Writer’s Duet: <https://writerduet.com/>

Celtx: <http://celtx.com/index.html>

Adobe’s Story: <https://story.adobe.com/en-us/index.html>

Please Note: If you do get Final Draft, you do not need Final Draft AV for the purposes of this class. Also, if you find some other software, please check with the instructor before using.

In order to cogently participate in class you will need to watch the shows we are talking about. That might mean renting them. Getting them through the library (if they are available – consider public libraries as well), or getting a membership to an online resource such as Netflix.com or Hulu.com. This is part of the expense of the class.

Course Description:

The primary objective of this course is to learn the basics of writing for television. We will do this in part through the examination of format, style, structure, and needs of the network for both a comedy (30 minute) and a drama (60 minute) series. We will also study the basics of scene building, conflict, and dialogue by writing both a “spec” script and an original pilot.

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 show 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.

Assignments and Readings: All readings and assignments will be posted online. 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. Work needs to be in on time to ensure that the class has enough time to read it before class.

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.

Last note on absences – the workshop is integral to absorbing the material in this class. If you miss too many classes you won't be experiencing the main pedagogical tool of this course. It's not fair to you, the class, or your instructor to exempt you from that part of the process.

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.

Grade Breakdown:

	Percent of Total Grade (Based on 100 points)
Choose Show / Premises	-
Formatting Assignment	5
TV Show Analysis	5
Show Bible	5
Spec Treatment	5
Spec Pgs. 1-15	5
Spec Pgs. 15-30	5
Pilot Outlines	5
Pilot Outline Feedback	5
Spec Rewrite or Finish	10
Pilot Beat Sheet	5
Pilot Pgs. 1-15	10
Pilot Pgs. 15-30	10
Pilot Beat Feedback	5
Rewrite & Finish Pilot	10
Participation	10

This Syllabus is subject to change:

	Date	Class
1	11-Jan	<p>What we'll do in class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to TV Writing • Syllabus • Connection Exercise • What's a "Spec" script? • The Franchise • How to properly format a script
2	18-Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quick primer on 3-act structure – Why does it matter? • How to begin: TV bible and premise • How to do a TV show analysis • Workshop: Formatting exercise <p>Due: Formatting Choose Shows</p>
3	25-Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Premises • How to do a Treatment <p>Due: TV show analysis Show "bible" Premises Read: Sandler Chp. 1-9 Douglas – How to use this book: If you're a writer, Chp. 1 Watch shows</p>
4	1-Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss Breaking Bad • Talk the talk – Dialogue Lecture <p>Due: Spec Treatment Read: Sandler Chp. 10 Read: Douglas Chp. 3 Read: Breaking Bad Pilot Watch shows</p>
5	8-Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Spec Treatment <p>Due: Read Treatments Read: Douglas Chp. 2 Read: Sandler Chp. 11-18 Watch shows</p>

6	15-Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Spec Pgs. 1-15 <u>Due:</u> Read: Scripts we haven't workshopped Read: Douglas Chp. 4 Watch shows
7	22-Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Spec Pgs. 1-15 • Workshop: Premises <u>Due:</u> Original Series Premises
8	1-Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Premises • Workshop: Spec Pgs. 15-30 <u>Due:</u> Pilot Short Outlines – Bibles Read: Arrested Development Pilot
9	8-Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Spec Pgs. 15-30 <u>Due:</u> Read Bibles Post Bible Feedback
10	15-Mar	Spring Break
11	22-Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mechanics of a Great Pilot • Workshop: Finished Script • Pilot Beat Sheet <u>Due:</u> Due Monday March 21 – Rewrite or write at least 15 more pages
12	29-Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings: Beat Sheet Workshops <u>Due:</u> Read: Professional Drama TV Pilot TBA Pilot Beat Sheet – Due Mon. March 28 Read and Post notes to Beat sheets
13	5-Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Issues <u>Due:</u> Pilot Pgs 1-15
14	12-Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Pilot pgs 1-30 <u>Due:</u> Pilot pgs. 1-30
15	19-Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop – 15 pages of your choice <u>Due:</u> Rewrite 1-30
16	26-Apr	TBA <u>Due:</u> Rewrite & finish

OFFICIAL UT DALLAS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Please review the official UT Dallas Policies and Procedures online:

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