

**Instructor:** Matthew T. Price

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**Class:** Mon/Wed 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM. Jerome Richfield Hall, Room 244.

**Office hours:** Wed 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM, MZ room 161; or by appointment.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Whether you're thinking of narrative or documentary, movies, television, or new media, storytelling is at the heart of cinema. And the story starts with a script.

Not everyone wants to be a screenwriter, but everyone on set should have a fundamental understanding of the screen story, whether they are a producer, director, cinematographer, editor, or anything else. The screenplay is the foundation upon which everything else is built.

In this class, you will not only gain an understanding of, but also an appreciation for the craft of screenwriting. You will write your own stories, as well as help your classmates improve their writing in a supportive, creative environment. And, hopefully, you'll have some fun along the way, too.

### **STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Upon successful completion of this class, you should:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the technical and aesthetic issues related to writing for television, film and other electronic media.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the fundamental principles of narrative fiction screenwriting.
3. Demonstrate proficiency in writing in a variety of script formats, including the episodic television script, two-column video script, film script, and multicamera script formats.

This course addresses CTVA Departmental SLO #2: Develop and write scripts for fiction and non-fiction audio/visual productions.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

- *Writing for Visual Media*, 4th Edition, by Anthony Friedmann
- *Media Writing Handbook*, by Donald Wood

### **RECOMMENDED TEXTS**

- *The Elements of Style*, 4th Edition, by William Strunk, & E. B. White
- *The 21st Century Screenplay: A Comprehensive Guide to Writing Tomorrow's Films*, by Linda Aronson
- *The Art Of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis In The Creative Interpretation Of Human Motives*, by Lajos Egri
- *99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style*, by Matt Madden

## ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

We will be writing in a variety of formats throughout the semester, but the following holds true for every assignment:

- All assignments are to be turned in electronically, via Canvas, unless otherwise specified in class.
- All written work turned in is expected to be completely original. Any material written for this class found not original will be severely dealt with, as dictated by the department and the university.
- Every assignment must have a title page, which includes the title of the work, your name, and the date of completion.
- Every page, except the title and first page, should be numbered.
- Assignments must be turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized 1 point for every day late.
- Every assignment must be turned in using the proper formatting, as discussed in class. Everything you turn in should be proofread for spelling and grammatical errors, as well.
  - If I find 6 or more errors on a single page, the assignment will be returned without grading. If you choose to re-write the assignment, it will be accepted for **half credit**.

I strongly suggest you have a friend or roommate proofread your assignments. You can also find help at the University Writing Center, which is free to all students.

Students with disabilities must register with the Center on Disabilities and complete a services agreement each semester. Staff within the Center will verify the existence of a disability based on the documentation provided and approved accommodations. Students who are approved for test taking accommodations must provide a proctor form to their faculty member signed by a counselor in the Center on Disabilities prior to making testing arrangements. The Center on Disabilities is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110. Staff can be reached at (818) 677-2684.

## ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

We will be working in a collaborative, supportive classroom. As such, your attendance and *attention* are of utmost importance. This will be reflected in your grade (see grading below). If you miss a class, you are still responsible for any assignments given in class that day. A missed class is one point off your grade, unless you have an appropriate doctor's note or similarly valid excuse.

Cell phones are to be put on silent, and put away during class. Use of laptops is encouraged for in-class writing exercises, but should not be used for non-class related activities. Distracting yourself or others will count against your participation grade.

## GRADE BREAKDOWN

Attendance and Participation	15 points
Two-Column Script	5 points
TV Spec Scene	5 points
Short Film Analysis	2 point
Feature Film Analysis	3 point
Feature Script Analysis	3 points
Midterm	15 points
Character Worksheets	5 points
Short Film Pitch (written)	5 points
Short Film Pitch (verbal)	5 points
Short Script Outline	5 points
First Act of Short Script	4 points
Second Act of Short Script	4 points
Third Act of Short Script	4 points
Final, Revised Short Script	20 points

At the end of the semester, your points will be totalled and converted to a letter grade using the scale below.

A = 91-100 ; B = 81-90 ; C = 71-80 ; D = 61-70 ; F = 0-59

## WHAT TO EXPECT

The best way to learn to write is to write. The second best way is to read. In this course, you will be doing a lot of both. But this is an introductory course, and I don't expect Academy Award-winning scripts. The focus is far more on doing the work and improving over the course of the semester.

# CLASS SCHEDULE

(subject to change)

## Week 1

8/26 - Introduction to Introduction to Media Writing

*Meet the professor • The ceremonial reading of the syllabus • Why writing is important • Assumptions about the course*

**Assignment:** Fill out student questionnaire. Sign up for Hoopla & Kanopy.

8/28 - Writing with Pictures

*Writing visually • Two column format • Exposition • What are images good for? • What are words good for?*

**Assignment 1:** Using the two column format, write an explainer video on the topic of your choice. **DUE SEP 4**

**Assignment 2:** Choose a screenplay for a film you're familiar with, and check it out from the script library. Read before week 4.

## Week 2

9/2 - Labor Day!

*Unions • Capital & Labor • Not attending class*

**Assignment:** see above

9/4 - What's the Story?

*All stories are made up, even the true ones • The world's shortest story • Character motivations • Deep structure • Theme*

**Assignment:** Watch one of the assigned short films ; write a 1 page analysis of the deep structure

## Week 3

9/9 - Character as Story

*Protagonists • Want vs need • Backstory • Character Tree*

**Assignment:** Start thinking about who the protagonist of your story is

9/11 - Conflict as story

*Antagonists • Against the world • Dilemmas • Jeopardy - a Game of Two • Character Bone Structure*

**Assignment:** Fill out the Character Bone Structure worksheet and your Character Tree; one for your protagonist and one for your antagonist.

## Week 4

9/16 - Formatting, Part 1

*Basic screenplay format • Three questions • What to include • What to exclude*

**Assignment:** Read Academy formatting guidelines. Purchase Final Draft or sign up for WriterDuet (free). Bring computer to class next session.

9/18 - Formatting, Part 2

*Variations on a theme • Single camera • Multicam • We now interrupt this program • Cliffhangers • Multipart stories • In-class formatting practice*

**Assignment:** Analyze the script you checked out from the library. Topics to include: formatting; deep structure; character motivations. Minimum 3 pages.

## Week 5

9/23 - Words on the Page

*Scene work • Every scene is its own story • Start late, finish early • Shoeleather*

**Assignment:** Pick a TV show whose writing you like, and find a copy of an episode script.

9/25 - Stylistics

*Metaphor • Subtext • Context • Two answers to the question, "What is a spec?"*

**Assignment:** Write a spec scene for your chosen TV series.

## Week 6

9/30 - Three Act Structure - An Overview

*Why Aristotle still matters • Beginning, middle, and end*

10/2 - Getting Started - Act I

*First impressions matter • How to watch a movie • Your hero vs. the world • Chekhov's Gun • Inciting incident*

**Assignment:** Watch one of the assigned films, and write a 2 page analysis of how effectively the parts of the first act were or were not utilized.

## Week 7

10/7 - And Then Some Stuff Happens - Act II

*Causality • Therefore vs And Then • Escalation • Progressive complications*

10/9 - This Is the End, the End of Our Story - Act III

*The point of it all • Confrontation • Denouement*

**Assignment:** Take-home midterm. Begin thinking about your short film concept.

## Week 8

10/14 - Development Hell

*What makes a good idea? • The elevator pitch • The logline*

**Assignment:** Write 10 concepts in the format provided.

10/16 - Development Heaven

*Sharing ideas with others • Audience reaction vs personal expression*

**Assignment:** Choose your favorite concept, and write a 1 page pitch (using the provided format).

## Week 9

10/21 - Fleshing Out the Story

*Outlining • Snowflake method*

**Assignment:** Begin your outline (**Due October 30**)

10/23 - Verbal Pitching

*Most people would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy • Confidence • Practice • Visual aids*

**Assignment:** Prepare your verbal pitch to present in class next week.

## Week 10

10/28 - Pitches

*Students will be randomly chosen to pitch their idea to the class.*

**Assignment:** If you didn't pitch today, then you're pitching next time.

10/30 - More Pitches

*More in-class pitches.*

**OUTLINES DUE TODAY**

**Assignment:** Watch one of the assigned films; write your logline and pitch for it.

## Week 11

11/4 - Why Shorts?

*Viewing classic short films • Differences between a short and a feature • More in-class pitches*

**Assignment:** Pick a short film to watch in class (no more than 6 minutes). Think about *why* you think it's good/worth watching.

11/6 - Final Pitches

*Last in-class pitches • Class discussion of lessons learned.*

**Assignment:** Write Act I. **Due November 11**

**Assignment:** Read fellow student's scripts for discussion in the next class.

## Week 12

11/11 - Veterans' Day

*Service • Duty • Not attending class*

11/13 - Student Critiques

*How to give constructive criticism • How to take constructive criticism • Divide into small groups to discuss first acts*

**Assignment:** Rewrite Act I, based professor and students' notes. Choose a scene to be read in class next week. Think about who you want to read each part.

## Week 13

11/18 - Is That What I Sound Like?

*Reading scenes from students' scripts aloud in class.*

**Assignment:** If your script wasn't read today, it will be next class.

11/20 - Hearing is Believing

*Reading scenes from students' scripts aloud in class.*

**Assignment:** Begin Act II. (**Due December 1**)

## Week 14

11/25 - The Desert of Act II

*Why is writing hard? • Finding motivation • Character map*

**Assignment:** Complete Act II, and email it to your small group **by NOON Sunday, Dec 1**. Read your group's scripts **before class on Dec 2**.

11/27 - Festival of Shorts

*Viewing students' short film picks • Positive and negative inspiration*

**Assignment:** Reminder that Act II is due by **NOON on Sunday Dec 1**.

## Week 15

12/2 - Everybody's a Critic

*More small group discussions*

**Assignment:** Choose a scene to be read in the next class.

12/4 - Acting Out

*Reading scenes aloud in class*

**Assignment:** Write Act III

## Week 16

12/9 - Writing for Production

*Writing is rewriting • The script is not the end product*

**Assignment:** Rewrite final script. **DUE DECEMBER 16**