

**CTVA 595E**

**STUDIES IN MASS COMMUNICATIONS  
PRODUCTION AND DIRECTION FOR WRITERS**

**FALL 2020**

**Instructor:** Matthew T. Price

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**Class:** Wed 7:00 PM - 9:50 PM. Manzanita Hall, Room 124.

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

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

In today's Hollywood, writers do much more than just writing. Television writers are expected to produce, as well. Many independent filmmakers are writer/directors. Feature writers often run their own production companies.

But even if your goal is to "only" be a writer, production considerations should still inform your process. After all, screenplay is not a literary form; scripts are intended to be *shot*. Learning how a story makes its way from page to screen should make anyone a better writer.

And so, the goal of this class is not to produce or direct a finished film, per se; rather, it's to take you through steps involved, from casting to prep to principal photography to post. But should you have the ambition to complete a short film, we will be able to support you in that, as well.

**STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Upon successful completion of this class, you should:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the technical and aesthetic issues related to producing and directing film.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of breaking down, budgeting, scheduling, and casting a film.
3. Demonstrate proficiency in rewriting for production..

This course addresses CTVA Departmental SLO #2 - Develop and write scripts for fiction and non-fiction audio/visual productions; #3 - Demonstrate the skills necessary to manage entertainment business structures and to produce, research, and/or present an entertainment industry or other media project; and #4 - Demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and problem-solving abilities that are pertinent in a professional setting

## REQUIRED TEXTS

There are no required texts for the course, but certain articles and videos will be assigned throughout the semester.

## RECOMMENDED TEXTS

- *Making Movies*, Sidney Lumet
- *99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style*, by Matt Madden
- *Directing Actors*, Judith Weston
- *Master Shots, Vols 1 & 2*, Christopher Kenworthy
- *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging*, David Bordwell
- *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud

## ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

We will be creating various production documents 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 include the title of the work, your name, and the date of completion.
- The file names for assignments should be in the following format: "Your Name - Assignment Title Class Number Date.pdf" i.e. "Matthew Price Production Schedule 595E 11292019.pdf"
- 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 will affect 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 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	20 points
Actor Floorplan	10 points
Camera Floorplan	10 points
Shotlist	10 points
Production Breakdown	10 points
Schedule	10 points
Budget	10 points
Casting Breakdown	10 points
Midterm	10 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 direct and produce is to shoot. The second best way is to read what others have done. In this course, you will be doing a lot of both. But this course is an overview, and I don't expect Academy Award-winning production. The focus is far more on doing the work and improving over the course of the semester.

# CLASS SCHEDULE

(subject to change)

## Week 0

**Assignment:** Bring a 2-page scene, with only two characters and one location, to the first class.

## Week 1

8/26 - Introductions

*Meet the professor • The ceremonial reading of the syllabus • Assumptions about the course • Why do we write? • Performance*

**In-class activity:** Perform scenes.

**Assignment:** Read “Modest Virtuosity,” “The Cross,” “Seedbeds of Style.”

## Week 2

9/2 - Staging

*Where do we go? • Business • Filling out the scene • Floorplans*

**In-class activity:** Blocking a dialogue scene.

**Assignment:** Draw a floorplan for dinner scene.

Read “Picturing performance: Theatre to Cinema,” “Anybody but Griffith,” “Shot-consciousness.”

## Week 3

9/9 - Camera Framing and Movement

*The unnamed character • Inside or outside the scene • Rule of thirds • Shot length • Reframing*

**In-class activity:** Pictorial scavenger hunt.

**Assignment:** Add camera(s) to your floorplan.

Read “You are my density,” “Constructive editing.”

## Week 4

9/16 - Shotlisting

*What shots do you want? • What shots do you need? • Inserts • Coverage • Setups vs shots • Turning around*

**In-class activity:** The Table Scene.

**Assignment:** Write a shotlist for your assigned scene.

## Week 5

9/23 - Breakdowns

*Elements of a script • What does everybody do? • The most important department*

**In-class activity:** Breakdown example.

**Assignment:** Breakdown your script.

## Week 6

9/30 - Scheduling

*How long is this gonna take? • One liner • Production schedule • Call sheet • Company move • Gradations of importance • Assumptions*

**In-class activity:** Scheduling example.

**Assignment:** Schedule your script.

## Week 7

10/7 - Budget

*Time and money • Above the line • Below the line • Fringes • Insurance • Overages & contingencies*

**In-class activity:** Group project - budgeting different levels.

**Assignment:** Write three levels of budget: no budget, low budget, dream budget.

## Week 8

10/14 - Casting

*Breakdown • Choosing sides • No small roles • Diversity • Virtual auditions*

**In-class activity:** Breaking it down.

**Assignment:** Create a casting breakdown.

## Week 9

10/21 - Production Rewrites

*Murphy's Law • Ad libitum • What do we have time for?*

**In-class activity:** Timed rewrites

**Assignment:** Read *99 Ways to Tell a Story*.

## Week 10

10/28 - Dailies

*No movie is better than the dailies • What to look for • Circle takes*

**In-class activity:** Tell a story 99 ways.

**Assignment:** Read "Intensified continuity revisited," "Pudovkin's Montage."

## Week 11

11/4 - Notes on the Edit

*No movie is worse than the first cut • Editing is not writing • Reaction shots • Juxtaposition*

**In-class activity:** Editing notes.

**Assignment:** Watch "How *Star Wars* was saved in the edit."

## Week 12

11/11 - Post Production Rewrites

*ADR • Back of the head dialogue • Context • Cutting for time*

**In-class activity:** ADR rewrite.

**Assignment:** Read *Directing Actors* excerpts.

## **Week 13**

11/18 - Rehearsal

*Talking to actors • Action verbs • Objectives • Beats • Turns • Subtext • Finding your marks*

**In-class activity:** Rehearsal.

**Assignment:** Read “The Black & Blue Setiquette Guide.” Watch “Who's Who in the Movie Credits.”

## **Week 14**

11/25 - Setiquette

*Sides, but not those kinds of side • Call sheet • A “typical” day*

**In-class activity:** Setup walkthrough.

**Assignment:** Take-home Midterm

## **Week 15**

12/2 - Film Practicum

*Putting it all into practice*

**In-class activity:** Shoot a scene.

**Assignment:** Prep for next Week

## **Week 16**

12/9 - Film Practicum

*Putting it all into practice*

**In-class activity:** Shoot a scene.