

Fall 2007

WRITING THE SCREENPLAY

MPW 999

Syllabus

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Course Description

Purpose of the course: To write and complete the first half (or more) of an original screenplay. Each participant will develop an original idea from inception through completion. The first half of the course will focus on preparing the idea: structure, character, scene execution will be discussed and developed through written coursework that will be assigned each week and turned in at the beginning of the next session. After the preparation material is complete, we write ten pages per week, starting with the first ten pages, followed by the second ten pages, then the Plot Point at the end of Act I and through Act II. Student pages will be read and analyzed in class. The goal of this course is to write and complete the first 45 – 60 pages of an original screenplay. Movies will be assigned each week to be viewed and short essays written focusing on specific aspects of the film, ranging from critical, structural and character perspectives.

<u>WEEK</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ASSIGNMENT (a)</u>
I	-	<p><u>General Introduction</u> <u>Assignment:</u> Movie assigned and short essay written</p>
II	-	<p><u>What is a Screenplay?</u> Distinctions: Novel, Play, Screenplay The Evolution/Revolution of the American screenplay Choosing the idea/ The Subject Analysis and Discussion <u>Assignment:</u> Write three ideas for feature length screenplays Movie assigned and essay written</p>
III	-	<p><u>Shaping the Formless Into Form</u></p>

Selection and Presentation of the Idea
 Defining the Subject –Action and Character
 The dynamics of Dramatic Structure
 The Paradigm

Writing the Four Page Treatment

Assignment: Structuring the idea on the Paradigm; writing a four page treatment focusing on the main elements of dramatic structure.

Copy pages for class members and bring to class.

Movie analysis and essay due for next week

IV - **Creating Character**

What is Character?

Distinctions: Character and Characterization

What Makes Good Character?

Writing the Character Biography

Read Four Page Treatments in Class (2 volunteers)

Assignment: Writing the Character Biography: 5-7 pages of character's life from birth up until the time the story begins.

Writing the four aspects of good character

◆ Do not copy – bring bios to class

Movie viewed

V - **The Tools of Character**

Researching the character - Live and historical research

The Requirements of Character

The Four Stages of Intellectual Growth

Creating the Circle of Being

Read excerpts of participant's character biography in class

Assignment: Creating the Circle of Being

Movie viewed and analyzed

VI - **Setting Up Character & Story: The Back Story**

Film is Behavior – Action is Character

Structuring Act I

Using 3 X 5 Cards

Writing the Back Story

Read the Circle of Being

Assignment: Structuring Act I on 14 3 X 5 Cards;
 Writing the Back Story

Movie assignment

VII: **Writing Act I :**

Designing the First Ten Pages

Setting up story and character

The Two Incidents: *Inciting Incident* & *Key Incident*

Screenplay Form: Final Draft available at Student Bookstore

Reading the Cards and Back Story in Class

Assignment: Writing the First Ten Pages

Copy Pages for participants and bring to class

Movie assignment

VIII: **Writing the Second & Third Ten Pages:**

Following Focus on the Main Character

Setting Up Plot Point I

The Plot Point

Writing Effective Dialogue

Reading the First Ten Pages: (2 Volunteers)

Assignment: Writing the Second Ten Pages

Movie assignment

IX - **Approaching Act II:**

Entering Act II - the Dramatic Need

Establishing the Mid-Point

Building the First Half of Act II

The Cards – Building the Foundation

Reading the Second Ten Pages: (3 Volunteers)

Assignment: Writing Plot Point I

Establishing the Mid-Point

Structuring First Half of Act II on cards

X - **Writing the First Ten Pages of Act II**

Creating the Sub-Dramatic Context, First Half

Building the Action

Approaching the Scene

Enter Late and Get Out Early

Reading Plot Point I and First Half cards

Assignment: Write the First 10 Pages of Act II

Movie viewed

XI - **Approaching the Mid-Point**

The Nature of the Mid-Point
 Designing the Scene & Sequence
 Flashbacks & the Flashpresent

Reading the First 10 pages of Act II

Assignment: Write the Second Ten Pages of Act II
 Movie assignment

XII **Writing Effective Dialogue**

The function of dialogue
 The Art of Transition

Reading the Second 10 pages of Act II

Assignment: Write the Mid-Point

XIII - **The Re-Write**

The power of writing relationship essays
 Identifying the problems
 The Nature of Plot, Character and Structure
 Working in Units of Dramatic Action

Reading the Second Ten Pages of Act II

Assignment: Structure Second Half of Act II on Cards

XIV - **Challenges of the Screenwriter**

Finding an Agent
 The Business of Writing
 Responsibility of the Writer
 Protecting your material

Assignment: Writing the First Ten Pages of Act II

Reading the Mid-Point

XV - **Open Discussion**

Reading pages
 Questions & Answers

Course Requirements and Grades

Required Texts:

Screenplay and *The Screenwriter's Workbook* by Syd Field

Both published by The Dell Publishing Co.

Suggested Reading: *The Screenwriter's Problem Solver* by Syd Field

Published by The Dell Publishing Co.

Grades:

There are three parts to my grading system:

- 1) - Class participation – the most important
- 2) - Completing the assignments - strengthening your writing experience
- 3) - Attendance - Commitment to your craft as a writer
