

INTERMEDIATE SCREENWRITING

CTWR 529 Fall 2015

Section: 19423D

Time: Wed 7-10 pm

Room: SCB 101

Instructor: Siavash Farahani

Email: karma@karmafilm.com

Office hours: By appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

This intermediate screenwriting course will build and expand on your previous classes and sharpen your storytelling craft. Our motto and guiding principle will be Frank Daniel's famous motto, "A good story well told."

To that end we will study and workshop the entire screenwriting process with emphasis on ideation, character, theme, structure, visualization, construction of dramatic scenes, dialog and format.

Our time will be divided between lectures, discussions, watching films/clips and in-class table read of the student's written pages. Our ultimate goal is to empower you the writer with the tools of the craft and give voice to your unique imagination and perspective to create compelling characters and stories for the screen.

COURSE WORK:

Students will complete 3 projects during the semester:

- Two complete and revised narrative short-film screenplays, following the submission guidelines of CTPR 546 for possible production in that class. 8-10 pages each.
- One complete revised Outline/Treatment for an original narrative feature film. 8-10 pages.

Each project will include supplemental work such as loglines, character bios, outlines etc.

The class will be divided into two reading groups and alternate weekly. If you miss a class when your work is to be discussed you will forfeit your opportunity for feedback for that week. **You are expected to attend and work on your project even on weeks when your group is not up.**

This is a workshop course, where every student participates weekly both by presenting material developed for his/her story and by analyzing and giving constructive feedback on all other students' presented material. Giving and receiving feedback is not only useful to your classmates, but crucial to your own development as professional storytellers. It is also a requirement of the course.

WORK EVALUATION & GRADES:

While there are many different and time honored storytelling traditions in the world, this course specifically focuses on the Western narrative tradition and the 3 act structure. As such, stories are expected to include a clear protagonist, a central objective/ conflict, a clear theme, and a plot that has a beginning, a middle, an end, a climax , and a resolution that includes a character arc.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Short Script #1 (20%) and supplemental work (10%)	30%
Short Script #2 (20%) and supplemental work (10%)	30%
Feature Script Outline/Treatment	30%
Participation	10%

** 2% Extra Credit can be earned by doing script/film breakdowns. 3 max. Ask for details.

As per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

A	100% to 94%	C	76% to 73%
A-	93% to 90%	C-	72% to 70%
B+	89% to 87%	D+	69% to 67%
B	86% to 83%	D	66% to 63%
B-	82% to 80%	D-	62% to 60%
C+	79% to 77%	F	59% to 0%

A : Work of **excellent** quality. Outstanding application of the dramatic principles and fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines as specified in the syllabus.

B : Work of **good** quality. Above average fulfillments of course requirements and deadlines.

C : Work of **fair** quality. Minimum fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines for passing graduate credit.

C - : **FAIL to meet minimum grade for credit. NON PASSING GRADE.**

REQUIRED READING:

Students must read these two books on their own time outside of class. We will be referring to these texts regularly:

The Tools of Screenwriting Howard/Mabley

Save the Cat Blake Snyder

You are urged to read as many screenplays as possible.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED READING:

Save the Cat Goes To the Movies by Blake Snyder

Save the Cat Strikes Back by Blake Snyder

The Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell

The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler

Stealing Fire From the Gods by James Bonnet

Cut to the Chase by Linda Venis

HOUSE RULES:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Unexcused absences or repeated lateness will lower your final grade. Two unexcused absences will lower your final grade by half a letter. A third unexcused absence will lower your final grade by a full letter. More than three absences will be basis for failure for the course. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

In order for an absence to be excused, the student must have approval from the instructor prior to the absence and provide documentation at the next attended class session.

Late Assignments will be recorded as such and will reduce the grade on the assignment by half a grade for each late day.

Missed Assignment or Incompletes: The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who need to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before the final assignment is due.

Assignments must be properly formatted and PROOFREAD. You will be held to professional standards – typos, abused homonyms (“there, their, they’re”, etc.), grammatical and spelling errors may cause your draft to be returned unread.

All work must be original and originate in this class – no revisions of work started in other classes or adaptations of others’ work will be accepted without the prior permission of the instructor.

E-mail formats: Assignments are to be uploaded to class dropbox and only in PDF format. The filenames should consist of the “student’s last name_ assignment name_date.pdf” (Example: Smith_CharacterSketch_1-22-15.pdf)

If your work is not uploaded to the correct folder it will not be read.

Unless otherwise noted, all work is due on the morning prior to start of class when your reading group is up, delivered to instructor and all classmates via dropbox.

Laptop, Cell Phone, iPad Policy: Cell phones, Blackberrys, and similar devices must be turned off during class. Laptops, iPads and similar devices may be used only with permission from the instructor. Use of any of the above to text, surf the web or social media will result in loss of privilege of using those devices for the duration of the semester.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (8/25/15)

- Introductions
- Lecture “Good Story Well Told”
- Ideation

Written work due Week 2: All groups prepare 3 potential loglines for 1st short film project. Keep each logline between 25-30 words. Keep it simple. The logline must indicate:

- 1) Who this story is about (protagonist/antagonist)
- 2) What the story about (the central conflict/objective)
- 3) Where/when the story takes place (setting/world)
- 4) What the tone /genre of the story is

NOTE: If you wish to submit your script to be considered for production in 546, please check with production division regarding deadlines and production guidelines.

WEEK 2 (9/2/15)

- Pitch loglines to class (all groups)
- Give and receive feedback
- Lecture on Theme, Character development and the nature of the short film.

Turn in and pitch: 3 short-film loglines.

Written assignment due Week 3: From your 3 loglines choose the one you most want to develop in this class and WRITE A BRIEF BACKSTORY for both its protagonist and its antagonist. THEN WRITE A ONE-PAGE CHARACTER SKETCH of each of these characters, writing IN THE FIRST PERSON. That is, let each character speak in his/her own voice, revealing as much as possible about some aspect of that character's life. Try to capture each character's unique speaking rhythms and point-of-view. See if you can let each character reveal something to us that the character doesn't yet know or understand about himself/herself. Hint: What the character thinks about things won't be as important as how he or she acts or feels about things.

NOTE: Now is also a good time to begin thinking of IDEAS FOR YOUR FEATURE FILM STORY, which you'll be working on later in the semester. Allow time for these ideas to develop and mature.

WEEK 3 (9/9/15)

- Workshop character sketches/backstories (all groups)
- Lecture "Story Structure"

Turn in: Character backstories and first-person character sketches.

Written Assignment due Week 4: Write a ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS of your story and from that synopsis, write a BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE (or “beat sheet”). For the synopsis: Keep it simple at this point. Tell the story as it will unfold on the screen: Include the setting, the major characters, the main story beats, and the resolution. Make us want to see this movie! For the step outline: Write in the present tense only, and limit your description to what we will actually see and hear on the screen, in the order we’ll see and hear it.

WEEK 4 (9/16/15)

- Workshop Synopsis/beat sheets (all groups)
- Lecture: Writing the scene

Turn In: Your short-film synopsis and beat sheet.

Written Assignment due Week 5: All groups start to write the FIRST DRAFT of Project 1 short film screenplay.

WEEK 5 (9/23/15)

- Workshop Group A first drafts of Script #1
- Lecture: Visualizing the moment/Writing Scene Description

Turn in: Script # 1 first draft.

Written Assignment due Week 7: Revise first draft based on feedback. Craft 3 loglines for 2nd project. Choose something different from your first project.

WEEK 6 (9/30/15)

- Workshop Group B first drafts of Script #1
- Lecture: Writing Dialogue

Written Assignment for next week: Keep working on first draft and develop loglines for Script #2.

WEEK 7 (10/7/15)

- Pitch and workshop 3 loglines for Script #2
- Lecture: The Rewrite

Turn in: Script #2 Loglines

Written Assignment due Week 8:

All groups choose idea for Project 2

1 page character sketch (in the words of the character as before)

1 page character backstory as before

1 page outline as before

Revise Project 1 based on feedback.

WEEK 8 (10/14/15)

- Workshop character sketch, backstories and outline for Project 2 for all groups

Turn In: Character sketch, backstory and outline for Project 2

Written Assignment due Week 9:

Both groups start writing first draft of Script #2 and start revising Script #1.

WEEK 9 (10/21/15)

- Group A workshop first draft of Script #2

Turn in: Group A turns in first draft of Script #2

Written Assignment: Both groups keep working on revising Script #1 and writing first draft of Script #2

WEEK 10 (10/28/15)

- Group B workshop first draft of Script #2

Turn in: Group B turns in first draft of Script #2

Written assignment:

- 1) Both groups revise both scripts and submit drafts to instructor and class prior to class on Sunday October 25th by noon. Read all scripts prior to next class and be ready to give feedback on both.
- 2) Develop 3 loglines for feature.

As before each idea should address who and what the story is about. What the tone genre, and setting are. And lastly why the idea is important to you and deserves to be made into a feature.

WEEK 11 (11/4/15)

- Feedback on revised Script #1 and 2 scripts.
- Pitch/workshop feature loglines.

Turn in: Feature loglines

Written assignment: Develop outline and character sketches for the feature idea you want to pursue.

WEEK 12 (11/18/15)

- Workshop feature outlines and character sketches (all groups)
- Streamlining sequences and scenes for maximum dramatic impact

Turn in: feature outlines and character sketches.

Written assignment: keep developing feature idea.

Week 13 (11/25/15) THANKGIVING BREAK. NO CLASS.

WEEK 14 (12/2/15)

- Workshop feature outline ideas (all groups)
- Final thoughts on the writing process and the business of writing.

Turn in: Latest version feature outlines.

Final written assignment due 12/9/15: Completed and revised feature outline (5-10 pages)

**** Syllabus and assignments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

USC Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the Department of Public Safety <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/departments-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability

Services and Programs

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html

provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Disruptive Student Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.