School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
CTWR 414: The Screenplay
Spring 2017

Instructor: Craig Sabin
Class Schedule: Mondays 10:00 am-12:50 pm
Class Location: SCA 214
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Information: robertcraigsabin@gmail.com

Course Objective:

To deepen your understanding of and familiarity with the craft of screenwriting, by writing, reading, and workshopping scripts.

Course Description:

This course is for fledgling writers who have taken their first tentative steps into the craft of screenwriting. You've discovered the exhilaration of writing, but you've also met the inevitable frustrations of translating your inner life into a comprehensible written document, specifically a document that is intended to be seen as opposed to read. We will take this time to bring you into a deeper understanding of the unique craft of screenwriting, as well as your own creative impulses.

There will be two fronts to our approach. The primary focus will be on writing new material for this class. All students will be required to write and polish a short script, a format the class should be familiar with. The scripts will align with the submission guidelines for CTPR 480 scripts, 7-10 pgs in length.

Once completed, we will develop feature scripts, from initial pitch, to completed 10 pg. treatment, to fully written first act.

Finally, a baseline assignment of keeping a "dialogue journal", for noting snippets of conversation that you overhear or participate in, to refine your ear for dialogue.

The second front, no less important, will be in workshopping the material of the rest of the class. Each student will be expected to read and note up the work of fellow classmates, as well as be prepared to discuss the work in class. This will help you more easily identify the effects of good craft and poor craft, and apply lessons learned to your own work.

In addition to writing, we'll be watching examples of the elements and tools discussed in already produced short films, some successful, some not. You'll see how filmmakers before you dealt with the issues you're dealing with and learn from them what to do, and what to avoid.

Assignments:

In class assignments due by the end of class. Homework Assignments will be due by the Friday following class, no later than 3:00 pm. Students are expected to read and "note up" each other's work by start of the following class In addition;

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Journal: Students will maintain a dialogue journal, capturing snippets of overheard or imagined dialogue, as well as character sketches. The goal is to develop your ear for dialogue. Journals will be checked randomly.

Short Script (two drafts): Students will create, write and revise/polish a complete short script, 7-10 pages in length.

Feature Treatment: Students will write a treatment for a complete feature 10-15 pgs., with a main character, a clear goal, several sources of conflict and transformation.

Feature Act 1: Students will write a complete and properly formatted first act, 20-30 pgs in length.

Course Requirements

Dialogue Journal (submitted as a PDF document)
Word processing Software
Adobe PDF creation capability
Screenwriting Software or script formatting capability (Final Draft strongly urged!)

Course Reading:
Required; THE NEW ELEMENTS OF STANDARD SCREENPLAY FORMAT by Jean-Paul Ouellette.
Recommended; MAKING A GOOD SCRIPT GREAT by Linda Segar

Grading Criteria:
Students must turn in all assignments in PDF format. All work must be properly formatted, properly punctuated, correctly spelled and grammatically correct. Assignments should be read and notes prepared by start of the following class.

Participation:	10%
Journal:	5%
Assignments: (in class)	20% (12 assignments, 1.66% each)
Script #1:	20%
Feature Treatment:	20%
Feature Act 1:	25%

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%

Late Assignments will be recorded as such and will negatively impact your final grade, each late day increasing the penalty.

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.

All work must 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.

Expectation of Professionalism:
All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:
Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class. Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by one full point (ex: A to a (A-). A third unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered another full point (ex: B to a (B-). Your grade will be lowered by one point for every absence after. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

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

Please note that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:
Respect is the rule. Please silence cell phones during class.

Laptops will be allowed, for note taking and in-class assignments only.

Class Schedule:
Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1 1/09: Hello. Syllabus Review, Schedule Review. DropBox Intro. What are your favorite types of films? Introduction to Short Film Structure. Character, Goal, Inner Flaw, Conflict, Transformaton. Short scripts vs. Feature Scripts. We'll examine two illustrative short films.
Assignment; Prepare your short script pitches (3). Make sure your pitches include a main character (flawed) with a goal that suggests great conflict or difficulty, and a sense of resolution/transformation. Due 1/16. Notes due 1/23.
Assignment; Write a character sketch of your main character. Include back story, inner goals, inner flaw, and how your story will challenge the flaw. Due 1/22. Notes due 1/25.
Reading; Short Script TBD

Week 2 1/16: No Class! Happy MLK Day! Keep the dream alive!

Week 3 1/23: Workshop pitches and character sketches. Goal and Theme Intensive. How do you translate your theme into a visual story? Why does what you're writing about matter to you? How do you convey that meaning and vitality to an audience? How does your character's Inner Flaw relate to Theme? Overview of the Writer's Toolbox; Props, Dialogue, Plant/Payoff, Misdirect, P.O.V., Twist, Props, Mood, Genre, Lantern. In Class Assignment; Write a short scene for your movie, showing your Hero dealing with two or more sources of conflict.
Assignment: Write your Short Film Outline. Include the Hero, the Goal, the Conflict, the Transformation and the Resolution. Due Friday, 1/27. Notes due 1/30
Reading; Short Script TBD

Week 4 1/30: Outline Workshop. Conflict! Scene Structure Overview. Sequence Overview. What is the best way to tell the story you want to tell? What genre is your film? How do you construct compelling sequences? What is an Antagonist? Why can't we all just get along? How does Conflict impact on your Protagonist? Where does Conflict come from? How does Conflict relate to Theme? We'll watch illustrative short films.
Assignment: First Draft of Short Script #1. Due 2/3. Notes due 2/6.

Week 5 2/06: Workshop all first drafts. Scene Descriptions. How do you write scripts that leap off the page? What are passive verbs, and how do you avoid them? How large should my text blocks be? How can I punch up important details?
The Best Argument; How do you convey ideas visually? How can you use structure, props, goal and conflict, POV and environment, planting/payoff and twist? How do you reconcile all sides of the argument?
Assignment; Rewrite and Polish Short Script. **Final Draft Due 2/12**. Consultations available.
Reading Assignment; Whiplash

Week 6 2/13: Feature! Review/Overview of Visual Storytelling. What's working? What's not clear? Feedback. Review of the toolbox. Difference between short and feature. Feature structure overview. 8 Part structure Breakdown. We'll create a feature film idea in class, mapping out the crucial moments.
Assignment: Prepare three feature ideas for pitching in class.
Reading; African Queen screenplay.

Week 7 2/20: No Class! Happy President's Day!

Week 8 2/27: Feature Pitches Workshop. Lining up the Conflict on your Outline. How do you get a powerful feature length character arc? Transformations and Mini-Transformations. Inching your Hero towards the Transfrmation. We'll watch scenes from The Matrix.
Assignment: 8 Part Act Breakdown Outline for your Feature Film, with Character decisions/mini-transfromations included.
Reading; The Sting
Reading; Treatment Sample

Week 9 3/06: The Importance of Relationships. Scene Stucture. Character Transformations. How are scenes constructed in a screenplay? How do I keep my audience surprised and engaged? What, exactly, is a "Twist" and how do you accomplish it? How does misdirection work? How does P.O.V. help manage expectations?
Assignment: First draft of your Feature Treatment (10-15 pgs.) Due Friday 3/17. Notes due 3/20.
Reading; Rosemary's Baby

Week 10 3/13: No Class! Happy Spring Break!

Week 11 3/20: Treatment Workshop. Importance of the Kick-Ass Opening Scene. Compression and Stakes. How can you stock pile conflict? How do you raise physical stakes? Goal stakes? Personal stakes? We'll watch clips from Jaws, Tootsie, Indiana Jones and Altered States as well as illustrative short films.
Assignment; Write an intriguing opening scene for your movie, 3-5 pgs. Due 3/24. Notes due 3/27.

Week 12 3/27: Workshop opening scene. Character Set-up/Inciting Incident. Establish your main character, and create an intriguing inciting incident that will set the goal in motion. Transformation Set up.
Assignment; Write a solid character set-up, establishing future sources of conflict, and an intriguing inciting incident, 4-7 pgs. Goal should be clearly established. Due Friday 3/31. Notes due 4/3.

Week 13 4/3: Inciting Incident Workshop. Theme? Flaw? Future Conflicts?
Assignment; Write your Hero's preparation to pursue the goal, and show us the first steps taken. Your Hero should be clever, strong or resilient. Connect his pursuit to his flaw. Set up more sources of future conflict, 3-5 pgs. Due Friday 4/7. Notes due 4/10.

Week 14 4/10: First Steps Workshop. Dialogue? Props? Twists? Plant/Payoff? Misdirection?
Assignment; Write your First Act Twist. Make it powerful, exciting, moving, and make sure it shifts the narrative, adding higher stakes 10-12 pgs. Due Friday 4/14. Notes due 4/17.

Week 15 4/17: Act Twist Workshop. Editing workshop.
Assignment; Put it all together for a polished, revised "first draft" of your first act. Due 4/21. Notes due 4/24.
Assignment; Using what you discovered in writing Act 1, revise and polish your Final Draft Treatment. Due Friday 4/21.

Week 16 4/24: Final Class. Act 1 Workshop. Fine tuning the twists. Scenes will be read in class. Preparing for your Fun and Games. Fiunal Questions. Next steps. Wrapping it up.

Week 17 5/1: No Class. Study Day. Work on your final draft of Act 1.

Act 1 of your Feature Script (20-30 pgs.) due **Monday, May 8th.**

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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/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety 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 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.htmlprovides 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.

PLEASE NOTE:
FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX