

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Advanced Screenwriting: Narrative Workshop
Spring 2025

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DESCRIPTION:

Advanced Screenwriting: Narrative Workshop builds on introductory screenwriting skills, guiding students in outlining and writing marketable screenplays/teleplays for film, television, and/or digital programming. Lectures include sequencing, writing for genre, alternative plot structures, sub-plotting, and marketing your screenplay. Students are encouraged to bring a two-to-ten-page proposal for a narrative film or scripted series to the first class and can expect to write ten-to-fifteen pages per week, resulting in a minimum of thirty pages by the end of the course. If this requirement is met, you can submit a *completed* screenplay (not to exceed 120 pages) within thirty days to the instructor for written notes and one-on-one Zoom critique. As with our introductory class, a significant portion of this course will be devoted to class discussion of student work. Successful completion of *Introduction to Screenwriting* or permission of the instructor is required.

CONTENT:

Time spent in class will consist of brief weekly lectures with the remainder of each session devoted to student readings and open critiques.

Students are expected to submit eight-to-fifteen pages of new screenplay pages or other assigned materials such as proposals, outlines, writers' guides, and scene and/or sequence cards before each class meeting.

Due to time limitations, everyone may not read each week. If one doesn't read, the instructor will review and comment on your weekly progress via email within the next two-to-three days.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Develop the idea and write thirty-plus pages of an engaging narrative screenplay for film, television, and/or digital programming

Rewrite an existing screenplay (if applicable)

Gain a greater critical and artistic sensibility as a writer

Understand the basics of the business of screenwriting

ASSIGNMENTS:

Students are required to complete weekly writing assignments. Assignments are tailored to the specific needs of each student and are assigned by email or in class.

Reading assignments are optional but strongly encouraged. Reading assignments are listed on the class schedule and due before the appropriate class meeting.

If reading in class, please come prepared with a list of character roles.

Always keep a copy of your work for yourself.

GRADES:

The grading schema for non-credit classes follows below.

(SC) Successfully Completed

Successful completion is based on a minimum aggregate grade of 750 points based on satisfactory attendance and completion of the course assignments listed below.

Assignments are due on the dates listed in the class schedule.

- Assignment 1 (85 pts.)
- Assignment 2 (85 pts.)
- Assignment 3 (85 pts.)
- Assignment 4 (85 pts.)
- Assignment 5 (85 pts.)
- Assignment 6 (85 pts.)
- Assignment 7 (85 pts.)
- Assignment 8 (85 pts.)
- Assignment 9 (0 pts./optional)
- Participation (220 pts., 18.33 pts. per class)
- Attendance (100 pts., 8.34 pts. per class)
- Total: points (1000)

(AT) Attendance Verified

A grade of (AT) indicates that a student was in attendance for a majority of the course, but did not satisfactorily complete all course requirements or meet learning objectives.

(RE) Registered but Never Attended

A grade of (RE) indicates that a student was enrolled in the course, but failed to physically attend.

(W) Withdrawal

A grade of (W) indicates that a student formally withdrew from the course prior to the start of the course.

(I) Incomplete

A grade of (I) incomplete indicates that a student made arrangements with the faculty member to complete the course work within three months after the last class. Once the course work has been completed, submitted and evaluated by the faculty member, the grade will be changed accordingly.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

Fifteen points will be deducted each day past the due date. Assignments submitted three days past the due date will not be accepted.

LATE ARRIVAL/EARLY DEPARTURE:

Students will be marked as absent if arriving ten minutes late or leaving ten minutes early. Exceptions will be made based on the sole discretion of the instructor.

AI AND ChatGPT:

The greatest asset you can develop as a screenwriter is a unique, original voice. This is the antithesis of what is offered by AI and ChatGPT. The voice of the individual is replaced by the voice of the collective whole. Its story ideas are generic. Its dialogue reads like it is written for robots. Without question it will one day “write” a derivative Grade-B movie that produces a box office hit. But it will never write a *Citizen Kane*, a *Parasite*, a *Moonlight*, not even a *Barbie*. Such execution and insight into the human experience can only come from a flesh-and-blood artist. While I respect what AI and ChatGPT may offer an experienced screenwriter, its use is discouraged in this class. Doing so will result in zero points given for each questionable assignment.

CONTROVERSIAL OR PROVOCATIVE CONTENT:

Like most forms of art and entertainment, many films of course contain controversial or provocative content. While I will try to limit such, it is important to note that difficult films (like literature, paintings, etc.) often prompt audiences to consider and interrogate important issues and themes. If you believe that you are sensitive to certain subjects or have specific “triggers,” I advise you to look ahead at the tentatively scheduled films, especially those listed with ratings of **R** as well as **NR** (usually international or “pre-Code”), and research these titles online, for example at <https://www.imdb.com/>, to mentally prepare yourself

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTINUITY:

If a class session is canceled, every effort will be made to maintain instructional continuity by rescheduling the session on Zoom. Should this occur students should refer to Canvas for further information. The absence of any instruction indicates alternatives are not possible and make-up arrangements will be made.

POLICIES AND GENERAL REMARKS:

No guests, silence all cell phones, no recording of lectures.

Class begins promptly at the designated time.

Various topics cited in this syllabus may be subject to change.

RIGHTS:

Screenplay and screenplay concepts are the property of the writers

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

Keep your ideas simple.

Allot a specific period each week to write.

Keep writing no matter what!

TEXTS/RESOURCES FOR THOSE WRITING THEATRICAL FILMS:

Gulino, Paul, *Screenwriting, the Sequence Approach*, Bloomsbury Academic

Seeger, Linda, *Making a Good Script Great*, 3rd Edition, Samuel French Trade

Trottier, David *The Screenwriter's Bible* Silman-James Press (7th edition)

Dancyger et al, 2023, *Alternative Screenwriting* Focal press (6th edition)

IMDb Pro, monthly membership (December only)

Screenplays and teleplays, your choice (Good and Bad!)

TEXTS/RESOURCES FOR THOSE WRITING TELEVISION PILOTS AND PROGRAMS:

Rabkin, William, *Writing the Pilot*, Moon & Sun & Whiskey Inc.

Trottier, David, *The Screenwriter's Bible*, Silman-James Press (7th edition)

Calvisi, Daniel, *The 30-minute TV Pilot Beat Sheet*, webinar, ActFourScreenplays.com, available at the Writers Store

Calvisi, Daniel, *The TV Pilot Beat Sheet: from ABC to AMC to HBO to Netflix*, webinar, ActFourScreenplays.com, available at the Writers Store

IMDb Pro, monthly membership (December only)

Screenplays and teleplays, your choice (Good and Bad!)

SUGGESTED TEXTS/READINGS:

Egri, Lajos, *The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives*, Simon & Schuster

Vogler, Christopher, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, Michael Wiese Productions (3rd Edition)

McKee, Robert, *Dialogue: The Art of Verbal Action for Page, Stage, and Screen*, Grand Central Publishing

McKee, Robert, *Character, The Art of Cast Design for Page, Stage, and Screen*, Grand Central Publishing

Rabkin, William, *Writing the Pilot: Creating the Series*, moon & sun & whiskey, Incorporated

Russell, Peter, *Write Great TV Scenes: Learn the Secrets of the TV 'Beat'*, webinar, available at the Writers Store

Schedule

Class one: 4/8

- **Review:** Student proposals (pt.1)
- **Lecture:** The short vs. the feature, the arena, subplots, theme, sequencing, subplots, beats
- **Assignment #1:** List the subplots and their function in a narrative film or episodic series assigned by the instructor. POTENTIAL titles include *The Shape of Water*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Up, the Incredible Kimmy Schmidt*, or *Breaking Bad* pilot.
Due Class # 2

- **Assignment # 2:** Sequence your script or outline your beats, write its logline, include brief character bios, and list two or three potential subplots. Due Class #3
- **Read/view:** STSA 1-38, MGSG 50-65, Calvisi 26-44 (60-minute worksheet) or all of the Calvisi 30-minute worksheet, Canvas Posts

Class two: 4/10

- **Review:** Student proposals (pt.2)
- **Lecture:** Writing for genre, Mixing genres, Subverting genre
- **Assignment #3:** Determine your genre and how you plan to reshape/challenge/update genre conventions. Due Class #3
- **Assignment #2 (continued):** Sequence your script, outline your beats, include brief character bios, list two or three potential subplots. Due Class #3
- **Read/view:** AS 99-117, 121-181, Canvas Posts

EASTER BREAK – NO CLASSES 4/14-4/18

Class three: 4/22

- **Review:** Student work, sequences, beats, character bios, subplots, genre (pt.1)
- **Lecture:** Restorative three-act structure, The Central Question, Writing Act One (Film and TV), Beyond the protagonist
- **Assignment #4:** Sequence A (FILM) or cold open/act one (TV) - Due Class #5
- **Read/view:** AS 15-33, MGS 19-32, 197-223, TSB 59-60, Canvas Posts

Class four: 4/24

- **Review:** Student work, sequences, beats, loglines, character bios, subplots, genre (pt.2)
- **Lecture:** Other standard approaches, The Hero's Journey, Archetypes
- **Assignment #4 (continued):** Sequence A (FILM) or cold open/act one (TV) - Due Class #5
- **Read/view:** Canvas Posts

Class five: 4/29

- **Review:** Student work, sequence A (FILM) or cold open/act one (TV) (pt.1)
- **Assignment #5:** Sequence B (FILM), acts two, three, and tag (half-hour TV), or acts two and three (one-hour TV) - Due Class #7

Class six: 5/1

- **Review:** Student work, sequence A (FILM) or cold open/act one (TV) (pt. 2)
- **Lecture:** High concept vs low concept, Non-linear, Formalism vs. realism, Alternative structures, Film movements, Film criticism
- **Assignment #5 (continued):** Sequence B (FILM), acts two, three, and tag (half-hour TV), or acts two and three (one-hour TV) - Due Class #7
- **Read/view:** AS 35-53, 183-203, Canvas Posts

Class seven: 5/6

- **Review:** Student work, sequence B (FILM), acts two, three, and tag (half-hour TV), or acts two and three (one-hour TV) (pt.1)
- **Assignment #6:** Sequence C (FILM), rewrite/polish cold open/act one (half-hour TV), or write act four and tag (one-hour TV) - Due Class #9

Class eight: 5/8

- **Review:** Student work, sequence B (FILM), acts two, three, and tag (half-hour TV), or acts two and three (one-hour TV) (pt. 2)
- **Lecture:** Writing acts two and three, static/jumping conflict, unifying aspect between scenes
- **Assignment #6 (continued):** sequence C (FILM), rewrite/polish cold open/act one (half-hour TV), or write act four and tag (one-hour TV) - Due Class #9
- **Read/view:** MGS 65-85, 35-36, Canvas Posts

Class nine: 5/13

- **Review:** Student work, sequence C (film), rewrite/polish cold open/act one (half-hour TV), or write act four and tag (one-hour TV) (pt.1)
- **Assignment #7:** Sequence D (FILM) or rewrite/polish acts two, three, and tag (half-hour TV), or rewrite/polish all acts (one-hour TV) – Due Class #11

Class ten: 5/15

- **Review:** Student work, Sequence C (FILM), rewrite/polish cold open/act one (half-hour TV), or write act four and tag (one-hour TV) (pt.2)
- **Lecture:** the business of screenwriting, the Writer's Guild, marketing strategies, pitches, proposals, producers, agents, managers, lawyers
- **Assignment #7 (continued):** sequence D (FILM) or rewrite/polish acts two, three, and tag (half-hour TV), or rewrite/polish all acts (one-hour TV) – Due Class #11
- **Assignment #8:** Write a query letter and a one-page pitch, and list five potential contacts – Due Class #12
- **Read/view:** TSB 327-380, Canvas Posts

Class eleven: 5/20

- **Review:** Student work, sequence D (film), rewrite/polish all acts (TV) (pt.1)
- **Assignment #8 (continued):** Write a query letter, one-page pitch, and list five potential contacts. Due Class #12
- **Read/view:** TSB 380-444, Canvas Posts

Class twelve: 5/22

- **Review:** Student work, sequence D (film), rewrite/polish all acts (TV) (pt.2)
- **Lecture:** Contests, fellowships, grants, writers' groups, what to do next
- **Assignment #9 (optional):** Finish your screenplay/teleplay – Due 1/12/24
- **Read/view:** TSB 327-442, Canvas Posts

