

**GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
INTRODUCTION TO SCREENWRITING
Spring 2025**

**Professor Kevin Downs
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DESCRIPTION:

Introduction to Screenwriting teaches the mechanical skills needed to prepare screenplays for film, television, and the web, using the standard, industry-accepted format and guidelines. During the first two weeks of class, we will focus on the basics. After that, each student will write an original short film and prepare a one-page pitch for a feature-length film or pilot for an episodic series. Though lectures will cover such essential elements as plot structure, character, and dialogue development, the bulk of class time, and the bulk of what students learn, will come from in-class discussion of student work. Participants can expect to write approximately five to eight pages per week; no prior screenwriting experience is required.

CONTENT:

Class time will consist of a mix of lecture and reading student work in group critiques.

GOALS:

By the end of the semester I want you to:

- understand the basics of visual storytelling and know how it differs from works of fiction and stage plays
- understand how to format a feature-length screenplay
- understand the structure of a feature-length film by writing a 20 to 30-minute original narrative screenplay
- understand how to write pitches, proposals, treatments, and outlines for scripted films, television programs, and online narrative content

ASSIGNMENTS:

Students are required to complete weekly writing assignments. These assignments **include but are not limited to** writing a dramatic screenplay for a ~5-pp. narrative “silent” film, a dramatic screenplay for a ~20 to 30-pp. narrative “sound” film, a treatment for a short film, and an analyses of a feature-length film or screenplay.

- Students are expected to submit assignments when due to the instructor via Canvas
- Students are expected to participate with group critiques
- Reading assignments are optional but strongly encouraged. Reading assignments are listed on the class schedule and due before the appropriate class meeting.
- 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 a minimum aggregate grade of 750 points based on satisfactory attendance and completion of the course assignments listed below. Assignments are due on by TIME on due date listed below.

▪ Assignment 1	(50 pts.)
▪ Assignment 2	(50 pts.)
▪ Assignment 3	(50 pts.)
▪ Assignment 4	(50 pts.)
▪ Assignment 5	(150 pts.)
▪ Assignment 6	(0 pts.)
▪ Assignment 7	(150 pts.)
▪ Assignment 8	(150 pts.)
▪ Assignment 9	(150 pts.)
▪ Participation	(10.00 pts. per class)
▪ Attendance	(6.66 pts. per class)
▪ Total: points	(1000)

Policy Late Assignments

50-point Assignments: 10 points deducted each day past the due date for three days, not accepted after three days

150-point Assignments: 25 points deducted each day past the due date for three days, not accepted after three days.

(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.

(Consider withdrawing or requesting a transfer if you foresee missing more than five classes.)

(RE) Registered but Never Attended

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

(W) Withdrawal

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

(I) Incomplete

A grade of (I) incomplete indicates that a student has 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.

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, films, and screenplays often contain controversial or provocative (in the sense of provoking a reaction) content. While I will try to limit this in the film clips and screenplays I share in class, it is important to note that film (like literature, paintings, and other forms of expression) often prompts audiences to consider and interrogate important and even difficult issues and themes. This shared material does not necessarily reflect the position of Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies or its officials. Nor is it intended to malign any religion, ethnic group, club, organization, company, or individual. It is solely provided for educational purposes. If you are sensitive to certain subjects or have specific “triggers,” please alert me in advance, so that we may address these concerns together as we explore the challenging art of screenwriting.

POLICIES AND GENERAL REMARKS:

- No guests, turn off your cell phones, mute your microphones, no taping of lectures
- Please arrive on time. I begin promptly @ 7:30

- Students will be considered absent if arriving ten minutes late or leaving ten minutes early unless excused by the instructor
- Various topics and assignments cited on this syllabus may be subject to change

NON-CREDIT STUDENT HANDBOOK:

Additional policies not specific to this class can be found in the Georgetown University Non-credit Student Handbook posted in Canvas.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- Keep your ideas simple
- Allot a specific period of time each week to write
- Keep writing no matter what!

TEXT:

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

SCHEDULE

Class one: 2/11

- **Lecture:** Review syllabus, show don't tell, plot, protagonist, arc, conflict, theme, logline
- **Screening:** Short silent film
- **Assignment one:** Write the logline for a five-page visually descriptive screenplay. There should be NO SOUND, NO INNER MONOLOGUE, NO INFERRED DIALOGUE, AND NO TEXTS necessary to convey the story and to understand the characters. Due class #2
- **Read/view:** TSB pp. 38-44, 50-56

Class two: 2/13

- **Lecture:** What is a screenplay? Master scene vs shooting script style, formatting pt.1

- **Assignment two:** Write the screenplay for your silent film. The story should be told in the 3rd-person, present tense. It should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. It should also have a clear sense of conflict. The primary character should experience
- profound inner realization or change. Use Master Scene style formatting only. Due class #3
- **Read:** TSB pp. 237-290, screenplay TBA

Class three: 2/18

- **Lecture:** Coverage, three-act structure
- **Screening:** Review silent screenplays (if time allows)
- **Assignment three:** Read/view a feature-length film/screenplay assigned by the instructor. Identify the protagonist's goal, the conflict, the catalyst, plot point one (the big event), the midpoint, plot point two (the crisis), the climax, and the realization. Due class #4
- **Assignment four:** Write the logline for your short sound film. Due class #5
- **Read/view:** Canvas posts, read/view *Sound of Metal*, TSB pp. 11-27

Class four: 2/20

- **Lecture:** Pitches, one-sheets, proposals, treatments, outlines, scene cards, character bios.
- **Assignment five:** Write a pitch (1 paragraph), the proposal (two to three double-spaced pp.), a character bio (one or two paragraphs) and 12-15 scene cards or an outline for a 20 to 30-minute sound film. AVOID FLASHBACKS, VOICE OVER, AND MONTAGE. Due class #5
- **Read/view:** Canvas posts, TSB pp. 382-405

Class five: 2/25

- **Review:** Loglines, Pitches, selected Proposals, and Outlines (pt. 1)
- **Assignment six (Optional):** Polish proposals, outlines – only if needed. Due class #6

Class six: 2/27

- **Review:** Loglines, Pitches, selected Proposals, and Outlines (pt. 2)

- **Lecture:** Formatting pt. 2 - Montage, Flashbacks, Texts, Phone Calls, Writing in screen time, Prose writing, Action Paras, Describing Character
- **Assignment seven (act one only):** Begin master scene screenplay for your twenty to thirty-minute film - Due class #12. Have Act 1 finished for class #8, Act 2 finished for class #10, and Act 3 finished for class #12
- **Read/view:** Canvas posts, TSB 237-290 (again)

Class seven: 3/4

- **Lecture:** Writing for character, want vs. need, Vonnegut arcs
- **Assignment:** Continue writing Act 1, Due class #8
- **Read/View:** Canvas posts, TSB pp. 61-91

Class eight: 3/6

- **Review:** Act 1 of your screenplay
- **Assignment eight:** Begin Act 2. Due class #10

Class nine: 3/11

- **Lecture:** Writing dialogue, writing scenes
- **Assignment:** Continue writing Act 2. Due class #10
- **Read/view:** Canvas posts, TSB pp. 96-120

Class ten: 3/13

- **Review:** Act 2 of your screenplay
- **Assignment nine:** Begin Act 3. Due class #12

Class eleven: 3/18

- **Lecture:** Television, Documentaries, Web Series,
- **Assignment:** Continue Act 3. Due Class #12
- **Read/view:** Canvas posts, TSB pp. 316-323

Class twelve: 3/20

- **Review:** Act 3

Assignment: (*Advanced students only/optional*) Write a logline and proposal for a feature film or bible for an episodic series (2–10 double-spaced pages) and a 40-60 scene outline for a feature film or act structure/beat sheet outline (probably 9-16 scenes/beats for half an hour, maybe twice that or more for an hour -- but there are no hard and fast rules). Due day 1 of Advanced.

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