

Film 150 Screenwriting
Summer Session 2 July 29-August 29
Class Location: 165 Soc Sci 2
Office Location: 165 Soc Sci 2

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Office Hours: Tu/Th 5-6 pm
& b/4 class by appt (email request)

This is an introductory course in which students will learn basic principles of screenwriting, including how it differs from other forms of writing. Emphasis this Summer is on narrative (fictional) writing.

Telling stories is how we learn about the world, ourselves, and other people. Having an idea for a story, and wanting to share it, is a deeply human impulse. Your job, as screenwriters, is to learn to tell your stories in the most effective way possible for an audience. You want to move people—to tears or laughter or fear or joy—so they can understand something new and unique about life.

The main activity of this class is writing—you'll write a short narrative screenplay, 5-30 pages in length. We will be primarily concerned with STRUCTURE and CHARACTER, as key components in storytelling. We will analyze films, screenplays, and your own scripts in terms of narrative structure and character development.

Becoming a better writer is a journey, and we all learn by attempting things and growing beyond our limitations. We learn by WRITING, first and foremost. We also learn by reading, to see how other writers solved problems, structured their ideas, or revealed their characters' thoughts and inner lives. So, it's also important to read the assignments.

The excerpts in the Course Reader are designed to help you write, think about, and structure each week's script writing assignment. Your writing WILL improve IF you follow the advice in the Reader - I guarantee this.

It's also important to read screenplays. It's a completely different experience to READ a screenplay, than to watch a video. Read, re-read, and analyze scripts: they can help you become a better writer. You will also be reading each other's work in class—these workshop sessions allow us ALL to learn more about our OWN writing, since all writers struggle with the same problems. Stay active and engaged, ask: can I apply this lesson to MY story? Am I making these same mistakes?

Assignments:

You will be writing stories about a Protagonist's TRANSFORMATION... Most genres are okay (** see proviso next page), as long as your main character undergoes some sort of personal change or transformation. Let your imagination and creativity guide you toward the kind of story you want to tell.

Expect to do a lot of writing, at least 15 pages a week. Put all your assignments in a lightweight 3-ring binder, with your name and e-mail written on the inside cover.

Number your pages. Label everything (i.e.: Treatment, Outline, Bios, Drafts, etc.) and keep it all in the one binder, including your revisions. When you turn in assignments, turn in the whole binder (new work on top), so that I can refer to your previous work while reading the current assignment. You will also turn in this binder at the end of the quarter, with everything you have written, for your final evaluation. Keep it organized and date your revisions. Be neat & professional—appearances count in Hollywood! Back up your work on hardcopy or electronic source.

It is important that you write on a regular schedule, either daily or weekly. The goal for this course is a minimum of 75 pages, including Treatment(s), Bios, Script(s), and Revisions. Keep a small notebook with you at all times, in which to jot down ideas, observations, snatches of dialogue, or blinding bursts of inspiration as they occur. Keep pen and paper by your bed, to note down dreams. These notes are to serve your creativity, imagination, and idea retention—you won't turn these in. (Only *assigned* writings count toward your 75 page-total.)

** Don't write Science Fiction, Fantasy, Parody, or Animation—genres that require the invention of whole worlds. Don't write your own story—this is NOT a class in self-expression—learn the art of storytelling. Use your imagination and the great “what if...” (“What if a totally laid-back stoner got swept up in a Raymond Chandler-style crime thriller?” Voila: *The Big Lebowski!*) Try to put the truth of life into your story—your observations about life and people will serve you well (all the more reason to develop these skills by keeping a notebook & dream journal.)

Required texts:

Course Reader for Film 150, available at UCSC Copy Center (not bookstore!)

Your course reader is available at the UCSC Copy Center, located in the basement of J Baskin Engineering, Room 25, right beside the building loading dock and the on-campus post office. Your course reader can be charged to your student account with your student ID card, or paid by check. The UCSC Copy Center is open Monday through Friday between 8 am and 4:30 pm. Please call (831) 459-3888 or email copy@ucsc.edu if you have any questions.

The Short Screenplay: Your Short Film from Concept to Production. D. Gurskis, 2007.
101 Habits of Highly Successful Screenwriters. Karl Iglesias, 2001 (I have a .pdf for you)
Juno: The Shooting Script. Diablo Cody, 2008. (.pdf also available free thru instructor)

On-line scripts for self-chosen reading available at:

<http://www.script-o-rama.com/snazzy/dircut.html>
http://www.aellea.com/?page_id=3 (for Movie Classics Scripts)
<http://www.awesomefilm.com/>
<http://simplyscripts.com/fullmovie.html>

On YouTube, please watch “Ira Glass on Storytelling” #1, #2, #3, #4

You can download **FREE** screenwriting software from: www.celtx.com/desktop.html (You need to download “classic desktop” version to your hard-drive, otherwise you cannot **SAVE** your work. Scroll to bottom of page to find **FREE** version. It asks you to set up an account: give email, then download the **FREE** desktop version. You don't need to buy anything.)

Class rules:

In addition to turning in ALL writing assignments, you are expected to prepare ALL readings, participate in class discussions and workshops, and attend class regularly and on-time.

Class starts promptly at 1:00 pm; 2 “lates” = one absence, in my gradebook.

If you miss TWO class meetings, you will ding your grade (downward half a grade). If you are absent for three classes, you will automatically FAIL the course.

Q: Does 2 absents + 2 tardies = 3 absents (and automatic failure)? YES!

If you cannot attend on time regularly, or don't think you can turn in 15 pages of writing assignments per week, you should DROP this course.

WARNING! This class requires self-discipline. Reread rule above. Students CAN and DO fail this class... I demand a LOT of writing in this class. Students learn only by writing and rewriting.

Each week, please NUMBER your pages and mark any NEW WORK for my attention. I do NOT accept work via email. Print out & submit even *partial* assignments - it's better to get some help and credit than none at all.

Office Hours:

I encourage and expect you to make use of my weekly Office Hours to develop your stories and ideas. We can get a lot more accomplished in a short face-to-face meeting, than with weekly paper comments. I'm friendly and interested in your stories, and students usually find the time they spend one-on-one with me to be extremely helpful! If you can't make my scheduled hours, we can work out another appointment time - I WANT to help you! Don't stay away if you feel unclear or lost - I can help you “find,” as well as develop, your story!

Writing-Intensive Requirement (W code):

These courses often require more writing than other classes, but they also stress explicit attention to the craft of writing in the subject matter of the course or discipline. Papers are assigned throughout the quarter, and editorial comment is provided by the instructor. Students must complete the University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement and satisfy the Composition requirement before enrolling in a course that satisfies the writing-intensive requirement.

Disability Accommodation:

NOTE: If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me during my office hours in a timely manner, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY).

Evaluations for Summer Quarter FDM courses:

You will receive a notification from eCommons in your Slugmail/UCSC email account when online evaluations become available. If you are having trouble using eCommons, please send an email to ecommons.help@ucsc.edu.

Please be thoughtful in your responses, as FDM take these evaluations very seriously. FDM uses the data collected from these evaluations in faculty personnel actions, which include re-appointments, promotions, merits, etc.

Additionally, evaluations help faculty gauge ways in which their instruction or the course material could be improved. Please give me as careful feedback as I have offered you all quarter.

Week 1
7/26/14
Tuesday

Class Overview. Story Structure, Terminology
Quick story pitches & choose writing partners. Do Partner Works 1 & 2.
Writing logline, premise, treatment, and character bios; intro to 3 Act Structure
Example film: *Juno*
Example short: *Academy Awards – I'll Wait for the Next One*

Assn 1

Write a **logline** for your story.
Write ten or so **premises** for your story.
Write 3-5 page **character bios** for each of 2 or 3 MAIN CHARACTERS.
Write 4-5 page **treatment** for your story...
Story (comedy or drama) about **Protagonist's** transformation: the character must grow, learn something, or change in some important way. This is loose; be creative. Due next class.

Read:

101 Habits: Intro, Parts I and II (thru page 62)
Course Reader: excerpts 1-6: Lamott & Ueland. Rabiger, Egri, Horton, AND Seger (backstory)

7/28/14
Thursday

Acts, Sequences, Scenes. Plotting, turning & mid- points. Set-Up, Complication, Pay off
Writing Sequence Outlines (hint: from the bottom up!) Do Partner Work #3
Example shorts: *Life Lessons*

Due:

Log-line, premises, treatment, and character bios.

Assn 2

Expand, revise, and develop your story into a **Sequence Outline**, with **Acts & Sequences** of complete story.
Due next class. Rework/resubmit/or complete 1st assignment, as needed.

Read:

101 Habits: Part III (thru page 116)
Course Reader: excerpts 7 - 9: Field, Goldberg, Lucey.
Juno: *Shooting Script* (read whole script)

Week 2
8/5/14
Tuesday

Set-Up: **Protagonist, Goal, Obstacle. Antagonist** (Who, What, Why?) Drama is Conflict.
Character Arcs. Revealing character WITHOUT dialog; **Screenplay Format**.
Tip: The choice to use Voice Over
Example script: *Juno*
Example short: *Academy Awards – Dog; Kitchen Sink*

Due:

Complete Outline; plus any revised/improved/expanded bios, treatments, loglines/premises, etc. Turn in 15 pages please! Complete you Partner works assignments.

Assn 3:

Write Act One/SILENT VERSION of story in **screenplay format**
Group A and B due next class. Need Group A volunteers for workshop next week.

Read:

Reader: excerpts 10-13: Bresson, Vogler, Hauge, Mamet.
101 Habits: Part IV (thru page 145)

Week 2
8/7/14
Thursday

Set-Up: **Genre, Setting, Pace, Tone.** Set-ups and Pay-offs
(When, Where, How?) – Entertaining your Audience
Writing Action and Visual Storytelling; **Screenplay Style**
Tip: Use Action Verbs! Present Tense. Punctuation!?!?!
Example clip (horror): *The Sixth Sense*
Example short: *Academy Awards – Gridlock, I Hate Musicals*

Due: Group A & B: Act One and revisions. Selected students bring in copies for workshop.

Assn 4: Continue writing Act Two or rewrite Act One
Selected students: Xerox 12 copies and bring in: 3-5 page scene from Act One for in-class reading & analysis

Read: Reader: 14-17: Macauley, Dancyger, Flinn, Goldberg.
101 Habits: Part V (thru page 191)

Week 3
8/12/14
Tuesday

Complications: **Raising the Stakes** – ticking clock, tension & release structure, repetition.
The greater the obstacles/antagonist, the more your Protagonist is revealed and grows.
Tip: Writing Dream Sequences, Flashbacks
Example short: *The Black Rider, Our Time is Up*

Due: First half of Act Two
Selected students: Xerox 12 copies and bring in: 3-5 page scene from Act One for in-class reading & analysis

Assn 5: Write complete Act Two
Selected students: Xerox 12 copies and bring in: 3-5 page scene from Act Two for in-class reading & analysis

Read: Course Reader: excerpts 18-19: Smiley, Lerch.
101 Habits: Part VI (thru page end of book)

8/14/14
Thursday

Complications: **Reversals** – expectations, cause & effect,
Antithesis (audience expectation v. character expectation)
Tip: Writing Phone Conversations, Parallel Action
Tip: Naming Characters for Clarity, Meaning
Example short: *Academy Awards – Six Shooter*

Due: All of Act Two
Selected students: Xerox 12 copies and bring in: 3-5 page scene from Act Two for in-class reading & analysis

Assn 6: Continue: rewrite as needed or press onward to end of story – everyone move forward!
Unread students: Xerox 12 copies and bring in: 3-5 page scene from Act Two for in-class reading & analysis

Read: Gurkis: Chapters One and Two (pages 1 - 42)
An on-line script that is *similar* to your story/tastes
Course Reader: excerpt 20: McKee.

Week 4
8/19/14
Tuesday

TV writing. Complications: **Subplots** – avoiding dramatic duplication, mini 3-act structures.
Multiple plots: ensemble pieces
Tip: Naming Characters for Clarity, Meaning
Example script: *Juno*
Example short: *Zen and the Art of Landscaping*

Due: Group B: Act Two
Group A: Xerox 10 copies and bring in: 5-10 page scene from Act Two for in-class reading & analysis

Assn 7 A: Write thru to the end of story
B: Continue: rewrite Act Two or press onward
Group B: Xerox 10 copies and bring in: 5-10 page scene from Act Two for in-class reading & analysis

Read: Gurskis: Chapters Three and Four (pages 43 - 86)
An on-line script that is *antithetical* to your story/tastes
Course Reader: excerpt 19: Seger.

8/21/14
Thursday

Depth: symbols, deepening character and dialogue
– subtext, silences, limitations of character psychology, vocabularies
Tip: Writing colloquial dialogue
Example short: *Sling Blade*

Due: Act Three – thru end! Keep moving at your own pace, wherever you are with story.
Unread students: Xerox 12 copies and bring in: 3-5 page scene from Act Two for in-class reading & analysis

Assn 7 First rewrite or complete the script.

Read: Gurskis: Chapter Seven (page 135 – end, can skim)
Any on-line script that won an Academy Award for *Screenwriting* (any year, either adapted or original)
Course Reader: excerpt 21 & 22: Seger.

Week 5
8/26/14
Tuesday

Resolution: Structural parallelism – measuring growth, use of contrasts, pay-offs.
Example short: *More*

Assn 8

First or second rewrite for everyone.
Everyone: Prepare to pitch your story in class next class.
PRACTICE pitching your story w/partner before next class.

Read:

Handout Chapter 18, Pitching (p. 173 – 181) from *101 Habits*
Course Reader: excerpt 23: Callan.

Due:

Complete scripts and rewrites.

8/28/14
Thursday

Pitching your story: verbally and on-paper (why important)

Due:

Story pitch. Final POLISHED script DUE! No e-mail submissions.
Submit all work in a lightweight binder, with NEW WORK clearly marked. Include all previously submitted assignments. Number pages of your scripts, and note any revisions.

PARTNER WORK #1: Tell Backs

A. tells B. **A's story idea** for 5 minutes (timed)

A's goal is to tell story as well as s/he can
B's goal is to listen

B. then tells **A's story** back to A. (a "tell back")

B's goal is to tell A's story as well as B. can
A's goal is to listen ONLY, do NOT correct B. (you want to hear and learn what came through in your telling and what needs further elaboration or emphasis)

Reverse!

B. tells A. **B's story idea** for 5 minutes (timed)

B's goal is to tell story as well as s/he can
A's goal is to listen

A. then tells **B's story** back to B. (a "tell back")

A's goal is to tell B's story as well as A. can
B's goal is to listen ONLY, do NOT correct A. (you want to hear and learn what came through in your telling and what needs further elaboration or emphasis)

Afterwards

Each partner can give the other suggestions and ideas that might help improve the other's story, or even just

mention some issues or things to consider. Limit exchange to 3 ideas/suggestions each.

PARTNER WORK #2: Bios, Loglines, Premises, Treatments

- Logline: Anything confusing? What genre? Who's Protagonist? How transformed? What kind of movie or tone do you expect? What else do you want to know?
 - Premises: Worthwhile? Which is/are most interesting to you as reader? Which ideas seem most promising for a short film?
 - Bio #1: What was confusing? Enough EMOTIONAL info about character? What's most interesting? Most memorable? What else do you want to know?
 - Bio #2: ditto
 - Bio #3: ditto
 - Treatment: Anything confusing? Which parts were easiest to follow or visualize? What's the main theme of the story? What else would you like to know?
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PARTNER WORK #3: Outline

- Act One: Is **Protagonist** clear? P's **goal/want/need** clear? (Initial **obstacle** to P clear?
- Act One: Is P's **problem** clear? Too easy? A worthy challenge? Is there a different, separate story problem? How are these two problems related?
- Act One Turning Point: a "**false**" **solution** to P's problem? How false? Does it cause story to turn?

- Act Two: stays **focused on Protagonist**? Is Protag **actively** working to solve problem?
- Act Two: Any **aftermath** of Act 1 T Pt? How P (or P's **strategy**) **changed**?
- Act Two **Stakes**: being raised? How so? Often enough? Enough at stake?

- Act Two Turning Point: is **All Hope Lost** for P? Nothing more to lose? Everything at risk? Does it cause story to turn?
- Act Three: Resolution: Everything tied up? **Satisfying**? Appropriate? Any dangling questions or unresolved issues?