COM 267 SCREENWRITING FUNDAMENTALS
Online, Winter 2015
Professor Helen C. Harrison
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BOU 207 by appointment

Description
This four-unit lower division course is an introduction to the major elements that constitute a narrative screenplay: script formatting; story ideas; themes; narrative/character point/s of view; voice, mood, tone and visual style; genre; setting; plot & subplot; story structure; dramatic & writing style techniques; character; dialog; premises; synopses; summaries; step-outlines; treatments.
You are not expected to have studied screenwriting previously but you are expected to have developed the individual motivation and study habits that will result in full completion of all course requirements. Classes will consist of reading, audio lectures and writing assignments.

Objectives
To learn the major elements of narrative screenwriting.

1. To learn correct screenplay formatting at an introductory level.
2. To integrate these major elements into the planning and development of an original screenplay idea as well as into individual writing assignments.
3. To complete a 25-30 page original idea screenplay in correct format.
4. To participate in giving and receiving professional creative feedback.

Texts and Programs
It is possible to set tabs in Microsoft Word for correct screenplay format if you’d like to do that. However, it is easier to use the free version of the scriptwriting software Celtx which can be downloaded from the Internet. It has formatting limitations so in time you may want to purchase a professional version. In addition to Celtx, Movie Magic Screenwriter and Final Draft are two other industry standard scriptwriting software packages you may want to investigate. Regardless of what screenwriting software you choose, you must submit your scripts in correct screenplay format. If you do not submit your scripts in correct format, the assignment will be rejected until the format is correct.

Behavior
Your instructor may revise this syllabus or course policies at any time. Appropriating the work of others without credit is known as plagiarism and is strictly prohibited. Plagiarism will result in an F for the course and possibly dismissal from the department or university. Extra credit is available upon request.
Requirements

A. Reading and Listening. You are expected to study the texts and listen to the audio lectures (in Pages section of Canvas) carefully and to assimilate the material so thoroughly that you will easily demonstrate your knowledge of it through your writings. All course activities are based on the assumption that you have studied the chapters and listened to the recordings in advance of the scheduled assignments.

B. Writing. You are expected to submit the following writing assignments:

1) 5-6 page script format exercise (both exercises should altogether be about 5-6 script pages).

2) Story Concepts: A sample submission is in the Files section of Canvas.
   For 3 stories, from which you will select one for further development. Include:
   A. themes (intellectual, moral or emotional topics that the story investigates; can be 1-3 single words or several short phrases)
   B. creative premises (the emotional journey of the story that indicates the emotional beginning of the story, the emotional challenges of the story's middle and the emotional end of the story. The emotional journey is the working out of the theme(s) through the story. 1-2 sentences),
   C. ideas (“what if”: a different or unique angle or take on a narrative integrating first expected and then unexpected story conditions; 1-2 sentences),
   D. structural premises (1-2 sentence description of who-character takes what action to fulfill what goal. This is a compact summary of the main plot; it generally does not address in detail issues of theme or creative premise), and
   E. synopsis (5-6 sentences expanding the structural premise. Again, it is a compact summary of the plot, just 4-5 sentences longer than the structural premise.)

3) Story Design:
   Describe the following for your selected story (only 1 story is required):
   A. Provide a description of the story's genre (What type or kind of story is it?) and why you think it would be the best genre for the theme and creative premise;
   B. Voice (What is your [the author's] intellectual opinion on the topic/theme? What are you trying to say about the theme/topic? What do you want your audience to think or feel about the topic/theme after watching your story?);
   C. Mood (What emotion will be established by the story's atmosphere? What will the locations look like that will give an overall sense of the emotional mood of the story. Is there a lot of color? Are there a lot of shadows? What will the weather be like? What will the environment look like? The buildings? How will the set be dressed to suggest the mood? What will the characters look like? Hair? Make-up? Wardrobe? Will the mood be scary? Happy? How will that be established visually or aurally through the production design and storytelling choices? Will the mood change in different settings and after specific events? What will be different?);
   and related to mood...
   D. Style (What will be the visual creative artistry of the story presentation? What are the distinctive production design elements that are expressive of this story only. Are there any special visual, aural, editing or computer effects? Are there any special ways of shooting [e.g. camera placement, image distortions] that will be characteristic of this story to convey voice, mood, style, tone);
E. Tone (What is your characters' attitudes about life? What are they feeling about what is happening to them? About others? How will you write so that your writing style reveals these attitudes and emotions that embody the topic/theme and the journey (arc) of your character(s)? What kind of writing style will you engage to present a character's tone? Examples of verbs, adjectives, adverbs, descriptive phrases, dialog?);
F. Narrative/character point/s-of-view (From what narrative/character perspective/s is the story told? How will that point of view be represented in the writing process so it can be demonstrated visually and aurally through the production process?); and,
G. Setting (What are the temporal and spatial contexts for the story? What are the historical, social and physical conditions? Why are these important for telling the story? Why is this setting or those settings necessary for conveying the story?).

4) Summary (4-6 paragraphs; also called a Long Synopsis), step-outline (1-2 pages) and treatment (6-8 pages) of the plot and subplot. Step-outline example in Pages. Instructions for the type of writing for a treatment (how to write it; what and what not to include) are in the "Summary, Step-Outline and Treatment" audio lecture. Also in the text box of the Canvas page for the Assignment. Also in Trottier 377-386. Link to treatment examples in Pages section of Canvas at bottom of the site. See format in Writing Style section below.

5) Character sketches for all the major characters of your story with some dialog samples. Write out in prose three-four paragraphs of description for each of your major characters and then create 2 short scenes of about 1-2 script pages long each that demonstrate how your characters interact and talk with others (think tone). These can be scenes you use in your final work or one-off exercises.

I'd like to see you describe your main characters as persons. What are their temperaments? What are their goals? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How are they motivated? What are they apathetic about? What do they really value in life? What is their attitude on certain topics? What do they like and dislike? Make them as real a person as you can imagine, and then write some sample scenes that show these character(s) come alive in the script. How does their verbal and non-verbal behavior reveal who they are.

Start writing the whole script!

6) Scene description, dialog and action exercise in script format for the first 10 pages; and
7) 25-30 properly formatted screenplay pages for your story as a final project with beginning, middle and end.

Writing Style
All writing assignments must not have more than 3 GPSFVS (grammar, punctuation, spelling, format, vocabulary, style) errors per page or they will be returned without being graded and must be corrected before grading. Non-script, essay/prose-type assignments must be in Times New Roman font, 12 pt type, 1.25” margins left and right, 1” margins top and bottom, and single-spaced with a blank line between paragraphs. Prose style for the treatment should be more creative; more use of picturesque scene, character and action description, but not too much. A little psychological interiorization (describing what a character is thinking or feeling) but not a lot -- just enough to convey character attitude and emotion (tone) upon introduction or at an important plot point. Script assignments must follow screenplay format conventions or they will be returned without being graded and must be corrected before grading.
Submit your scripts to Canvas in PDF format as Canvas cannot open specialty scriptwriting program formats. Late assignments are worth 60% value and may be submitted after the term is over to complete the course.

C. Participation: You are required to post 2 assignments into the Discussion section of Canvas and you are required to give feedback to 4 different students for each assignment so that by the end of the term you have given feedback to all 8 other students in the class. What do you like about your colleagues efforts? What do you find intriguing about their ideas or story? What things confuse you? What is not as strong as it could be? What suggestions for improvements can you make?

Be polite and helpful in your feedback. Everyone is sensitive about his or her creative efforts and we’re not here to prove how smart we are or to put others down. The media industry is based on a collaborative creative process so you must learn how to contribute positively and respectfully to achieving a creative goal. You will be graded on the creative insight of your feedback and on the professional manner you deliver your feedback.

The two assignments to post are: #2 Story Concepts and #6 First 10 Pages. After the due date for posting you will have 4 days to review your colleagues’ work and give feedback. I will give my feedback as to which idea is the most intriguing from a narrative standpoint and recommend that idea for developing into a script. There is no credit for giving late feedback.

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>25 points each time</th>
<th>50 points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Format Exercise</td>
<td>5-6 script pages total</td>
<td>50 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Concepts</td>
<td>3 essay pages min.</td>
<td>50 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ideas, themes, premises, synopses)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story Design</td>
<td>4-5 essay pages min.</td>
<td>50 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>(genre, voice, mood, style, tone, narrative/character pov/s, setting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character Sketches/Dialog</td>
<td>2-3 essay pages; 3-4 script pages</td>
<td>50 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary/Outline/Treatment</td>
<td>Summary: 1-2 pages</td>
<td>100 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatment: 6-8 pages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene/Dialog/Action</td>
<td>First 10 pages of script</td>
<td>50 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-30 Screenplay pages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total points</td>
<td>600 points</td>
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A=550 and above; B=500 to 549; C=450 to 499; F= 449 and below. This is an 8% grading scale and not a 10% grading scale: 92%=A; 84%=B; 76%=C.

Schedule

Week 1: Jan 6 – Jan 12, 2015

Lectures What is a Story? Context, Characters, Complications/Conflict, Consequences
Readings Trottier, Book III: Formatting Technique
Rusin, Ch 2: Format

Assignment 1 Format Exercises #2 & #3, p 36 of Russin/Downs. DUE 1/12/15 by 8:00pm

Be sure your scripts are properly formatted. I will not grade your submission if the totality of your effort does not follow the guidance provided by Trottier.
Week 2: Jan 13 – Jan 19, 2015
Lectures: The Content and Process of Screenwriting
Story Concept: themes/creative premises, ideas/structural premises, synopses
Readings: Trottier, Book I: How to Write a Screenplay – A Primer
(Use Book II: A Workbook if you would like structured guidance on turning your story idea into a script)
Russin, Ch 3: Theme, Meaning and Emotion
Assignment 2 Create 3 Story Concepts that will work for a 25-30 page screenplay. DUE 1/18/15 8:00pm
Post in the Discussion section of Canvas for Group Feedback AND Post in the Assignment Section of Canvas so it can be graded Discussion
Post positive and helpful feedback to 4 colleagues. DUE 1/22/15 8:00pm

Week 3: Jan 20 – Jan 26, 2015
Lectures: Elements of Screenplay Construction and Setting
Download Elements of Screenplay Construction document and listen to audio that explains the document simultaneously.
Readings: Russin, Ch 4: The World of the Story; Ch 11: The Structures of Genres
Assignment 3 Story Design for the Selected Idea. DUE 2/2/15 8:00pm

Week 4: Jan 27 – Feb 2, 2015
Work on and Submit your Story Design.
Lectures Available: Conflict and Power; Barriers to Communication; Paradox
Read well-written sample short form screenplay Therapy with mark-up. This script demonstrates great plot and characterization but with some oversights in tone, scene description, scene headings and dialog. Located in Pages section of Canvas.

Week 5: Feb 3 – Feb 9, 2015
Lectures: Story Structure: Dramatic Techniques Checklist; Subplots; Summary, Step-outline, Treatment (See Canvas Pages)
Document: Writing Style Techniques (See Canvas Pages)
Readings: Russin, Ch 6: Historical Approaches to Structure; Ch 7: Power and Conflict; Ch 12: Narrative
Assignment 4 Summary, Step-outline, Treatment. DUE 2/16/2015

Week 6: Feb 10 – Feb 16, 2015
Work on and submit your Summary, Step-outline and Treatment.
Lectures: Dialog: Character Tone & Voice; Delivery; Overview; Subtext & Exposition Characters: Building Characters; Adversity; Relationships; Stereotypes, Character Types & Archetypes; Antagonists.
Week 7: Feb 17 – Feb 23, 2015
Lectures: Character, Dialog
Readings: Russin, Ch 5: Character; Ch 13: Dialog
Assignment 5 Character Sketches with Dialog Sample Scenes. DUE 3/2/15 8:00pm

Week 8: Feb 24 – Mar 2, 2015
Work on and submit your Character Sketches with Dialog Sample Scenes.
Additional lectures as needed.

Week 9: Mar 3 – Mar 9, 2015
Lecture: Writing Scenes
Reading: Russin: Ch 8: Beats, Scenes and Sequences
Assignment 6 First 10 Pages of your Project. DUE 3/8/15 8:00pm
Post in the Discussion section of Canvas for Group Feedback AND
Post in the Assignment Section of Canvas so it can be graded
Discussion Post positive and helpful feedback to 4 colleagues. DUE 3/12/15 8:00pm

Week 10: Mar 10 – Mar 13, 2015
Write 25-30 page short narrative screenplay. DUE 3/19/15 8:00pm