EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION

FILM AND VIDEO

School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design
Department of Cinema and Media Arts

FA / FILM 2121 6.0 SECTION A
SCREENWRITING FUNDAMENTALS
FALL 2017 / WINTER 2018

Last Modified Date: 09/27/2017

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION

Provides a broad introduction to the art and craft of screenwriting. Writing for film is very specific, both an art and a technical document. Students, through the examination of films, will discuss how film stories are told and the fundamental requirements to writing a script. However, unlike FA/FILM 2120, these scripts are not written to be produced and therefore do not cover the technical language of filmmaking (camera angles, production and crewing). This course is a degree requirement option for all BFA Screenwriting students and is a prerequisite to all upper level screenwriting courses in the department of film. Course credit exclusion: FA/FILM 2120 6.00.

Provides a broad introduction to the art and craft of screenwriting designed for students with a strong interest in the subject but who are not enrolled in the BFA program in the Department of Film Video, and therefore not versed in the technical language and syntax of students taking the perquisite FA/FM 2120. Writing for film is very specific, both an art and a technical document. Students, through the examination of films, will discuss how film stories are told and the fundamental requirements to writing a script. However, unlike FA/FM 2120, these scripts are not written to be produced and therefore do not cover the technical language of filmmaking (camera angles, production and crewing). This course is a pre-requisite to all upper level screenwriting courses in the department of film and video.

INSTRUCTOR(S)

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Section / Format / Term</th>
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SPECIAL FEATURES

A good screenwriter knows how to integrate creativity (the act of writing) with analysis (the ability to evaluate and improve the work). This course will take students in the direction of good screenwriting by working on creative expression through a variety of writing assignments, as well as enhancing the craft skills that enable the writer to identify and solve the problems in their work. We’ll deepen the student’s understanding of the form of the screenplay and its various components: plot, character, theme, scenes, dialogue, subtext. We’ll examine the role of the writer primarily in feature films and short films. We will also briefly discuss documentary and some television.

ALL SCRIPTS TO BE SUBMITTED IN CORRECT PROFESSIONAL FORMAT

Prerequisite / Co-requisite: FA/Film 3120 6.0 (for 4120)

Course Goals:
• to write 5 short films over the course of two terms, along with a rewrite of one of those films
  • of the first three films, one must be suitable for submission to a panel for selection for filming adhering to a set of parameters as established by the Department.
• To learn to think critically about every step of the writing process.
  
  • To learn to give constructive, supportive and productive feedback on the work of writing peers, working individually and in groups.

  • To understand the professional screenwriting format and to apply it to one’s work with conscientious standards with regard to grammar, spelling and typographical errors.

TOPICS AND CONCEPTS

This is largely a workshop course. You will be expected to write five short (5 -15 page) screenplays, among other assignments. Exploration of concepts will be integrated into the hands-on screenwriting assignments. The class will be conducted through lectures and discussions, along with writing workshops and writing assignments. The lectures will be supplemented by screenings of films, feature length (and feature excerpts), and short films. Students will occasionally be asked to share their own material in class and in small groups in the process of creating characters, scenes, and short scripts. Students are expected to fully participate in all workshops and classes and to serve as story editors on specific work of their peers. They will also engage in reading and analyzing short and feature-length screenplays. They are expected to purchase a screenwriting book on formatting as well as a screenwriting program.

Course Text/Readings

“Screenwriter’s Bible” by David Trottier

Recommended Readings

“The Hero’s Journey” by Christopher Vogler“
“Making a Good Script Great” by Linda Seger
“The Way of the Screenwriter” by Amnon Buchbinder
“Writing Short Films” by Linda Cowgill

Additional readings may be assigned or recommended during the course.

LIST OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXAMPLES OF

Students will learn to read and interpret screenplays with greater understanding and insight. They will learn to develop, present (pitch), and write (in professional industry format) 8-15 page screenplays based on their own original stories, as well as one assignment adapted from other source material. They will also learn to analyze produced short films, feature films, and, to an extent, the screenplays developed by their peers.

In the process of creating four original short screenplays, as well as a 10-page adaptation of existing material, students will be exposed to the key building blocks of screenwriting. Through hands-on experience with screenplay elements (dramatic conflict, plot, structure, character development, theme, scene making, dialogue, and clear communication, as well as learning standard screenplay format), students will create and develop original screenplays. Some of these original screenplays may be eventually be produced in the York film production program. Students will also learn to read and interpret a screenplay with greater understanding and insight.

CLASS SCHEDULE:
Workshops and In-class exercises: (subject to change)

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION EXPECTED

Sept 13 - Story Truth/Happening Truth/The Ordinary World/Character

Workshop family characters
WORKSHOP ASSIGNMENT #1
Character/Ordinary world

Sept 20 – Premise
Character/want/need paradigm

Screening – SETUP/discussion
WORKSHOP ASSIGNMENT #2
3 characters
Select one

Due Oct 4- GRADED ASSIGNMENT #1
8-10 page script NO dialogue

Sept 27 – Story Editing – WORKSHOP ASSIGNMENT#1
  • Characters -Select one for development
  • Want/Need/Lack
  • Story arc
  • Story ideas
  • VISUAL storytelling/exercises

WORKSHOP ASSIGNMENT #2
  • 3 story ideas

Oct 4 - Screening – discuss character, premise, stakes
  Difference between long & short narratives
  Workshop 3 story ideas
  • Select one/discuss

Dialogue - Workshop dialogue with two characters

SUBMIT GRADED ASSIGNMENT #1
(script – NO dialogue)

Due Oct 11- GRADED ASSIGNMENT #2
DIALOGUE Scene with 2 characters
(2 pages screenplay format)
Oct 11 - Dialogue –

Screening – discuss various dialogue strategies
Workshop script in progress

SUBMIT GRADED ASSIGNMENT #2
(Dialogue/2 characters)

DUE Nov 1 - GRADED ASSIGNMENT #3
10 page original script w. minimal dialogue

Oct 18 - Plot/Scene Goals and TURNS - Discussion and workshop
Metaphor/Archetypes – Fairy Tales
Workshop story ideas

DUE Nov 15 - GRADED ASSIGNMENT #4
10 page adaptation of Fairy Tale
DUE Nov 15 - GRADED ASSIGNMENT #5
2-4 page treatment of original script

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Oct 25 - Reading Week -

*Develop ASSIGNMENTS for Nov 1 and 8
*(Fairy Tale taken from assigned shortlist
And treatment)

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Nov 1 – Screening – Closer look at 3 Act Structure
ACT 1 – World/Character/Change
ACT 2 – development/complications/climax
Writing a great treatment – crisp, visual language
Workshop treatments

SUBMIT GRADED ASSIGNMENT #3
(10 page original script)
DUE Nov 8 - GRADED ASSIGNMENT #5
2-4 page Treatment for original script
Nov 8 - Discuss treatments
Secondary Characters
Pitch story ideas for Assignment #5/6

SUBMIT GRADED ASSIGNMENT #5
Treatment for 10 minute script
(2 to 4 pages single spaced)

Nov 15 - Story Arc – ACT 3 – presence of theme
Scene Conflict/ownership

In class exercise – 3 Act structure in 3 minutes

SUBMIT GRADED ASSIGNMENT #4
10 page Fairy Tale Adaptation

Nov 22 – Theme – how focus on theme helps create structure
Screening – discussion of theme

Nov 29 – Contrast & Conflict
Screening –

DUE JAN 10 – GRADED ASSIGNMENT #6
10 page original script

End of Fall Term

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Jan 10 – **Screening** – discussion

**SUBMIT GRADED ASSIGNMENT #6**
(10 page original script)

Jan 17 – Workshop

**In class exercise – scenes for ASSIGNMENT # 5**

**DUE - FEB 14 GRADED ASSIGNMENT #6**
10 minute original script

Jan 24 – Pitching – key points to express

Jan 31 – TBA

Feb 7 – TBA

Feb 14 – TBA

**SUBMIT GRADED ASSIGNMENT # 6**
(10 page script)

Feb 21 – Reading Week Feb 17 to 23

Feb 28 – **Screening** - discussion

Mar 7 – TBA - **DUE - MAR 28 FINAL ASSIGNMENT #7**
(to be announced)

Mar 14 – TBA – Discussion –

Mar 21 – TBA

Mar 28 – TBA

**SUBMIT GRADED ASSIGNMENT #7**

April 4 - WRAP on the year/final discussion on challenges faced
End of Winter term

GRADED ASSESSMENT

Assignment Due Dates, Grading Breakdown

FALL TERM

ASSIGNMENT #1 - 10%
An 8- 10-scene screenplay based on an original story, without dialogue, in screenplay format.

ASSIGNMENT #2 - 5%
Dialogue scene with two characters in screenplay format

ASSIGNMENT #3 - 10%
A 10 minute original screenplay in screenplay format

ASSIGNMENT #4 – 15%
Adaptation: a 10-page screenplay, based on a fairy tale by Hans Christian Anderson or the Brothers Grimm… stories to be assigned.

WINTER TERM

ASSIGNMENT #5 – 10%
Treatment of an original screenplay for a short film (2 to 4 pages).

ASSIGNMENT #6 - 15%
A 10 page original screenplay in screenplay format

ASSIGNMENT #7 – 20%

PARTICIPATION - 15% Includes attendance, participation in classroom discussions, attitude, collaboration with others. (Being late or absent, except in cases of verifiable illness or family emergency will result in a reduction of this portion of the final mark.)

Grading, Assignment Submission,
Lateness Penalties and Missed Tests

Grading: The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g., A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ - 7, C+ = 5, etc.). Assignments and tests* will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100, A = 80 to 90, B+ = 75 to 79, etc.) (For a full description of York grading system see the York University Undergraduate Calendar - http://calendars.students.yorku.ca/2017-2018/film

Assignment Submission: Proper academic performance depends on students doing their work not only well, but on time. Accordingly, assignments for this course must be received on the due date specified for the assignment. Assignments are to be handed in electronically via the course Moodle site.
**Lateness Penalty:** Assignments received later than the due date will be penalized by 2 marks out of 100, per day, up to a maximum of 5 days. After that, assignments will not be accepted unless there has been a conversation with the course director. Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., may be entertained by the Course Instructor but will require supporting documentation (e.g., a doctor’s letter).

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Please make note of when the class meets in the studio and when we meet online. Most of the studio sessions will include some movement, so wear comfortable clothing. Go to the course Moodle site for more information.

**IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS**

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information, available on the Senate Committee on Academic Standards, Curriculum & Pedagogy webpage (see Reports, Initiatives, Documents) - [http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/senate/](http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/senate/)

- Senate Policy on Academic Honesty and the Academic Integrity Website
- Ethics Review Process for research involving human participants
- Course requirement accommodation for students with disabilities, including physical, medical, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities
- Student Conduct Standards

Religious Observance Accommodation

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Many courses utilize Moodle, York University's course website system. If your course is using Moodle, click here to access it.

_Moodle @ York University_