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 2018 / WINTER 2019

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 6.00, 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 prerequisite to all upper level screenwriting courses in the department of film and video.

INSTRUCTOR(S)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Section / Format / Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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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 look at documentary and some television.

Prerequisite / Co-requisite: FA/Film 1120 3.0

Course Goals:
• To write 4 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 the process of ideation and writing to assist with each subsequent script.
• To learn to give constructive, supportive and productive feedback on the work of writing peers, working individually and in teams.

• 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 (10-15 page) screenplays (one of them a revision), 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 (The Screenwriter’s Bible) as well as a screenwriting program.

Course Text/Readings

“The Way Of The Screenwriter” by Amnon Buchbinder
“The Screenwriter’s Bible” by David Trottier
"Writing Short Films" by Linda Cowgill
“The Short Screenplay” by David Gurskis

Recommended Readings

“The Hero’s Journey” by Chris Vogler
“Aristotle’s Poetics for Screenwriters” by Michael Tierno

Feature Films

“Get Out” by Jordan Peele
“Whale Rider” by Nikki Caro or “Pariah” by Dee Rees
“Whiplash” by Damien Chazelle or
“Wonder Woman” by Allen Heinberg

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) 10-15 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:
Classrooms and In-class exercises: (subject to change)
ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION EXPECTED

September 5:  Week 1
Introduction
Review of course material and introductions.
SCREENING: Silent short films. (Rabbit, Copy Shop)

ASSIGNMENT #1: prepare at least 3 story ideas for short films – make one of them something you could try without dialogue. Expand one to 1-2 pages (1.5 spaced) Due September 12.

September 12: Week #2
Review elements of a Short Film Script.
SCREENING: More short films: THE MAN WITHOUT A HEAD; MILO 55160;

September 19: Week #3
Screening of Feature Film #1. Whole class discussion and analysis of this film’s elements.
Due: ASSIGNMENT #2: Write a 10-scene screenplay without dialogue. No real time limit although lack of dialogue probably constrains length. Due September 19.

September 26: Week #4
- SEPTEMBER 26, class #4
WORKSHOP #1: Character

October 3: Week #5
Screening of Feature Film #2

OCTOBER 10 IS FALL STUDY WEEK

October 17 & October 24, Weeks #6-7
WORKSHOP #2: Breaking story; creating beat sheets for Assignment #4, Script #3.
ASSIGNMENT #3: Write an 10 page script based on a story by Hans Christian Anderson, to be assigned.
Due October 17.

October 31, Week 8: Plot Construction
November 7: Week 9: Scene Structure

November 14: Week 10: Clarifying Ideas
ASSIGNMENT #3: Write an original screenplay for a short film (10) pages. Due November 14.

November 21: WEEK 11. Theme. How to give feedback and analysis.

Nov. 28 – WEEK 12
ASSIGNMENT #5: Story edit your partner’s script and provide notes. Due November 28.

NOTE: DEC. 5 IS LAST DAY TO SUBMIT WORK FOR THIS TERM. (TBC)
Provision of grades on work to this point from instructor.

- WINTER TERM
- JANUARY 9 – Week #1
WORKSHOP #3: Pitching

Jan. 16 Class #2 –
Assignment #6 due. Re-write of Script #3.
Class: Table Readings of Scripts to be submitted for Production

Jan. 23 – Class #3 –
Table Readings Continued

Jan. 30 – Class #4
Screening of Feature Film #3

Feb. 6 – Class #5
Workshop #4: The Art of Dialogue

FEBRUARY 13, class #6
Bring outlines of Script #4 to class for sharing.

February 18-25 – READING WEEK

February 27, Class #7. Three Act Structure for Features.
ASSIGNMENT #7, Script #4: Due Feb. 27. 12-15 pages, no restrictions, but this must be a self-contained work that could be made as a short film.
March 6, Class #8
Adaptation.

MARCH 13 & 20, weeks #9-10
WORKSHOP #5

March 27, Week #11. Unconventional Structures
Assignment #8, Script #5 Due. 12-20 pages, no restrictions, but this must be a self-contained work.

APRIL 3 – Final Class

GRADED ASSESSMENT

Assignment Due Dates, Grading Breakdown

FALL TERM
ASSIGNMENT #2 (10%): DUE SEPTEMBER 19, class #3
A 10-scene screenplay based on an original story, without dialogue, in screenplay format.

ASSIGNMENT #3 (15%): DUE OCTOBER 17, class #6
Adaptation: Script #2, a 10-page screenplay, based on a fairy tale by Hans Christian Anderson (student has choice of 5 stories as basis)

ASSIGNMENT #4 (15%): DUE NOVEMBER 14, class #10.
Script #3, First Draft of an original screenplay for a short film (10-12 pages). Submit 2 copies, one to Course Director, one to assigned writing partner.

ASSIGNMENT #5 (5%): DUE NOVEMBER 28, class #12.
Story editing notes: critique/analysis of partner’s script (Assignment #3). 2 pages minimum, 2 copies to be given to partner and instructor.

WINTER TERM
ASSIGNMENT #6 (10%): DUE JANUARY 18, class #2
2nd Draft of your original screenplay (Assignment #4, Script #3), based on story-editing notes from partner (Assignment #4) and Course Director.

ASSIGNMENT #7 (15%) DUE FEBRUARY 27, class #6
Third original screenplay for a short film (10-12 pages).

ASSIGNMENT #8 (15%): DUE MARCH 27, class #11.
Fourth original screenplay for a short film (12-15 pages).

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:
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.registrar.yorku.ca/pdfs/ug2004cal/calug04_5_acadinfo.pdf)

Students may take a limited number of courses for degree credit on an ungraded (pass/fail) basis. For full information on this option see Alternative Grading Option in the Fine Arts section of the Undergraduate Calendar.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Go to the course Moodle site for more information, and any updates to the information below.

**Submission of Work:**

Work is to be submitted as a soft copy, on Moodle, on the due date. For specific classes, work must be submitted prior to the start of the class on that day, as it will be used in the class. Email submissions are the instructor’s first choice, unless there are technical problems. Students may also be responsible for providing their work to fellow students. Please do not submit material directly to the instructor in hard copy or via personal e-mail. Work should not be left in the department's drop-box. Your work is not considered received until the course director has confirmed receipt in writing. No responsibility is assumed by the course director or the department for work submitted in any other fashion. Please remember to BACK UP YOUR WORK at every stage. Don’t lose your script because you didn’t create a back-up copy.

Written work is to be computer-generated in suitable font, presented free of errors -- spelling, grammar and format. Spell Check can only do so much; make a habit of proofing your work!

Unless otherwise indicated, assignments should be formatted as follows: 1.5 spacing, 12 pt. font, ragged right margin. Pages should always be Numbered. A Cover Sheet clearly indicating the Student's Name, Course Name and Number, and Assignment number/Title, is also required. Always Staple pages so that they are not lost.

Screenplay assignments must be submitted in correct screenplay format. See Trottier’s “A Screenwriter’s Bible, required text, above. Also, see http://www.oscars.org/nicholl/format.html (then print out pdf on format).

Screenwriting Software can be purchased from Data Integrity in the York Lanes Mall with a substantial educational discount.

Industry Standard Programs: Movie Magic Screenwriter is available online for $99 US with student I.D. Final Draft offers a free 20 page demo version, though this is not suitable for longer screenplays and leaves a water mark across all printed pages.

Fade In offers a non-subscription formatting software at a reasonable price.

**Lateness penalties:**

Late assignments will not be accepted, other than under extraordinary circumstances and by arrangement with the course director before the due date. Assignments received later than the due date may be penalized (one half letter grade per day that the assignment is late), with a grade of F after one week. Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness or compassionate grounds will require supporting documentation (e.g. a doctor’s letter). We have a very tight syllabus; those who miss assignments will quickly fall behind. Students who fail to hand in assignments on time will also miss out on significant
feedback in the development of their material.

*Attendance at classes is mandatory. Staying away from class to work on an assignment is not a valid excuse. Classes begin promptly so plan to arrive few minutes early. Late arrivals are disruptive.*

**A Note on Email and class decorum:**
The course director will use email and Moodle to communicate information to the whole class, (please make sure I have your current email). Please make use of office hours; face-to-face communication is preferred. Desperate night-before-due-date emails are also discouraged.

Last date to drop a full year (Y) course without receiving a grade: February 8, 2019

**ACADEMIC POLICIES/INFORMATION**

- The Senate Academic Standards, Curriculum and Pedagogy (ASCP) provides a Student Information Sheet that includes:
  - York’s Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures / Academic Integrity Web site
  - Access/Disability
  - Ethics Review Process for Research Involving Human Participants
  - Religious Observance Accommodation
  - Student Code of Conduct

Additional information:
- Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
- Alternate Exam and Test Scheduling
- Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy
  The Senate Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy stipulates that (a) the grading scheme (i.e. kinds and weights of assignments, essays, exams, etc.) be announced, and be available in writing, within the first two weeks of class, and that, (b) under normal circumstances, graded feedback worth at least 15% of the final grade for Fall, Winter or Summer Term, and 30% for ‘full year’ courses offered in the Fall/Winter Term be received by students in all courses prior to the final withdrawal date from a course without receiving a grade.
- Important University Sessional Dates (you will find classes and exams start/end dates, reading/co-curricular week, add/drop deadlines, holidays, University closings and more.
  http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/enrol/dates/index.htm
- "20% Rule"
  No examinations or tests collectively worth more than 20% of the final grade in a course will be given during the final 14 calendar days of classes in a term. The exceptions to the rule are classes which regularly meet Friday evenings or on Saturday and/or Sunday at any time, and courses offered in the compressed summer terms.
  Final course grades may be adjusted to conform to Program or Faculty grades distribution profiles.

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

Moodle @ York University