EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION

FILM AND VIDEO

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

FA / FILM 2120 6.0 SECTION A
SCREENWRITING FUNDAMENTALS (PRODUCTION)
FALL 2019 / WINTER 2020

Last Modified Date: 09/24/2019

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION

Introduces the craft of screenwriting, taking a general view of screenwriting and its relationship to filmmaking, storytelling and writing. This course is a prerequisite for all upper-level screenwriting courses.

Prerequisites: Film majors: FA/FILM 1010 3.00 or permission of committee. Open to Non-majors by permission of committee.

Instructor(s)

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Section / Format / Term</th>
<th>Contact Email</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 her/his own and others’ work). This course will embrace wholistic 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 problems in their work. If story is the hub of the wheel, then plot, character, theme, tone, scenes, action, dialogue, and subtext are the spokes. We will deepen the student’s understanding of the screenplay form and the aforementioned components. We will examine the role of the writer primarily in feature films and short films. We will also briefly look at documentary, docudrama, and some television.

Topics and Concepts

This is largely a workshop course. You will be expected to write five short (10-15 page) screenplays, among other assignments and exercises. Exploration of different screenwriting 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 format their screenplays in order to comply with industry standards. They may do so by purchasing a screenwriting book on formatting ("Screenwriter’s Bible” by
David Trottier) as well as screenwriting software or creating required formatting styles in other word processing software.

Additional readings may be assigned or recommended during the course and distributed via Moodle or as handouts in the beginning of every class. It is students’ duty to check Moodle document updates every week.

Required readings and main texts:
“The Way Of The Screenwriter” by Amnon Buchbinder
“Screenwriter’s Bible” by David Trottier
"Writing Short Films” by Linda Cowgill

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

LIST OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXAMPLES OF

Students 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 one 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 eventually be produced in the York film production program. Students will also learn to read and interpret a screenplay with greater understanding and insight.

GRADED ASSESSMENT

Assignment Due Dates, Grading Breakdown

FALL TERM

**ASSIGNMENT #1 (10%)**: DUE September 24, class #3
A 10-scene screenplay (6-8 pages, no less) based on an original story, without dialogue, in screenplay format.

**ASSIGNMENT #2 (15%)**: DUE OCTOBER 22, class #6 (no class Oct. 1)
Adaptation: a 10-page screenplay, based on a fairy tale by Hans Christian Anderson or the Brothers Grimm… stories to be assigned.
ASSIGNMENT #3 (15%): DUE NOVEMBER 26, class #10.
First Draft of an original screenplay for a short film (10-12 pages). Submit 2 copies, one to Course Director, 1 to story editor.

ASSIGNMENT #4 (ungraded): DUE DECEMBER 3, class #11
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 #5 (15 %): DUE JANUARY 14, class #2
2nd Draft of your original screenplay (Assignment #3), based on story-editing notes from partner (Assignment #4) and story group feedback on first class back, and Course Director’s notes…

ASSIGNMENT #6 (15%) DUE FEB. 25 class #8
Second original screenplay for a short film (10-12 pages).

ASSIGNMENT #7 (20%): DUE MARCH 24, class #12.
Third original screenplay for a short film (12-15 pages)
OR ONLY with the permission of the instructor, 15-20 pages max. This length will not be appropriate for Fiction 1.

PARTICIPATION (10%): Includes attendance, participation in classroom discussions, attitude, collaboration with others. Students who miss more than 4 classes will lose their entire participation grade, unless absence is due to legitimate reasons like family matters or illness (confirmed by a doctor’s note).

Workshops and In-class exercises: (subject to change)
Attendance/participation expected.

FALL TERM

WORKSHOP #1 September 24, class #3
Script Analysis of an assigned feature film

IN-CLASS SCRIPT ANALYSIS OCTOBER 8, class #4
Character Observation/Stream of Consciousness Piece

WORKSHOP #2 October 8 & 22, classes #4 & 6
Breaking story; creating beat sheets of the assigned adaptations. Small groups work on structural analysis of assigned adaptations and on each other’s stories for Assignment #4, then share the results with the class.

WINTER TERM

WORKSHOP #3 JANUARY 14 & 21, classes #2 and #3
Pitching practice in small groups and in front of the class.

WORKSHOP #4 FEBRUARY 11, class #6
Finding the theme: Small group discussion on themes in each other’s short film scripts.

WORKSHOP #5 MARCH 10 & 17, classes #9-10
Scene writing: in-class exercise writing scenes of conflict from Assignment #7.

Grading scheme 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.: Evaluation of creative materials will be based on the student’s handling of creative and
technical elements. These include the creation, execution, and compelling nature of
story, plot and character, strength of dramatic structure and effective use of accepted
screenplay format. Each assignment will be graded on the basis of creativity/originality,
content, mastery of the form from lessons learned in class, language skills, and clarity of
communication.

** Final course grades may be adjusted to conform to program or Faculty grades
distribution profiles,**

Submission of Work:
Work is to be submitted as a hard copy, in person at the start of class on the due date OR through Moodle-
only if it is late. Hard copies always preferred.

Email submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances. If in-person
submission is not possible, work may be left in the department's drop-box where it will be date-stamped.

Your work is not considered received until it is in the course director’s hands, in person, or on Moodle or
with a date-stamp from the drop-box. 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-printed 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 that are NOT SCREENPLAYS 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.

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.

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.
Screenplays are available for reading through York University Library @ American Film Scripts Online. https://www.library.yorku.ca/find/Search/Results?lookfor=american+film+scripts+online+database&type=AllFields&submit=Go

Industry Standard Programs:

Movie Magic Screenwriter is available online for $99 US with student I.D.
http://dramatica.stores.yahoo.net/movmagscreen4.html

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. They also have a discount for students on the regular version of the program. https://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-10-edu.html

ScreenPro97 This is free or very inexpensive, but will require further configuration in order to conform to acceptable format. You need to update format as instructed on homepage.
http://www.passarella.com/screenpro/#3sqsg.html

FadeIn has a free demo, and the full program costs $80 US. https://www.fadeinpro.com
Celtx has a free version and a paid version. https://www.celtx.com/index.html

Also, alternative option is to format styles in Word. That has to be done according to industry standards.

NOTE RE ORIGINAL MATERIAL: You may NOT adapt or base your original screenplays on pre-existing material, unless it is your own (with absolutely no collaborators), and it is specifically cleared with the instructor. You may not co-write your screenplays since you are being assessed on the basis of your individual performance. These are potentially serious issues. When in doubt, ask the instructor.

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 will 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.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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 when necessary to communicate information to the whole class, (please make sure I have your current email), but prefers not to engage in individual correspondence other than in exceptional circumstances. Please make use of office hours; face-to-face communication is preferred. Desperate night-before-due-date emails are also discouraged.

Associated Fees: A $10 fee will be assessed each student for Course Materials.

DROP DATES:

Last date to drop a fall term (F) course without receiving a grade: November 8, 2019
Last date to drop a winter term (W) course without receiving a grade: March 13, 2020
Last date to drop a full year (Y) course without receiving a grade: February 3, 2020

Academic Policies / Information

The Senate Academic Standards, Curriculum and Pedagogy Committee (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

http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/CourseInformationForStudentsAugust20121.pdf

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
• Manage my Academic record
http://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/
• "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