

COMM 3305-01: SHORT FORM SCREENWRITING & ANALYSIS

CRN 80788 Fall 2018 T/TH 12:30 – 1:45 PM ANTHROPOLOGY G15

INSTRUCTOR: Christopher Renaud

Office Hours: M/W 11– 1 PM; T/Th 1 – 3 PM and by appt.

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REQUIRED MATERIALS See <http://www.bookstore.westga.edu/>

- Your Screenplay Sucks: 100 Ways to Make it Great.** Akers, William. Wise Film. 2008. ISBN 1-932907-45-9. Available at UWG Bookstore.
- Celtx.com account** (free screenwriting software from Celtx.com)
- Other online readings and resources via CourseDen**

I write it. I read it. If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it.
– Elmore Leonard

If I have a good trait, it's probably relentlessness
– Bruce Springsteen

COURSE OVERVIEW

In this writing skills workshop, students will study and implement storytelling structure and the conventions of screenwriting practice towards the creation of short cinematic, televisual and web-based stories and series. Because it serves as the foundational writing-intensive course for two Mass Communications concentrations, close and consistent attention will be given to the technical, structural, and grammatical components of screenwriting (including editing, re-writing and proofreading). Students will practice skills in clear, concise communication for the page, for the screen and in dialogue with each other in a workshop setting.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. Students will **understand** and **practice** script formatting, and produce content that aligns with industry standards for specific audiences. (ACEJMC SLO 9)
2. Students will **understand** the narrative structure of single-camera fiction production.
3. Students will **practice** strategies of story and small-project development for the screen, including writing loglines, synopses and treatments.
4. Students will **understand** and **implement** strategies of re-writing and proofreading.
5. Students will **develop** skills in clear, concise and formal written communication.
6. Students will **value** and **practice** the communicative skills of giving and receiving critical feedback in a workshop setting.
7. Students will critically **evaluate** their own work and that of others for **accuracy** and **fairness, clarity, appropriate style** and **grammatical correctness**. (ACEJMC SLO 10)
8. Students will understand **concepts** and apply **theories** in the use and presentation of **images** and **information**. (ACEJMC SLO 5)
9. Students will think **critically, creatively** and **independently**. (SLO 7)

ASSIGNMENTS

- **Writing Exercises (10 points)** – Short pieces of exploratory writing to help you find story ideas, themes and characters. These (and all below) will be detailed via separate handouts.
- **Script #1: Shopping Trip (10 points)** – 5 pages, standard script format, 3 characters maximum. Protagonist is shopping inside a store (of choice) for something they will use that evening. They interact with a stranger, and that interaction changes their original plans for the night.
- **Script #2: Family Gathering (10 points)** – 5 pages maximum, standard script format. Relatives have gathered for an event, but conflict ensues when someone delivers important news.
- **Script #3: Flash Fiction Adaptation (10 points)** – 6 pages maximum, standard script format. Adaptation allows you to focus on craftsmanship and style rather than from-scratch story development. Flash fiction is a super short (1-2 page) but evocative story that challenges you to work with emotions, ideas, images and sounds, with minimal dialogue.
- **Logline (2.5 points)** – 1-2 sentence teaser of your Final Script.
- **Synopsis (2.5 points)** – 2-5 sentence plot summary of your Final Script.
- **Treatment/Prose Outline (5 points)** – 1-2 pages, single-spaced. Your complete Final Script story written in short story format.
- **Final Script (25 points)** – 15 pages maximum, no minimum. Content of choice, but must be feasible for production by a college student with available resources similar to your own. Should be a completely developed piece that stands on its own.
- **Reading Quizzes 2 x 5 (10 points)** – To test comprehension of textbook reading assignments.
- **Participation (15 points)** – Assessed by the quality of in-class peer critiques, engagement during in-class table-readings and discussions, and attendance as required for in-class participation.

*Our assignments have multiples phases, often multiple revisions of the same script. You will **not** be able to get an **A** (full points) if you do **not follow all the instructions** given and **meet all the deadlines** provided.*

Assignments frequently contain an in-class component, including self and peer review, or in class reading, that will contribute to that assignment's overall grade. In class participation will be evaluated alongside your written work.

Late Assignments: I reserve the right to **not** accept late assignments. If a late assignment is deemed acceptable, it will be severely penalized (think 15-40%).

Assignment Formatting

Each assignment will spell out its delivery format, either as a **paper** or **digital document**. Read the assignment handouts carefully. Generally this will be a digital document (**as a .pdf file**) in the CourseDen dropbox for that assignment. **You must follow delivery guidelines in the assignment to receive credit.**

GRADE ALLOCATION

You will build your grade from zero points. Together, the assignments total 100 points = 100 percent.

A = 90 - 100% B = 80 – 89% C = 70 – 79% D = 60 – 69% F = 59% or below

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:

This is a workshop-style class and requires your **active in-the-room participation**.

Writing is so much more than typing at your computer. Writing is a process. It includes *listening, thinking, asking* each other probing *questions*, and *offering feedback*. If you are not here, you are not participating and you are not learning, and doing yourself and your classmates a disservice.

Attendance and active participation are learning.

You can expect **something due every week** of the semester along with other in-class exercises and assignments. When you miss, you miss a lot. **If you are not in class, your work will be considered late** and you will miss in-class exercises and discussion, which are also graded.

- **Show up prepared and on time.** Class starts promptly at 12:30. Being prepared includes having assignments printed and/or delivered electronically before our meeting.

- **Cell phone use:** Be in one place. Doing things unrelated to the class during class-time (ie. sleeping, emailing, surfing the web, not paying attention) are distracting to everyone around you, including me. No “multitasking.” This is a space for you to focus on one thing, and one thing only – the craft of screenwriting.

If there is something pressing you need to deal with, inform me before class begins, and leave the room to the deal with the matter.

- Because so much learning happens in the workshop setting of this class, if you miss more than 25% of our class meetings, **for whatever reason**, you will not pass the class.

OTHER UNIVERSITY AND COURSE POLICIES

Common language for course syllabi: Students should please review the following information regarding ADA, UWG Email Policy, Credit Hour Policy, and UWG Honor Code.

http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf

Students with Special Needs: I will gladly make the necessary accommodations to ensure students with special needs can complete the class and get the most out of it. Please don't “wing it” and then tell later. Come see me in private with your accommodation paperwork and we can discuss your particular needs.

UWG Email Policy: The University considers students' **my.westga.edu (Gmail)** account to be an official means of communication between the University and the student. It is the student's responsibility to check his or her email frequently for class, department, and University information. As needed, I may email documents and class-related updates – not checking your email is no excuse for not completing work on time.

FINAL “EXAM” MEETING

Your final screenplay is your final “exam” for this class. Attendance is **required** for our final class meeting.

We will meet on **Thursday, Dec. 13, 11:00-1:00 pm** to wrap the semester, “table-read” from your final projects and do course evaluations.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Our schedule will be delivered separately, **as a live-link on CourseDen**. If necessary, will be adjusted to accommodate the flow and trajectory of the course, or take advantage of developing opportunities. You are responsible for tracking these changes and meeting class deadlines. No adjustment will compromise the time allotted for you to complete an assignment.

MY ROLE

As with most endeavors related to filmmaking, you will be asked to reckon with (and juggle) understanding of both technical and creative concepts.

I am **absolutely, fundamentally committed** to helping you understand these concepts, principles, and methods – both professionally and by personal inclination.

I will endeavor to:

- 1) design exercises and projects that stimulate you creatively and intellectually
- 2) provide interesting examples and context
- 3) demystify the process the process of storytelling
- 3) facilitate lively in-class discussions
- 4) foster and offer the most frank, benevolent feedback on your (and our) work – with the **sole** purpose of helping you become a **better, more expressive filmmaker**

I am ready and available to help you when you need it. If you’re having trouble, it’s crucial that you **speak up**. I’m perceptive, but I cannot read minds. Don’t be afraid to ...

Ask. Seek. Question.

Aim high. Stay in the game. I will be there for you.