Summer 2016 Course Syllabus

I. Course Information

Course Name: Playwriting (Department of Theater Arts)
Course Number: THA 71a
Course Dates: June 6-August 10, 2016
4 credit hours
Requirements Fulfilled: ca (Creative Arts) wi (Writing Intensive)

Instructor’s Name and Contact Information
• Joseph A. Coroniti, PhD
• Professor, Drama & Film
• coroniti@brandeis.edu

Description

In this Online Scriptwriting Workshop, students develop short plays or screenplays. The workshop is asynchronous (we do not meet in real time) so members submit writing exercises and scenes according to their own time zones.

Sample Topics: creating compelling action, three-dimensional characters in conflict, engaging dialogue, and stories that grab the audience’s attention. In addition to stage plays or screenplays (drama or comedy), participants have the option to create one-man/woman shows; performance art; or multimedia experiments employing other art forms, e.g., music, photography, or video.

As models for writing, we will consider several short plays and films by great dramatists. However, the focus will be on students' original work. While creative projects may be arranged individually, workshop members typically write one ten-minute piece and one one-act piece.

Scripts will be considered for publication in FUSION: Global Art, Words, and Music: http://www.fusionmagazine.org/

Overview

Sample Topics: creating compelling action; three-dimensional characters in conflict; engaging dialogue; and stories that grab the audience’s attention.

As models for writing, we will consider a small number of one-act plays by great dramatists. However, the focus will be on students' original scripts.
Workshop Participation: Regular involvement in the workshop. This includes your contribution to the development of others’ work as well as the presentation of your own work.

Scripts will be considered for publication in FUSION Magazine: Global Art, Words, and Music: http://www.fusionmagazine.org/

**Required Texts:**


*Plays In One Act*. Edited by Daniel Halpern. The Ecco Press.  

NB: As you develop your script, check your dramatic structure against the Story Sense checklist: http://www.storysense.com/checklist.htm

**Required Software:**

Final Draft Software, Education Pricing:  
http://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-9-edu.html

**Online Course Content:** The LATTE course site contains the course syllabus, assignments, discussion forums, links/resources to course-related resources and sites, and other materials. Access information will be emailed to participants before the start of the course.

**Overall Course Objectives:**

*The course is intended to provide students with an understanding of:*

Dramatic Sound and Structure (including Story arcs and the essential ingredient to all drama: Conflict)

Characterization

Dramatic dialogue

The Mythic Structure of storytelling in dramas

The nature of tragedy, comedy, and ritual

**Overall Course Outcomes:**

*At the end of the course, the student will be able to:*

Build intriguing, believable characters the reader will *care* about.

Create scripts with high dramatic tension and internal and external conflict.

Breathe life into his/her characters by writing sharp, convincing dialogue.

Construct a dramatic structure that holds the attention of the audience.
Create characters, conflict, and a storyline that follow, e.g., the stages of Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero’s Journey*, such as the Call to Adventure and Crossing the First Threshold.

Write with a heightened understanding of form, metaphor, voice, style, sound (the “music of what happens”), humor, and ritual.

Internalize and act upon the truth that in writing, as in many things, “less is more.”

Create settings that reflect the conflict in a scene.

Harness the power of "unresolved conflict" between characters.

* * *

“The medium of drama is not words, but persons moving about on stage using words.” —Ezra Pound
Course Grading Criteria:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Component</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Workshop Participation, including Posting On Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Weekly Exercises (mostly Scenes) and Ten-Minute Play</td>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>Final Portfolio (including your Final One-Act Play)</td>
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<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Exam on Readings: <em>Art and Craft of Playwriting</em></td>
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Description of Assignments:

**Portfolio**: a collection of exercises from *The Art and Craft of Playwriting* (ACP); brief commentaries on the one-act plays; a Ten-Minute Play; and your Final Project One-Act Play. All writing assignments have individual LATTE Forums.

1.) **Post Weekly ACP Exercises [exs] by Tuesday on LATTE**: See Outline below. Note: Exercises marked “Scene” should be dramatized, i.e., write Dialogue, not Prose.

2.) **Reading Like a Playwright**: Your Brief Notes on the One-Act Plays

3.) **Ten-Minute Play**: See LATTE for due date

   **Feedback (FB) to peers on their Ten-Minute Play:**
   Download each other’s Ten-Minute Play using Final Draft; make comments within the text or use “ScriptNotes” (not just general comments at end). Repost with your edits/Feedback [FB] and label as follows: “Ten-Minute Play.Peer’s Name.Your Name.FB.”

4.) **Exam on Readings**: *Art and Craft of Playwriting* & One-Act Plays

5.) **Final Project**: Your Final One-Act Script (*due date on LATTE*).
   You may incorporate (but revise) the scenes you’ve written as Exercises in earlier weeks for this one-act play.

   **FB**: Prior to competing your One-Act Play, all members must provide FB on each other’s Revised Character Bios & Plot Outline

*LABEL AND NUMBER THE ENTRIES*, for example, Your Name.Wk 3. Ex 1, page x
Outcomes, Weeks 1-9

Week 1.
Investigate the elements & meaning of Drama (from the Greek, “to do”)
Formulate dramatic questions & suspense

Week 2.
Compose subtle exposition & “ordinary world.”
Implement various types of beginnings.

Week 3.
Write concise, rhythmic, persuasive dialogue
Create characters who don’t sound like each other
Reveal Personality through dialogue
Omit Voice Over and Excessive Narration

Week 4.
Dramatize Aristotle’s Element of Character
Demonstrate you understanding that “character is action; action is character.”
Create characters with “active goals.”

Week 5.
Dramatize Aristotle’s Elements of Action & Ideas
Distinguish the difference between Actions & Activities
Reveal Ideas through Showing, not Telling

Week 6.
Dramatize Aristotle’s Elements of Language & Spectacle
Write dialogue that Defines Character
Create Theatricality (rather than “talking heads”) by orchestrating Spectacle

Week 7.
Consolidate Space, Time and Causality in your dramatic writing
Design Scenes according to principles of Causality

Week 8.
Synthesize Elements of Dramatic Structure, incl. the inciting incident, the Hero’s Journey.
Construct a scenario that clearly defines conflict, climax, and resolution.
Design Obstacles, Opportunities, and Tension to maintain Momentum in the middle of the drama.

9.
Create a climactic, plausible Ending to the play.
Articulate various types of Endings.
Write an Ending consistent with the “Spine” of the play.
Read the following plays from *Plays In One Act* as models for your writing. The plays are arranged alphabetically by playwright’s last name. See LATTE for Assignment on the plays.

**Read the “Preface”**

Week 1: Read Only; no notes required this week:
- Four Baboons Adoring the Sun / John Guare page 115
- Protest / Václav Havel (tr. Vera Blackwell) 188

Week 2: Read Only; no notes required this week:
- Am I Blue / Beth Henley 208
- Teeth / Tina Howe 236

Week 3: See LATTE re Your Notes on the plays, Weeks 3-8]
- She Talks to Beethoven / Adrienne Kennedy 248

Week 4:
- Linda Her / Harry Kondoleon 259

Week 5:
- A Life With No Joy In It / David Mamet 291

Week 6:
- Tone Clusters / Joyce Carol Oates 349

Week 7:
- A Bond Honored / John Osborne 369

Week 8:
- Tender Offer / Wendy Wasserstein 452

Week 9: Read Only; no notes required this week
- The Chalky White Substance / Tennessee Williams 467

**II. Course Policies and Procedures**

**Late Policies:**
Writing Assignments will be marked late after the due date, since they are part of the process of workshopping your work.

This is a graded workshop, not Credit/Non-Credit [Pass/Fail]
Work Expectations:

Students are responsible to explore each week's materials and submit required work by their due dates.

On average, a student can expect to spend approximately 6 hours per week reading and completing assignments.

Confidentiality

- We should respect our fellow classmates and work under the assumption that what is discussed here stays within the confines of the classroom.
- For your awareness, members of the University's technical staff have access to all course sites to aid in course setup and technical troubleshooting. Students enrolled in online courses can expect that individuals other than their fellow classmates and the course instructor(s) may visit their course for various purposes. Their intentions are to aid in technical troubleshooting and to ensure that quality course delivery standards are met. Strict confidentiality of student information is maintained.

III. University Policies and Standards

Learning Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please contact me immediately.

Academic Honesty and Student Integrity: Academic honesty and student integrity are of fundamental importance at Brandeis University and we want students to understand this clearly at the start of the term. As stated in the Brandeis Rights and Responsibilities handbook, “Every member of the University Community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. A student shall not receive credit for work that is not the product of the student’s own effort. A student's name on any written exercise constitutes a statement that the work is the result of the student's own thought and study, stated in the students own words, and produced without the assistance of others, except in quotes, footnotes or references with appropriate acknowledgement of the source.” In particular, students must be aware that material (including ideas, phrases, sentences, etc.) taken from the Internet and other sources MUST be appropriately cited if quoted, and footnoted in any written work turned in for this, or any, Brandeis class. Also, students will not be allowed to collaborate on work except by the specific permission of the instructor. Failure to cite resources properly may result in a referral being made to the Office of Student Development and Judicial Education. The outcome of this action may involve academic and disciplinary sanctions, which could include (but are not limited to) such penalties as receiving no credit for the assignment in question, receiving no credit for the related course, or suspension or dismissal from the University.

University Caveat: The above schedule, content, and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.
All exercises from *The Art & Craft of Playwriting* are due Tuesday midnight, your local time.

**Week 1, June 6**  
*The Art and Craft of Playwriting* [ACP]: “Introduction”;  
Chapter 1: Drama and Theatre, p 19, Exercise #3, in PROSE

Chapter 4: Getting the Great Idea and Turning It Into a Play, p 77, Exercises #1-5: just make notes for 1-4 and concentrate on the SCENE for exercise 5. While #5 calls for 3 ideas, one will suffice. [The exercise gives sample scenarios; create your own.]

**Week 2, June 13**  
Chapter 6: Great Beginnings, p 111, Exercise #6, as a SCENE

**Week 3, June 20**  
Chapter 5: Structure, p. 92, All exercises, #1-4, PROSE

**Week 4, June 27**  
Chapter 2: The Six Elements of Aristotle: Section 1.  
Character, p 33, 1-4, Prose.

**Due Friday:** Post your Character Bios (OK to combine with above exs) & Plot Outline as they relate to your Ten-Minute Play.

**Week 5, July 5 (Tuesday due to Holiday)**  
Since your Ten-Minute Play is due this week, read and apply what the chapter and exercises include to your Ten-Minute Play, BUT you do NOT have to complete the exercises.

Chapter 2: The Six Elements of Aristotle: *Simply Apply principles, no exercises due:*  
Section 4. Language, p 47, #3  
Section 6. Spectacle, p 52, #1

**Due Wednesday:** Post your Ten-Minute Play (approx. 10 pages. OK to REVISE incorporating earlier scenes)

**FB Due to Entire Workshop by FRIDAY of next week [6].**  
You must upload your peers’ FD files, add your edits, and upload your *edited* FD file as a “reply.” Label: Your Name edits.author’s name.10-minute play.  
Late posts will be marked down. You will only receive FB from your peers if your play is posted by midnight, your local time, Friday of this week.  
Receiving FB will help you shape your future exercises and One-Act play.

**Week 6, July 11**  
Chapter 2: The Six Elements of Aristotle: Section 3: Ideas, p 45, #4, SCENE
Week 7, July 18
Chapter 3: Space, Time and Causality, p. 66, #5, SCENE

Due Thursday: Post your REVISED Character Bios & Plot Outline as they relate to your Final Project One-Act Play.

Only in LATTE Box (no uploading required): FB on REVISED Character Bios & Plot Outline Due to Entire Workshop (not small groups) by WEDNESDAY of next week [8].

Week 8, July 25
Chapter 9: Dialogue, p 152, Exercises # 2, 4: SCENES
Chapter 7: Great Middles, p. 121, #1: Just Make a LIST. 6-10 Actions will be enough. This is only an informal jotting of actions, not an exercise per se.

Week 9, August 1
Chapter 8: Great Endings, p. 132, #6, SCENE

Post your Portfolio and Final One-Act Play, Due Date TBA:
All SCRIPT material in ONE Final Draft doc  All PROSE in ONE Word doc
No Late Portfolios or Projects.

Week 10, August
No Exercises
Feedback on each other’s Final Projects: Due Date TBA
Wrap-up & Curtain Calls