ENG 79A Directed Writing: Beginning Screenplay

Contact Details

Professor Marc Weinberg
marcw@brandeis.edu
Please contact me by email to set up an office meeting.

Meeting Times

Classes meet via Zoom M, T, & TH 2-4:30 pm EST

Course Description

Skills and knowledge
Combining lectures, workshops, and screenings, this course examines the fundamentals of writing for a narrative feature-length film. The course will examine story structure, characterization, scene writing, and dialogue. Students will move from ideation to developing and writing a detailed outline and the first act of their original scripts.

This class is both workshop and lecture. You will read and discuss the scripts of recent movies, pitch ideas for feature films, write frequently. Assignments will be reviewed in class, meaning you will receive criticism on your pages, as well as critique classmates' work.

Learning Goals
This course is designed to provide you with the tools necessary to tell a story visually and to get you started on your screenplay. By the end of the class, you will be able to:

1. Display an understanding of effective pitching skills,
2. Create a 35-40 scene outline for your original screenplay
3. Write the first act of an original screenplay.
4. Develop a screenplay that includes the following key elements:
   - The 3-act structure
   - Character and story arc
   - Visual storytelling
   - Beat outline
   - Script format

Class preparation time

On average, you can expect to spend 8-12 hours a week preparing for class. This may be through writing script pages, reading the textbook and additional readings, or watching assigned films.

Prerequisites
While there is no prerequisite for the class, students are expected to have basic grammatical skills.

Course Requirements

Academic Integrity
Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student's own effort. Infringement of academic honesty by a student subjects that student to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University or other sanctions (see section 20 of R&R). Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality.

A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic honesty as they apply to a specific course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards. Citation and research assistance can be found at Brandeis Library Guides - Citing Sources (https://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=301723).

Assignments
All written assignments should be converted into PDF format and submitted via Latte by the due date.

Participation

- You must keep up with all readings and assigned viewings.
- All assignments, whether they are graded or not, are mandatory and are expected on time. To prevent lost pages and avoid late submissions, please save your work to the cloud each time you finish writing. Computer malfunction is NOT an excuse for a late submission.
- All homework must be typed and include your name, the date, and the assignment title.
- All work must be proofread for grammar, spelling errors, and typos. Your work will be graded down for mistakes.
- Students are allowed two unexcused absences. A third unexcused absence will result in no credit for the class.
- Students joining class more than 10 minutes late are considered tardy; two tardies count as one unexcused absence.

Portfolio

Throughout the semester, you will be expected to complete writing assignments, designed to show your growing expertise in dramatic writing and screenplay format. In some instances, assignments will be assigned, completed, and discussed, all in the same class meeting. Other times, you will have anywhere from 1 to 3 weeks to complete a more challenging writing assignment. These scripts will be emailed to me and your classmates by a predetermined due date.

Portfolios can be maintained through a Google folder. Consult Ivan Nieves (ivannieves@brandeis.edu), Lead Analyst Technologist, Information Technology, Portfolio Services, for help with portfolios.

Essential Resources

Accommodations

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, I want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability of requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS Student Accessibility Support) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

Course Materials

If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your Student Financial Services or Academic Services advisor to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives.

Required Readings & Viewings

Textbook: The Foundations of Screenwriting, by Syd Field
https://search.library.brandeis.edu/permalink/f/urfvar/BRAND_ALMA51418107700001921

Additional required readings and the following assigned films are available via Latte:

- **School of Rock**
- **Lion (film and screenplay)**
- **Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind**
- **Get Out**

Apps or Tools/Equipment

You are required to use a screenwriting program for this class. The preferred program is [Final Draft](#), which you can download and use this semester for free at http://trial.finaldraft.com/edutrial/

You may also use another free scriptwriting program, [Celtx](#) (http://www.celtx.com).

Do not use a standard word processing software, such as Microsoft Word, to write scripts.

[LATTE](#)

LATTE is the Brandeis learning management system: http://latte.brandeis.edu. Login using your UNET ID and password.

Library

[The Brandeis Library](#) collections and staff offer resources and services to support Brandeis students, faculty and staff. These include workshops, consultations, collaboration, materials and instruction on emerging trends in technologies such as machine learning, emerging trends in research such as data visualization, and emerging trends in scholarship such as open access. Librarians at the Circulation Desk, Research Help Desk, Archives & Special Collections, Sound & Image Media Studios, MakerLab, AutomationLab, and Digital Scholarship Lab are available to help you. https://www.brandeis.edu/library/about/index.html

Privacy

This class requires the use of tools that may disclose your coursework and identity to parties outside the class. Should you choose to use the screenwriting program, Celtx, your classwork will be stored online. To protect your privacy, you may wish to use a pseudonym/alias rather than your name in submitting such work. You must share the pseudonym/alias with me and your classmates as needed. Alternatively, with prior consultation, you may submit such work directly to me.

Student Support

Brandeis University is committed to supporting all our students so they can thrive. The following resources are available to help with the many academic and non-academic factors that contribute to student success (finances, health, food supply, housing, mental health counseling, academic advising, physical and social activities, etc.). Please explore the many links on this [Support at Brandeis](#) page (https://www.brandeis.edu/support/undergraduate-students/browse.html) to find out more about the resources that Brandeis provides to help you and your classmates to achieve success.

Evaluation & Course grading

Evaluation

- This class, as well as all creative writing courses at Brandeis, are offered exclusively on a credit/non-credit basis.
- All students will be evaluated according to the same percentages and criteria.
- You must keep up with all readings and assigned viewings.
- All assignments, whether they are graded or not, are mandatory and are expected on time. To prevent lost pages and avoid late submissions, please save your work to the cloud each time you finish writing. Computer malfunction is NOT an excuse for a late submission.
- All homework must be typed and include your name, the date, and the assignment title.
- All work must be proofread for grammar, spelling errors, and typos. Your work will be graded down for mistakes.
- Students are allowed one unexcused absence. A second unexcused absence will result in no credit for the class.
- Students joining class more than 10 minutes late are considered tardy; two tardies count as one unexcused absence.

Class Element	Grade %	Due Date	Learning Goals
In-class participation	20%		
First 10 pages of your script	10%		
Second set of script pages	10%		
Assigned viewing	10%		
Final quiz	10%		
Beat outline containing 36-40 scenes	10%		
Complete Act 1	30%		

Course Plan

WEEK 0: Mon 5/24/2021 – Mon 5/30/2021

Week 0 Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Access the course site in Latte, navigate to the course Syllabus and Units
- Define the course requirements and components of your final grade

Week 0 To-Do List

- Read the Syllabus
- Read the Latte Help materials
- Download Field textbook

WEEK 1: Tue 6/1/2021 - Sun 6/6/2021

Week 1 Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the inciting event in a movie
- Develop an original story pitch
- Develop a 7-beat outline for your original story

Week 1 To-Do List

- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/3:** Read Topic Notes on Inciting Event
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/3**: Read Topic Notes on How to Pitch
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/3**: Prepare 2 Original Pitches, which you will present to the class during our Zoom meeting.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/3:** Watch the film The School of Rock
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/3:** Read Topic Notes on 7-Beat Outline
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/3:** Read [Field, Intro & Chapters 1 & 2](#)
- **DUE FRIDAY, 6/4:** Identify your script's 7 most important beats: the first scene, inciting event, first act break, midpoint, second act break, climax, and resolution and post it by Friday night by 11:59 pm EST.

TUESDAY, 6/1

- Introduction
- Pair off with classmate to develop a feature idea for a movie

THURSDAY, 6/3

- Present two pitches to the class
- Discuss the film, The School of Rock
- Discuss [Field, Intro & Chapters 1 & 2](#)

WEEK 2: Mon 6/7/2021 - Sun 6/13/2021

Week 2 Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyze 3-act structure in almost any film
- Begin writing your script using proper formatting
- Develop scenes with conflict
- Incorporate critique notes from class

Week 2 To-Do List

- **DUE MONDAY, 6/7** Team A will post the PDF-formatted first scene of their screenplays (3 pages maximum) prior to the start of class.
- **DUE MONDAY, 6/7:** Read Topic Notes on Screenplay Format and Rules
- **DUE MONDAY, 6/7:** Read Topic Notes on 3-Act Structure and the Hero's Journey
- **DUE MONDAY, 6/7:** Read Field, Chapters 3-5
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/8:** Team B will post the PDF-formatted first scene of their screenplays (3 pages maximum) prior to the start of class.
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/8:** Download the first act of the screenplay for Arrival.
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/8:** Read Topic Notes on Building Conflict
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/10:** Team C will post the PDF-formatted first scene of their screenplays (3 pages maximum) prior to the start of class.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/10:** Read Field, Chapters 6-7
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/10:** Read the screenplay for Lion and watch the film
- **DUE FRIDAY, 6/11:** Expand your outline from 7 to 16 beats: 4 beats for Act 1, 4 beats for the first half of Act 2, 4 beats for the second half of Act 2, and 4 beats for Act 3. Be sure to include: inciting event, first act break, midpoint, second act break, climax, resolution, AND include the Logline! Post your outline by Friday night by 11:59 pm EST. Use the sample 16-beat outline for reference/template.

MONDAY, 6/7

- Read and discuss Team A's first scenes.
- Discuss Screenplay Format and Important Screenplay Rules.

TUESDAY, 6/8

- Read and discuss Team B's first scenes
- View and compare 1st act of Arrival to the (partial) screenplay

THURSDAY, 6/10

- Read and discuss Team C's first scenes
- Discuss the film, Lion
- Discuss Field chapters

WEEK 3: Mon 6/14/2021 - Sun 6/20/2021

Week 3 Objectives
After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Lay the foundation for your 36-40 beat outline due in Week 5
- Continue writing your original screenplay
- Provide constructive criticism to your fellow screenwriters
- Create engaging characters

Week 3 To-Do List

- **DUE MONDAY, 6/14:** Team A will post their first 10 pages in PDF-format prior to the start of class.
- **DUE MONDAY, 6/14:** Read Field, Chapters 8-9
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/15:** Team B will post their first 10 pages in PDF-format prior to the start of class.
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/15:** Read Topic Notes on The Importance of Change
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/17:** Team C will post their first 10 pages in PDF-format prior to the start of class.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/17:** Watch Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/17:** Read Field, Chapters 10, 11, & 12

MONDAY, 6/14

- Read and discuss Team A's first 10 pages.

TUESDAY, 6/15

- Read and discuss Team B's first 10 pages.

THURSDAY, 6/17

- Read and discuss Team C's first 10 pages
- Discuss the film, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.
- Discuss Field, Chapters 8-12

WEEK 4: Mon 6/21/2021 - Sun 6/27/2021

Week 4 Objectives
After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Continue working on the first act of your screenplay
- Incorporate critique notes from class
- Write scenes with more confidence using your insights into the subtext
- Create scenes that avoid meaningless dialogue
- Avoid the pitfalls of poorly written scenes that don't advance the plot
- Become more skillful at providing classmates with constructive criticism
- Keep working toward the 36-40 Beat Outline due in Week 5

Week 4 To-Do List

- **DUE MONDAY, 6/21:** Team A will post their second set of (5-10) pages in PDF format prior to the start of class.
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/22:** Team B will post their second set of (5-10) pages in PDF format prior to the start of class.
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/22:** Read the Topic Notes on Subtext
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/24:** Group C will post their second set of (5-10) pages in PDF format prior to the start of class.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/24:** Watch the film **Get Out**
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/24:** Read Field, Chapters 13-17

MONDAY, 6/21

- Read and discuss Team A's second set of pages

TUESDAY, 6/22

- Read and discuss Team B's second set of pages

THURSDAY, 6/24

- Read and discuss Team C's second set of pages
- Discuss film Get Out
- Discuss Field, Chapters 13-17

WEEK 5: Mon 6/28/2021 - Thurs 7/1/2021

Week 5 Objectives
After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Drive your friends crazy by analyzing every movie you watch

Week 5 To-Do List

- **DUE MONDAY 6/28:** Final Quiz (Part 1)
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/29:** Final Quiz (Part 2)
- **DUE THURSDAY, 7/1:** Completed first act and final outline

MONDAY, 6/28

- Final Quiz (Part 1)

TUESDAY, 6/29

- Final Quiz (Part 2)

THURSDAY, 7/1

- Wrap-up
- Your completed first act (25-30 pages) and 36-40 beat outline, covering all 3 acts, are due