



# ENG 149A Directed Writing: Writing for Television

## Contact Details

Professor Marc Weinberg

[marcw@brandeis.edu](mailto:marcw@brandeis.edu)

Office Hours: Please contact me by email to set up an office meeting.

## Meeting Locations & Times

Mendel G11, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays 11:10 AM-1:40 PM EST

## Course Description

### **Skills and knowledge**

Combining lectures, workshops, and screenings, this course examines the fundamentals of writing for situation comedy and episodic drama. The course will examine story structure, characterization, scene writing, and dialogue. Students will move from ideation to writing a detailed outline and the first draft of an original pilot script.

This class is both workshop and lecture. You will read scripts from existing television series, pitch ideas for pilots, and 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 develop and write your television pilot. By the end of the class, you will be able to:

1. Display an understanding of effective pitching skills.
2. Create a 3-7 act beat sheet for your entire teleplay.
3. Write a complete teleplay for an original pilot.
4. Develop a teleplay that includes the following key elements:
  - The three-act structure
  - Character arc 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 television programs.

**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) (<https://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=301723>).

**Assignments**

All written assignments should be converted into PDF format and emailed to the class 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.

**Attendance and Participation**

Class meets three times weekly (Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays, 11:10 AM – 1:40 PM EST). The expectation is that you will participate in all class meetings. If you cannot take part in a meeting because of extenuating circumstances, please contact me by email. You will still be expected to meet course requirements (i.e. submitting pages and writing notes of your classmates' pages).

**Late Work Policy**

Please communicate with me in a reasonable amount of time (preferably 24 hours before an assignment due) if you'd like to request an extension on a specific assignment. Extensions will be permitted on a case-by-case basis.

**Communication Policy**

Email is an appropriate and preferred method for official communication. If I need to contact you outside of class, I will use your Brandeis email address, and expect that you will read and respond to this communication in a timely manner. I will attempt to respond to students within 24 hours. If you have not received a reply from me within 24 hours, please resend the email.

**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 \(ivannieves@brandeis.edu\)](mailto: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](mailto: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.

If you do not have proper computer equipment, you should contact the Administration for help at [emergencyfunds@brandeis.edu](mailto:emergencyfunds@brandeis.edu)

### Required Readings & Viewings

You are required to purchase one textbook: [Inside the Room, edited by Linda Venis](#)

Textbook: [Inside the Room, by Linda Venis](#)

All additional required readings and viewings will be available on Latte:

- **Abbott Elementary (S01E05)**

### 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.



Class sessions may be recorded for educational purposes. You may decline to be recorded; if so, please contact me to identify suitable alternatives for class participation. These recordings will be deleted within two months after the end of the semester. If you can be personally identified in a recording, no other use is permitted without your formal permission. You may not record classes on your own without my express permission, and may not share the URL and/or password to anyone unaffiliated with this course. Your behavior in these recordings, and in this class as a whole, must fulfill Brandeis standards:

Brandeis University is committed to providing its students, faculty and staff with an environment conducive to learning and working, where all people are treated with respect and dignity. You must refrain from any behavior toward members of our Brandeis community, including students, faculty, staff, and guests, that intimidates, threatens, harasses, or bullies.

### **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](https://www.brandeis.edu/support/undergraduate-students/browse.html) 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 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 absences. 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%     |          |                |
| Teaser and first act of your teleplay | 10%     |          |                |
| Second act of your teleplay           | 10%     |          |                |
| Assigned viewing                      | 10%     |          |                |
| Final quiz                            | 10%     |          |                |
| Completed beatsheet                   | 10%     |          |                |
| Completed pilot                       | 30%     |          |                |

## Course Plan

**PLEASE NOTE:** There may be changes to the syllabus. Please review the weekly assignment emails for the latest updates

### **WEEK 0: Mon 5/29/2023 – Mon 6/5/2023**

#### ***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: Tuesday 6/6/2023 - Monday 6/12/2023**

#### ***Week 1 Objectives***

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

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



**Week 1: To-Do List:**

- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/6:** Review the syllabus.
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/6:** Review *Abbott Elementary* beatsheet.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/7:** Read *Topic Notes: How to Pitch an Episodic Pilot*.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/7:** Read *Inside the Room, Chapter 5*
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/7:** Download Final Draft screenwriting program (<http://trial.finaldraft.com/edutrial/>).
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/8:** Develop 2 original ideas for pilots. After presenting the premise of the pilot, pitch ideas for 3 episodes.

**TUESDAY, 6/6**

- Introduction
- In-class assignment

**WEDNESDAY, 6/7**

- Final Draft introduction
- Conflict and theme discussion
- In-class assignment.

**THURSDAY, 6/8**

- Students pitch two original ideas for series, as well as three episodes for each series.
- Discuss Chapter 5.
- In-class assignment.

**WEEK 2: Tuesday 6/13/2023 – Monday 6/19/2023**

**Week 2 Objectives:**

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the inciting event in an episode of any series.
- Develop a pitch for your original series pilot.
- Complete a beatsheet for your original series pilot.

### **Week 2 To-Do List**

- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/13:** Read *Breaking Bad* script
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/13:** Review Week 1 Powerpoint
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/13:** Flesh out the A, B, & C stories for your pilot into a beat sheet. Detail the arc of each story. Email your beatsheet to the professor.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/14:** Discuss cold opens.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/14:** Read *Topic Notes Half-Hour Comedy*.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/14:** Read *Topic Notes: Writing the Teaser/Cold Open*.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/15:** Email your teaser to the professor and your classmates prior to the start of class (maximum 4 pages).
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/15:** Read *Topic Notes: Inciting Event & Story Structure*.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/15:** Read *Inside the Room, Chapter 6*.

### **TUESDAY, 6/13**

- Read and discuss student beatsheets.
- In-class assignment.

### **WEDNESDAY, 6/14**

- In-class assignment.

### **THURSDAY, 6/15**

- Discuss in-class assignment.

### **WEEK 3: Tuesday 6/20/2023 – Monday 6/26/2023**

#### **Week 3 Objectives**

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand what makes for a compelling teaser.
- Write the first act of an original pilot.
- Build conflict into scenes, both internal and external

#### **Week 3 To-Do List**





- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/20:** Email your first 10 pages to the professor and your classmates prior to the start of class.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/21:** Read *Inside the Room, Chapter 7*
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/21:** Email your next set of pages to the professor and your classmates prior to the start of class.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/21:** Read *Topic Notes TV Script Format*.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/21:** Read *Topic Notes TV Script Rules*.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/22:** Email your complete first act (15-16 pages) to the professor and your classmates prior to the start of class.

## **TUESDAY, 6/20**

- Read and discuss pages.

## **WEDNESDAY, 6/21**

- Read and discuss pages.
- Select a pilot for view in class.

## **THURSDAY, 6/22**

- Read and discuss pages, completing your first act.
- Discuss Chapter 7.

## **WEEK 4: Tuesday 6/27/2023 – Monday 7/3/2023**

### ***Week 4 Objectives***

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Continue working on your original series pilot.
- Deepen your understanding of your characters and how they drive storytelling.
- Have a deeper understanding of proper script format and writing techniques

### ***Week 4 To-Do List***

- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/27:** Read *Topic Notes: Building Through Character*.
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/27:** Email your first set of second act pages to the professor and your classmates.
- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/27:** Select a pilot for view in class.



- **DUE TUESDAY, 6/27:** Read *Inside the Room*, Chapter 8.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/28:** Email your revised/next set of second act pages to the professor and your classmates.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 6/28:** Select a pilot for view in class.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 6/29:** Email your complete second act (10-11 pages) to the professor and your classmates prior to the start of class.

## **TUESDAY, 6/27**

- Read and discuss pages.
- Discuss Chapter 8.

## **WEDNESDAY, 6/28**

- Read and discuss pages.
- In-class assignment.

## **THURSDAY, 6/29**

- Read and discuss pages, completing your second act.

## **WEEK 5: Tuesday 7/4/2023 – Thursday 7/6/2023**

### ***Week 5 Objectives***

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Improve your dialogue based on examples we've studied.
- Analyze structure and pacing in a variety of episodic series.
- Finish the first draft of your teleplay.
- Dazzle friends and family with your knowledge of television series and structure.

### ***Week 5 To-Do List***

- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 7/5:** Final quiz.
- **DUE WEDNESDAY, 7/5:** Wrap-up party.
- **DUE THURSDAY, 7/6:** Your completed teleplay is due by 11 AM.



## **WEDNESDAY, 7/5**

- Final Quiz
- Wrap-up

## **THURSDAY, 7/6**

- Email your completed PDF-formatted teleplay by 11:00 AM.