

## Summer 2018 Course Syllabus

### I. Course Information

---

**Course Name: Playwriting (Department of Theater Arts)**

**Course Number: THA 71a**

**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**

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

“Drama is anticipation mingled with uncertainty.” — William Archer

In this Online Scriptwriting Workshop, students develop short plays. 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.

The focus will be on students' original work. As models for writing, we will consider a small number of short plays and films (available for free online), e.g.,

[Kanopy](#) Streaming service. [Access through Brandeis.](#)  
[Short of the Week](#)  
[Vimeo](#)

While creative projects may be arranged individually, workshop members typically write one ten-minute piece and one one-act piece.

#### **Required Text:**

*The Art and Craft of Playwriting* (ACP). Jeffrey Hatcher. Story Press Books, 2000.  
ISBN-13: 9781884910463

NB: As you develop your script, check your dramatic structure against the  
[Story Sense checklist](#)

**Software:**

Required: [Final Draft Software](#), Education Pricing.

**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.

**Course Grading Criteria:**

Percent	Component
33%	Workshop Participation, including Posting On Time
33%	Weekly Exercises (mostly Scenes) and Ten-Minute Play
33%	Final Portfolio (including your Final One-Act Play)

### Description of Assignments:

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

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

**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 Dramatist:** Your Brief Notes on dramas online, TBA.

**3.) Ten-Minute Play.** **10 pages maximum.** See LATTE for due date

**4.) Final Project:** Your Final One-Act Script (*due date on LATTE*) **30 pages maximum**  
You may incorporate (but *revise*) the scenes you’ve written as Exercises in earlier weeks for this one-act play. So, “Double Dipping” is not only allowed, but encouraged, since “all good writing is rewriting.”

### 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 your 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.

## 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 writing.

### **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.

## IV. Weekly Outline

---

All exercises from *The Art & Craft of Playwriting* are due Tuesday midnight, your local time. (See exceptions for Week 1.) Viewing on Kanopy, etc. [see above] TBA.

### Week 1

*The Art and Craft of Playwriting* [ACP]: “Introduction”;

Chapter 1: Drama and Theatre, p 19, Exercise #3, in PROSE (Due Wednesday)

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.] (Due Friday)

### Week 2

Chapter 6: Great Beginnings, p 111, Exercise #6, as a SCENE

### Week 3

Chapter 5: Structure, p. 92, All exercises, #1-4, PROSE

### Week 4

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) and Plot Outline as they relate to your Ten-Minute Play.

### Week 5

Since your Ten-Minute Play is due this week, read and *apply to your Ten-Minute Play* the topics covered in the chapter and exercises below. *However, 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 (**10 pages MAX**. OK to REVISE incorporating earlier scenes).

You will give and receive Feedback on your Ten-Minute Plays. Due Date TBD.

### Week 6

Chapter 2: The Six Elements of Aristotle: Section 3: Ideas, p 45, #4, SCENE

### Week 7

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.

**Week 8**

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**

Chapter 8: Great Endings, p. 132, #6, SCENE

**Post your Portfolio and Final One-Act Play, 30 pages maximum.**

You will give and receive Feedback on your One-Act Plays. Due Dates TBD.

All SCRIPT material in ONE Final Draft doc All PROSE in ONE Word doc

No Late Portfolios or Projects.

**Week 10**

*No Exercises*

Wrap-up & Curtain Calls