ENG 79A Directed Writing: Beginning Screenplay

Contact Details
Professor Marc Weinberg
Telephone: 310-766-5393
marcw@brandeis.edu Please contact me by email to set up an office meeting.

Meeting Times
Classes M, T, & TH 2-4:40 PM
Office Hours M 1-2 PM Meetings by cell or Zoom

Course Description

Skills and knowledge
Combining lecture, workshop, and screenings, this course examines the fundamentals of writing for 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.

Teaching/learning strategies
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 have developed pitching skills, created a 35-40 scene outline for your original screenplay, and written its first act.
You are expected to grasp the key elements of screenwriting, including:

- The three-act structure
- Character and story arc
- Visual storytelling
- Beat outline
- Script format

Class preparation time
On average, you can expect to spend 4-5 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 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 using the Mahara program inside of LATTE, or 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**
You are required to purchase one textbook: The Foundations of Screenwriting, by Syd Field (https://www.amazon.com/Screenplay-Foundations-Screenwriting-Syd-Field-ebook/dp/B000S1LAYG/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=syd+field&qid=1587776326&sr=8-2).

All additional required readings and movies will be available on Latte.

**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](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](https://www.brandeis.edu/support/undergraduate-students/browse.html) page 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.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Element</th>
<th>Grade Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>First 10 pages of your script</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second set of script pages</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assigned viewing</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final quiz</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beat outline containing 36-40 scenes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete Act 1</td>
<td>30%</td>
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**Course Plan**

**WEEK 0: Mon 5/18/2020 - Sun 5/31/2020**

**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, and post to the Discussions
- Define the course requirements and components of your final grade

**Week 0 To-Do List**

- Complete Latte training
  - Watch the Welcome Video and review the Home Page
  - Read the Syllabus
  - Read the Latte Help materials
  - Introduce yourself by posting to the Introduction Discussion

**WEEK 1: Mon 6/1/2020 - Sun 6/7/2020**

**Week 1 Objectives**

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the inciting event in a movie
- Develop an original story pitch

**Week 1 To-Do List**
WEEK 2: Mon 6/8/2020 - Sun 6/14/2020

Week 2 Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

● Analyze 3-act structure in almost any film
● Develop a 7-beat outline for your original story
● Begin writing your script using proper formatting
● Develop scenes with conflict
● Incorporate critique notes from class
● Lay the foundation for your 36-40 beat outline due in Week 5

Week 2 To-Do List

● DUE TUESDAY: 7-Beat outline
  ● Read Topic Notes on 3-Act Structure & Hero’s Journey
  ● Read Topic Notes on Building Conflict
  ● Read the Topic Notes on Plot & Structure
  ● Read Field, Chapters 3-7
  ● Read Black Swan screenplay and watch the film Black Swan
  ● Answer Discussion questions
● DUE THURSDAY: Post the first scene of your screenplay
● DUE THURSDAY: Read & discuss your classmates’ first scenes

Trigger warning: this week's film, Black Swan, contains disturbing images.

WEEK 3: Mon 6/15/2020 - Sun 6/21/2020

Week 3 Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be able to:
● Expand your 7-Beat Outline to a 20-Beat Outline
● Continue writing your original screenplay
● Provide constructive criticism to your fellow screenwriters
● Develop a backstory and mini-biography for your main characters
● Create engaging characters

**Week 3 To-Do List**

- **DUE TUESDAY: GROUP A**: Post first 10 pages of your script in PDF format
- **DUE TUESDAY: ALL STUDENTS**: Download, read, and critique your classmates' work
- Read Topic Notes on Screenplay Format & Rules
- Read the Topic Notes on Creating an Engaging Protagonist
- Read *Field, Chapters 8-11*
- Answer Discussion Questions
- Watch the film *Lion* and answer Discussion questions
- **DUE THURSDAY: GROUP B**: Post first 10 pages of your script in PDF format
- **DUE TUESDAY: ALL STUDENTS**: Download, read, and critique your classmates' work
- **DUE THURSDAY**: 20-Beat Outline

**WEEK 4: Mon 6/22/2020 - Sun 6/28/2020**

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

- Refine your 20-Beat outline based on structural changes as needed
- 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 TUESDAY: GROUP A**: Post second set of (5-10) pages of your script in PDF format
- **DUE TUESDAY: ALL STUDENTS**: Download, read, and critique your classmates' work
- Read the Topic Notes on Creating Dialogue
- Read the Topic Notes on Subtext
- Read Topic Notes on The Importance of Change
- Answer Discussion Questions
- Read *Field, Chapters 12-17*
● Watch the film Get Out and answer Discussion questions
● DUE THURSDAY: GROUP B: Post second set of (5-10) pages of your script in PDF format
● DUE THURSDAY: ALL STUDENTS: Download, read, and critique your classmates' work

WEEK 5: Mon 6/29/2020 - Sun 7/5/2020

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

● Read the Topic Notes on the 36-40 Beat Outline
● Prepare for Final Quiz
● DUE TUESDAY: Final Quiz (Part 1)
● DUE THURSDAY: Final Quiz (Part 2)
● DUE THURSDAY: The complete First Act of your screenplay
● DUE THURSDAY: 36-40 Beat Outline, covering all 3 acts of your script