

CTVA 425 ADVANCED SCREENWRITING FALL 2009

Tuesdays 7:00 p.m. – 9:45 p.m.

Instructor: Professor Eric Edson

Office: MZ 316 Hours: Mon. 4-5, Tues. 4-5, Thurs. 3-5 FOR GRAD STUDENTS ONLY

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COURSE CONTENT:

In this class you will write a complete feature-length screenplay of between 80 and 100 pages, in standard feature film format. These scripts will be based on your own *original* story ideas, understanding that the seeds for story ideas can come from many different sources. We will *NOT* be doing adaptations of any kind. In a supportive workshop environment, students will continue to build skills in dramatic story structure, visual storytelling, character, dialogue, conflict enhancement, effective description, and theme development. This is not a simple undertaking; ***this course is demanding, and is NOT recommended for students with an otherwise heavy academic or extracurricular work load.*** We have a lot of work to do in a short period, and this is not a class wherein you can allow yourself to fall behind.

This is a writing workshop, and participation is critical. Student material will be read aloud and discussed, and **your contributions to these class discussions are desired, required, and will be graded.** To miss one class is to miss almost 7% of the whole course. You will be expected to arrive on time and attend every session, and failure to do so will be reflected in your grade.

Please note: an "A" script but poor workshop participation and/or attendance can result in a much lower overall grade. So please make the personal commitment to be a full participant in this undertaking and it will make the experience that much more worthwhile.

All work must be computer typed (12 point Courier font), properly formatted, and thoroughly proofread. A professional level of presentation is expected, and ***the use of a formatting program such as Final Draft® is required.***

EXAMINATIONS: Your final exam will be your completed feature-length screenplay. **there will be one *midterm* multiple choice test, to be sure you've carefully done the required reading and absorbed the lectures.**

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. demonstrate a command of the principles of screenplay story structure,
2. demonstrate an ability to improve screenplay material through rewriting,
3. demonstrate a practicable understanding of the uses of screenplay character, dialogue, and scene description.
4. demonstrate the use of screenwriting craft principles in the insightful analysis and accurate criticism of other people's script writing work.

REQUIRED TEXT: *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters*, 3rd ed., by Chris Vogler. Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. **a. Story summary.** For your script idea – according to character, conflict, and action – write two summaries: the first one, 2-3 pages, and the second, a one page PREMISE STATEMENT.
b. Also, write a THEMATIC STATEMENT (1/2 of a page) telling what you believe your story is about (*what it means*) and why you want to write it.
(We will NOT be writing “seven act” Movies for Television.)
2. **Two minute “pitch” of your story.**
3. **Short treatment.** Based upon your story premise and your key structural dramatic elements, write a four page treatment (no more and no less, four pages exactly) using the formula provided by the instructor, delineating your beginning, three acts with key plot points, and climatic scene.
4. **Two character monologues** (*written in the first person*). At least 2 double-spaced pages each, PROSE FORM, one for the heroine/hero and one for the nemesis, 4 pages total. These monologues relate in personal, emotional terms back story experiences or current conflicts involving the character.
5. **Two character worksheets, one for the hero, one for the nemesis.**
6. **Progressive development of 21 to 23 “Hero Goal Sequence®” ideas** outline delineating in order the dominant hero goal concepts for each 2-8 page section of your script, and including also the Inciting Incident, Stunning Surprise I, the Midpoint Sequence, Stunning Surprise II, the Obligatory Scene, and Denouement.
7. **Rewritten “Hero Goal Sequence®” ideas 1-13.**
8. **a. A draft of the first 10 pages** of your screenplay and,
b. 5-6 copies of the first 5 pages for reading in class. (Make as many copies as speaking characters, plus three.)
9. **A draft of the entire act one of your screenplay**, approximately 20-30 pages. (**Three copies, with the first 10 pages rewritten, for student critique.** No final scripts will be accepted without these draft pages having first been submitted, on time, for critique.)
10. A 2-3 page **critique** of two fellow students' act one draft pages. (=4-6 pgs double spaced.)
11. Copies of the **Act Two climax scene** from your script, containing Stunning Surprise Two, 5-6 pgs.
12. Two copies of your 80-110 page **presentation draft** screenplay.

*******IMPORTANT NOTE:**

These writing and rewriting assignments are designed for the cumulative growth of your project. **If these assignments are turned in late they quickly become irrelevant.** For example, turning in late the first draft of your complete first act sabotages other students because they then have nothing to critique, and it wounds you because you no longer get the benefit of critiques in a timely manner to improve your own final screenplay. We are creatively co-dependent here. **You must keep up.**

ORIGINALITY: In the film and television industries each working screenwriter's contract contains a clause in which the writer must attest, on pain of severe legal and financial consequence, to the originality of their creations. Studios don't mess around with this issue, and as a training ground for the real world, neither does the University. The complete originality of student's work is expected. Be aware that student work from past years is kept on file and cross-referenced with current work just to be sure.

No final script that does not show evidence of original, progressive development will be accepted.

KEEP FILE DRAFT COPIES: Occasionally print out file drafts of all your own work as you revise and rewrite it, both to serve as evidence of the progressive growth of your original work, and as a backup in case of a hard drive crash or other technical problem. Students are required to keep paper copies of all work handed in.

GRADING will be done on a curve. Plus (B+, C+) and minus (B-, A-) grading will be used.

In the incredibly rare case of absence -- acceptable only in cases of death or dismemberment -- the deceased or maimed student is responsible for calling classmates to acquire notes on class activities and lectures.

Prompt attendance and class participation

	63 points (or more)
Story, Premise, and theme summary	15 points
Story PITCH	10 points
Four page treatment	15 points
Character monologues (2 monologues x 2 pgs = 4 pages)	16 points (8+8)
Character worksheets (hero + nemesis = 2)	16 points (8+8)
Hero Goal Sequences® outline 1 through 12	20 points
Hero Goal Sequences® outline 13 through 23	20 points
Rewritten Hero Goal Sequences® 1-13	15 points
Midterm	50 points
Draft of first 10 script pages	15 points
Draft of act one, 25-30 pages	20 points
2 Critiques of fellow students' work	30 points (15+15)
Act 2 Climax scene	15 points
Presentation draft screenplay, 80-100 pages	<u>120 points</u>
Total:	440 points

CONSIDER: Our class time together is valuable and relatively short, so please help us all make the best use of it. Because one semester is not much time in which to write a feature screenplay, it's recommended that you choose a story that is set in an arena or milieu you already understand reasonably well. There simply isn't enough time to do extensive research for these projects. Find a subject and characters you care about, something that you can get passionate about. The writer's level of emotional involvement in the material *always* comes through on the page.

REMEMBER THAT SUCCESSFUL SCREENWRITERS DO NOT "WRITE WHAT THEY KNOW," THEY WRITE THE UNUSUAL IN TERMS OF WHAT THEY KNOW.

AND RECONSIDER: Class meetings spent reading student material aloud and discussing it are one-time-only experiences rich with spontaneous teaching, learning, and growth. This is the true beating heart of any writing class. Please don't miss them. I expect we'll have a great deal of fun together.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Aug. 25

Week one

Course introduction. Review of the principles of screenwriting. Student story ideas discussed – where ideas come from. Write a premise statement in class.

Assignment: WRITE your original 2-3 pg story summary, 1 pg premise, and ½ pg theme statement. Prepare a 2 minute pitch of your story.

Sept. 1

Week two

DUE: STORY SUMMARIES w/ THEME, PREMISE STATEMENT, and 2 MINUTE PITCH.

Story structure review. The power of plot points. The 21 "Hero Goal Sequences®" outline concept. Hear story pitches.

Assignment: read the preface and introduction to Vogler's The Writer's Journey. WRITE four (4) page treatment as per instructions.

Sept. 8

Week three

DUE: FOUR PAGE TREATMENT.

More structure review. Video/DVD clip examples. How plot serves character. Hear the rest of the story pitches.

Assignment: read "A Practical Guide," and "The Archetypes" in Vogler. WRITE two (2) 2-3 page character monologues (4-6 pages total) AND write two character worksheets.

Sept. 15

Week four

DUE: two (2) 2-3 page character monologues (4-6 pages) AND two character worksheets.

Discuss example films as demonstrations of screen story structure, Hero Goal Sequences®, and The Hero's Journey. Read some monologues and discuss.

Assignment: read "Hero, Mentor, Threshold Guardian, Herald, Shapeshifter, Shadow, and Trickster" in Vogler. WRITE your "Hero Goal Sequences®" 1 through 12 as per example (first half of your movie).

Sept. 22

Week five

DUE: HERO GOAL SEQUENCES® 1-12, with copies of 1-6 for everyone.

Dialogue and subtext. Idea sequences read aloud (1-6) and considered.

Assignment: read "The Ordinary World, Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call" in Vogler. REWRITE "Hero Goal Sequences" 1-12.

Sept. 29

Week six

More idea sequences read aloud (1-6) and considered. Film examples.

Assignment: IN ADDITION TO REWRITTEN 1-12, WRITE Goal Sequences 13-21. (Creating the architecture of story in screenwriting represents about 75% of the work, and is critical to success. A screenwriter lives or dies on the carefully considered details of story construction.)

OCT 6

Week seven

DUE: REWRITTEN SEQUENCES 1-12 AND HERO GOAL SEQUENCES® 13-21.

Read aloud sections and discuss.

Assignment: read "Stage" 4,5, and 6 of Vogler. WRITE first 10 pages of your screenplay, and bring enough copies of first 5 pages to read aloud (# of copies = all speaking characters plus 3).

OCT 13

Week eight ***THIS WILL BE A FURLOUGH DAY. NO CLASS.*** Keep writing your script.

OCT 20

Week nine ***DUE: FIRST 10 SCRIPT PAGES, and 5 PAGE COPIES FOR READING.***
Read and discuss opening scenes.
Assignment: read "Stage" 7,8, and 9 of Vogler. Finish writing Act One.

OCT 27

Week ten ***DUE: DRAFT OF YOUR FIRST ACT, 25-30 PAGES.***
(1 + 2 EXTRA COPIES FOR TWO STUDENT CRITIQUES = 3 COPIES.)
Read aloud and discuss opening scenes.
Assignment: read "Stage" 10, 11, and 12 in Vogler. Continue your script. WRITE two (2) three page critiques of fellow students' work.

NOV 3

Week eleven ***DUE: CRITIQUES OF FELLOW STUDENTS' FIRST ACTS.***
Read scenes aloud and analyze.
Assignment: read "Epilogue" pgs. 237-266 of Vogler. KEEP WRITING.

NOV 10

Week twelve Read scenes aloud and analyze. On screen examples.
Assignment: KEEP WRITING. Read "Epilogue" pgs 267-300 of Vogler. STUDY FOR THE TEST.

MIDTERM IS NEXT WEEK.

NOV 17

Week thirteen ***MIDTERM.***
Discussion/workshop. Address individual problems and concerns.
Assignment: KEEP WRITING AND REWRITING.

NOV 24

Week fourteen Scene readings/discussion/workshop.
Assignment: KEEP WRITING AND REWRITING, as per class analysis. WRITE ACT TWO CLIMAX, 5-6 PAGES, INCLUSIVE OF STUNNING SURPRISE 2.

DEC 1

Week fifteen ***DUE: ACT TWO CLIMAX SCENE WITH STUNNING SURPRISE 2.***
Review of problem elements. Read scenes aloud and workshop.
Assignment: FINISH WRITING YOUR SCREENPLAY.

DEC 8

Week sixteen ***DUE: TUESDAY, DEC. 8, PRESENTATION DRAFT SCREENPLAY TWO COPIES, 80 TO 100 PAGES.***

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STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Students with disabilities must register with the Center on Disabilities and complete a services agreement each semester. Staff within the Center will verify the existence of a disability based on the documentation provided and approve accommodations. Students who are approved for test taking accommodations must provide a proctor form to their faculty member signed by a counselor in the Center on Disabilities prior to making testing arrangements. The Center on Disabilities is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110. Staff can be reached at (818) 677-2684.