

YALE UNIVERSITY – Summer 2021, Session A

FILM S-350 -- Introduction To Screenwriting

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Each Workshop Member is expected to keep a **JOURNAL** throughout the duration of the course (and beyond). The purpose of the journal is to chronicle this experience. You are expected to comment on screenplays you've read for class and outside of class as well as on the films you've seen —how well each fulfills or does not fulfill your expectations of a compelling plot with clever story twists, effective characterizations, a pervading sense of mystery, strong dialogue, an overall enjoyable evening of cinema, etc. It should also detail the particular process (i.e. problems, triumphs) you're encountering in the development of your own screenplays. The JOURNAL will show an on-going effort by the student to apply techniques and perspectives presented in class lectures and discussions to her or his own writing.

The JOURNAL is a personal thing and should be kept long after this class is over. It will help you immensely in your quest to become a more dimensional writer. It will also be a valuable time capsule in the future when you come across it years from now, allowing its forgotten pages to transport you back to your college days... and nights.

All Workshop Members **MUST ATTEND CLASS**. The final grade will be based on class participation, attendance and writing assignments (**THE MID-TERM FOLDER**)--culminating in a final, much-revised draft of an **8-12 PAGE SCREENPLAY** that is a complete story by itself (not an excerpt).

Keep in mind that the “tone” you establish in your screenplay is crucial. The reading of the screenplays assigned for the course will begin to reveal many important lessons about tone. Screenwriters draw from life. Do not be afraid to look into your own experience for material to fuel your stories.

Session to session and week-to-week, I will give out assignments and readings that must be completed for the next class meeting. This will be determined by the size of the class and the pace at which we workshop student material. Each class has its own distinct personality and specific group dynamic and moves along at its own rate. We must be aware of this. We want to move at a comfortable speed but be thorough in our comments and notes to one another when student scripts are workshopped.

I will divide the class into **SUB-GROUPS** that are expected to meet outside of class to discuss and analyze the professional screenplays we're reading (for we won't have time to discuss each one individually in class) as well as to pitch and brainstorm your own story ideas and give additional feedback on work presented in class. The sub-groups will enable you to evolve at an exponential

rate if you truly apply and dedicate yourselves to each other. I strongly urge you to treat this class much like a graduate-level screenwriting seminar. Much will be accomplished in our afternoons together but much more will take place outside the narrow confines of our classroom's walls.

** A note on the **COURSE PACKET**: The packet is full of important articles on format, information on copyrights, national screenplay contests (which many of my former students have won), funding for low-budget films, interviews with major screenwriters (i.e. Robert Towne, the author of CHINATOWN), tips on narrative structure, how to pursue an agent and other marketing suggestions, etc. The packet is for you to read and re-read and will certainly aid you well not only throughout the duration of this course but is also designed to be a helpful reference tool students can utilize in the future as they venture more deeply into their professional careers and the development of their craft.

*** A dozen screenplays in pdf format will be provided free of charge to all students in the seminar. The course packet and all other relevant course materials and articles will be electronically sent to you at no charge as well. There are no charges for materials in this course.

“Between the plan and the fulfillment always stands the frail barrier of a human life.” – George Stewart -- from his novel, EARTH ABIDES

“Comedy is serious business. That’s why tyrants fear it.” – Joe Orton

Have a great class.

M.L.

Marc Lapadula

Yale University

The Mid-Term Folder Requirements for your pocketed folder:

1. 4-5 separate and revised versions (each no more than a single page) of your proposed (8-12 page) screenplay premise. The last two versions should offer a second paragraph vividly describing your “specific ending.”
2. The first page of your screenplay in correct format with a revision of that first page stapled to it.

3. Two detailed character profiles--- one for the film's chief protagonist and one for the chief antagonist. Make these people compelling and dimensional. Bring them to vivid life. The more specific you are, the more they will be delineated from one another. Always remember: the antagonist is what makes your protagonist interesting because he/she forces the protagonist to stretch and locate abilities that the protagonist never knew he/she possessed.
4. Write a one-paragraph, stream-of-consciousness monologue for each of the characters you've just created (protagonist and antagonist). Listen to them. Let them speak to you. They may tell you something you do not yet know about their character. OR, write an interview where you pose trenchant questions to your characters or have the protagonist interview the antagonist and then vice versa.
5. A scene-by-scene outline of your story using slug lines to denote each scene followed by a brief description of what happens in that scene. This is going to be your roadmap to write your movie so make it clear and concise, striving to realize your story through visually-driven scenes and events that propel the narrative forward.
6. Identify the plot-points (not a summary of the entire movie!) in five (5) of the full-length screenplays you've read this semester. Plot-points are surprising incidents that hook into the action of the story and spin the narrative into a whole new direction. They are unanticipated by the chief protagonist as well as the audience. They push a protagonist to find a new path. (Examples: Think of the chilling "shower scene" in PSYCHO where Marion Crane serves as an elaborate introduction to the main character who is Norman or the sudden and terrifying appearance of the Terminator in Sarah Connor's quiet life to name just two outrageous examples illustrating a plot-point).
7. Perform full-coverage on two (2) of the full-length screenplays you have read. You must start with a brief logline, followed by a one-page synopsis of the story, and then deliver a 2-page (all single-spaced) critique of the script, specifically detailing the strengths and weakness of the plot, characters, dialogue, themes and overall quality of the writing. (3-5 pages total for each) Do not be afraid to express your honest opinion about the scripts you analyze. Your ability to cover scripts in a professional manner may well land you a ground-level job in the film industry someday. This is where the author of (500) DAYS OF SUMMER and many others started.

ORGANIZE all the material into a pocketed folder and be prepared to hand it in for a mid-term grade. Be sure to have your name on each individual assignment and clearly identify each assignment and cluster the pages of that specific assignment as a separate unit stapled together in your folder.

When done, you are ready to embark on the writing of your 8-12 page screenplay. Good luck!

FINAL SUBMISSION

Write a 3 to 5-page analysis of your work this semester. Please include the following:

1. Cite the specific changes you've made between the first draft of your screenplay read in class and the final draft you are preparing to submit for your final grade. Why did you make these changes? What do they mean to the story you are trying to tell?
2. What, in your eyes, are the strengths and weaknesses of this final draft? Be specific.
3. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a screenwriter in general as you aim to write full-length scripts in the future? Where do you someday see yourself? What kinds of stories do you wish to deal with in the years ahead and why?

Please attach this analysis to the final draft of your screenplay and hand it in.

Keep writing!

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Meeting 1 – Intro. – What is a Screenwriter? Examples of Great Screenwriting via film clips

Meeting 2 – Close analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's PSYCHO/ Ridley Scott's BLADE RUNNER

Meeting 3 – Delving Deeply into Character Development – film clips will be screened

Meeting 4 – The Art of Cinematic Narrative – How to Construct a Compelling Story

Meeting 5 – Creating Cinematic Dialogue – In-class writing assignment with a partner

Meeting 6 – Cinematic Pacing/ Subtext/ Visual Storytelling

Meeting 7 – Classic Film clips closely examined

Meeting 8 – Workshopping Student Screenplays – in-depth critiques

Meeting 9 – Workshopping Student Screenplays – in-depth critiques

Meeting 10 – Marketing Your Screenplay/ Industry Expectations – Final Draft of Script and Short Essay Due