

YALE UNIVERSITY – Summer 2022

Film S-350 Screenwriting

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Each Workshop Member is encouraged to keep a **JOURNAL** throughout the duration of the course (and beyond). The purpose of the journal is to chronicle this experience. You are urged 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 and triumphs) you're encountering in the development of your own creative story ideas. 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, revised draft of an **8-12 PAGE SCREENPLAY** that is a complete story by itself (not a small excerpt of a longer narrative).

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 will be completed for the next class meeting. This will be determined by the size of the class and the rate at which we workshop student material. Each class has its own distinct personality and specific group dynamic and moves along at its own exciting pace. 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 being analyzed.

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 list of screenplays in pdf text format covering a wide range of styles, genres, subjects and eras will be provided free of charge to all students in the seminar (as well as examples of past student screenplays for your perusal). I want you to build your own Script Library with your future writing in mind. What I provide you will be a good start. You will select a few of these professional screenplays to read to fulfill the mid-term assignments.

All relevant course materials and articles will be electronically sent to you via email. There are no charges for the materials in this course. If you wish to purchase Final Draft #12 Screenwriting Software, I can put you directly in touch with a manager at FD for the best student discount available. But FD does offer a free trial that you can sign up for and use throughout the duration of the class.

Film clips will be screened during class for discussion. Films like PSYCHO, CHINATOWN, NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN, THE GRADUATE, HELL OR HIGH WATER, WINTER'S BONE, LADY BIRD, THERE WILL BE BLOOD and BOOKSMART will be analyzed closely and discussed.

There will be in-class writing assignments as well as students pitching their stories and workshopping pages-in-progress.

I will invite former students as Guest Speakers who are award-winning filmmakers, screenwriters and producers in Hollywood to visit the class and share their expertise.

THE MID-TERM FOLDER REQUIREMENTS for your pdf folder:

1. 4 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 four (4) of the full-length screenplays you've read for this course. 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 script-coverage on one (1) 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. (2-4 pages total) 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 pdf file and email it for a mid-term grade. Be sure to have your name on each individual assignment and clearly identify each assignment. Cluster the pages of that specific assignment as a separate unit.

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

FINAL SUBMISSION

Write a 2 to 4-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 send it to me via email in a pdf file.

“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, playwright

“Life beats down and crushes the soul and art reminds you that you have one.”

– Stella Adler, acting coach

“Now more than ever we need to talk to each other, to listen to each other and understand how we see the world, and cinema is the best medium for doing this.”

– Martin Scorsese, filmmaker

"If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."

--Toni Morrison

“And by the way, everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.”

—Sylvia Plath, poet and novelist

“All plays are, in essence, detective stories. Indeed, there are serious mysteries to be solved here.”

— Eugene Ionesco, playwright

Have a great class. Keep writing!

M.L.

Below you will see a partial list of some of my ex-student accomplishments:

Former students have written, directed and/or produced successful and/or critically acclaimed scripts for films such as:

Pig, , (500) Days of Summer, Oceans 8, La La Land, The Break Up, Better Watch Out, Undocumented, The Sisterhood of Night, Bride Wars, Olympus Has Fallen, The Fault In Our Stars, Paper Towns, The Spectacular Now, Behind The Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon, Anamorph, Our Souls At Night, The Wedding Ringer, Bad Education, Expendables 3, The Autopsy of Jane Doe, Ass Backwards, Bernard and Huey, The Honor List, Destroyer, The Truth Below, The Mothership, Master and many others.

They have also scripted award-winning teleplays for:

Family Guy, Scrubs, The Simpsons, Random Acts of Flyness, Law and Order -SVU, Channel Zero, The Agency, Hannibal, Believe, The Last Resort, Benched, The Act, Friends With Benefits, Brand New Cherry Flavor, The Very Funny Show, The Baxters, The Good Fight, Leimert Park, Evil, Truth Be Told, Queen Sugar, The Family, Constantine, The Edge of Sleep, Blackout, Daisy Jones and the Six and other noteworthy shows.

More Inspirational Quotes from Successful Writers:

"You don't start out writing good stuff. You start out writing crap and thinking it's good stuff, and then gradually you get better at it. That's why I say one of the most valuable traits is persistence."

— Octavia E. Butler

"Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing."

--Benjamin Franklin

"I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn."

--Anne Frank

"I write to discover what I know."

--Flannery O'Connor

"Get it down. Take chances. It may be bad, but it's the only way you can do anything really good."

--William Faulkner

"I believe that the most important single thing, beyond discipline and creativity is daring to dare."

— Maya Angelou

"We work in the dark - we do what we can - we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion, and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art."

— Henry James