

FILM 350: SCREENWRITING – SUMMER 2025

INSTRUCTOR: BRIAN PRICE



Note: this is a draft syllabus and is subject to change

About the Course

Class Time	Monday/Wednesday 1:00pm-4:15pm
Class Location	on ZOOM
Online Material	on Canvas

About the Instructor

Contact Information	brian.price@yale.edu
	Office hours by appointment on Zoom

Course Overview

This is a writing workshop intended to provide a rigorous examination of the fundamentals of the screenwriting craft, including story, structure, character, dialogue, and formatting.

Through lectures, discussions, screenings, readings, and weekly writing exercises, students will learn what goes into making a professional screenplay as they develop stories, outlines, character bios and pages of a feature-length screenplay idea and then complete an original short screenplay (8-10 pages).

All Workshop Members **MUST ATTEND CLASS**. The final grade will be based on class participation, attendance and writing assignments, culminating in a final, revised draft of an 8-10 PAGE SCREENPLAY that is a complete story unto itself (not an excerpt).

Meeting to meeting, 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 progress. Every class has its own distinct personality and specific 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, especially when student work is workshopped.

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course the student should:

- have a firm knowledge and appreciation of the craft of screenwriting
- have completed a full outline (beat sheet) of a feature-length film
- have completed an original short form screenplay

Commitment to the Workshop

Class by class, you will learn the skill set and craft of being a professional writer. Your proficiency at the end of the session will be determined by your attendance, participation, commitment, and discipline.

Commitment to the Writing Process

An important element of committing to the process, is committing to the journey of learning and writing with your fellow workshop classmates. Convey kindness, warmth and humor. Expect the best of one another. Practice an attitude of honesty with diplomacy. Show respect for one another and for the teacher. We believe in honesty, but not necessarily brutal honesty. We are here to SUPPORT EACH OTHER as we endeavor to help our colleagues take their work to the next level.

My Commitment to You

Every individual in this workshop should feel accepted as a writer; accepted at the critique table; and, accepted in his or her artistic endeavors. I am not especially interested in my writing students being comfortable, because challenge is part of the process of growth as you develop as a writer.

But every student should feel respected in the classroom and on campus.

If any action or comment is made, that makes a student feel alienated, displaced, or unwelcome, please bring it to my attention. We can often get caught up in a moment of humor, or in an especially vigorous discussion of critique and sometimes be unaware that we've crossed a line of sensitivity.

Notes on Receiving Notes

It is a PRIVILEGE to receive notes from others. Treat it as such, as an opportunity to improve your work and your skills, to hear different points of view, and to have your own creative process sparked anew.

Your attitude coming into ANY note session should be: “My work may be fine, but it can ALWAYS be better. And hopefully, today, someone will give me notes that impel me to take my work to a level I hadn’t even dared dream of.” It should NEVER be: “This is perfect. Let me show it off and get validation from my peers.” Only a mediocre writer is EVER satisfied with their work.

It is your job to listen to the notes. To close your mouth and open your ears. To nod. To express gratitude. To make the note-giver feel good about the notes they gave, so they remain encouraged to keep doing so. NEVER respond defensively to a note. NEVER argue or debate about someone else’s opinion or suggestion. It is completely up to you, after the note session, to take that note or discard it. After all, it is your story. But when it’s offered, it is only to your detriment to do anything that will put up a wall, that will make the note-giver reluctant to express their suggestions.

Never execute a suggestion precisely as given, simply because it was given. Again, it is YOUR story. Your job is to determine the PROBLEM that the suggestion is intending to resolve (which the note-giver may not even be conscious of) and find the way that is organic to you and your story to resolve that problem.

Bottom line: you will get the most out of a note session, whether in a workshop or a development meeting, if you are polite, grateful, express a positive interest in every suggestion given, no matter how ridiculous or inappropriate, and (as I’ve learned through hard experience) just sit there and shut up. Not always an easy thing to do, but essential in the end.

Project Schedule

Mid-term Folder will be due halfway through the semester (made up of assignments completed up to that point, whether read in class or not).

Final revision of original short screenplay and self-analysis will be due on our final class.

Course Materials (required)

Classical Storytelling and Contemporary Screenwriting by Brian Price

Handouts (to be available on Canvas)

Screenplays TBD (and to be found online)

Course Schedule

Refinements to this schedule and additional progress deadlines will be announced during the semester, depending on enrollment and class progress.

WEEK ONE

Note: prior to our first class, please read Classical Storytelling and Contemporary Screenwriting, Chapters 1- 4.

Class 1: INTRO/PREMISE. Syllabus and course objectives. Note giving and receiving. Movie Ideas: What makes a good one? Universal truths and the human condition. Personal story + imagination. In

class exercise: Telling Lies Skillfully. Screen: The Lunch Date. Premise and loglines. **Assignment: Loglines (3x3). Read: CSCS, Chapters 5-10.**

Class 2: STRUCTURE. Pitch loglines. What Aristotle taught us. Why do we tell stories? How do we tell them well? Imitation of an action. Mimesis and catharsis. ANCHOR POINTS. Screen: One Froggy Evening. **Assignment: Premise to Anchor Points. Read Screenplay #1 – Little Miss Sunshine (respond to paragraph prompt on Canvas).**

WEEK TWO

Class 3: CHARACTER. Workshop Anchor Points. What makes a memorable/believable character? Want vs. Need. Objective and Flaw. Screen: Character Intros. **Assignment: Character Worksheet and Bios. Read CSCS pp. 83-103.**

Class 4: STRUCTURE CONTINUED. Workshop bios. Stepping Stone Beats. Progressing from the general to specific. **Assignment: Stepping Stone Pyramids. Read CSCS pp. 105-137. Read Screenplay #2 – Get Out (respond to paragraph prompt on Canvas).**

WEEK THREE

Class 5: OUTLINES. Workshop Pyramids. The Beat Sheet and Step Outline. Seeing the Big Picture. Screen: First Act TBD. **Assignment: Sketchy Beat Sheets.**

Class 6: SCENES. Midterm Packet Due. Description and Dialogue. Formatting. Read: Spiderman, Great Openings. **Homework: Opening Hook. Read CSCS pp. 153-202. Read Screenplay #3 – TBD (respond to paragraph prompt on Canvas).**

WEEK FOUR

Class 7: PAGES. Workshop Opening Hooks. Screen: Selected Shorts. Discuss Short Form Screenplays. **Assignment: Pitch short screenplay idea/short beat sheet.**

Class 8: PITCHES. Pitch Final Project. Workshop Beat Sheets. **Assignment: Write Short Screenplay.**

WEEK FIVE

Class 9: REWRITES. Workshop Short Screenplays. Notes. Rewrites vs. Polishes.

Class 10: FINAL SUBMISSION DUE. Rewriting. The business of screenwriting. Questions answered.

Notes on Assignments

The assignments in this class are cumulative, each building upon the choices made from the previous assignment. Thus it is essential that students keep up with the work and meet all deadlines.

Depending on the size of the class, it may be the case that not all assignments can be workshopped in class. Those that we don't get to in class will have priority in class for the next assignment.

The Weekly Assignments include: loglines, anchor points, character bios, stepping stones, and beat sheets.

The Midterm Folder will contain your weekly writing assignments and responses to the produced screenplays you read.

The Final Submission will consist of the revised draft of your completed original screenplay (8-10 pages), as well as a 1-2 page analysis of your work this semester that should 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 when you hand it in.

Grading | Evaluation

Attendance and Class Participation: **20%**

Weekly Written Exercises: **20%**

Midterm Folder: **25%**

Screenplay drafts: **10%**

Final Submission: **25%**

Final Course Grades use standard point percentages. **A** = 93%+, **A-**=90%+, **B+**=87%+, **B**=83%+, **B-**=80%+, **C+**=77%+, **C**=73%+, **C-**=70%+, **D**=60%+, **F**=0%+

Screenplays will be graded according to narrative clarity, originality, dramatic effectiveness, application of course materials, presentation (including formatting), and effort. **Remember:** this is a writing course, and the technical aspects of your writing (spelling, grammar, etc.) will be a factor in your grade.

Course Policies

All work should be posted as PDFs. Script pages must be submitted professionally formatted. I recommend you acquire a scriptwriting program like Final Draft, which is the industry standard. A free screenwriting software called CELTX is available for download online. It has a few glitches but it gets the job done.

Attendance	Attendance at all class is required in accordance with Yale College Attendance Policy. Late work will not be accepted without prior instructor approval. This means that if you are unable to attend class on the day an assignment is due, you are still expected to submit the work on time. Note that the creative writing work in this class is cumulative, with each assignment building to the next.
DEIB Statement	Yale University adheres to the philosophy that all community members should enjoy an environment free of any form of harassment, sexual misconduct, discrimination, or intimate partner violence. If you have been the victim of sexual misconduct, we encourage you to report this. If you report this to a faculty/staff member, they must notify our college's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose to request confidentiality from the University). If

you encounter sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Stephanie Spangler, at stephanie.spangler@yale.edu(link sends e-mail)(203.432.4446) or any of the University Title IX Coordinators, who can be found at: <http://provost.yale.edu/title-ix/coordinators>

Every individual in this seminar should feel accepted as an equal and integral part of the class. While I am not especially interested in my students always being comfortable, because challenge is an essential part of the process of growth as you develop as a creative and thinking individual, every student should feel completely respected in the classroom and on campus.

If any action or comment is made, that makes a student feel alienated, displaced, or unwelcome, please bring it to my attention immediately. We can sometimes get caught up in a moment of humor or in an especially vigorous discussion or critique and be unaware that we've crossed a line of sensitivity. We must, at all times, support one another and be vigilant against any words or actions that may result in anyone feeling unwelcome or disrespected in any way.

Accessibility

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design. I am always happy to consider creative solutions as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity. You are also welcome to contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations for this or other courses. I welcome feedback that will assist me in improving the usability and experience for all students.

Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work, words, or ideas as if they were your own. Here are three reasons not to do it:

- By far the deepest consequence to plagiarizing is the detriment to your intellectual and moral development: you won't learn anything, and your ethics will be corrupted.
- Giving credit where it's due but adding your own reflection will get you higher grades than putting your name on someone else's work. In an academic context, it counts more to show your ideas in conversation than to try to present them as *sui generis*.
- Finally, Yale punishes academic dishonesty severely. The most common penalty is suspension from the university, but students caught plagiarizing are also subject to lowered or failing grades as well as the possibility of expulsion. Please be sure to review [Yale's Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Wellness Support

Yale is home to a diverse array of student organizations and related resources involved in promoting wellness. These organizations vary in their focus and address issues ranging from art and culture to the true meaning of happiness. Many work to encourage wellness on campus through events, discussions, activities, coursework, and advocacy.

Wellness-focused student organizations and opportunities for peer-to-peer discussion are described in detail below. Use the sort and tag features to view these resources grouped according to topic.

For a list of peer counseling resources, [click here](#).

Other Resources

[Components of a Successful Essay](#)

[Writing About Fiction](#)

- Yale Classics Library: <http://www.library.yale.edu/arts/classics.html>

If you have any questions about the library or need assistance with research contact Classics Librarian, Colin McCaffrey (colin.mccaffrey@yale.edu, 203-432-0854)

- Yale Writing Center: <http://www.yale.edu/writing>

All students are encouraged to take advantage of the free writing services offered by the Yale College Writing Center, especially before turning in a paper.

Revision Date 01/13/2025

Author Brian Price

“A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.”

- Thomas Mann