

RTF: 369 ADVANCED SCREENWRITING FOR FEATURE FILM (09050)

Professor Maya Perez

Spring 2019: Wednesdays 12 - 3 p.m. CMA 6.146

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Office hours: Wednesdays 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. and by appointment.

Recommended Texts:

"The Writer's Journey" by Christopher Vogler

"Bird by Bird" by Anne Lamott

"On Writing" by Stephen King

"On Story: Screenwriters and Their Craft" edited by Barbara Morgan & Maya Perez

Recommended Podcasts:

"Scriptnotes"

"Austin Film Festival's On Story"

Recommended Blogs:

gointothestory.blcklst.com

Johnaugust.com

wordplayer.com

Scripts/readings on Canvas Course Page. Additional scripts available online, at gointothestory.blcklst.com, and in the "The RTF Script Library" dropbox.

Software: Final Draft is required for this course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The focus of this course is the feature-length narrative screenplay using the three-act structure. This is an advanced course where students are expected to write a treatment, an outline, and an original feature length screenplay. Students will continue their exploration of the basic dramatic principles of the form—story, character, and structure.

Each class meeting will be divided into lecture and workshop/critique session.

This class will focus on the process of screenwriting—the initial premise, story development, character exploration, dialogue, treatments, outlines, and, finally, a completed first draft.

The craft of screenwriting is learned through the critical examination of other screenplays and films—we watch movies to learn how to write movies, read screenplays in order to write screenplays. This course will hone your critical and editorial skills and the application of those skills to your own writing.

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Writing requirements: By the end of the semester, each student will have a complete treatment, outline, and first draft of a feature length screenplay.

Reading/Watching Requirements: Every week, you are expected to read a produced screenplay and watch the respective movie. This is required and failure to do so will be reflected in your grade. When applicable, watch the respective movie, as well. I recommend reading the script first, then watching the movie with script in hand—or on a laptop beside you—so you can compare how the scene was written with what appears on the screen. Take note of how much or little detail is given in action lines, description, character gestures, dialogue, etc.

In addition, over the course of the semester, you may be assigned additional screenplays to read. We will analyze these scripts in class.

Office Hours: Students are strongly encouraged to come to my office hours.

Mechanics: Assignments to be discussed on Wednesdays are to be posted on Canvas discussion board by MIDNIGHT SUNDAY. Script pages must be posted as a PDF. Students must adhere to this deadline in order to give their peers plenty of time to read

the script pages before class. Each assignment should be treated like a submission to a producer or agent, and thus should look professional—properly formatted and free of spelling and grammatical errors. Sloppy work gives the impression that you don't care about your readers or your script.

Class Participation: This class is a workshop in which students will both write new work and receive feedback as well as discuss and critically evaluate their peers' work. All students are expected to read and comment constructively on their classmates' submitted work and come to class prepared for meaningful discussion. Active participation from each student is required; failure to do so will be reflected in your grade.

Some thoughts on the workshop:

- Don't hold back. If something has problems, say so. However...
- You must give constructive, helpful, and, ultimately, positive notes. Putting your work out there is tough. Putting out new work even tougher. It requires trust on both sides.
- Identifying problems isn't enough. You must also identify possible solutions. Don't simply say that a character or a scene doesn't work for you. Say why it doesn't. If you have suggestions for changes that could improve the script, offer them, but—and this is the hard part—try not to offer advice that would make it the script *you* would write. Rather, offer ideas that help the writer's vision and voice.
- With regard to criticism of your own work, remember that your instructor and classmates are commenting on your script, not on you. Getting and implementing notes is a big—if not the biggest—part of a screenwriter's career, and you must learn how to handle this professionally!
- Ultimately, students are expected to respect each other's work. The work in this class will be new and unpolished, so be kind. Rudeness will not be tolerated.
- **Attendance:** After one absence, you will be penalized 10 points per unexcused absence. If absent or late, you are responsible for what was covered in class, including assignments and written feedback on your classmates' scripts.
- **Grading:** In evaluating your work, I try to assess what's been learned and how hard a student works. Have you demonstrated an understanding of the dramatic concepts discussed in class, and is that understanding reflected in your work? How do you receive notes? Being able to take notes from your instructor and implement them accordingly is a skill that you will forever need as a professional screenwriter. You may not agree with the notes, but it is your job to address

them. Your final grade will reflect the quality and sincerity of your efforts in this class.

- Equally important is the level and quality of participation in class discussions, as reflected by contribution to workshop. Your final grade will reflect the quality of your participation in class discussions.
- There will be no tests or final exam. Grades will be determined on a 100 point scale. Point totals for the script include all writing assignments (logline, treatment, outline, script): 80 pts. Class participation: 20 pts. Final grades will be given on a +/- scale.

- **Please turn off cell phones during class and screenings.**
- **No phoning, text messaging, emailing, tweeting, or Web surfing during class lectures or film screenings. Doing so will result in 10 points deducted from your grade, and you will lose the right to use your devices in class.**

You will be treated like professional writers and I expect you to act professionally. Being late, rude, inappropriate in behavior or discussion, and turning in sloppy work are considered unprofessional.

The University of Texas Honor Code: The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Regarding Scholastic Dishonesty: The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services website at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>

About Services for Students with Disabilities: The University of Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-6441 TTY.

Moody Writing Support Program: The Moody College Writing Support Program, located in BMC 3.322, offers one-on-one assistance without charge to undergraduates seeking to improve their professional writing in all fields of communication. We have student specialists in Journalism, RTF, CSD, CMS, Communication & Leadership and PR & Advertising. In addition, we offer workshops to strengthen core writing skills in each field and to inspire students to strive for excellence. Students may guarantee their time by booking half-hour appointments on our website for assistance during all stages of the writing process. Writing coaches also will take drop-ins if they are not working with appointments. Please take advantage of this incredible resource!

University Writing Center: The University Writing Center, located in the FAC 211, offers individualized assistance to students who want to improve their writing skills. There is no charge, and students may come in on a drop-in or appointment basis. Phone: (512)471-6222.

Religious Holidays: Religious holy days sometimes conflict with class and examination schedules. If you miss a work assignment or other project due to the observance of a religious holy day you will be given an opportunity to complete the work missed within a reasonable time after the absence. It is the policy of the University of Texas at Austin that you must notify each of your instructors at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates you will be absent to observe a religious holy day.

Email: Email, like postal mail, is a mechanism for official University communication to students. The University will exercise the right to send email communications to all students, and the University will expect that email communications will be received and read in a timely manner.

Summary: The creative process isn't always easy nor black and white. I'll do everything I can to help guide you throughout this process and make it as meaningful a learning experience as I can. Please come and see me if you're having concerns or problems that you want to talk over. In this class, I encourage you to try new things. This class is about learning, experimenting with genres, and pushing yourself. Let's have a great class!

RTF 369: Spring 2019 Class Schedule & Due Dates

Note: These are approximate due dates. They will change/vary depending on class demands, guest speakers, and individual projects.

POST ASSIGNMENTS ON CANVAS AS A PDF DOCUMENT BY SUNDAY MIDNIGHT

*“On Tuesday, May 23, 2000, at 4:27 p.m., I sat down to write Little Miss Sunshine...” -
Michael Arndt*

January 23: Orientation. What are your goals for this class? What story do you want to write?

Assignment due January 27: Read Logline article in Reader. Post to Canvas three LOGLINES for movie ideas you want to write and three loglines for movies in same wheelhouse.

January 30: Discuss Loglines. What is your connection to this story? Lecture: STRUCTURE/TREATMENTS. What is your beginning, middle, end? Who are your main characters? Your big scenes? Trailer moments? If time, start working on character bios.

Assignment due February 3: Read article on Treatments. Write a TREATMENT of your feature idea; should be 1-3 pages. Include your revised selected logline. Read script for a movie in your wheelhouse. Read your peers' submitted work and write constructive feedback.

February 6: Discuss Treatments. Do you have the right protagonist? Antagonist? Can your story open later? What questions does your first act ask? Are they answered in your third act? Lecture: OUTLINE. What is happening in each scene? What purpose do these scenes serve? Must they occur in this order? Do the stakes increase, the pace increase with each subsequent scene?

Assignment due February 10: Read articles in Reader and examples. Write OUTLINE that includes slug lines and act breaks. Read script for a movie in your wheelhouse. Read your peers' submitted work and write constructive feedback.

February 13: Discuss Outlines. Does it feel solid? Do you want to rewrite? Lecture: FIRST TEN PAGES. Opening your story, grabbing the attention of your reader, setting tone, introducing characters.

Assignment due February 17: Read articles in Reader and examples. Rewrite Outline or First Ten Pages - I'll assign. Read script for a movie in your wheelhouse/assigned script focusing on first ten pages and character in those first ten. Read your peers' submitted work and write constructive feedback. Send to your classmates and copy me.

February 20: Discuss First Ten Pages. Lecture: ACT ONE. Inciting incident, action lines, dialogue. I will divide you into Group A and Group B. Oscars pool!

Assignment due February 24: Group A: Act One. Read script for a movie in your wheelhouse/assigned script - what's the first act break? Read your peers' submitted work and write constructive feedback.

February 27: Discuss Group A's Act Ones. Writing exercise: Write one of your scenes five different ways. Who won Oscars pool?

Assignment due March 3: Group B: Write Act One. Read assigned script - how have stakes increased? Read your peers' submitted work and write constructive feedback.

March 6: Writing exercise. Discuss Group B Act One. Lecture: PAGE 45

Assignment due March 10: Group A & B write up to Page 45. Read assigned script - how have stakes increased even more from last 15 pages? Can you isolate scenes in the first half of script's second act? How many are there? What changes in them?

March 13: Discuss Group A & B up to Page 45. Lecture: MIDPOINT. Escalating action! Writing exercise.

Assignment due March 17 or March 24? Class vote!: Group A up to Midpoint. Read script from wheelhouse/assigned script - what changes at the midpoint? Is there a story pivot? A POV pivot?

SPRING BREAK March 18-22: Read! Watch movies! Go outside! Catch up!

March 27: Discuss Group A up to Midpoint. Lecture. Writing exercise.

Assignment due March 31: Group B: Write up to the Midpoint. Read assigned script - what changes in second half of second act?

April 3: Discuss Group B Midpoint. Lecture: PAGE 75. Writing exercise. Everyone 21+ invited to *On Story* premiere party.

Assignment due April 7: Groups A & B up to Page 75. Read assigned script - what changes in second half of second act?

April 10: Discuss Groups A & B up to Page 75. Lecture: ACT TWO BREAK.

Assignment due April 14: Group A: End of Act Two. Read assigned script - what's the low point? Is this reflected from Act One?

April 17: Discuss Group A End of Act Two. Pitching your script, write the review for your script.

Assignment due April 21: Group B: End of Act Two. Read assigned script - focus on Act Three

April 24: Discuss Group A End of Act Two. Discuss ACT THREE. This is it! Your third act should answer the questions set up in your first act. Did your protagonist catch the killer? Find love? At what cost? Writing exercise.

Assignment due April 28: Read "Shitty First Drafts" chapter from *Bird by Bird*. Group A: Act Three

May 1: Discuss Act Three for Group A. Discuss lookbooks.

Assignment due May 5: Group B: Act Three

May 8 - LAST CLASS: Discuss Act Three for Group B. Rewriting, competitions, what's next.

Assignment: Final drafts are due Friday, May 10 by 5pm.

