RTF N348:
The Working Hollywood Writer
Summer 2019
73485
Tuesday 6:30-10:40pm
UTLA Classroom

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Office Hrs: Tues. 3:30-6:30pm
Office Hrs Location: UTLA

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

RTF 348 will introduce you to the life and expectations of a working Hollywood writer, and prepare you for the start of your own screenwriting career. You will leave this course with the first act of an original TV pilot, and the first act of an original feature. We will explore the basic theory and formal aspects of story, structure, and character, which are essential to all forms of screenwriting. In addition, we will cover how to navigate the business of being a freelance writer, skills that can be just as important as your writing talents.

We will carefully examine each step of the screenwriting process – from the initial premise, through character exploration and treatments, to writing the first draft – then apply those steps to the development of your own scripts. With the help of your peers in workshop, you will leave this course a better writer than you entered. Workshopping is not just for the classroom. Every successful writer has their own version of a writer’s group— I’ve been in the same group, that meets weekly, for the last nine years.

COURSE MATERIALS:

TEXTS: Screenplays available on http://canvas.utexas.edu/

. Various articles and chapters, also available on Canvas.
SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE: There are many options out there, but you must use one of them. (Remember to get your discounted educational version!)

Final Draft is commonplace. www.finaldraft.com/edu

Please Note: you do not need Final Draft AV for this class.

I personally use WriterDuet. And they offer your first 3 scripts for free. https://writerduet.com/free

Others options: Fade In, Movie Magic Screenwriter, or Celtx.

NOTE: Laptops are allowed for note taking only. All laptops should be put away during video viewing, workshops, and guest speakers. Phones should always be out of view.

MECHANICS:

Writing Requirements: By the end of the course, each student will have completed:

- Act I of a feature-length screenplay (30 pgs), plus an outline for going forward.
- Act I of a television drama or sitcom (15 pgs), plus an outline for going forward.

Assignments and Readings: All readings and assignments will be posted on the Canvas class site. No outside texts need to be purchased.

Due Dates: Assignments are to be posted on our Canvas Discussion Board by 6pm Sunday (2 days before class). This is to give your fellow workshop members a chance to read and thoughtfully prepare their notes.

Assignments must be typewritten. Must be 12 point courier. Must be in the proper format. Must be page-numbered. (None of this should be a problem if you’re using screenwriting software.) You will receive a 10% reduction in grade for every day your assignment is late. Each assignment should be treated like a
submission to a producer or agent, and thus should look professional: properly formatted and error-free. Remember, you have a team of smart people giving you feedback. Take advantage of this and guarantee that you are getting the best notes by not wasting your workshop time with notes on spelling and formatting.

Here is a quick formatting guide: 
https://www.writersstore.com/how-to-write-a-screenplay-a-guide-to-scriptwriting/

A more detailed formatting guide can be found on Canvas under “Pages.”

On the assignments for which no rewrite is scheduled, you may, at your discretion, choose to rewrite your assignment and re-submit it. The second grade will be averaged with the first, but your grade improvement may not exceed one letter grade.

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance will be taken. You're allowed ONE unexcused absence. Excused absences require a doctor’s note or similar concrete justification. After one absence, you will be penalized five points per absence -- essentially, half of a letter grade. You are allowed one late arrival (defined as 10 minutes past scheduled start time) But, after that, if you are more than 10 minutes late, you will be penalized 2.5 points. In a class such as this one where your feedback on your classmates' work is a critical component, you've simply got to be here -- having read the material, of course. Please be on time. If absent or late, you are responsible for what was covered in class, including assignments: please contact two fellow students before contacting me for this purpose.

NOTE: Running late from your internship is not an acceptable excuse. The internships are designed to complement your academic pursuits, not inhibit them. Please let the UTLA administration know if this becomes a problem.

GRADING:
Assignment grades will be posted weekly on Canvas.

You will be assessed on three levels:

• The level and quality of participation in class, ie: how often do you talk, and what do you talk about?
• Your understanding of the concepts discussed in lecture -- and how that understanding is reflected in your own creative work, ie: are you learning and improving?
• Quizzes: there will be several unannounced quizzes during lecture. They will be based on the readings. (hint: they are not hard questions. If you’ve done the reading, you should easily be able to answer these questions.)

The grading breakdown is as follows:

- Quizzes on Readings: 10 points
- Feature 1pg Outline: 5 points
- Feature Treatment: 5 points
- Feature Step-outline: 10 points
- Feature Act I (pgs 1-15): 15 points
- Feature Act I (pgs 15-30): 15 points
- TV Outline: 5 points
- TV Beat Sheet: 10 points
- TV Act I: 15 points
- Workshop Participation (note giving/note taking): 5 points
- Class Participation (lectures/guest speakers): 5 points

___________
Total: 100 points

There will be no final exam

FINAL GRADE RANGES:
A 93-100  C 73-76
A- 90-92  C- 70-72
B+ 87-89  D+ 67-69
B 83-86  D 63-66
B- 80-82  D- 60-62
C+ 77-79  F 0-59
RULES OF CRITICISM:

• Don't hold back. If something has problems, it has problems. Say so. However...
• Negative comments are a lot easier to make than positive ones. So, no matter how constructive your criticism is, try to match it with a compliment somewhere else.
• Identifying problems isn't enough -- also identify possible solutions. Don't simply say that a character or a scene doesn't work for you. Say why it doesn't, then tell us what changes to the character or scene would make it work for you.
• With regard to criticism of your own work: start developing a thick skin. Remember that your instructors and classmates are commenting on your scripts, not on you. Use their criticism to become a better writer. Keep in mind that as a working writer, you will get notes for the rest of your life. First from your writer’s group, then from your manager, then from your producer, then from your studio exec, then from your director… it’s endless.

(There’s a rule of thumb in TV writer rooms that you shouldn’t point out a problem unless you also have a fix. It’s not always possible, but it’s a good habit to develop.)

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
SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 512-471-6259, or 512-410-6644 (video phone).

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.

UNIVERSITY ELECTRONIC MAIL NOTIFICATION POLICY

It is the student’s responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her email address. Students are expected to check email on a frequent and regular basis-daily, or, at minimum, twice/week-in order to stay current with University communications, recognizing they may be time-critical. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your email address are available at: https://cio.utexas.edu/policies/university-electronic-mail-student-notification-policy

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Religious holy days sometimes conflict with class and examination schedules. It is the policy of The University of Texas at Austin that the student must notify each instructor at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates he or she will be absent to observe a religious holy day. For religious holidays that fall within the first two weeks of the semester, the notice should be given on the first day of the semester. The student may not be penalized for these excused absences but the instructor may appropriately respond if the student fails to complete satisfactorily the missed assignment or examination within a reasonable time after the excused absence.
WEEKLY SYLLABUS

6/04 THE ESSENTIALS

LECTURE:
About the Class
The Basics -- Character, Story, Structure
Loglines

WORKSHOP:
Workshop structure & Getting to know your group
Picking a logline

ASSIGNMENT: READ: Aristotle, "Poetics"
READ: E.T.
WRITE: Feature 1pg outline
(upload to Canvas by 5pm Sun. June 9th)

NOTE: All assigned readings must be completed before the following lecture.

6/11 FINDING THE STORY & 3 ACT STRUCTURE

LECTURE: "The Godfather": Beginnings, Middles, and Ends
Aristotelian Drama
“E.T.” 5 Key Moments

WORKSHOP: Feature 1 pg Outline

ASSIGNMENT: READ: Hauge Chpt 3
READ: “Schindler’s List”
READ: Art of Betterization
WRITE: Feature Treatment
(upload to Canvas by 5pm Sun. June 16th)

6/18 CHARACTER, CONFLICT & ACT II

LECTURE: Dramatizing Character
Role of Conflict

WORKSHOP: Feature Treatment

ASSIGNMENT: READ: McKee Chpt. 15
- READ: “Thelma & Louise”
- WRITE: Feature Step-Outline
  (upload to Canvas by 5pm Sun June 23rd)

6/25 POLISHING THE STORY

LECTURE: The Art of Subtlety
  Monomyth: “The Star Wars of Oz”

WORKSHOP: Feature Step-Outline

ASSIGNMENT: WRITE: Feature Act I (pg 1 – 15)
  (upload to Canvas by 5pm Sun June 30th)

7/2 INTRODUCTION TO TV WRITING

LECTURE: Where to Begin: from Bible to Premise
  World & Rules

WORKSHOP: Feature Act I (pg 1-15)

ASSIGNMENT: READ: Goldberg, chapt. 2
- READ: “Breaking Bad”- pilot
- READ: Scarbrough
- READ: “Community” - pilot
- WRITE: Feature Act I (pg 15-30)
  (upload to Canvas by 5pm Sun July 7th)

7/9 TV: SITCOM

LECTURE: Single Cam vs Multi Cam
  Comedy Building Blocks
WORKSHOP: Feature Act I (pg 15-30)
TV Ideas

ASSIGNMENT: READ: Brody Chpt 9
READ: Sample beat-sheet
READ: “The Shield”
WRITE: TV Outline
(upload to Canvas by 5pm Sun. July 14th)

7/16 TV: DRAMA
LECTURE: Cable vs Network

WORKSHOP: TV Outline

ASSIGNMENT: READ: Mamet Memo
WRITE: TV Beat Sheet
(upload to Canvas by 5pm Sun 7/21)

7/23 REVISION: THE REAL WORK BEGINS
LECTURE: Revision: The 3 I's
The Biz: What I Wish Someone Had Told Me

WORKSHOP: TV Beat Sheet

ASSIGNMENT: READ: Speaker bios and prep 2-3 Q’s
WRITE: TV Act I (pg 1-15)
(upload to Canvas by 5pm Sun 7/28)

7/30 Q&A WITH GUEST SPEAKERS
WORKSHOP: TV Act I (pg 1-15)

and always keep in mind...

“A writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.” -- Thomas Mann