
THE ART OF SCREENWRITING in Spring 2019 (CL2028)

Course Code	CL2028	Professor(s)	Jordi Wijnalda
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	TBA
Class Schedule	M: 16:55-19:50 in G-L21	Office Hours	Mon, 13:30-15:00
Credits	4	Email	jwijnalda@aup.edu
Semester	Spring 2019	Office Tel. Ext.	n/a

Course Description

The goal of this course is to introduce you to the art and craft of screenwriting: using language to create a visually and aurally expressive film on the page. We will explore how screenwriting differs from the novel and the play and how the screenwriter works in the larger film and television landscape. To refine our craft, we will read screenplays, master screenwriting format, learn techniques for developing character, study ways to create complex scenes and cluster those scenes into strong sequences that create the best dramatic structure for your personally expressive feature film script. Your creation of film language will deepen, you will understand the historical and contemporary role of the screenwriting in the production system and recognize key screenwriters by the questions they ask and the way that they ask them. You will finish the semester with a clearer sense of your own dramatic voice, a better understanding of three-act structure, a complete feature film outline and a portfolio of six essential scenes from your feature.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Understanding screenwriting as a distinct form differing from the novel and the play
- Deepen your ability to understand and create film language.
- Write complex dramatic scenes, arcs, and acts.
- Develop your own dramatic voice.
- Create a full length film outline and write the first 30 pages of a screenplay.
- Develop characters and dramatic situations that raise questions about the world
- Understand, analyze and create long form stories using three act structure
- Understand the historical and contemporary role of screenwriting in the production system

General Education

METHODS

Class time will be divided into lecture, screenplay breakdown, in class writing exercises to master technique and critique sessions of works in progress.

CLASS CONDUCT

Filmmaking is a collaborative art form. We'll treat our class as a writer's room, working together to support each student's development. Your involvement in discussions of your classmates' work is essential to the creation of a vital, committed and productive workshop. These conversations will help you grow as a writer in a supportive, creative community.

Just like in a professional writer's room, lateness, cell phone use, texting and internet use *will not be tolerated* and will lower your participation score. Each unexcused absence will lower your course grade by ½ grade. Lateness will count against your participation score. Because of the cumulative nature of the workshop, late work is not acceptable. I know this sounds tough, but this is the only way to work as a screenwriter. If you don't think you have time for this commitment this semester, it's best to postpone taking the course.

ASSIGNMENTS & DAILY WRITING

A screenwriter practices their craft by writing. Each week, in addition to assigned reading and script analysis, you will develop the habits of a professional screenwriter by writing six days a week. I will give you assignments to guide your practice and develop your craft, and will require that you post a weekly Writing Journal (specifics to come) to Blackboard every Monday by 9am.

MATERIALS NEEDED

You will need a notebook to write in, something to write with, a folder for scripts and hand-outs, printed copies or equivalent of film scripts, index cards and colored pencils (these last two are not needed until later in the semester). You will need to download and use a Screenwriting program (like *Celtx* or *Final Draft*) to write your screenplays. We're lucky that AUP owns many full copies of Final Draft 9 and which can be used for FREE on computers in Grenelle, Combes and the library. Bring all your screenwriting to the class each week in paper format. *You must check your AUP email regularly or forward your AUP email to another account.*

OFFICE HOURS

I will expect you to take advantage of office hours to vet individual scene and structural progress.

DUE DATES

Groups assignment will determine when drafts are due. Plan ahead by proof reading, printing, collating and stapling so you can arrive EARLY to class. Bring all assigned work to class every week.

Course Outline

WEEK 1 – Monday January 21st

TOPICS: INTRODUCTION: WRITING IN THE LANGUAGE OF CINEMA (asking questions in a unique form)

READINGS:

Buy textbook. Download *April Rider* screenplay and read *Little Miss Sunshine* screenplay. Read **Trottier**, Book II, pages 113-133 (6 out of the “7 Steps to a Stunning Script: a Workbook”)

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Read Trottier and take notes for mapping out your own writing process this semester.
- Read and bring in typed notes about how *Little Miss Sunshine* uses character introductions, flaws, physical action, behaviour and dialogue as they physicalize inner life. We'll share responsibility for the characters this week. Make lists for how each character is introduced, how they change etc. Be specific, use page #s, etc.
- **Daily Writing Practice (DWP):** Introduction of a flawed character in a setting that reveals that flaw and a challenge. Develop a different character every day. Write for 15 min a day (use a timer). Write scenes that introduce a character with a flaw in a setting that helps reveal those flaws. Bring in your best fully formatted scene to the next class.
- **Upload Writing Log synopsis to Blackboard every Monday by 9am.**

January 27 – last day to drop/add courses online

WEEK 2 – Monday January 28th

TOPICS: THREE ACT STRUCTURE - THE FLOW OF THE STORY

READINGS:

Re-read *Little Miss Sunshine* screenplay thoroughly, making notes.

Read **Trottier**, Book I, pages 3-10 (“How stories work”) and pages 11-28 (“Situation, conflict, and resolution”).

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Fill in worksheet for *Little Miss Sunshine*. Write in the dramatic action from class. Fill in each stage along the dramatic structure. Be specific for each category, use page #s, screen descriptions, etc.
- Read the Trottier chapters and take notes, especially alongside the *Little Miss Sunshine* screenplay.
- **(DWP)**: Write for 15 min a day (use a timer) developing main characters with flaws you want to pursue who could connect in some way to the larger thematic questions/tensions you hope to explore. Write one per day; bring your best to our next class.
- Upload Writing Log synopsis to Blackboard Monday by 9am.

WEEK 3 – Monday February 4th

TOPICS: CHARACTER AS EXPLORATION OF AN IDEA + DRAMATIC ACTION + Refining your core ideas and creating a secondary character

READINGS:

Read *Children of Men* screenplay. Read **Trottier**, Book I, pages 57-78 (“Ten keys to creating captivating characters”)

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Fill in worksheet for *Children of Men*. Fill in each stage along the dramatic structure. Be specific for each category, use page #s, screen descriptions, etc.
- Read the Trottier chapter and take notes, especially alongside the *Children of Men* screenplay.
- **(DWP)**: Write for 15 min a day (use a timer). Develop at least two interesting secondary characters that could connect to your core dramatic action with their own different set of flaws that connect to the idea at stake. Write one per day (this is important); bring your best to our next class.
- Upload Writing Log synopsis to Blackboard Monday by 9am.

WEEK 4 – Monday February 11th

TOPICS: ACT I: LIFE (AS WE KNOW AND VALUE IT) GETS UPSET

READINGS:

Re-read *Children of Men* screenplay thoroughly. Read **Trottier**, Book I, pages 36-57 (“Story-layering, plot and genre”).

ASSIGNMENTS:

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- Create rough outline of your screenplay's first act with each scene described in action.
 - Read Trottier and take notes. Refine your own idea based on these notes. Be specific!
 - **(DWP)**: Write for 20 min a day (use a timer). Create mock-ups for scenes that show your character responding to a tiny glitch in a manner that reveals what they value about themselves in their current life. What's the worst thing that could happen to unseat this value? Write some scenes that escalate to do this. Push yourself (this is important).
 - Upload Writing Log synopsis to Blackboard Monday by 9am.

WEEK 5 – Monday February 18th

TOPICS: ACT II: COMPLICATIONS AND REVERSALS: Pushing yourself to explore unknown territory

READINGS:

Read **Trottier**, Book I, pages 82-92 ("Dialogue, subtext, and exposition"), pages 93-100 ("How to make a scene")

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Review worksheets for *Children of Men* and *Little Miss Sunshine*.
- Create rough outline of your script's second act, each scene described in action.
- Read Trottier and take notes. Refine your own idea based on these notes!
- **(DWP)**: Write for 20 min a day (use a timer). This is a big week and needs a lot of brainstorming, sketching and scene crafting as you generate complex complications, reversals, near failures and the lowest point and sketch these out as scenes.
- Upload Writing Log synopsis to Blackboard Monday by 9am.

WEEK 6 – Monday February 25th

TOPICS:

ACT III: COMPLICATIONS AND REVERSALS: Pushing yourself to explore unknown territory

READINGS:

- Read **Trottier**, Book IV, pages 283-303 ("The first ten pages")

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Review worksheets for *Children of Men* and *Little Miss Sunshine*.
- Create rough outline of your script's third act, each scene described in action.
- Read Ch. 14 and take notes. Refine your own idea based on these notes!
- **(DWP)**: Write for 20 min a day (use a timer). This is a big week and needs a lot of brainstorming, sketching and scene crafting as you generate complex complications,

reversals, near failures and the lowest point and sketch these out as scenes.

- All groups refine your three-act outlines. Group A bring copies of complete section for the whole class to our next class meeting, Monday March 18t, to class. Please print far in advance to make sure you arrive on time.
- *Upload Writing Log synopsis to Blackboard Monday March 18th by 9am.*

March 4-15 (included), **Spring Break, no classes**

WEEK 7 – Monday March 18th

TOPICS: WRITER'S ROOM: GROUP A

READINGS:

Read **Trottier**, Book IV, pages 283-303 ("The first ten pages")

ASSIGNMENTS:

- All groups refine your three-act outlines and begin writing scenes, testing out the fullness of your idea. Group B bring copies for the whole class on Monday to class.
- *Upload Writing Log synopsis to Blackboard Monday by 9am.*

March 22nd, **Mid-semester grades due**

WEEK 8 – Monday March 25th

TOPICS: WRITER'S ROOM: GROUP B

READINGS:

Excerpt from Aronson's *The 21st Century Screenplay*, to be made available as PDF via Blackboard.

ASSIGNMENTS:

- All groups refine your three-act outlines and begin writing scenes, testing out the fullness of your idea. Group C bring copies for the whole class on Monday to class.
- *Upload Writing Log synopsis to Blackboard Monday by 9am.*

WEEK 9 - Monday April 1st

TOPICS WRITER'S ROOM: GROUP C, finalizing your structured ideas.

READINGS:

Excerpt from Aronson's *The 21st Century Screenplay*, to be made available as PDF via

Blackboard.

ASSIGNMENT: All final, reviewed, strengthened, expressive outlines due to me at the beginning of next week's class.

WEEK 10 – Monday April 8th

TOPICS: POWERFUL, ESSENTIAL SCENES: How to write, re-write and surprise using elements of cinema.

READINGS: *Selection of sample scenes to be studied will be made available on Blackboard.*

ASSIGNMENTS:

- (DWP): Should now be 25 minutes per day. Write, write, write, reimagine, complicate and deepen.
- Create an index card for every scene in your film – bring these to the next class along with colored pencils. Follow specific class guidelines and make sure to bring all the cards on time on April 15th.

WEEK 11 - Monday April 15th

TOPICS: VISUAL REVISION, REVISED OUTLINES and KEY SCENES rough to polish.

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Using your adjusted cards, refine, rewrite to better employ your characters and world to explore your ideas cinematically.
- Everyone write and revise outline and six key scenes
- Group A plus Group ½ Group B bring copies for everyone of your requested six scenes and revised outline overview to the next class.

*April 22nd, **Easter Monday, no classes***

WEEK 12 – Monday April 29th

TOPICS: WRITER'S ROOM: ESSENTIAL SCENES – GROUP A+ ½ B

READINGS: TBD depending on script issues presented

ASSIGNMENTS:

- (DWP): Should now be 25 minutes per day. Continue writing and revising your scenes; complicate, refine, add dimension and surprise all with your question powerfully in mind.
- Second ½ Group B + Group C bring copies for everyone of your requested six scenes to

the next class and revised outline overview.

WEEK 13 – Monday May 6th - LAST CLASS

TOPICS: WRITER'S ROOM: ESSENTIAL SCENES – GROUP second ½ B + C

READINGS: TBD depending on script issues presented

ASSIGNMENTS:

- **(DWP):** Push yourself in your final week to write as many scenes of your feature as possible, and deeply refine making sure your scenes, including your essential scenes, work to raise and complicate your core ideas.

FINAL SCENES DUE:

All final, reviewed, strengthened portfolio scenes emailed as a PDF to me by May 10th at 9am – the second day of reading days and four days after our last class.

ALL READ AND PREPARE COMMENTS: Everyone use the final three reading days to read everyone else's work – you will need your notes on each for the final – as well as positive specific praise of each script.

May 6th, last day of classes; May 9th-12th, reading days

FINAL EXAM - Monday May 13th - 15:30

Final pitch presentations and student response.

THE WORKING SCREENWRITER

Textbooks

This course doesn't have any textbook.

Attendance Policy

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and in case of absence, should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has its own attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for students' participation in study trips related to their courses.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory.

IN ALL CASES OF MISSED COURSE MEETINGS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PROFESSOR, AND FOR ARRANGING TO MAKE UP MISSED WORK, RESTS SOLELY WITH THE STUDENT.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Grading Policy

Attendance & <u>engaged</u> participation in workshop (10%) <i>Exceptional</i>	A- to A	90 – 100	
Writing Log (20%) <i>Good</i>	B- to B	80 – 89	<i>Good to Very</i>
Weekly Assignments and Quizzes (10%)	C - to C+	70 – 79	<i>Adequate</i>
Midterm – Complex Feature outline (30%)	D- to D+	60 – 69	<i>Poor</i>
Six essential scenes (30%) <i>missed classes</i>	<i>Failure: below 60 or more than 3</i>		

Other

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY STATEMENT: As an Anglophone university, The American University of Paris is strongly committed to effective English language mastery at the undergraduate level. Most courses require scholarly research and formal written and oral presentations in English, and AUP students are expected to strive to achieve excellence in these domains as part of their course work. To that end, professors include English proficiency among the criteria in student evaluation, often referring students to the university Writing Lab where they may obtain help on specific academic assignments. Proficiency in English is monitored at various points throughout the student's academic career, most notably during the admissions and advising processes, while the student is completing general education requirements, and during the accomplishment of degree program courses and senior theses.