
THE ART OF SCREENWRITING in Spring 2021 (FM2028)

Course Code	FM2028	Professor(s)	
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	
Class Schedule	F: 13:45-16:40 in G-L22	Office Hours	by appointment
Credits	4	Email	sharris@aup.edu
Semester	Spring 2021	Office Tel. Ext.	

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 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 personal screenplay. Your knowledge of film language will deepen, you will understand the historical and contemporary role of 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, an understanding of three-act structure, a complete feature film outline, and at least the first 30 pages for 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

Course Outline

January

Friday January 22nd

TOPICS

How to not make an A in this class, 3 act structure, the shape of story, research.

READINGS

Story, first 11 pages of Chapter 2 (on Blackboard)

April Rider screenplay (on Blackboard)

WATCH

One of your personal favorite films, and breakdown the act structure and plot points, as discussed in class. Email them to me at sharris@aup.edu by Thursday at 9am.

WRITE

Spend at least 20 minutes a day writing, and don't delete anything. I might ask to see the entire file at the end of the semester. For the first week, I want you to spend each day coming up with a different story idea, focus on the overall structure.

January 24th – last day to drop/add courses online

Friday January 29th

TOPICS

Analyze some of the films you watched last week, take a look at what people who hate 3 act structure say, formatting, and coverage.

READINGS

Thelma and Louise screenplay, on Blackboard. Write one page of coverage, as discussed in class, and email it to me by the start of class next week.

WATCH

Casablanca and LA Confidential, and breakdown the act structure and plot points, as discussed in class. Email them to me at sharris@aup.edu before Friday at 9am.

WRITE

Continue writing every day in your journal. Spend at least 20 minutes a day writing a new story idea.

February

Friday February 5th

TOPICS

Characters and character arcs.

READINGS

Story, Chapter 5 (on Blackboard) Chinatown screenplay on Blackboard, write coverage, and email it to me by the start of class next week.

WATCH

Fargo (the film, not the TV series) and breakdown the act structure and plot points, as discussed in class. Email them to me at sharris@aup.edu by Friday at 9am.

WRITE

Continue writing every day in your journal. Spend at least 20 minutes a day writing about a different story, focus on the turning points that we've discussed in class.

Friday February 12th

TOPICS

Films that stray from the traditional structure, revealing information, exposition, controlling idea, subplots.

READINGS

Story, Chapter 19 (on Blackboard)

WATCH

The Wind That Shakes The Barley and Kramer Vs. Kramer, and breakdown the act structure and plot points, as discussed in class. Email them to me at sharris@aup.edu by Friday at 9am.

WRITE

Write a one-page, single-spaced synopsis of your favorite idea. Identify each of the plot points that

we've discussed in class. Email your favorite one to me by Thursday at 9am.

Friday February 19th

TOPICS

ACT I

WATCH

Network and Tootsie, and breakdown the act structure and plot points, as discussed in class. Email them to me at sharris@aup.edu by Friday the 5th at 9am.

WRITE

Write a step outline for the first act and email it to me by Thursday the 4th at 9am.

February 24th – 28th, Mini break 2, (no classes)

March

Friday March 5th

TOPICS

ACT II and elevator pitches

WATCH

North by Northwest and Little Miss Sunshine, and breakdown the act structure and plot points, as discussed in class. Email them to me at sharris@aup.edu by Friday at 9am.

WRITE

Write a step outline for the second act and email to me by Thursday at 9am.

Friday March 12th

TOPICS

ACT III and scene construction

WRITE

Write a step outline for the third act and email to me by Thursday at 9am.

Friday March 19th

TOPICS

Race and Gender, Dialogue, and Formatting

WRITE

Half the class will be assigned to email the entire class their full outline by Wednesday morning at 9am. The entire class should read all of the outlines and type up notes and ideas for each one. You must send your feedback to me **before** class next week, and to the writer after class.

March 17th, Mid-semester

March 19th, Mid-semester grades due

Friday March 26th

TOPICS

Discuss the outlines.

WRITE

The other half of the class should email the entire class their full outline by Wednesday morning at 9am. The entire class should read all of the outlines and type up notes and ideas for each one. You must send your feedback to me **before** class next week, and to the writer after class.

Friday April 2nd

TOPICS

Discuss the outlines.

WRITE

Group A should write the first 15 pages of their screenplays, in proper format, and email them to the entire class by Wednesday morning at 9am. The entire class should read all of the outlines and type up notes and ideas for each one. You must send your feedback to me **before** class next week, and to the writer after class.

April 2nd, last day to withdraw from a course.

Last day to choose the CR/NC grading option.

April

Friday April 9th

TOPICS

Discuss Group A's first 15 pages

WRITE

Group B should write the first 15 pages of their screenplays, in proper format, and email them to the entire class by Wednesday morning at 9am. The entire class should read all of the outlines and type up notes and ideas for each one. You must send your feedback to me **before** class next week, and to the writer after class.

Friday April 16th

TOPICS

Discuss Group B's first 15 pages

WRITE

Group C should write the first 15 pages of their screenplays, in proper format, and email them to the entire class by Wednesday morning at 9am. The entire class should read all of the outlines and type up notes and ideas for each one. You must send your feedback to me **before** class next week, and to the writer after class.

Friday April 23rd

TOPICS

Discuss Group C's first 15 pages

WRITE

Everyone should email their first 30 pages to me by the day of the final exam.

April 29th, – May 2nd, Reading days (May 1st, holiday)

May 7th - 18:30 Final Exam

There will be no formal exam in this class, the 30-page draft is the final. So on the day of the exam we'll have a discussion/lecture about the nature of storytelling and the ethical responsibility a screenwriter has.

May 26th, all grades du

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

20% Class Participation (that includes giving quality feedback to your peers and not using Facebook or sending text messages in class.)

10% Weekly assignments

20% Step Outline

20% The first 15 pages of your screenplay

30% The first 30 pages of your screenplay

I won't necessarily grade you down if your screenplay isn't to my personal taste, but I will take off points if I don't think you've properly researched your story, if it's late, and if you don't use the correct format. Otherwise, points are earned by showing an understanding and mastery of the principles taught in class.

Other
