

## **BEGINNING SCREENWRITING:**

**TEXTS:** *Story*, Robert McKee  
Course Pack - Available from Science Center Printing Office  
Additional Readings & Bibliography provided by Instructor

### **COURSE GOALS:**

Introduction to Screenwriting is an intensive course that provides members the opportunity to develop a film script while increasing each member's use of individual voice, creative method and screenwriting technical skills.

All course members will produce a completed treatment, script outline and first act of a feature length screenplay. Students need not have a script concept when they enter the course; ideas will be developed in class. If you have begun a script, wish to write or rewrite an entire screenplay in this course, you must notify the instructor at the outset to arrange a customized writing schedule. Every writer has individual working styles, so each person will be encouraged to develop a creative approach appropriate to his or her needs and subject matter.

### **FORMAT:**

Meetings will consist lectures, writing workshops, film clip analyses and dramatic readings of scripts. Among some films analyzed will be *Chinatown*, *The Godfather*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Fallen Angels* and *American Beauty*. Films proposed by course members will be considered for analysis. Lectures will cover essential elements including: conflict, voice, script structure, plot, theme, character development, dialogue and visual sequence construction. Film business matters such as: script formatting, script copyright, registration, marketing, production considerations and contractual agreements are part of the course. A step-by-step plan will guide you through writing the script. Members will read, discuss and evaluate each other's work.

### **WRITING:**

ALL WRITTEN WORK HANDED IN MUST BE TYPEWRITTEN, hard-copy, error-free and all pages must be numbered - or I will not read the work. Always keep copies of your work. Assignments must be handed in on time. Sometimes students will be asked to xerox work. I do not accept script materials by email.

### **CONFERENCES:**

Class members may schedule a private conference at any time to discuss work. Please bring your writing with you to our meeting.

### **GRADING POLICY:**

**WRITING:** (See Assignment Schedule pgs 3 & 4) 75%

• WRITTEN SUPPORTING MATERIALS AND ACT I:  
75%

- Voice, tone: establish and maintain strong, compelling voice integrity, tone.
- Character: credibility, drive, interest, motivations & development arc
- Plot: credibility, structural tightness, use of plot points.
- Theme, Thought: A theme or thought emerges from and relates to story, plot.
- Dialogue will be evaluated on basis of: unique character expression/voice, credibility, originality, language power, specificity, dramatic pacing and use of dramatic beats, rhythm.
- Formal Mastery: Evidence of aesthetic standards and use of form to convey meanings are credited.
- Scene Units: Core scenes must be essential & have following characteristics: a small “story”, shifts in dramatic value emotional, action) (McKee’s + or -); contain a dramatic arc; characters have identifiable “scene goals”; progress in a series of dramatic beats or turns.
- Ability to identify & recognize your writing's strengths and problems
- Flexibility in ability to find solutions to script problems; maximize its strengths

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND EDITORIAL ABILITIES: 25%

- Ability to identify other scripts’ strengths and weaknesses, suggest solutions
- Class Contribution: participation in class discussion
- Class Presentations: Video Clip & Dramatic Reading
- One absence is permitted. Beyond that, each absence is deducted from your grade. Absence on the day of your treatment analysis, dramatic reading or video clip presentation is critical and results in a 1/2 grade deduction for each absence.
- ALL WORK MUST BE SUBMITTED FOR FINALREVIEW (Page 4 - Syllabus). For each missing or incomplete assignment in final project, a grade will be subtracted.

FINAL PROJECT:

- 1) Script Story Spine or “Log Line” \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) Script Notes, Ideas (3-4 pages Xeroxed) \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3) Revised Entire Screenplay Plot Summary \_\_\_\_\_
- Either: a) Revised Scene Breakdown of entire script from beginning to end  
Or b) Revised Treatment Entire script from beginning to end
- 4) Completed Act I Screenplay written in script format – approx. 30 pages \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: •While I want to know about other writing that you are doing, my reading and comments are limited to assignments for this course.

## SCHEDULE

Occasionally there may be some modification in lecture or discussion dates.

WEEK ONE:

- 09/15:** CLASS #1: Course Introduction and Goals  
Dramatic Elements: Aristotle, *Poetics*  
A Screenwriter's Tools

Three Act Dramatic Structure

**Workshop:** Introductions & Script Concepts  
Script Concepts/Story Spines

**Assignment:** Read: McKee, Structure and Character, pp. 31-66  
Organize your script notes, computer files & notebooks

**09/22: CLASS #2:** Working Methods: Alternative Narrative Approaches  
Developing your concept

The Treatment

**Workshop:** Script Concepts

The Nine Point Plot

**Assignment:** Write Treatment, using selected method - due  
McKee, Structure and Setting, pp. 67-78

**09/29: CLASS #3** Character: Plot-Character Relations

**Workshop:** Character Workshop

Assignment: Write Treatment

Read: McKee, Structure and Character, pp. 100-109

McKee, Structure and Meaning, pp. 110-131

**10/06: CLASS #4** Scene Breakdown: Scene & Sequence • **Treatment Due**

Elements of the Dramatic Scene

Sub-Plot Origins, Strategy and Uses

Treatment Questions & Analysis

**Assignment:** Begin Scene Breakdown – for Conference

Read Treatments for Treatment Workshop #1

**10/13 HOLIDAY: COLUMBUS DAY WEEKEND**

(Continue scene breakdown)

**10/20: CLASS #5: Character Development**

Theme

Script Format

**Workshop:** Treatment Workshop #1

**Assignment:** Write scene breakdown

Write Script Act I first 10-15 pages

Read Treatments for Workshop #2

**10/27:** CLASS #6: Character Voice and Dialogue: Origins  
**Workshop:** Treatment Workshop #2

**Assignment:** Write Script Act I (10 pages Act I due  
Read McKee, The Substance of Story, pp. 1 35-180  
Read & Critique Treatments for Workshop #3

**11/03:** CLASS #7: Character Dialogue: Voice and Sources  
**Workshop:** Treatment Workshop #3

**Assignment:** Write: Script Act I – 10-15 pges  
Read & Critique Treatments for Workshop #3

**11/10:** CLASS #8: **Script Act I 10-15 pges Due**  
Dialogue Strategies: Text-Subtext  
**Workshop:** Treatments Workshop #4

**Assignment:** Write Script entire Act I  
Cue Video Clips for Analysis

**11/17:** CLASS #9 Re-vision  
Professional Business of Screenwriting  
**Workshop:** Video Clip Analysis #1

**Assignment:** : Prepare for Dramatic Reading  
Revise and completion: all script notebook materials  
(see Assignment 08/08, CL. #14)

**11/24:** CLASS #10 Professional Business of Screenwriting - Part II  
**Workshop:** Video Clip Analysis #2

**Assignment:** Revision and completion: all script materials

**12/01:** CLASS #11 Professional Business of Screenwriting

**Assignment:** Revision & Completion: All script materials  
Prepare for Dramatic Reading with Actors

**12/08:** CLASS#12 Dramatic Readings with Actors #1

**Assignment:** Revise Act I & Associated Writing

**12/15:** CLASS #13 Dramatic Readings with Actors #2

**Assignment:** Revise Act I & Associated Writing

**01/05:** CLASS #14 Dramatic Reading with Actors #3

**Assignment:** Revise Act I & Associated Writing

01/12: CLASS #15: Dramatic Reading With Actors #4  
Course Summary + Where to from here

**• All Final Projects Due in Grossman Library in a manila envelop with my name and your name on it by 5pm.**

**• Due Final Project:**

- 1) Story Spine/Concept “Tag” line
- 2) Script Notes/Ideas (3-4 pages)
- 3) Revised Story Plot Summary
  - a) Scene Breakdown of Entire Screenplay OR
  - b) Treatment form
- 4) Completed Act I Screenplay in format - approximately 30 pages

