

Course Description – Theatre 5331: Screenwriting FALL Semester, 2018

EXPLORATION OF CREATIVE SCRIPT WRITING FOR CINEMA/VIDEO; DEVELOPMENT OF FILM SCRIPTS

Through lecture, examples, class discussion, viewing film clips and script writing workshops, instructor Scott Spears will lead aspiring screenwriters through the process of writing a short film script.

Students will write two industry formatted scripts approximately 6-10 pages and 20-22 pages in length using professional screenwriting techniques, principles and tools including story, plot, theme, character development and three-act structure. The longer script will be broken down into 3 Acts with each Act being an assignment leading up to a final full length script. (Adaptations of other works is discouraged, but can be pursued with permission of the instructor, but students may be required to obtain the creative rights for the original work.)

After the initial lectures, the class will follow a screenplay development schedule, which leads students through the process of writing a short script as if it were being developed for production. To better understand the screenplay structure and “real world” application of the work, students will review existing scripts as part of their research. As a part of the development process, students will create and utilize a number of industry standard tools including an outline, a short treatment, character back story and script analysis as part of their screenplay development. Each student will write a first draft, a re-write and a final polish of their script. As part of the writer’s workshop portion of the course, students are required to read the screenplays of their fellow students and scripts picked by the instructor.

Location: 2038 Drake Performance Center

Time: Wed. & Friday

Class 1: 11:10 - 12:30

Class 2: 12:45- 2:05

Instructor: Scott Spears

Department of Theatre

The Ohio State University

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Office Hours: Wednesday & Friday by appointment between 1:50pm - 2:15pm, other hours optional

SCOTT SPEARS FOUR RULES FOR SCREENWRITING

1. Show, don't tell.
2. Conflict in every scene.
3. Can you make it shorter?
4. Don't bore me.

(This syllabus is subject to change depending on class progress and other factors.)

Format: Develop a schedule for writing a script for production,

- Writing Assignments: Synopses, Script research,/Analysis Paper, A 6-10 page short script (2 drafts) Synopsis for 20-22 page script, Outline and, First Act, Second Act and All Three Acts together for a 20-21 page script for the final script.
- Workshops: Class sections are broken into 2 writing groups, A and B. Workshops begin with 1st drafts with Group A for one class and Group B for the next class. Groups will discuss their group’s scripts
- Students are required to: 1: read all screenplays submitted by their peers during the Semester and 2: provide verbal and some written feedback to their peers in the workshops.
- Feedback must provided to peers via Carmen or in a hard copy.
- Students are required to participate in all class discussions and workshops.
- Completion of all writing assignments is mandatory for a passing grade (C) in the class.
- Theatre 5331 may NOT be taken for Audit or Pass/Not Pass status

Objectives: By the conclusion of this class, students should be able to:

1. Properly format and write an industry standard script
2. Use fundamental act, arc, story and plot structures to create compelling screenplays
3. Use visual, character and dialogue techniques to create interesting characters
4. Critically and constructively discuss the written work of others
5. Incorporate the notes and feedback to create coherent re-writes

Attendance: Attendance is required to receive a passing grade in the course

- Students are responsible for communicating with the instructor regarding any absences.
- Missing class for work/employment is NOT a valid excuse.
- For every TWO unexcused absences, your final grade will be lowered one letter grade.
- Two late classes equal one unexcused one unexcused absence (if you arrive after roll is taken, it is your responsibility to make sure you are marked late, not absent)

Assignments: Assignments must be submitted in **electronic** and **hard copy** forms.

- All assignments must be turned in to receive a passing grade in the course
- Electronic copies must be submitted via Carmen discussion boards in **PDF format**.
- **Hard copies** must be submitted in class or in the instructor's mailbox, located in the Dept. of Theatre, Drake Performance and Event Center.
- **NOTE:** Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the designated date, or any day and date specified in the course calendar. This includes electronic and hard copies.
- Assignments submitted after the deadline will lose a half a grade for each day late. (e.g. A- goes to a B+)

Electronic Devices/Technology Use and Rules for Theatre 5331

- The following rules apply regarding classroom use of electronic devices including mobile telephones, PDAs, computers, audio recording devices, etc...
- Audio and video recording devices are prohibited. Computers may only be use for taking notes or referencing information relevant to the course discussion and content
- **Texting, on-line chatting or instant messaging of any kind during class is prohibited.** If there is some emergency situation, please notify the instructor and you may leave the class to deal with the message. Students will receive a verbal warning upon the first instance of texting/messaging, etc.... With a second warning, you will asked to leave the classroom and you will receive an absence for that session. Texting at breaks is permitted.

Grades: Grades will be based on the scale below. Assignments submitted late will lose half a grade for each day late.

	<u>Points</u>	A = 1000-950	C = 769-730
Pitch/Story Synopsis	25	A- = 949-900	C- = 729-700
Short Script - Draft 1	50	B+ = 899-870	D+ = 699-670
Short Script - Draft 2	75	B = 869-830	D = 669-630
Outlines	25	B- = 829-800	D- = 629-600
Script research & Analysis	25	C+ = 799-770	F = 599-000
Midterm	50		
Script Reviews	50		
Act I	150		
Act II	150		
Act III	150		
Final Script(all 3 Acts)	150		
Participation	100		

Required Texts: Scripts and other materials will be provided by the instructor and fellow students and:
Lew Hunter's Screenwriting 434 by Lew Hunter

Recommended Texts: The following books are recommended, but not required:
Essentials of Screenwriting by Richard Walters Save the Cat by Blake Synder

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT: It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (<http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resources/>).

I will run scripts through OSU system for checking for plagiarism, so this is just a heads up.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 089 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Av., Columbus, OH 43210; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

For Your Safety: The OSU Escort Service is available after 6pm by dialing 292-3323

Course Calendar

<p>Week 1 Aug. 20-24</p>	<p>Medium, Structure, and Tools Course Overview, Texts, Plot vs. Theme, Proper Formatting <u>Reading:</u> Hunter, Chapters 1 – 2 <u>Films:</u> Short films viewed and discussed - <i>Films TBD</i></p>
<p>Week 2 Aug. 27 - Aug 31</p>	<p>Examples of Short Films /Characters/ Story Conference View examples of short films - Creating believable characters <u>Reading:</u> Hunter, Chapter 3 <u>Film:</u> <i>Various short films</i> DUE: Wednesday - Story Idea for short script 6-10 Pages</p>
<p>Week 3 Sep. 3 - 7</p>	<p>Writing Good Dialogue How to write believable dialogue, Screen: "Newsroom Pilot" Friday: 1st Draft 6-10 page scripts Due (on Carmen)</p>
<p>Week 4 Sep. 10 - 14</p>	<p>Structure & Screenplay Workshop 1: Short Scripts 6-10 pages Discuss 3 Act Structure <u>Reading:</u> Hunter, Chapters 4 Wednesday: Group A - Friday: Group B Review and comment on 1st Draft of 6-10 page scripts</p>
<p>Week 5 Sep. 17 - 21</p>	<p>Breakdown a Film "Hoosiers" View the film "Hoosiers" and analyze it <u>Reading:</u> Hunter, Chapters 5 - 7 <u>Films:</u> "Hoosier" **FRIDAY - 2nd Drafts due of 6-10 page scripts Due (Hard copy & on Carmen)</p>
<p>Week 6 Sep. 24 - 28</p>	<p>Developing Good Characters/ Outlines Developing Good Characters Screening: Twilight Zone, Pilot for "The Unit" WEDNESDAY: ASSIGN "Winter's Bone" Script Analysis</p>
<p>Week 7 Oct. 1 - 5</p>	<p>Story Construction Wednesday: Review for Midterm - Discuss Character Sketches and Outlines Screening: Southland Pilot MIDTERM ON FRIDAY DUE: Script Analysis of "Winter's Bone" FRIDAY: Story synopsis due for 20 pages</p>
<p>Week 8 Oct. 8 - 12</p>	<p>Story Conferences for Long Scripts WEDNESDAY: Story Conferences for synopsis FRIDAY: NO CLASSES - AUTUMN BREAK</p>
<p>Week 9 Oct. 15 - 19</p>	<p>WEDNESDAY: CHARACTER BACKSTORIES DUE (Only main character) FRIDAY: 1ST ACTS DUE (Hard Copy & on Carmen)</p>

<p>Week 10 Oct 22- 26</p> <hr/>	<p>Screenplay Workshop 2: Act 1 Wednesday: Group B Friday: Group A Please come with comments on your fellow students scripts **Reviews are due on your group meeting day (Only on Carmen)</p> <hr/>
<p>Week 11 Oct. 29 - Nov 2</p> <hr/>	<p>Learn from the Pros: Screening: Tale From the Script WEDNESDAY: Group A ** FRIDAY: 2nd Acts Due (Hard Copy & on Carmen)</p> <hr/>
<p>Week 12 Nov. 5 - 9</p> <hr/>	<p>Screenplay Workshop Session 3: Act 2 Group A & B Critiques– Meet Wednesday, Please come with comments on your fellow students scripts **Reviews are due on your group meeting day (Only on Carmen) FRIDAY: NO CLASSES</p> <hr/>
<p>Week 13 Nov. 12 - 16</p> <hr/>	<p>Exploring Screenwriting Screening: TBD ** WEDNESDAY: 3rd Acts Due (Hard Copy & on Carmen)</p> <hr/>
<p>THANKSGIVING Nov. 19 - 23</p> <hr/>	<p>HAVE FUN AND BE SAFE</p> <hr/>
<p>Week 14 Nov. 27 - Dec. 1</p> <hr/>	<p>Final Workshop GROUP A: WEDNESDAY FRIDAY: NO CLASSES</p> <hr/>
<p>FINALS Dec. 3 - 7</p> <hr/>	<p>Final Workshop GROUP B: WEDNESDAY FRIDAY: NO CLASSES</p> <hr/>
<p>FINALS DEC. 11 - 15</p>	<p>Final Scripts Due **FINAL Scripts Due Monday, December 10th!!! In my office or mail box and on Carmen 2:00pm deadline. THANK YOU!!!</p>

NOTE: The course calendar is subject to change.

ALL ASSIGNMENTS: PLEASE PUT YOUR NAME AND GROUP NAME FOR GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

Example: Scott Spears Group B 11:10am or Scott Spears 12:45pm Group A

Assignment: Synopsis
Due Date: (see schedule)
Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

****Assignments submitted electronically must be submitted as a PDF file.**

****Assignments submitted after the stated deadline, will not be work-shopped and will lose half a letter grade for each day they are late (e.g., A- to B+).**

A pitch is all about confidently convincing someone that they should “buy” what you are “selling.” In this case, you are “selling” your idea for a short film script.

The short script that you will be writing this Semester must be a story you are passionate about, as you will be required to stick with this story throughout the Semester and the process of developing it into a screenplay.

For this assignment:

1. Select TWO story ideas that you would like to turn into a script. Even if you have decided
2. on a story idea, you are required to develop and write a synopsis for a second as part of this creative exercise.
3. Write a one to two paragraph synopsis of each story idea.
4. Keep in mind the following considerations as you write your synopses. Be prepared to discuss your ideas, including topics such as (but do not have to be in turned in assignment):

Assignment: Character Backstory (only one character)
Due Date:
Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

Character Back Story Assignment Details

The *Character Back Story* is a fairly straightforward assignment: one page detailing **your main character's** history leading up to the opening of the film. This is a *working document* that serves to help you better understand your main character as you develop your story and script.

THERE IS A CHARACTER BACK STORY FORM ON-LINE ON CARMEN

- This is a *working document* that serves to help you better understand your main character as you develop your story and script.
- A detailed back story will help you bring the characters to life on the page, so to speak, allowing the character to be more than an extension of you telling the story of the film.
- A character's past influences how they act and react to events, situations, and other characters. You can insert here any number of conditions, acts or events that would shape the psyche of a person - that can apply to characters as well.
- Back story will become apparent in the script (and the film) in the way characters act, react, and dialogue, and their choices - what they do and say and how they do and say it.

Notes: Please read notes completely and carefully.

- **Protagonist:** Please note that the Character Back Story should be focused on your main character, also known as your protagonist, the "hero" of your story - the one the audience most identifies with; the one who leads the audience through the story.

- **What to Include:** The *Character Back Story* should include information on the character's *traits, setting* (time and place they inhabit), and *the pivotal events that help shaped them, their personality, character, goals, behaviors.* Include information relevant to **your** understanding of the protagonist.

Traits to consider including, as relevant to your story:

- Age, sex, physical and mental health/state, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, etc.
- Occupation, marital status, etc.
- Geography & Timeframe: *When/where are they from? When/where were they born? When/where did they grow up? etc....*
- Background: socioeconomic, educational, religion, etc.
- Family makeup/history
- Talents, skills, hobbies knowledge, likes/dislikes, etc.

Format of the Back Story Assignment: There is a form on-line on Carmen that you can use. The format is, as mentioned in class and above, one page.

- *A few paragraphs* - please be succinct, to the point - paragraphs should not be more than *4 to five sentences each*, no need to *over-write* in this assignment.
- The point is... get to the point, hone and tighten your writing.

- **Assignment Due Dates:** *(See schedule)*

Assignment: Outline & Treatment

Due Date: *(see schedule)*

Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

****Assignments submitted electronically must be submitted as a PDF file.**

****Assignments submitted after the stated deadline, will not be work-shopped and will lose half a letter grade for each day they are late (e.g., A- to B+).**

Outline

- Outlines follow the *Step Outline* format covered in class (also available in Carmen >> Content).
- Outlines consist of a series of key scenes or moments in the story that build on each other.
- Scene descriptions in the Outline should be summarized in a short sentence or phrase that succinctly represents the meaning of each scene.
- Like the Treatment and screenplay, the Outline should contain a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Assignment: Outline

Due Date:

Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

For this assignment:

1. Develop an outline for the selected story idea.

First Draft Grading Criteria

- Outline is succinct and adheres to proper format
- Story is complete, having an identifiable Beginning, Middle and End
- Captures the tone
- Establishes the world of the story
- PHYSICAL ELEMENTS relevant to story, character, and/or plot are mentioned
- Establishes the main conflict for your protagonist

- Creates a believable ANTAGONIST/OBSTACLE for your main character

Assignment: Script Research and Analysis
Due Date: (see schedule)
Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

Script Research and Analysis: In this assignment, students will read and analyze an existing feature film screenplay which has been produced. The analysis will include the following sections:

I. Plot/Structure Analysis, II. Protagonist/Character, III. Style and Format.

I. Plot Breakdown - The *plot breakdown* should compare the film script's structure to the *Three Act Climactic Structure*. Include the following:

1. An outline and description of the major events in the plot and how they relate to structure.
2. Compare and contrast the structure to the *Three Act Climactic Structure* studied in the course.

II. Character Breakdown - The *character breakdown* should compare the film's protagonist to the attributes and characteristics we discussed during the Semester, especially those discussed in the *Building Complex Characters* lecture, in the texts and during workshops and class discussions.

Examples of elements that should be included in this section are as follows:

1. **Protagonist Charter Description:** Include a brief, insightful character description of the *protagonist*, including traits, any important physical characteristics
2. **Character Back Story:** Discuss any back story or background revealed in the script.
3. **Essential Elements in Building Complex Characters:**
4. - Who is the Protagonist? - What are their Enabling Circumstances?
5. - What is their main character flaw? - What is the Life Changing Event?
6. - What does the Protagonist *want, need?* - *What are his/her goals (objective & subjective)?*
7. - Who is the Antagonist? - Who is the Protagonist's main Ally?
8. - What is the Jeopardy presented in the plot and how does it drive the protagonist to act?
9. **Character Arc:** Discuss and outline of the protagonist's *character arc*, which tracks their internal growth or transformation.

III. Style/Format - In this section, compare the format to that studied in class and discuss the writer's style of writing within the construct of screenplay format.

1. **Format:** If you are reading a *shooting script*, mention that and point out characteristics and devices that make that apparent (camera direction, etc.).
2. **Style:** Discuss the writer's style. *How do they write scene action? Dialogue?*
3. *What is effective and what works in their writing?*

Script Resources: Students will use screenplays available in the Theatre Research Institute, Special Collections, or Rare Books at Thompson Library. The scripts assigned will be kept on a hold shelf in Special Collections. You will need to read the script on-site at Thompson.

Paper Length and Format: You should target *one page* for each section.

- *The total length of the paper should not exceed five (5) pages.*

- **Line Spacing:** 1.5 lines

- **Font:** 11pt. Times or Courier font.

Please check Carmen for a basic format for this assignment

Assignment: First Draft - Short Script 6-10 pages

Date Due: (see calendar)

Format: Hard Copy & PDF on Carmen

Your first draft should be a complete telling of the story. It should have a comprehensible storyline and convey the theme/concept of your story. Short scripts focus more on the beginning and ending and less on the Act 2. My advice, keep it simple and focused.

Recommendation: Limit the story to 2-3 characters and focus on easily defined story.

You are required to use proper script formatting.

****Assignments submitted electronically must be submitted as a PDF file.**

****Assignments submitted after the stated deadline, will not be work-shopped and will lose half a letter grade for each day they are late (e.g., A- to B+).**

Assignment: Second Draft - Short Script 6-10 pages

Date Due: (see calendar)

Format: Hard Copy & PDF on Carmen

Your second draft should refine your story and correct any issues you had with the first draft.

- It should address notes from the first draft.

You are required to use proper script formatting.

****Assignments submitted electronically must be submitted as a PDF file.**

****Assignments submitted after the stated deadline, will not be work-shopped and will lose half a letter grade for each day they are late (e.g., A- to B+).**

Assignment: 1st Act, 6 pages

Due Date:

Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

Your first act should do three main things; establish your characters, create the world they live in and introduce the main conflict. A fourth element is how the characters fit in the world.

For this assignment:

1. Write an approximately 6 page first act. Maximum of 7 pages.

2. This script should be properly formatted.

3. This script should reflect the discussion during your Pitch session: *don't change ideas.(!)*

****Assignments submitted electronically must be submitted as a PDF file.**

****Assignments submitted after the stated deadline, will not be work-shopped and will lose half a letter grade for each day they are late (e.g., A- to B+).**

NOTE: If you are attempting a TV pilot, it must have a beginning, middle and end. I know you are building a series and cannot address all the character and storylines, but I still need a defined 3 act structure with some kind of resolution. It can leave some questions unanswered, but not so many that your script is more mystery than complete.

The First Act Grading Criteria:

- Adheres to proper script format
- Contains well defined characters
- Creates a believable world/setting
- Is not a generic story
- No fewer than 6 pages
- Follows an established genre
- Establishes the main conflict
- Leads into the 2nd Act
- The protagonist changes/learns/evolves in the story
- Antagonist behaves in a believable way
- Script has what can only be seen and heard, using the rule - SHOW DON'T TELL
- Story is well told and engaging

Assignment: 2nd Act, 7-9 pages
Due Date: (see schedule)
Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

Your second act should be a logical extension of the first act. In this act, you will add complications to your main character's attempts to resolve the main conflict. The second act is almost always the hardest because it can become unfocused and you get away from your plot, so keep it moving, stay true to your characters and don't introduce plot lines that are not pertinent to your story.

For this assignment:

1. Think complications. How can you make it seem to the audience that your main character cannot solve the main problem in your story?
2. Continue to build believable characters
3. Make your antagonist believable, also.
4. Refine dialog.
5. At the end of the 2nd Act, it should appear that your main character will not be able to solve the main problem.

*****Assignments submitted electronically must be submitted as a PDF file.***

*****Assignments submitted after the stated deadline, will not be work-shopped and will lose half a letter grade for each day they are late (e.g., A- to B+).***

The Second Act Grading Criteria:

- Plot is progressing
- Characters are evolving and growing
- Plot is logical and fits the genre
- Maintain focus on the story as a whole
- Is the dialogue appropriate, while remaining as short as possible?
- Has the page count of 7-9 pages been reached?
- All formatting problems from Act 1 been addressed?
- Are you SHOWING, NOT TELLING?

Assignment: 3rd Act. 6-8 pages
Due Date: (see schedule)
Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

The third act is where you wrap up your story in a satisfying way, either heroically or tragically. At the beginning of the third act, your character should have a revelation or put to use something they've learned in Acts 1 & 2 to lead to a logical conclusion of your story. The actions of the characters should be consistent throughout the story and this should be true of the third act. If your character has been developed properly, the solution or tragic ending should come from the character's evolution or lack of learning.

You should wrap up all your major plotlines and tie up any subplots. Make sure all story areas involving your supporting players are resolved.

Is the ending satisfying? Does your character learn, evolve and grow by the end? Does your plot make sense? Did you SHOW, NOT TELL throughout the script.

For this assignment:

1. Make sure that your plot makes sense.
2. Make sure your main character shows growth.

Basic Criteria for your 3rd Act:

- Does your story fit within the page count requirement?
- Have you uses notes previous acts to improve your script?
- Is your formatting meeting the standards? (At this point there should be none.)
- Does your ending show growth and change in your main character?
- Is your story wrapped up in a convincing way?

Assignment: Final 20-22 page Scripts

Due Date: (see schedule)

Format: Electronic copy (as PDF) and hard copy.

This final draft is an opportunity to complete the script, getting it to a state where it is ready for production, can serve as a piece of work for your professional portfolio, and/or ready for development as a feature screenplay. The needs for the final draft may vary on each script on a case by case basis.

In some cases, students will need to rewrite the script to incorporate notes from the previous assignment to address any outstanding issues, or they may need to incorporate a major change if the script lacks conflict or is what is termed in the industry “flat”. The point is to produce a final draft that meets the goals included in the syllabus. In yet other cases, the final draft may be more of a final polish in which a student has the opportunity to “clean up” the script by correcting format and typos, and tweaking scene action and dialogue in their own style.

In the case where a “Major Change” or major note(s) needs to be incorporated into the script, this should be viewed as something that will help bring the script to life, allowing it to better engage the reader and evoke their imagination. Sometimes, this may be a story element that really turns your story “up-side-down”. Your task is to incorporate this change or note(s) into your story. Sometimes, a major change will create something wonderful. Usually, making a major change allows you to see your story differently and will give you insight into your characters and your story that you were unable to see before. These insights will allow you to write a solid Final Draft of your story after this class is finished. Good luck!

****Note: Assignments are due by 2pm on the designated date unless otherwise noted on the course calendar.**

****Assignments submitted electronically must be submitted as a PDF file.**

****Assignments submitted after the stated deadline, will not be work-shopped and will lose half a letter grade for each day they are late (e.g., A- to B+).**

For this assignment:

1. Make sure that you understand the Major Change that has been assigned to you.
2. You may be required to embrace a Major Change, re-write your 20-22 page film script – no matter what it takes.
3. Pay close attention to the use of metaphor and visuals to tell your story.
4. Put special effort into manipulating your audience so that they “feel” your story.

Basic Criteria for your Final Draft:

- Have you corrected and refined your story to fit within the page count requirement?
- Have you addressed all the notes from the previous acts?
- Have you corrected any script formatting issues? (At this point there should be none.)
- Does your ending show growth and change in your main character?
- Is your story wrapped up in a convincing way?