

UCLA DEPARTMENT OF FILM, TELEVISION AND DIGITAL MEDIA
TV Writing Track – Class Syllabi

Example Syllabus. *The syllabi posted are general syllabi for students and alumni who wish to find out the topics generally covered in these courses*

FTV 131: INTRODUCTION TO TV WRITING Summer

COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

This course will dive into the process of writing a television series. By the end of the course, you will:

1. **Complete a TEASER and FIRST ACT of a TV pilot**
2. **Complete an OUTLINE for the rest of the pilot episode**
3. **Complete a SERIES DOCUMENT overviews your series**
4. **Be able to PITCH the core of your series in 5 minutes or less**

The course will study the current landscape of television, with an in-depth look at how projects are purchased, developed, and produced. You will become familiar with some of the major “buyers” and their specific mandates.

You will examine the different avenues of “breaking in” with a specific eye toward **writing an excellent original pilot.**

This course will explore your own tastes, experiences, and interests in order to help you develop a pilot and series that reflects your unique perspective.

Throughout the course, you will be reading and watching several noteworthy television pilots in order to analyze some current “best practices.” These pilots will be treated as texts for the course and will integrate discussions accordingly.

You will learn the fundamentals of dramatic story structure and be able to analyze the structural elements in your favorite shows and your own work.

You will also gain experience workshopping material. This includes giving and receiving feedback. You will learn how to respectfully provide notes, receive a note, pitch story ideas, and punch-up scenes.

REQUIRED READINGS

SCRIPTS

Black-ish by Kenya Barris
Breaking Bad by Vince Gilligan
Emergence by Michele Fazekas & Tara Butters
Friday Night Lights by Peter Berg
Insecure by Issa Rae
Killing Eve by Phoebe Waller Bridge
Stranger Things by The Duffer Brothers
Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt by Tina Fey and Robert Carlock

BOOKS

The Power of Film by Howard Suber
TV Writing on Demand by Neil Landau
The TV Showrunner's Roadmap by Neil Landau

SUGGESTED BOOKS

Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott
Story Maps: TV Drama by Daniel Calvisi
TV Outside the Box by Neil Landau
Writing the TV Drama Series by Pamela Douglas

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

- All assignments MUST be to the Professor. Late assignments will lose 15% points per day late.
- The assignment listed at the bottom of each CLASS will be DUE the day of the FOLLOWING CLASS. For example, the assignment listed at the bottom of CLASS 1 will be due no later than one hour before the beginning of CLASS 2.

READING/VIEWING ASSIGNMENTS

- The READING/VIEWING assignment listed at the bottom of each CLASS will be DUE the day of the NEXT CLASS. For example, the assignment listed at the bottom of CLASS 1 will be due no later than one hour before the beginning of CLASS 2.

COURSE SCHEDULE

CLASS 1: INTRO AND FORMAT

- Icebreaker
- Rules/syllabus

- Fundamental elements of a dramatic TV series
- What's a logline?
- In-class character exercise

READING/VIEWING:

Breaking Bad pilot.
TV Writing on Demand, Intro and Chapter 1

ASSIGNMENT:

Part 1: Write a LOGLINE for the story of your life (must include the word "BUT").

Part 2: Write TWO loglines for potential series you are interested in developing (must include the word "BUT"). Be prepared to share these loglines in class.

Part 3: Write a paragraph about what you hope to get out of this course.

CLASS 2: CHARACTERS AND CONFLICT

- What makes a great CHARACTER?
- What do we mean by CONFLICT and STORY ENGINE?
- Power of Paradox

READING/VIEWING:

Friday Night Lights pilot.
TV Writing on Demand, Chapter 7

ASSIGNMENT:

Part 1: Pick three characters from *Friday Night Lights* and answer how they are introduced and what is their main problem?

Part 2: Write THREE ORIGINAL CHARACTER BIOS for characters you'd be interested in exploring.

Part 3: Using screenplay formatting, write the dialogue of an argument between two characters. (More parameters will be given during class). 2 pages.

CLASS 3: DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

- Tentpoles of structure
- Pitching your series

READING/VIEWING:

Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt pilot
The Power of Film: "Aristotle"; "Structure"; "Acts"

ASSIGNMENT:

Part 1: Complete the first half of KNOW THY SERIES handout.

Part 2: Be prepared to PITCH the gist of your SERIES. You are allowed to use the notes from the handout.

CLASS 4: PITCHES/BISOCIATION

- Let's hear your pitches
- How to take a note
- What is BISOCIATION?
- What's funny? Bisociation and comedy

READING/VIEWING:

Killing Eve pilot

The Power of Film: "Bisociation"; "Paradox."

ASSIGNMENT:

Part 1: FINISH the KNOW THY SERIES handout.

CLASS 5: ELEMENTS OF A SCENE

- Review KNOW THY SERIES handouts
- Discuss MAJOR STORY TURNS
- Breaking down scenes and set pieces. Context. Content. Conflict.

READING/VIEWING: *Emergence* pilot

ASSIGNMENT:

Write TEN potential A story ideas for episode 2 of *Emergence*. Write FIVE potential B story ideas. Be prepared to pitch these in class.

CLASS 6: THE WRITERS ROOM

- Writers room simulation activity.
- Breaking a story.
- Room behavior.

READING/VIEWING:

Black-ish pilot

TV Showrunner's Roadmap, Intro and Chapters 1 & 2

ASSIGNMENT:

Complete the BEAT SHEET handout.

CLASS 7: WORKSHOP

- Workshop BEAT SHEETS
- Notes and feedback

READING/VIEWING:

TV Showrunner's Roadmap, Chapters 3 & 4
Insecure pilot

ASSIGNMENT:

Revise BEAT SHEETS

CLASS 8: TONE/VOICE/REWRITES

- Writing that leaps from the page
- Writing habits
- Craft vs. Voice

READING/VIEWING:

Choose a pilot that is a COMP for your series and be prepared to discuss

ASSIGNMENT: Write your TEASER**CLASS 9: WORKSHOP**

- Workshop TEASERS
- Notes and feedback

READING/VIEWING:

Stranger Things (Montauk) series bible

ASSIGNMENT:

Part 1: Revise TEASER

Part 2: Start ACT ONE

CLASS 10: TV LANDSCAPE

- Networks vs. Cable vs. Streaming
- How shows get bought. How shows get made. How shows get cancelled.

ASSIGNMENT:

Part 1: Be prepared to give short 2-5 minute pitch about your series.

Part 2: Start your SERIES DOC

CLASS 11: BREAKING INTO THE BIZ

- Practice pitches
- Receive feedback
- Guests TBD

ASSIGNMENT:

Polish your FINAL TEASER, FIRST ACT, BEAT SHEET, and SERIES DOC.

CLASS 12: REVIEW

- Individual meetings (schedule TBD)

ASSIGNMENT:

Polish your FINAL TEASER, FIRST ACT, BEAT SHEET, and SERIES DOC
(DUE by end of the day SUNDAY)

STATEMENT OF GRADING

Attendance and participation are mandatory. All written assignments including need to be carefully proofread. You will be marked down for careless errors.

Participation: 20%

Assignments: 20%

Beat Sheet: 20%

Teaser and First Act: 20%

Final Pitch: 20%

OTHER CLASS POLICIES

No electronic devices out unless we are reading someone's pages and you need to use your device to read. But devices go away when we are discussing.

This course aims towards creating a positive creative community. A huge part of being in a workshop is learning how to provide useful supportive feedback for your peers without simply poking holes in their stories. Disrespect to your classmates will not be tolerated.

**FTV 133B: INTERMEDIATE TV WRITING ONE-HOUR DRAMA/HALF-HOUR
DRAMEDY SERIES**

Example Syllabus. *The syllabi posted are general syllabi for students and alumni who wish to find out the topics generally covered in these courses*

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The goal for this class is for you to create an original one- hour original drama/dramedy or half-hour dramedy pilot.

COURSE GOALS:

Students will learn how to:

- Service the franchise of your original series
- Fit into the network's "wheelhouse" and meet their expectations
- Develop and deepen your characters
- Create and revise an Outline for your pilot
- Write the first draft of an effective pilot for your original series.

You'll also be expected to provide notes on your fellow writers' material. This includes: verbal/written notes, participation in table discussions, and active contribution to the work of others.

RECOMMENDED TEXTBOOKS/READINGS:

Writing the TV Drama Series, by Pamela Douglas

The TV Showrunner's Roadmap, by Neil Landau

TV Outside the Box: Trailblazing in the Digital Television Revolution, by Neil Landau

TV Writing On Demand: Creating Great Content in the Digital Era, by Neil Landau

Plus, read every successful pilot you can get your hands on, especially in the genre, style, and tone that relate to your script.

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE:

WEEK ONE (Class Meetings 1&2): Introduction to the course and syllabus. Student pitches and feedback. Review of: one-hour drama and half-hour dramedy structure; A, B, and C story-lines; premise, theme, conflict, characters; the difference between writing screenplays and episodic TV; episodic pilot vs. "premise pilot" vs. hybrid. Lecture on: servicing the "franchise" and story arcs (aka "long story"); breaking story; beat sheet and outline formats; effective pitches and loglines.

Assignment #1: Refine chosen pitch and come up with two potential A and B stories. Due for next class.

Assignment #2: Orally pitch two possible A and B stories for your pilot. Discussion of Beat Sheets and how to write a Teaser. Write a Beat Sheet for your pilot. Due for next class.

WEEK TWO (Class Meetings 3&4): Discussion and feedback on Beat Sheets. Discussion about writing an Outline based on Beat Sheets. Unifying theme, character arcs, network “story area documents,” and compelling act breaks. Character development.

Assignment #3: Write first half of outline (5 pages), due for next class. Discussion about outlines in progress.

Assignment #4: Revise first half and write second half of Outline (5 more pages). Completed Outline due for next class.

WEEK THREE (Class Meetings 5&6): Discussion and feedback on Outlines. Discussion about how to segue from Outline to First Draft. Scene structure. Writing memorable scenes. Discussion about series bibles. The studio and network notes process.

Assignment #5: Begin writing first draft of your script. Goal is complete rough draft of the Teaser, due for next class.

Assignment #6: Continue writing script. Goal is to complete Teaser and Act One. Due for next class.

WEEK FOUR (Class Meetings 7&8): Read selected pages in class and discuss. Discussion of issues that have emerged from Outline to script. Writing great dialogue.

Assignment #7: Continue writing script. Turn in pages for table read in next class.

Assignment #8: Continue writing scripts. Goal for this week is to complete Acts Two and Three, due for next class.

WEEK FIVE (Class Meetings 9&10): Read selected pages in class and discuss. Discussion on establishing the world of your show, tone, and voice.

Assignment #9: Acts 4 and 5 (depending on format). For half- hours, please revise all acts. Discussion about rewriting strategies, editing, and polishing. Solving story issues.

Assignment #10: Complete and revise first draft of script. Develop a pitch.

WEEK SIX (Class #11): **First draft of all teleplays due in PDF format via email.**

Discussion about what happens in the real world with the draft to be “published” and distributed to the director, actors, assistant directors, and all department heads for pre-production. The pre-production, production, and postproduction processes: the production board and call sheet. Breaking into the industry. Practice pitches.

Assignment #11: Refine your pitch for Pitch Session.

Class #12: Individual Script Conferences. Receive notes on your completed draft in a one-on-one script consult. You will also have the opportunity to discuss feedback from the Pitch Session.

STATEMENT OF GRADING:

GRADES: Attendance at every class is mandatory for a passing grade. Two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. Assignments must be turned in on time. Please carefully spellcheck and proof-read your work; sloppy, ungrammatical, typo-ridden work will be returned, unread, graded down.

Below is the weight given to each component of the final grade: Please note that **ALL COURSE GRADES ARE FINAL**.

Attendance	20%
Series Pitch	5%
A/B Stories	5%
Teaser	5%
Acts 1 & 2	15%
Acts 3,4,5	15%
Final Pitch	5%
Beat sheet	10%
Outline	10%
<u>First Draft</u>	10%
Total:	100%

Final Course Grade: 100%

- A (90-100%)
- B (80-89%)
- C (70-79%)
- D (60-69%)
- F (\leq 59%)

FOR ALL COURSES – IMPORTANT UCLA POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Please arrive to the online class on time. If you're going to be late/absent, please send instructor an email.

All ideas discussed in class are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with others outside of class.

Industry professionals are partially defined or rise and fall by their interactions with other Industry professionals. As such, you will be graded on your interactions in class. That means that class attendance is mandatory, as is class participation. Your feedback is invaluable to your colleagues. Therefore, you are expected to actively listen, contribute and analyze during class discussions.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND STUDENT CONDUCT

With its status as a world-class research institution, it is critical that the University uphold the highest standards of integrity both inside and outside the classroom. As a

student and member of the UCLA community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors. Accordingly, when accusations of academic dishonesty occur, The Office of the Dean of Students is charged with investigating and adjudicating suspected violations. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, multiple submissions or facilitating academic misconduct. Plagiarism is a serious offense. It is the presentation of another author's words or ideas as if they were your own. If you have any questions about documentation, quotations, and related matters, please do not hesitate to ask your instructor before submitting your work.

Please also refer to the UCLA Rules of Student Conduct at the below website:

<http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Student-Conduct>

STATEMENT OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

University of California Diversity Statement

Adopted by the Assembly of the Academic Senate May 10, 2006

Endorsed by the President of the University of California June 30, 2006

The diversity of the people of California has been the source of innovative ideas and creative accomplishments throughout the state's history into the present. Diversity – a defining feature of California's past, present, and future – refers to the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and geographic region, and more.

Because the core mission of the University of California is to serve the interests of the State of California, it must seek to achieve diversity among its student bodies and among its employees. The State of California has a compelling interest in making sure that people from all backgrounds perceive that access to the University is possible for talented students, staff, and faculty from all groups. The knowledge that the University of California is open to qualified students from all groups, and thus serves all parts of the community equitably, helps sustain the social fabric of the State.

Diversity should also be integral to the University's achievement of excellence. Diversity can enhance the ability of the University to accomplish its academic mission. Diversity aims to broaden and deepen both the educational experience and the scholarly environment, as students and faculty learn to interact effectively with each other, preparing them to participate in an increasingly complex and pluralistic society. Ideas, and practices based on those ideas, can be made richer by the process of being born and nurtured in a diverse community. The pluralistic university can model a process of proposing and testing ideas through respectful, civil communication. Educational excellence that truly incorporates diversity thus can promote mutual

respect and make possible the full, effective use of the talents and abilities of all to foster innovation and train future leadership.

Therefore, the University of California renews its commitment to the full realization of its historic promise to recognize and nurture merit, talent, and achievement by supporting diversity and equal opportunity in its education, services, and administration, as well as research and creative activity. The University particularly acknowledges the acute need to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of talented students, faculty, and staff from historically excluded populations who are currently underrepresented.