

English 138 - Topics in Creative Writing: Writing Screenplays

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Course Description

Students will learn the art of screenwriting and will have the opportunity to practice this art through the creation of an original story. Throughout the course students will develop their original screenplays, learning how to craft story, plot, character, dialogue, and theme, enabling them to produce a full outline and the First Act of their screenplays.

Grading

Participation:	20%
Assignments:	40%
First Act:	40%

Office Hours:

To be determined.

Reading Suggestions

There are no reading assignments for this class. However, if you are interested in further developing your skills, here is a list that you may find useful.

- If you want to know more about screenwriting, these may help:
 - Richard Walter, *Essentials of Screenwriting*
 - Hal Ackerman, *Write Screenplays that Sell the Ackerman Way*
 - Lew Hunter, *Lew Hunter's Screenwriting 434*
 - Aristotle, *Poetics* (Nota Bene: good for story)
 - Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (Nota Bene: good for character)

- If you want to know more about the art of film in general, this may help:
 - Howard Suber, *The Power of Film*

- If you want to be the best writer you can possibly be, commit these to memory:
 - The complete works of William Shakespeare

- If you want to know the answers to life's questions, read these:
- The complete works of Fyodor Dostoevsky
 - The complete works of Leo Tolstoy

Assignments

First Act:

Your final assignment will be the completed First Act of your screenplays (20-30 pages). We will work on these pages throughout the course.

Written Assignments:

In addition to writing the First Act of your screenplays you will be given writing assignments that will ultimately help you develop your stories.

Ice Breaker Assignments:

You will be given a fun prompt wherein you will have the opportunity to reveal something about yourself and wherein you will be able to practice the art of storytelling. How to tell a compelling story, how to grab an audience and sustain their attention, how to tell the story in the best possible way. Although it may seem intuitive, learning how to tell a story well takes practice. The responses to these prompts should be one paragraph to one page in length, singled-space.

Every week in class each student will share the answer to their prompt with a different partner. Before each class I will email a list of all the partners. And for each class two or three students will be chosen at random to share their prompts with the entire class. Please, do not worry about the Ice Breaker Assignments. The goal is for this to be an enjoyable experience for everyone.

Turning in Assignments:

The only assignments that will be due in class are the Ice Breaker paragraphs. All other assignments will be sent to my email (hasmik.ekimyan@ucla.edu). I will then email my notes back to you.

Assignments assigned on **Monday** will be due via email by **Wednesday at 2:00pm**, essentially before Wednesday's class.

Assignments assigned on **Wednesday** will be due via email by **Friday at Midnight**.

Please title all your assignment emails as such: Your full name: assignment title.

Course Schedule

Week One

Monday: Introduction and Good Stories

-Introduction

-What makes a good writer?

-What makes a good story?

-Assignments:

1) Ice Breaker Assignment: Think about why you like the films that you like. If you like action movies, why do you like action movies? If you like science fiction, what is it that draws you to such stories? If you tend to be eclectic in your tastes, you can also write about a particular film that you really like and explain why. The purpose of this assignment is to help you find the story you want to write.

2) Writing Assignment: Come up with a story idea and write a single-spaced paragraph describing the story. Please make sure you are passionate about the story you choose as you will spend six weeks working on it.

* “You can’t wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.” --Jack London

Wednesday: Screenwriting Format and Structure

-Share your Ice Breakers.

-Discuss Three Act Structure.

-Discuss Screenwriting Format.

-Assignments:

1) Ice Breaker Assignment: Write about something interesting or unusual about yourself.

2) Writing Assignment: Write a full Three Act Breakdown of the film assigned in class (i.e. Opening, Inciting Incident, The Point of No Return, Midpoint, Big Gloom, Enlightenment, Climax, Resolution).

3) Writing Assignment: Consider the beginning, middle, and end of your story. Once you know the journey of your story, write a full Three Act Breakdown of your screenplay (i.e. Opening, Inciting Incident, The Point of No Return, Midpoint, Big Gloom, Enlightenment, Climax, Resolution).

* “Wisdom begins in wonder.” --Socrates

Week Two

Monday: First Acts and Characters

-Share your Ice Breakers.

-Discuss the Three Act Structure of the assigned film.

- Discuss what makes a good character.
- Discuss First Acts.

-Assignments:

- 1) Ice Breaker Assignment: Write about something that you always carry with you, or a prized possession that you keep at home, something that is telling of your personality. Please bring this item with you to class. (And please, I beg you not to write about your phones, laptops, computers, tablets, et cetera!)
- 2) Writing Assignment: Think about who your main character is. Write a double-spaced, one page voiceover in your character's voice that illustrates who they are.
- 3) Writing Assignment: First Act Outline. Write a full scene-by-scene Outline for your First Act. Everything that happens in each scene should be included in your Outline.

* "Really great people make you feel that, you too, can become great." --Mark Twain.

Wednesday: Independence Day!

* "Character is destiny." --Heraclitus

Week Three

Monday: Second Acts, Third Acts, Character Evolution

- Share your Ice Breakers.
- Discuss Second and Third Acts.
- Discuss how characters evolve throughout a story.

-Assignments:

- 1) Ice Breaker Assignment: If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why.
- 2) Writing Assignment: Think about who your character will be at the end of your story. Through the course of your story your character will change in some way. Write a double-spaced, one page voiceover in your character's voice that illustrates who your character is at the end of the story.

* "Dream no small dreams for they have no power to move the hearts of men." --Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Wednesday: Good Scenes

- Share your Ice Breakers.
- Discuss how to write scenes.
- Discuss the differences between a scene and a sequence.

-Assignments:

- 1) Ice Breaker Assignment: Write about something funny that you have done, or something funny that happened to you.
- 2) Writing Assignments: Second and Third Act Outline. Write a full scene-by-scene Outline of your Second Act and your Third Act. Everything that happens in each scene should be included in your outline.

* “The pursuit of truth and beauty is a sphere of activity in which we are permitted to remain children all our lives.” --Albert Einstein

Week Four

Monday: The Fundamentals of Writing

- Share your Ice Breakers.
- Discuss the act of actual writing.
- Discuss Theme.
- Discuss Tone.

-Assignments:

- 1) Ice Breaker Assignment: Which film character do you wish was a real person. Please explain why.
- 2) Writing Assignment: Opening Scenes. Write your full opening scene in proper screenwriting format. There is no page limit for this assignment, just write the scene as long as it needs to be. If the opening of your film is a sequence of short scenes, write the sequence in its entirety.

* “Suit the action to the word, the word to the action.” --William Shakespeare (*Hamlet*)

Wednesday: The Fundamentals of Writing Part II

- Share your Ice Breakers.
- Discuss your opening scenes.

-Assignments:

- 1) Ice Breaker Assignment: Write about your happiest memory thus far.
- 2) Writing Assignment: Inciting Incident. Continue from where you left off with your Opening Scene and write until the end of your Inciting Incident.

* “The artist should be felt everywhere and seen nowhere.” --Gustave Flaubert

Week Five

Monday: Share, it's Good for You!

- Share your Ice Breakers.

-Break off into groups and share your Opening Scenes with your classmates.

-Assignments:

1) Ice Breaker Assignment: Write about your favorite person in the world.

* “I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.” --William Butler Yeats

Wednesday: Share, it’s Good for You, Part II!

-Share your Ice Breakers.

-Break off into groups and share your Inciting Incidents with your classmates.

-Assignments:

1) Ice Breaker Assignment: Write about an improbable dream you have. You know it will never come true and yet you dream it anyway.

2) Writing Assignment: Write until the First Act Break (The-Point-of-No-Return). Continue from where you left off with your Inciting Incident and write until the end of the First Act. Your First Act should fall somewhere between 15 to 30 pages.

* “And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” --Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Week Six

Monday: Revising Your First Act

-Share you Ice Breakers.

-Discuss how to revise your First Act.

-Assignments:

1) Ice Breaker Assignment: What is your passion? What are your dreams? Your goals?

2) Writing Assignment: Revise your First Act. Go back, revise, rewrite, and polish all your pages. This is your opportunity to incorporate all the notes you have received throughout our time together.

* “Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending.” --Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Wednesday: Parting is such Sweet Sorrow

-Share your Ice Breakers.

-What comes next...

-Assignments:

CARPE DIEM. Make your lives extraordinary.

* “Too much sanity may be madness. And maddest of all, to see life as it is and not as it should be.” --Miguel de Cervantes