SCREENWRITING

Image: Adaptation (Spike Jonze, 2002)

Screenwriting  |  FILM 3315  |  CRN: 11430  |  Fall 2023
Monday, 12:00 - 2:50 pm | Online - Zoom meeting room
Instructor: Gregory Beam
Email: gbeam@utep.edu
Office Hours (online): Monday/Wednesday, 9:00-11:00 am
COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course introduces students to the practice of writing dramatic narratives for the screen. We will focus on the core elements and principles of sound cinematic writing—including environment, action, dialogue, character, plot, theme, and tone—working toward establishing a solid technique. The bulk of the coursework will be generating original material, in the form of regular exercises and two longer creative assignments.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
• To learn how the various formatting elements of a screenplay are used.
• To build a strong understanding of the core principles of dramatic storytelling, specifically as they apply to writing for the screen.
• To develop optimal methods of communication with peers and collaborators.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
• The ability to format a script according to current industry standards.
• Facility with the craft of screenwriting sufficient to compose a script that is technically proficient and has considerable artistic merit.
• The confidence to deliver verbal feedback on the work of colleagues in a way that is meaningful, constructive, and conducive to further collaboration.

MATERIALS

Recommended Reading:

*Story*, Robert McKee
*The Screenwriter’s Bible*, David Trottier
*The Nutshell Technique*, Jill Chamberlain
*Poetics*, Aristotle

*I have posted a number of screenplays on Blackboard; in addition, many screenplays are available for free on-line. Making a regular habit of reading scripts is the best way to become familiar with the form.*

Recommended Listening:

*Scriptnotes* (podcast), John August and Craig Mazin
*Screenwriting 101: Mastering the Art of Story* (Great Courses Series), Angus Fletcher
Required Viewing:

The Sixth Sense (1999)
Get Out (2017)
Uncut Gems (2019)

*All four films are available in the Viewings folder in Blackboard. Please watch them ASAP as we will be referring to them in class.*

SOFTWARE

You should have access to software that is designed specifically for script formatting, such as Fade In, Final Draft, Highland, Celtx, or Writer Duet. There are a number of good screenwriting programs out there, each with its own bells and whistles. My recommendation is Fade In, which has a free demo version that never expires. (I use Final Draft out of habit, but if I were starting out today, I would definitely use Fade In.)

DUE DATES AND LATE WORK

All assignments are due by 8pm on the due date unless otherwise noted. They should be submitted through the appropriate assignment portal on Blackboard.
ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Grading Breakdown
Your final grade will be tabulated on a simple scale of 0-100.

A: 90-100
B: 80-89.9
C: 70-79.9
D: 60-69.9
F: 0-59.9

36% - Exercises (4 points each x 9 out of 10 assignments)
24% - Midterm Scene
40% - Final Script

Exercises
There will be a total of 10 exercises over the course of the term, each related to the current lesson and building progressively upon one another. You are expected to turn in at least 9 of the 10. These assignments will be submitted on-line. Carefully review the description for each assignment.

When appropriate, I may select submissions to discuss in class. Please bear in mind that these assignments may be shared with the whole class, so make sure you submit work that you are comfortable sharing and discussing. If you would prefer not to have your work shared, please note this in the comments section for the assignment.

The exercises will be graded on a complete/incomplete basis. I would advise you, however, that really digging into these is the best way to hone your skills for the Final Script. There are no shortcuts; screenwriting is a complex skill that can only be attained with a tremendous amount of study and practice.

NOTE: Please construct the file name of each assignment in the following manner — first name (or the name you prefer to be addressed by) and last initial, name of exercise. So if I were turning in the “Visual Story” assignment, the file name would look like this: “Greg B, Visual Story”. If you prefer to use an underscore or a hyphen instead of a comma, that’s fine. If
you feel very strongly that you wish to include your full surname and not just an initial, then by all means do so. The main point is that I should be able to quickly identify what exercise it is and who wrote it.

**Midterm Scene**

Around the middle of the semester, you will submit a short script (~5-10 pages) that constitutes a fully developed scene (or brief sequence of scenes) and demonstrates your integration of the techniques we have studied up to that point.

Your scene/sequence may be the complete script for a short film or a portion of a longer narrative.

Either way, your script should represent a complete sequence of action. (i.e. it should have a discernible beginning, middle, and end.)

I will be assessing the scripts based on Mechanics (formatting and readability), Setting, Action, Dialogue, and Story/Plot. A detailed grading rubric will be provided in the assignment portal.

**Final Script**

At the end of the semester, you will submit one of three options:

1.) A 10- to 25-page script for a short film.

2.) The first act (roughly 20-25 pages) of a feature film script.

3.) A pilot script (roughly 20-30 pages) for a half-hour TV series.

If you submit a script for a short film, make sure to structure it so that it works on its own as a standalone piece (i.e. has a beginning, middle, and end and a satisfying dramatic journey).

If you submit the first act of a feature film, make sure to structure it so that it points the way toward further development of the plot.

If you submit a pilot episode for a half-hour TV series, make sure that it BOTH works on its own and points the way toward further development of the narrative. Also make sure to research and incorporate the particular formatting conventions for this format (e.g. act breaks and headings).
With any of these options, you may build upon previous work you submitted during the semester for your final script.

This piece will represent a culmination of your work during the term. It should demonstrate your proficiency with all of the elements of dramatic writing we have worked on: environment and action, circumstances and conflict, dialogue, characterization, scene structure, narrative structure, and cinematic devices (e.g. motifs and transitions).

Finally, make sure to allow yourself time to go back over the script to carefully proofread for proper formatting, spelling, grammar, and word usage to ensure that your vision is fully realized and clearly communicated to the reader.

A detailed grading rubric will be provided in the assignment portal.

COMMUNICATION
You should have an active UTEP email address and check it regularly. You should also have regular access to Blackboard. These will be my primary means of communicating with you. Any announcements that pertain to the whole class will be sent via Blackboard and email. If I need to reach you individually, I will do so via email.

CLASS RECORDINGS
I may make audio or video recordings of class lectures, presentations, and discussions. Our use of such technology is governed by the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and UTEP’s acceptable-use policy. I will not share the recordings of your class activities outside of course participants, which include your fellow students, me, and any guest faculty or community-based learning partners with whom we may engage during a class session. You may not share recordings outside of this course.

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT
The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at UTEP provides students who require them with accommodations and support services to help them pursue their academic, graduation, and career goals. If you are dealing with any kind of mental, physical, emotional, or sensory disability—whether permanent or temporary—you are encouraged to contact them for a confidential consultation.
For more information, visit https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/ or consult the Student Handbook.

The university also provides a number of other resources that may be helpful to you in your students and/or your personal life as you navigate your university experience. Here are some links to student resources that you may want to take advantage of:

- **UTEP Library**: Access a wide range of resources including online, full-text access to thousands of journals and eBooks plus reference service and librarian assistance for enrolled students.

- **Technology Support**: Students experiencing technological challenges (email, Blackboard, software, etc.) can submit a ticket to the UTEP Helpdesk for assistance. Contact the Helpdesk via phone, email, chat, website, or in person if on campus.

- **University Writing Center (UWC)**: Submit papers here for assistance with writing style and formatting, ask a tutor for help, and explore other writing resources.

- **Military Student Success Center**: UTEP welcomes military-affiliated students to its degree programs, and the Military Student Success Center and its dedicated staff (many of whom are veterans and students themselves) are here to help personnel in any branch of service to reach their educational goals.

The University Writing Center may be particularly helpful in completing your final assignment for this course.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Any incident of academic dishonesty may result in a grade of zero on the assignment and possible disciplinary action. Please check the UTEP Student Handbook for more information on academic dishonesty.

**SUBJECT MATTER**

It is possible that work produced by students may touch on sensitive subject matters. Consequently, some of the coursework (i.e. work responses) may require discussion of difficult and mature issues. I ask 1.) that you never write anything with the intention of offending or inflicting distress on any of your classmates and 2.) that you are mindful of others’ dignity and welfare and always always ALWAYS keep your discussions respectful and sensitive.
If you have concerns about discussing specific subjects, please see me to discuss possible accommodations.
# COURSE SCHEDULE for Screenwriting, FILM 3315, Fall 2023 (Subject to Change)

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<th>Class Meeting</th>
<th>Assignments (all assignments due by 8pm on the due date unless otherwise noted)</th>
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| Week 1: Getting Started                                 | • Acquire screenwriting software and acquaint yourself with the elements and functions.  
• Read the article “Formatting a Screenplay” in the Week 1 folder on Blackboard and come to class next week with at least one question about screenplay formatting. |
| Monday, August 28                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Week 2: No Class (Labor Day)                            |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Read one of the screenplays posted in the Readings folder |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Week 3: Getting Started, cont’d                         | Exercise 1: First Scene due Sunday, Sept. 17                                                                                                    |
| Week 4: Setting the Scene - Environment & Action        | Exercise 3: Character due Sunday, Oct. 1                                                                                                         |
| Monday, Sept. 18                                        | Exercise 4: Dialogue due Sunday, Oct. 8                                                                                                          |
| Week 5: Creating Characters - Psychology & Behavior     | Exercise 5: Circumstances & Conflict due Sunday, Oct. 15                                                                                         |
| Monday, Sept. 25                                        | Exercise 6: Scene Structure due Sunday, Oct. 22                                                                                                  |
| Week 6: Creating Characters - Dialogue & Interactions   | Midterm Script due Sunday, Oct. 29, by end of day                                                                                               |
| Monday, Oct. 2                                          | Exercise 7: Loglines due Sunday, Nov. 5                                                                                                          |
| Week 7: Building a Scene - Circumstances | Conflict & Escalation                             | Exercise 8: Outline/Treatment due Sunday, Nov. 19                                                                                               |
| Monday, Oct. 9                                          | Exercise 9: Thematic Statement due Monday, Nov. 27                                                                                              |
| Week 8: Building a Scene - Goals, Obstacles, Tactics,   | Exercise 10: Alternate Scene due Sunday, Dec. 3                                                                                                 |
| Expectations | Reversals & Revelations                             |                                                                                                                                                |
| Monday, Oct. 16                                         |                                                                                                                                                |
| Week 9: Making Connections - Transitions & Devices      |                                                                                                                                                |
| Monday, Oct. 23                                         |                                                                                                                                                |
| Week 10: Generating Ideas                               |                                                                                                                                                |
| Monday, Oct. 30                                         |                                                                                                                                                |
| Week 11: Telling a Story - Story World | Character & Situation                             |                                                                                                                                                |
| Monday, Nov. 6                                          |                                                                                                                                                |
| Week 12: Telling a Story - Classical Structure          |                                                                                                                                                |
| Monday, Nov. 13                                         |                                                                                                                                                |
| Week 13: Telling a Story - Genre | Narrative Devices                                  |                                                                                                                                                |
| Monday, Nov. 20                                         |                                                                                                                                                |
| Week 14: Beyond the Feature Format - The Short Film &   |                                                                                                                                                |
| Television Pilot                                        |                                                                                                                                                |
| Monday, Nov. 27                                         |                                                                                                                                                |
| Week 15: Review                                         | Submission window open for Script 2 on Tuesday, Dec. 5                                                                                           |
| Monday, Dec. 4 | |
| Finals Week | Submission window closed for Final Script on Wednesday, Dec. 13 |