SCREENWRITING

Image: Adaptation (Spike Jonze, 2002)

Screenwriting  |  FILM 3315  |  CRN: 21440  |  Spring 2023

Monday, 1:30-4:20 pm
Psychology Building, Room 306
Instructor: Greg Beam
Email: gbeam@utep.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 12:30 pm - 2:30 pm
   *For the first two weeks of the semester (Jan. 17-27), I will be holding office hours by appointment only.*
COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course introduces students to the practice of writing dramatic narratives for the screen. The approach will be more practical than theoretical, focusing on the elements and principles of sound cinematic writing—including environment, action, dialogue, character, plot, theme, and tone—and geared 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 online. 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
Script Apart (podcast), Al Horner  
Screenwriting 101: Mastering the Art of Story (Great Courses Series), Angus Fletcher

Required Viewing:

Inside Out (2015)  
The Sixth Sense (1999)  
Back to the Future (1985)  
Uncut Gems (2019)  

*All three 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 recently switched from Final Draft to Fade In, and I’m much happier.)

DUE DATES AND LATE WORK

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

Late work:

Please do your absolute best to turn in Weekly Exercises on time, as I will be looking them over right away and using some as examples in class. That said, the assignment portals will remain open after the due date, and if you turn in an exercise a day late, you will likely receive credit. Please don’t make a habit out of this, though. Assignments submitted more than a day late will not receive credit.

If you have technical problems submitting an assignment, please contact the UTEP Help Desk and let me know ASAP. This happens from time to time. Don’t panic. Take a deep breath. These things can almost always be worked out.
If you expect you may need extra time to complete an assignment, please contact me in advance to discuss possible accommodations. It’s much easier for me to be flexible and work with you if you give me a heads-up in advance.
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

32 points - Exercises (4 points each x 8 assignments)
8 points - Script 1
20 points - Script 2
40 points - Final Script

Exercises (32%)
You will submit a total of 10 exercises over the course of the term, each related to the current lesson and building progressively upon one another. These assignments will be submitted online. Carefully review the description for each assignment. Some of the exercises may be begun—or entirely completed—in class.

When appropriate and useful, 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 “Opening Sequence” assignment, the file name would look like this: “Greg B, Opening Sequence”. 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.

**Scripts 1 & 2 (8% & 20%)**
During the semester, you will submit two short scripts (~5-15 pages) that demonstrate your integration of the techniques we have studied up to that point.

Script 1 will focus on the techniques of setting, action, character, and dialogue. Script 2 will focus on scene structure.

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

**Final Script (40%)**
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.
POLICIES: COURSE-SPECIFIC

ATTENDANCE
Attendance at all class sessions is expected and is critical for success in the course. There is no textbook for this course; all instruction, along with a good deal of the work, will take place during our class sessions.

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.

Please note that, pursuant to university policy, I will not respond to emails sent from personal email accounts. If you want to contact me, use your UTEP email address.

If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the Help Desk as they are trained specifically in assisting with the technological needs of students.

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.**

SUBJECT MATTER
It is very possible that work produced by students may touch on sensitive subject matters. Consequently, we may engage in discussions about 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.
POLICIES: GENERAL

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 will result in a grade of zero on the assignment and possible disciplinary action. This includes cheating and plagiarism. Please check the UTEP Student Handbook for more information on academic dishonesty.
# COURSE SCHEDULE for Screenwriting, FILM 3315, Fall 2021 (Subject to Change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Meeting</th>
<th>Assignments (all assignments due by 8pm on the due date unless otherwise noted)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1:</strong> Getting Started - Setting Up</td>
<td>• Acquire screenwriting software and acquaint yourself with the elements and functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO CLASS - MLK Day</td>
<td>• Read the article “Formatting a Screenplay” in the Week 1 folder on Blackboard and come to class next week with <strong>at least one question</strong> about screenplay formatting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2:</strong> Getting Started - Generating Ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Jan. 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 3:</strong> Getting Started - Form &amp; Formatting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Jan. 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 4:</strong> Setting the Scene - Environment &amp; Action</td>
<td>Visual Story Exercise due Sunday, Feb. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Feb. 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5:</strong> Creating Characters - Psychology &amp; Behavior</td>
<td>Character Exercise due Sunday, Feb. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Feb. 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 6:</strong> Creating Characters - Dialogue &amp; Interactions</td>
<td>Dialogue Exercise due Sunday, Feb. 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Feb. 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 7:</strong> Building a Scene - Circumstances</td>
<td>Conflict &amp; Escalation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Feb. 27</td>
<td>Script 1 due Sunday, Mar. 5, by end of day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 8:</strong> Building a Scene - Goals, Obstacles, Tactics, Expectations</td>
<td>Reversals &amp; Revelations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Mar. 6</td>
<td>Scene Exercise due Sunday, Mar. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring Break - NO CLASS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 9:</strong> Making Connections - Transitions &amp; Devices</td>
<td>Script 2 due Sunday, Apr. 2, by end of day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Mar. 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 10:</strong> Script Reading</td>
<td>Logline Exercise due Sunday, Apr. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Mar. 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 11:</strong> Telling a Story - Story World</td>
<td>Character &amp; Situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Apr. 3</td>
<td>Outline/Treatment due Sunday, Apr. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 12:</strong> Telling a Story - Classical Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Apr. 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 13:</strong> Telling a Story - Genre</td>
<td>Narrative Devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Apr. 17</td>
<td>Opening Scene due Sunday, Apr. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14: Beyond the Feature Format - The Short Film &amp; Television Pilot Monday, Apr. 24</td>
<td>Thematic Statement due Sunday, Apr. 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 15: Review Monday, May 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finals Week Writing Retreat on Monday, May 8, time TBA</td>
<td>Final Script due by end of day on Tuesday, May 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>