THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Department of Communication

COMM 3345 — MEDIA SCRIPTWRITING

Fall 2026 | Face-to-Face Course Syllabus

COURSE INFORMATION

Course	COMM 3345 — Media Scriptwriting
CRNs	11609 (MWF) and 12146 (TR)
Term	Fall 2026
Delivery Method	In person
Meeting Day and Time	MWF 10:30am – 11:20am TR 10:30am – 11:50am
Location	Cotton Memorial Bldg. Rm. 306

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Ramón Villa, Assistant Professor of Practice

Office: Cotton Memorial Building, Room 303A

Student Conference Hours: Fridays, 12:00–4:30 p.m., by appointment

Written Communication: UTEP email and Blackboard

Email: rvilla2@utep.edu

Emergency text only: 915-308-6452

COURSE DESCRIPTION

COMM 3345 examines how narrative film projects move from story concept into cinematic development. Students investigate character, conflict, theme, and structure before translating those ideas into visual research, pitch materials, and a proof-of-concept narrative scene. Through story development, cinematic analysis, visual research, pitching, rehearsal, and story-to-screen experimentation, students learn how filmmakers communicate the creative identity and production potential of a project before full production begins.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Break down the basic cinematic narrative elements needed to develop a screenplay and narrative film project.
- Apply an intentional process for developing original story ideas.
- Understand and apply the basic principles of a four-act dramatic structure.
- Critically evaluate short films and screenplays through emotional story, theme, actionable plot, and character development.
- Collaborate with peers through pitching, feedback, rehearsal, and story-to-screen development.
- Research short-form narrative production practices, cinematic references, and professional development resources.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Develop an original narrative concept using character want, need, flaw, ghost, conflict, theme, stakes, and transformation.
- Analyze narrative films and screenplays to identify relationships among character behavior, dramatic structure, theme, and cinematic storytelling.
- Research and evaluate cinematic references in cinematography, composition, color, production design, performance, and tone.

- Synthesize narrative and visual research into a professional film-development pitch deck that communicates story, character, theme, world, audience, and directorial vision.
- Translate a written dramatic scene into visual and performative choices through blocking, lighting, rehearsal, coverage, and revision.
- Create and critically evaluate a proof-of-concept scene demonstrating the creative identity and production potential of a larger narrative project.

UTEP EDGE ADVANTAGES

This course develops UTEP Edge Advantages through sustained creative development, critique, collaboration, pitching, and production-based problem solving.

	Problem Solving	Revise story and visual strategies in response to creative, logistical, and production challenges.
	Communication	Develop clear written, oral, visual, and production communication through pitching, critique, rehearsal, and collaboration.
	Teamwork	Collaborate across creative and production roles during story-to-screen labs and proof-of-concept work.
	Critical Thinking	Analyze films, screenplays, visual references, and feedback to make informed creative decisions.
	Confidence	Build the ability to articulate and defend creative choices through repeated pitching, rehearsal, revision, and screening.

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

- Access to Blackboard and OneDrive.
- Feature-film and short-film scripts provided through Blackboard.
- Personal journal or notebook for story concepts, observations, and development notes.
- Access to course-approved pre-production / visualization tools. **Students should anticipate approximately $50–$75 for pre-production websites or services when required;** specific options and instructions will be provided on Blackboard.
- LTX Studio may be used for exploration, iteration, visualization, and development when assigned. It is not a substitute for original story conception or critical creative decision-making.
- **Optional text:** Get Out: The Annotated Screenplay.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Assignments are organized as a development pipeline. Detailed instructions and rubrics will be provided on Blackboard.

Story Exploration + Development Package	15
Film/Screenplay Analysis + Development Exercises	10

Visual Research Portfolio	15
Midterm Pitch Deck + Oral Pitch	25
Proof-of-Concept Development Package	10
Final Proof-of-Concept Scene	20
Reflection / Development Retrospective	5
TOTAL	**100**

Grade scale: A = 90–100 | B = 80–89 | C = 70–79 | D = 60–69 | F = below 60

MAJOR PROJECTS

Story Exploration + Development Package: Develop an original narrative concept through character psychology, conflict, theme, stakes, transformation, logline, and story summary.

Film/Screenplay Analysis + Development Exercises: Analyze professional narrative work and apply concepts of structure, behavior, theme, scene design, and cinematic storytelling.

Visual Research Portfolio: Research cinematography, composition, color, production design, performance, and tone to define the project's visual identity.

Midterm Pitch Deck + Oral Pitch: Present the project's story, character, world, theme, audience, and directorial vision. Midterm feedback is expected to change and strengthen the project.

Proof-of-Concept Development Package: Select a scene that can demonstrate the larger project's creative identity and develop it for production.

Final Proof-of-Concept Scene: Translate the written scene into blocking, lighting, rehearsal, performance, coverage, editing, and revision. Strong projects may be considered for continued development in subsequent production coursework.

Development Retrospective: Critically reflect on feedback, revisions, production choices, and the next stage of the project.

SEMESTER DEVELOPMENT ARC

Weeks	Stage	Focus	Milestone
1–3	STORY PSYCHOLOGY	Rules of drama; want/need; flaw/ghost; conflict; theme/anti-theme; transformation; four acts; And Then / But / Except.	Story Exploration
4–5	PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	Character; story world; logline; story summary; film/script analysis.	Development Package v1
6–8	VISUAL DEVELOPMENT	ShotDeck methodology; cinematography; color; composition; production design; tone; Adobe pitch design; director's vision.	Visual Research Portfolio
8	MIDTERM DEVELOPMENT PITCH	Pitch Deck + oral pitch. Feedback should produce meaningful revision.	Midterm Pitch
9–10	POC SELECTION + SCENE WRITING	POC purpose; scene objective; behavior; conflict; subtext;	POC Development Package

		dialogue; scene turn.	
10–12	STORY-TO-SCREEN LAB	Block; light; rehearse; tweak. Scenes are tested in class before production.	Rehearsed / revised scene
13–14	POC PRODUCTION	Shoot; edit; review; reshoot or revise where possible.	Final POC Scene
15	DEVELOPMENT SCREENING	Pitch Deck v2; POC screening; reflection and next-step discussion.	Screening + Retrospective

COURSE COMMUNICATION

- Blackboard: Check announcements and course materials frequently. Assignment instructions, rubrics, grades, and updates will be posted there.
- **Email: UTEP email is the preferred method for individual questions. Include COMM 3345 in the subject line and identify your section.**
- Student Conference Hours: Fridays, 12:00–4:30 p.m. by appointment. Virtual meetings may be arranged when appropriate.
- Professional Communication: Communicate respectfully, identify the purpose of your message, reach out early when problems arise, and allow a reasonable response time.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS IN PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATION

Film development is collaborative. Students are expected to arrive prepared, engage constructively in discussion and critique, complete assigned work on time, review assignment instructions when they are assigned, and contribute positively to rehearsals, production exercises, screenings, and peer feedback.

The classroom as a safe haven: This classroom is a safe haven for all ideas. Respect not only your instructor, but also guest speakers and your peers as equals. We are all unique individuals entitled to our own opinions and beliefs. Therefore, any comments, jokes, or remarks that denigrate the worth of an individual's physical or mental ability, physical appearance, religion, race, creed, ethnic background, sexual preference, or gender are inappropriate and detract from your effectiveness as a speaker and from your credibility as a person.

Disruptive Behavior

· Walking in late to class.
· Lack of supplemental materials.
· Leaving electronic devices on during class.
· Taking credit for a thought, opinion and knowledge from sources and claiming them as your own (plagiarism).
· Chatting or talking during a presentation.
· Using vulgarity.

ATTENDANCE, ABSENCES, AND COURSE DROP POLICY

Attendance and active participation are essential because many course activities involve live pitching, critique, rehearsal, and collaborative production. Two late arrivals or early departures may be counted as one unexcused absence. **Three unexcused absences before the course drop deadline may result in an instructor-initiated drop, consistent with UTEP policy and instructor discretion.** Students should communicate as early as possible when circumstances affect attendance or participation.

According to the UTEP Catalog, at the discretion of the instructor, a student can be dropped from a course because of excessive absences or lack of effort. A grade of W may be assigned before the course drop deadline and a grade of F after the course drop deadline, consistent with applicable university policy.

DEADLINES, LATE WORK, AND MAKE-UP WORK

Deadlines are part of professional production practice. Assignment due dates will be posted on Blackboard. Late work is not normally accepted unless the circumstances are excusable or an accommodation has been arranged. Make-up work may be offered in documented emergencies and may use a different format from the original assignment. Contact the instructor as early as possible when an emergency affects a course requirement.

TECHNOLOGY AND BACKUP PRACTICES

Students are responsible for maintaining access to Blackboard, OneDrive, and the digital tools required for assigned work. Save working files in more than one location and allow time for uploads before deadlines. For technical problems with university systems, contact UTEP Technology Support / Help Desk.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTIC WORK

Academic integrity means honestly representing your work and giving appropriate credit to the ideas and contributions of others. You are encouraged to ask questions, seek feedback, collaborate when permitted, and use available campus resources. Work submitted for credit should reflect your own understanding and comply with the expectations provided for each assignment.

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. All suspected violations of academic integrity must be reported through the University's established procedures.

GUIDANCE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE — AI ENABLED FOR SPECIFIED ACTIVITIES

This course intentionally examines emerging pre-production and visualization technologies. AI-enabled tools may be used only for learning activities specifically identified by the instructor. Permitted uses may include visual exploration, iteration, previsualization, research organization, or testing alternative approaches during development. AI tools are not substitutes for original story conception, authorship, critical judgment, or the student's ability to explain and defend creative choices.

- Verify accuracy and evaluate sources using appropriate critical-literacy practices.
- Follow the instructions for each assignment and use only tools or functions authorized for that assignment.
- Document AI use when required.
- Protect personal, confidential, production, or research data.
- Keep your own voice, thoughts, authorship, and original ideas at the core of submitted work.
- Know your work well enough to discuss and defend it in live critique, pitch, or conference.

Submission of AI-generated content as one's own original work without authorization may constitute academic misconduct.

LEARNING COMMUNITY AND RESPECTFUL DISCOURSE

This course depends on critique and discussion. Students should engage ideas thoughtfully, listen actively, critique arguments and creative choices rather than individuals, and use respectful, evidence-based language. Differences of opinion are a normal and valuable part of higher education. Personal attacks, harassment, intimidation, disruptive behavior, or actions that interfere with the learning of others are inconsistent with the expectations of this course.

CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS

Narrative film and screenwriting may engage difficult, contested, or uncomfortable subjects. When these topics arise, students are expected to engage ideas rather than individuals, use evidence and reasoning, listen to understand, recognize complexity, practice intellectual humility, and demonstrate respect. When appropriate and pedagogically feasible, students may request an alternative assignment that requires comparable effort and addresses the same learning objectives and academic standards.

ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is committed to providing equal access and reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities, temporary disabilities, or students who are pregnant and experiencing pregnancy-related conditions, in accordance with federal and state laws. Students are encouraged to contact the UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 915-747-5148, by email at cass@utep.edu, or through the CASS Portal.

COURSE RESOURCES

UTEP provides academic, advising, technology, accessibility, wellness, and student-success resources. Students should use the UTEP Student Success Resource Hub and other university support services as needed.

SYLLABUS ADJUSTMENTS

The instructor may make reasonable adjustments to the course schedule, readings, screenings, exercises, or assignment sequence in response to instructional needs, production logistics, or university circumstances. Any substantive changes will be communicated through Blackboard.