

ART 3350-001: Introduction to Narrative Screenwriting
Fall 2013

Instructor: Kyle Smith

Office Number: FA 161

Telephone Number: 325.721.0890

Email Address: aksmith@uta.edu

Faculty Profile: <https://www.uta.edu/mentis/public/#profile/profile/view/id/12843>

Office Hours: Mon, 5 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Section Number: ART 3350-001

Class Meetings: Mon and Weds, 11a.m. – 1:50 p.m.; FA 156

Description of Course Content:

This course will introduce students to the fundamentals of visual storytelling for narrative short films by building on a series of discussions, exercises and writing workshops. Students will explore the basic theory and formal aspects of story, structure, character development and dialogue.

The primary focus of the course will be to craft original short screenplays drawing on basic dramatic principles and three-act structure. With the help of peers in workshop, students will leave this course with a solid grasp of how to write short narrative features in preparation for writing feature-length screenplays.

Also Note:

The craft of screenwriting is learned through the critical examination of other screenplays and films. In other words, we read screenplays in order to write screenplays. Just because you've seen the movie doesn't mean it's the same as the script. Screenplays are blueprints for films, which are written in a distinctive style. **As a result, if you don't read the assigned scripts, you are robbing yourself of an opportunity to learn how screenwriters communicate.**

All work must be typed, correctly spelled and in correct screenplay form. You must have a cover page on all work consisting of the following: **Your name, title of work, e-mail address, phone number and draft number.**

Cell phones must be turned off during class.

Required Text:

Crafting Short Screenplays That Connect by Claudia Hunter Johnson

You will also be asked to print your classmates' written material for workshops.

Attendance:

Attendance is required to **all** scheduled classes. However, I understand there are occasions when absence is necessary and excusable. The student is responsible for notifying the instructor **ahead** of class if the absence is unavoidable. It is up to the discretion of the instructor if the absence is excused or not. **Do not assume your absence is excused without getting written confirmation from the instructor.**

Students are allowed a maximum of two excused absences. A significant part of this course is workshop-based. If you are not in attendance, then you cannot participate. Absences for more than two classes for whatever reason will hinder your ability to understand the material. Absences totaling more than two days will result in the following grade reductions:

- **Three absences will result in reduction of a half-letter for the final semester grade.**
- **Four absences will result in a full letter off the final semester grade.**

- **Five absences will result in automatic failure of the class.**

The student is responsible for any work missed during absences, including any handouts given in class and any demonstrations. It is not the responsibility of faculty to re-teach what the student has missed. If students need additional information regarding what they missed, they should follow up with at least two other students before contacting the instructor. Attendance is also mandatory for all critiques whether the student has completed the work required or not.

Consistent lateness will also have a detrimental effect on the student's final grade. **If you are more than ten minutes late, you will be counted absent.** If you have a class before that makes this difficult, it is your responsibility to let the instructor know ahead of time.

Grading:

All assignments must be turned in on the due date. **NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED, unless there are unforeseen circumstances. This must be discussed with the instructor and only in rare circumstances will it be accepted.**

Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester and seek guidance from available sources (including the instructor) if their performance drops below satisfactory levels.

Assignment Grade Values:

- Four Quizzes (10%)
- Film Analysis (10%)
- The Discovery Script (10%)
- The Decision Script (10%)
- The Boxing Match Script (10%)
- The Improbable Connection (20%)
- The Long Short (20%)
- Class participation (10%)*

*The workshop part of this class is crucial. Analyzing and identifying problems with others' scripts will help you greatly improve your own material.

A few important notes on work:

- **Assignments are due at the beginning of the next class period unless otherwise noted on the Class Schedule below. A majority of screenwriting assignments will be due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m. on the Sunday following the assigned date in PDF format. This deadline applies to all groups (A,B and C).** It isn't fair to the first group being workshopped if the following groups have longer to complete their assignments.
- You are expected to print and read your classmates' work so you may make notes on the pages. These pages will be handed back to the student at the end of workshop. Having a hard copy of the workshop material in class will allow you to reference the material as well as your own notes for feedback. Class participation is a big part of your grade and failure to provide notes will be deducted from your participation grade.

Rules of workshop criticism:

- Don't hold back. If something has problems, it has problems. Say so. However...
- Negative comments are a lot easier to make than positive ones. So, no matter how constructive your criticism is, try to match it with a compliment somewhere else.
- Identifying problems isn't enough -- also identify possible solutions. Don't simply say that a character or a scene doesn't work for you. Say *why* it doesn't, then tell us what changes would make it work for you.
- With regard to criticism of your own work: start developing a thick skin. Remember that your

instructor and classmates are commenting on your scripts, not on you.

In evaluating your work, I try to assess what's been learned and if it's reflected in your writing, i.e., have you demonstrated an understanding of the dramatic concepts discussed in class, and is that understanding reflected in your own creative work? Your final grade will reflect the quality and sincerity of your efforts. Equally important are the level and quality of participation in class, as reflected by contribution to workshop.

There will be four quizzes throughout the semester but no final exam. Grades will be determined on a 100-point scale.

As a student in a university, it is assumed that you can write in complete sentences, using proper English grammar. You will need to be able to construct complete thoughts and communicate them on several levels. If you lack abilities in written communication, you are strongly encouraged to seek support through the campus Writing Center, <http://www.uta.edu/owl/services.htm>. Your grades will be based on the assumption that you can write at a level consistent with university students, but it is important that you take the lead in stepping up and seeking the help you need.

Electronic Communication: UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

Student Feedback Survey: At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as "lecture," "seminar," or "laboratory" shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

Final Review Week: A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

Emergency Exit Procedures: Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist handicapped individuals.

THE FOLLOWING SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE:

Class Schedule

	MONDAY		WEDNESDAY
26-Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to Screenwriting: Story, Character, Structure Formatting Blackboard instructions, due dates/times Assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Format assignment: Write a 2-3 page scene in proper screenwriting format for one of three scenarios Read Johnson, Ch. 5 	28-Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Story structure: beginnings/middle/ends; Aristotelian drama The Discovery Screenplay Workshop rules and etiquette Assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Johnson, Ch. 7 Write Discovery Screenplay (all groups' pages due on Blackboard by Sunday, 1 Sept, 11:59 p.m.) Read Group A Discovery screenplays
2-Sept	NO CLASS, LABOR DAY HOLIDAY	4-Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What makes a story worth telling? "City Lights": surface action/deep action Discovery and decision: Patterns of human change <i>Le Menu</i> exercise Workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group A Discovery Screenplay Assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group B Discovery Screenplays Read Johnson, Ch. 1, 2
9-Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Character Arcs Character goals: The "I Want" speech Life-or-death stakes: <i>Midnight Cowboy</i> vs. <i>Independence Day</i> Workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group B Discovery screenplays Assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group C Discovery screenplays Read Johnson, Ch. 6 	11-Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Decision Screenplay Writing effective scenes: <i>Taxi Driver</i> Workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group C Discovery Screenplays Assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Johnson, Ch. 8 Write the Decision screenplay (all groups' pages due on Blackboard by Sunday, 15 Sept, 11:59 p.m.)
16-Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual storytelling: <i>The Birds</i>, <i>There Will be Blood</i> The Mood Exercise Film analysis No Workshop Assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group A Decision screenplay Complete film analysis 	18-Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue: dos and don'ts; <i>The Social Network</i>, <i>It Happened One Night</i> The art of subtlety: <i>Thelma & Louise</i> Subtext: "Rolling on the Floor Laughing" Workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group A Decision screenplays Assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group B Decision screenplays

23-Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Option C: <i>The Sixth Sense</i> Action reveals character: "Hatch" <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group B Decision screenplay <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group C Decision screenplay 	25-Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Boxing Match screenplay Internal conflict externalized: <i>The Last Picture Show</i> Writing the treatment <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group C Decision Screenplay <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Johnson, Ch. 9 Write Boxing Match screenplay treatment Write Boxing Match screenplay (all groups' pages due on Blackboard by Sunday, 29 Sept, 11:59 p.m.)
30-Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Escalate, don't restate": <i>Indiana Jones</i> <p>No Workshop</p> <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group A Boxing Match screenplays 	2-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The protagonist: active, relatable, complex <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group A Boxing Match screenplays <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a character interview Read Group B Boxing Match screenplays
7-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World and Tone: <i>Edward Scissorhands</i>, <i>Rosemary's Baby</i>, <i>Safe</i> <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group B Boxing Match screenplays <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group C Boxing Match screenplays 	9-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Improbable Connection: "Curfew", <i>Night of the Iguana</i> Writing the step-outline: beat by beat <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group C Boxing Match screenplay <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Johnson, Ch. 10 Write the Improbable Connection screenplay step-outline (all groups' pages due on Blackboard by Sunday, 13 Oct, 11:59 p.m.)
14-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hope & Fear: <i>Alien</i>, <i>Castaway</i>, <i>Winter's Bone</i> Internal wants/external needs: <i>As Good as It Gets</i> <p>No Workshop</p> <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group A Improbable Connection screenplay step-outlines 	16-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Causality: Dominoes falling in <i>Unforgiven</i> "And because of that..." class exercise <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group A Improbable Connection screenplay step-outlines <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group B Improbable Connection screenplay step-outlines
21-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subverting expectation <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group B Improbable Connection screenplay step-outlines <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group C Improbable Connection screenplay step-outlines 	23-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telling the story "in the cut": <i>Marnie</i> Every word, every image has meaning: purposeful screenwriting <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group C Improbable Connection screenplay step-outlines <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write the Improbable Connection screenplay (all groups' pages due on Blackboard by Sunday, 27 Oct, 11:59 p.m.)

28-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screenwriting cheats Non-linear storytelling, alternative structures: <i>Pulp Fiction</i> <p>No Workshop</p> <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group A Improbable Connection screenplay 	30-Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict and connection <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group A Improbable Connection screenplay <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group B Improbable Connection screenplay Read "Missed Connection" short story
4-Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptation <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group B Improbable Connection screenplay <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group C Improbable Connection screenplay Write a treatment for "Missed Connection" short story 	6-Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pitching your ideas; fundraising Share "Missed Connection" treatment in class <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group C Improbable Connection screenplay <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Johnson, Ch. 11 Write the Long Short screenplay step-outline (all groups' pages due on Blackboard by Sunday, 10 Nov, 11:59 p.m.)
11-Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guest lecturer L. M. Harter presents her short film "T is for Tightrape"; writing shorts from a production standpoint <p>No Workshop</p> <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group A Long Short screenplay step-outlines Pitch, fundraising approach 	13-Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver pitches and/or fundraising plan for short film adaptation <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group A Long Short screenplay step-outlines <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group B Long Short screenplay step-outlines Read "Lena's Spaghetti" screenplay
18-Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch, discuss "Lena's Spaghetti" <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group B Long Short screenplay step-outlines <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group C Long Short screenplay step-outlines Read "Cool Breeze and Buzz" screenplay 	20-Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch, discuss "Cool Breeze and Buzz" <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group C Long Short screenplay step-outlines <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write the Long Short screenplay (all groups' pages due on Blackboard by Sunday, 24 Nov, by 11:59 p.m.) Read "The Making of 'Killer Kite'"
25-Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch, discuss "The Making of 'Killer Kite'" <p>No Workshop</p> <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group A Long Short screenplays Compile soundtrack for Long Short screenplay 	27-Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining momentum <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group A Long Short screenplays <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Group B Long Short screenplays

<p>2-Dec</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's it all about?: Theme emerges from stories well told <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group B Long Short screenplays <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Group C Long Short screenplays 	<p>4-Dec</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing for features: a sneak peak • Story structure: emotional beats vs. plot points; short films vs. feature films <p>Workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group C Long Short screenplays <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra credit: revise Long Short screenplays, due on Blackboard by time of class final
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