

ART 3350-001: Introduction to Narrative Screenwriting
Spring 2016

Instructor: Kyle Smith

Office Number: FA 158

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: Tues., 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m., FA 158

Section Number: ART 3350-001

Class Meetings: Mon., Weds., 8:00 a.m. – 10:50 p.m.; FA 164

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:

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.**

We will be watching short films, features and clips in class that contain adult language and content. If this bothers you, or you do not wish to view these materials, please let me know in advance.

Cell phones, tablets and laptops must be turned off during lectures. Notes are strongly encouraged as you learn to write stories for the screen and should be taken on paper.

Required Text:

Crafting Short Screenplays That Connect by Claudia Hunter Johnson, Fourth Edition

Final Draft screenwriting software:

<http://trial.finaldraft.com/edutrial/>

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:

- The Discovery Screenplay (10%)
- The Decision Screenplay (10%)
- The Boxing Match Screenplay (10%)
- The Improbable Connection Screenplay (10%)
- Collaboration Screenplay (20%)
- Final Project Screenplay (20%)
- Class Participation (20%)*

*The workshop part of this class is crucial. Analyzing and identifying problems with others' scripts will help you greatly improve your own material. Participation points are considered for: 1.) completing all course assignments (10%) and 2.) participating during class workshop discussions (10%).

A few important notes on work:

- **Assignments are due at the beginning of the next class period unless otherwise noted on. This deadline applies to all groups -- A, B, C and D.** It isn't fair to the first group being workshopped if the two groups following them have longer to complete their assignments. **Unless otherwise noted, all assignments should be posted to the appropriate Blackboard Discussions folder. PLEASE POST ALL ASSIGNMENTS IN PDF FORMAT, not Word or Final Draft, etc.**
- **Your screenplays will be read in class by the class. Your grade for the screenplay assignment will be emailed to you. In general, any "A" grade means your work is superior, "B" grades are above average, "C" grades are average, "D" grades are below average but still passing and "F" means failure.**

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. We will begin workshop with positive comments for each piece, then move on to constructive feedback. The writer should not "defend" their work or answer questions about the material

until all comments have been voiced.

- 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 work, 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 has 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 demonstrated 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 may be pop quizzes throughout the semester, which will apply to your participation grade, but no final exam.

As a student in a university, it is assumed 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 help is needed.

Drop Policy: Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Title IX: The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to upholding U.S. Federal Law "Title IX" such that no member of the UT Arlington community shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. For more information, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX.

Academic Integrity: Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

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 individuals with disabilities.

Student Support Services: UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at www.uta.edu/resources.

Writing Center: The Writing Center, 411 Central Library, offers individual 40-minute sessions to review assignments, *Quick Hits* (5-10 minute quick answers to questions), and workshops on grammar and specific writing projects. Visit <https://uta.mywconline.com/> to register and make appointments. For hours, information about the writing workshops we offer, scheduling a classroom visit, and descriptions of the services we offer undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members, please visit our website at www.uta.edu/owl/.

COURSE SCHEDULE

All assignments are due in PDF format on Blackboard: Discussions by the beginning of the next class period with the exception of the Formatting Assignment, in which case you will turn in a hard copy.

This schedule is subject to change.

Wednesday Jan. 20

Discuss: introductions; syllabus/course objectives; software; formatting
Assignment: formatting assignment
Due: n/a

.....

Monday Jan. 25

Discuss: story elements
Assignment: read Johnson, chapters 2 and 7; complete Le Menu
Due: formatting assignment (turn in hard copy in class)

Wednesday Jan. 27

Discuss: stories worth telling
Assignment: read one of this year's Oscar-nominated screenplays and write a short reflection paper about your thoughts related to: story, character, structure, formatting, anything that jumped out at you
Due: Le Menu

.....

Monday Feb. 1

Discuss: character
Assignment: read Johnson, Ch. 6; write a short bio of a character you create

Due: screenplay reflection paper

Wednesday Feb. 3

Discuss: character

Assignment: interview your character

Due: character bio

.....

Monday Feb. 8

Discuss: character

Assignment: write your character's "I Want" speech

Due: character interview

Wednesday Feb. 10

Discuss: character; discoveries; announce groups

Assignment: read Johnson, chapter 9; write the Discovery Screenplay

Due: "I Want" speech

.....

Monday Feb. 15

Discuss: dialogue; workshop Group A Discovery Screenplay

Assignment: read Johnson, chapter 8

Due: the Discovery Screenplay

Wednesday Feb. 17

Discuss: dialogue; workshop Group B Discovery Screenplay

Assignment: film analysis

Due: n/a

.....

Monday Feb. 22

Discuss: originality; workshop Group C Discovery Screenplay

Assignment: none

Due: film analysis

Wednesday Feb. 24

Discuss: originality; workshop Group D Discovery Screenplay; decisions

Assignment: read Johnson, chapter 10; write the Decision Screenplay

Due: n/a

.....

Monday Feb. 29

Discuss: visual storytelling; workshop Group A Decision Screenplay

Assignment: none
Due: the Decision Screenplay

Wednesday March 2

Discuss: visual storytelling; workshop Group B Decision Screenplay
Assignment: none
Due: n/a

.....

Monday March 7

Discuss: writing effective scenes; workshop Group C Decision Screenplay
Assignment: none
Due: n/a

Wednesday March 9

Discuss: writing effective scenes; boxing matches; workshop Group D Decision Screenplay
Assignment: read Johnson, chapter 11; write the Boxing Match screenplay
Due: n/a

.....

Monday March 14 (Spring Break)

Wednesday March 16 (Spring Break)

.....

Monday March 21

Discuss: subverting expectation; workshop Group A Boxing Match Screenplay
Assignment: none
Due: the Boxing Match Screenplay

Wednesday March 23

Discuss: subverting expectation; workshop Group B Boxing Match Screenplay
Assignment: none
Due: n/a

.....

Monday March 28

Discuss: rising action; workshop Group C Boxing Match Screenplay
Assignment: none
Due: n/a

Wednesday March 30

Discuss: rising action; workshop Group D Boxing Match Screenplay

Assignment: read Johnson, chapter 12; write the Improbable Connection
Screenplay
Due: n/a

.....

Monday April 4

Discuss: cause-and-effect; workshop Group A Improbable Connection Screenplay
Assignment: none
Due: n/a

Wednesday April 6

Discuss: cause-and-effect; workshop Group B Improbable Connection Screenplay
Assignment: none
Due: n/a

.....

Monday April 11

Discuss: tone and theme; workshop Group C Improbable Connection Screenplay
Assignment: none
Due: n/a

Wednesday April 13

Discuss: tone and theme; workshop Group D Improbable Connection Screenplay
Assignment: read Johnson, chapter 4; write the collaboration screenplay
Due: n/a

.....

Monday April 18

Discuss: loglines; workshop collaboration screenplays
Assignment: write 3 loglines for final project
Due: the collaboration screenplay

Wednesday April 20

Discuss: workshop collaboration screenplays; workshop loglines; pitches
Assignment: develop, write a pitch based on chosen logline
Due: 3 loglines for final project

.....

Monday April 25

Discuss: pitch to class (optional); treatments and step-outlines
Assignment: write a treatment and step-outline for final project
Due: pitch documents

Wednesday April 27

Discuss: workshop treatments/step-outlines

Assignment: write the final project screenplay

Due: treatments/step-outlines

.....

Monday May 2

Discuss: workshop Groups A and B final projects*

Assignment: none

Due: the final project screenplay

Wednesday May 4

Discuss: workshop Groups C and D final projects*

Assignment: none

Due: n/a

**Note: If you need extra time to write your Final Project, it will be due by the time of the class final. There will not be a final for this class, but your screenplay should be turned in on Blackboard before that allotted time.*