

## **ART 3350: Introduction to Narrative Screenwriting Spring 2018**

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Office Hours: Tuesdays. 2 - 4 PM and by appointment

Class Meetings: Mon. & Weds. 8-10:50 AM - Room: FA 166

### **COURSE OBJECTIVE AND CONTENTS:**

Screenwriting is the foundation and creative engine of narrative storytelling. The fundamental elements of screenwriting are essential not just for the one who writes the script but, later on, for the director, cinematographer, and many other creative collaborators in this art. The primary focus of the course is to introduce you to the fundamental aspects and necessary discipline required to write different types of scripts.

*All class time is a community effort in study, research, writing and criticism. It is because of this that aspects as attendance, participation, non-electronic distraction as well as time breaks will be strict. Continuous active engagement is extremely important. Is expected for all participants not just to be present but, attentive and properly prepared.*

With the help of your peers and instructor, you will leave this course with a solid grasp of how to write short narrative and feature film scripts. By building on a series of discussions and rewrites, you will explore the basic theory and formal aspects of story, structure, character development, and dialogue.

### **ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES:**

Students are *expected to be prepared before class with both assignments and readings completed*. Due to the practical and communal nature of the class *students who do not have the required work completed at the beginning of class will be asked to leave the classroom*. Any excuse for not presenting assignments must be discussed with the instructor the day prior to the class meeting.

All assignments must:

- 1) Be introduced by a cover page containing the title of the assignment, the name of the student, and the date (due).
- 2) All work must be typed, correctly spelled and in the proper screenplay form. Many times you will be required to bring a copy of a writing assignments for class discussion.

Assignments that do not follow all these guidelines will not be accepted. Late assignments will not be accepted.

### **MATERIALS:**

Required Text: *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and The Principles of Screenwriting* by Robert McKee

*Crafty TV Writing: Thinking Inside the Box* by Alex Epstein

Other readings and materials to be found in the class Blackboard.

*Final Draft screenwriting software: (PROVIDED to be used at school)*

*Students are highly recommended to have Final Draft <http://trial.finaldraft.com/edutrial/>*

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

**Use of electronic devices:** Cellphones, computers, tablets or any other electronic device are not allowed to be used during class time.

### **ATTENDANCE AND LATENESS:**

**Lateness:** The classroom door will be closed **TEN minutes after** the official scheduled class time. **NO STUDENT WILL BE ALLOWED** to enter the classroom after this ten minute grace period. Students who arrive late will be welcome to enter the classroom during the next class break, however that **late arrival will still be considered as an absence.**

**Absence:** Attendance is required to all scheduled classes. There are occasions when absence is unavoidable (film shoot days, minor illness which does not require a doctor's visit, car troubles, etc). In these cases students need to be aware that they are allowed a **maximum of two absences.**

A student can ask to have an absence waived by explaining the situation and providing documentation (doctor's appointment information, etc) no later than 48 hours after the day of the absence. 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 absences.**

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.

**Note: All assignments must be turned in on the due date. NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

### **ASSIGNMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS:**

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 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.

### **Assignments Distribution:**

- 5 Reading quizzes (30%)
- Draft 3 of short film scripts (15%)
- Draft 2 of feature script Stage 1 (20%)
- Final Draft of TV episode (15%)
- Final Draft of short script (10%)
- Class participation (10%)

Numeric - Letter Grade Equivalence Chart

Percent	Letter Grade
94 - 100	A
90 - 93	A-
87 - 89	B+
83 - 86	B
80 - 82	B-
77 - 79	C+
73 - 76	C
70 - 72	C-
67 - 69	D+
63 - 66	D
60 - 62	D-
< 60	F

Final grades will be weighted according to this schematic, and students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester and seek guidance from available sources (including the instructor).

### **ADVICE on peer review:**

- 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.
- 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.

**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/>).

**Regarding Student Support Services and disabilities:**

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](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at [www.uta.edu/resources](http://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/](http://www.uta.edu/owl/).

**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](http://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](http://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.

**Communication:**

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 daily. 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.

### **Class Calendar**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Class Contents</b>	<b>Start working in the following Assignment(s)</b>
Wednesday Jan. 17	Introduction to the class.	<b>Read</b> The Class Syllabi, <b>Study</b> the "Screenwriting Format Document"
Monday Jan. 22	<b>Topics:</b> Screenwriting format and software. Practice 1	
Wednesday Jan. 24	<b>Topics:</b> Screenwriting format practice 2.	<b>Reading 1:</b> McKee Chapter 18 <b>Write</b> the idea of your short film script. <b>Prepare</b> (rehears) to share your idea in 2 minutes.
Monday Jan. 29	<b>Reading 1 quiz.</b> <b>Topics:</b> Story elements. Character, backstory, The mood. The synopsis and the step outline.	<b>Rethinking</b> your short film script idea <b>Prepare</b> (rehears) to share your idea in 2 minutes.
Wednesday Jan. 31	Sharing and receiving feedback on original ideas.	<b>Write</b> the first draft of your short film script (6-7 pages) <b>Reading 2:</b> McKee Chapter 19
Monday Feb. 5	<b>Reading 2 quiz.</b> <b>Submission of the <u>First draft</u> of the short film script.</b> Class reading and criticism of the first draft of short film.	<b>Rewrite</b> the first draft of your short.

Wednesday Feb. 7	<b>Submission of the <u>Second draft</u> of the short film script</b> Class reading and criticism of the Second draft of short film.	<b>Rewrite</b> the second draft of your short. <b>Reading 3:</b> McKee Chapter 1 <b>Start thinking</b> about your second short story
Monday Feb. 12	<b>Submission of the <u>Third draft</u> of the short film script</b> Class reading and criticism of the Third draft of short film.	<b>Write</b> the second short story outline (between 120 and 150 words)
Wednesday Feb. 14	<b>Reading 3 quiz.</b> Sharing and receiving feedback on Second Short original ideas.	<b>Write</b> the first draft of your second short film script (6-7 pages) <b>Start Reading 4:</b> Shrek Feature Screenplay.
Monday Feb. 19	<b>Submission of the <u>First draft</u> of the second short film script.</b> Class reading and criticism of the first draft of short film.	<b>Finish Reading 4:</b> Shrek Feature Screenplay.
Wednesday Feb. 21	<b>Reading 4 quiz.</b> Discussion on Shrek. Watching "The Firm"	<b>Reading 5:</b> McKee Chapter 2 <b>Start thinking</b> about a story for a feature screenplay; be ready to tell something about it in next class.
Monday Feb. 26	<b>Reading 5 quiz.</b> <b>Topic:</b> The visible journey: The feature length film 5 story marks and 6 stages. <b>Topic:</b> The invisible journey: aspects of the main character.  Conversation about your initial feature script ideas (students expected to participate)	<b>Write</b> your feature film synopsis indicating: 5 turning points and 6 stages. <b>Reading 6:</b> McKee Chapter 8 (only from page 181 to 196)
Wednesday Feb. 28	<b>Reading 6 quiz.</b> Review of feature film synopsis indicating: 5 turning points and 6 stages.  Topic: Stage 1 - Create Engagement.	Write all information of your story world based on McKee Ch 8: "The world of the Story."
Monday Mar. 5	Analyzing the initial scenes of 3 films.  Presenting the story world of your film. Brainstorm possible initial scenes.	<b>Write</b> the first 4 scenes of stage 1. Creating engagement.
Wednesday Mar. 7	Review of the first 4 scenes of act 1 <b>Topic:</b> Subplots.	<b>Rewrite</b> the first 4 scenes of act 1. <b>Write</b> from scene 5 to the call to adventure point. (*)
<b><u>Spring Vacation. March 12 - 17</u></b>		



Monday Mar. 19	<b>Review and criticism of draft 2 of the first 4 scenes.</b> Review of draft 1 of scene 5 to the call to adventure point.	<b>Chose and submit</b> a particular problem.
Wednesday Mar. 21	Addressing specifics issues.	Final re-write of Stage 1. (due on Mar 26th for all)
Monday Mar. 26	Review of Draft 2 of Stage 1. First Group (groups will not be announced)	Rewrite the fist 4 scenes of act 1 (*) Write from scene 5 to the call to adventure point. (*)
Wednesday Mar. 28  (March 30, Last Day to Drop Class)	Review of Draft 2 of Stage 1. Second Group Group (Rest of the projects)	<b>Reading 7:</b> Epstein Chapter 1-2
Monday Apr. 2	<b>Reading 7 quiz.</b> TV Show Analysis 1 Topic: Analysis and discussion of Tv shows, springboards and bibles.	Reading: Selected episodes of TV Show. Reading: Personality Types
Wednesday Apr. 4	TV Show Analysis 2	Reading 8: Epstein Chapter 3-5
Monday Apr. 9	<b>Reading 8 quiz</b> Organization of groups for TV Writing. Introduction of the TV show in development and reading of screenplays.	Meeting (in groups): Create 2 TV episode pitches.
Wed. Apr. 11	Presentation of 2 TV episodes (pitches) by group. Re-thinking the TV episodes - Working in groups	Defining and preparing the pitches of the 2 TV episodes.
Monday Apr. 16	Presentation and selection of TV episodes	Write (in groups): TV episode.
Wed. Apr. 18	Work day in class by groups.	Write (in groups): TV episode.
Monday Apr. 23	TV episode 1 draft 1 due. Reading and criticism of TV Episodes.	Re-Write TV episode 1 draft 1
Wed April 25	TV episode 1 draft 2 due.	Re-Write TV episode 1 draft 2
Monday May 30	Recording of Episodes: Assigned Groups	
Wed. May 2	Recording of Episodes: Assigned Groups Submission of Final Draft of Short Film Script.	

(\*) This assignment needs to be typed, printed and given to the instructor at the end of class.