

MCOM 3375 Spring 2017

Mass Communication Dept., Sam Houston State University
Professor: Jeff Olsen Office Hours: MWF 4-5pm by appointment
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Note: Syllabus subject to change with verbal notice

Course Description

SCRIPTWRITING

Syllabus

A script is a blueprint for a performance. Its content depends on principles of storytelling. A script's form follows a set of conventions for a particular medium, type of program, and use: Radio, television, and film emphasize audio and visual performance differently. In this course you will learn the scriptwriting conventions for these different media, programs, and uses.

We will study the screenplay for fiction film and television in depth. Screenwriting is a profession within the film and tv industries' collaborative mode of production. Stories are developed and evaluated according to a standard process that involves basic concepts for story and character design. Each writer's creative process is unique, but they all conform to process of pitch, outline, draft, and revision, with feedback from peers. Students in this course will begin to develop a screenplay through this process, and you will prepare to write a feature or tv episode.

Course Objectives

Students completing the course will be able to:

1. Identify and implement script formats for various kinds of media, programs, and uses.

2. Analyze and assess works according to principles of classical story and character design.
3. Develop a pitch, outline, and screenplay according to the standard collaborative process.

Textbooks and Required Materials

McKee, Robert. *Story*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997. ISBN-10: 0-06-039168-3
Cook, Martie. *Write to TV*. 2nd Ed. New York, NY: Focal, 2014. ISBN-10: 0-415-71089-3.

Scriptwriting software: Celtx (free), Movie Magic Screenwriter, or Final Draft

Course Requirements

Weekly activities include reading, evaluating, and writing at different stages of development, as well as meetings with your peers in class. I will assess your adherence to formatting standards and story design principles, as well as your ability to revise; I am not grading your creativity or talent as a writer. For work submitted after the deadline, grade drops by 25% every 12 hours. Final grade determination will be guided by category weighting:

7 Quizzes: 50%

3 Assignments (Pitch, Outline, and Partial Screenplay): 50%

Units

(subject to change)

Unit 1: Story, Character and Formats/Developing a Pitch

1. Define key elements of story structure, character, and format
2. Study scripts for different media, programs, and uses

3. Develop a short pitch for a television show or feature film

Unit 2: The Elements of a Script/Developing an Outline

1. Define screenplay elements
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the act structure for both television and film
3. Write an outline for a television show or feature

Unit 3: Developing a Long Script

1. Read and analyze a longform script. Recognize formats and conditions for different long forms, and compare them
2. Write the first ten pages of your script

Rules of Conduct

Students will refrain from behavior in the online class environment that disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. Students are prohibited from making offensive remarks or engaging in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior shall result in, minimally, a directive to leave class or being reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with University policy.

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The

University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see Dean of Student's Office.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy:

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf

Students with Disabilities Policy

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these

programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/811006.pdf>

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CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Week One

Introduction, Overview of Syllabus

Assignment: Post your own introduction

Week Two

Assignment: Read McKee "Introduction"
and "The Story Problem"

Week Three

Assignment: Read McKee 2 "The Story Spectrum"
Then take Quiz 1

Week Four

Assignment: Read McKee 3 "Structure and Setting"

Week Five

Assignment: Read McKee 4 "Structure and Genre"
Then take Quiz 2
Unit 1 Project Due - Deliver Short Pitch

Week Six

Introduce Unit 2

Assignment: Read McKee 5 "Structure and Character"

Week Seven

Assignment: Read McKee 6 "Structure and Meaning"
Then take Quiz 3

Week Eight

Assignment: Read McKee 7 "The Substance of Story"

Week Nine

Assignment: Read McKee 8 "The inciting Incident"
Then take Quiz 4

Week Ten

Assignment: Read McKee 9 "Act Design"
Unit 2 Project Due - Outline

Week Eleven

Introduce Unit 3

Assignment: Read McKee 10 "Scene Design"
Then take Quiz 5

Week Twelve

Assignment: Read McKee 11 “Scene Analysis”

Week Thirteen

Assignment: Read McKee 12 “Composition”

Then take Quiz 6

Week Fourteen

Assignment: Read McKee 13 “Crisis, Climax, Resolution”

Week Fifteen

Quiz 7

Unit 2 Project Due – 10 Page Script