



Professor: A.J. “Alex” Avila, PhD

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Class Time/Days:

Tue-Thu: 11a.m. – 12:20 p.m.

DRCB 319

Office hours: Tuesdays 1:30 – 3 p.m.

Other Times Available by Appointment

Course Description:

An introduction to the process of writing screenplays for television and film. Topics covered include character development, genre, plot structure, dialogue, audience analysis and writing/revision. Other topics covered at instructor's discretion. Students should leave this class with a written short script ready for production.

Texts & Materials:

Blueprint for Screenwriting by Rachel Ballon (2004) Taylor & Francis;

Dramatic Story Structure: A Primer for Screenwriters by Edward J. Fink (2013) Routledge; plus, other readings provided by the professor.

Students will be required to use scriptwriting software. The open-sourced program *Celtx* is recommended. The program is free and comes in Mac, PC and Linux versions. (You do not need to get the paid studio version.) If you have purchased a copy of a popular screenwriting program such as *Final Draft*, *Movie Magic Screenwriter*, or *Fade In*, you may use that. You may NOT use MS-Word.

Students will be required to write a journal. This may be kept by hand or electronically. If journaling is done by hand, journals will be handed-in on occasion for grading. If the journaling is done by computer, the journal must be posted on a blog-site. (Any free blog site is acceptable.) When grading is due for journals, students should send a blog link via email.

Course Objectives:

This class will focus on the basic skills needed for aspiring screenwriters. To this end, this class will spend time watching, studying, analyzing, and writing film. Students will be given various writing assignments to develop writing and communication skills. Students will watch assigned films and be prepared to discuss key screenwriting aspects of the films watched. By the end of the course the student should successfully complete a variety of writing assignments on deadline demonstrating improved writing skills and an understanding of the format required for screenwriting.

Course Goal and Purpose:

Students will analyze film structure and character development and write a short screenplay based upon the principals learned in class and capable of being produced by a student film group.

Student Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn to effectively analyze and evaluate films, film scripts and film writing.
- Students will learn the fundamental principles of story development, character development, and key techniques used by professional screenwriters.
- Student will gain factual knowledge of industry terminology, methods and trends of screenwriting.
- Students will develop their own creative writing abilities through the application of techniques used by contemporary screenwriters.

Student Responsibilities:

- Students will complete assigned readings.
- Students will come to class with prepared assignments.
- Students will come to class prepared to participate in discussions.
- Students will watch assigned films.
- Students will utilize the online Blackboard class site regularly.
- Students will share their writing with the class.

Special Note About Adult Content:

This class studies, analyze and writes film. Some of the films we will encounter have various levels of profanity, violence, nudity, and adult situations. If you are easily offended then please talk to me to arrange an acceptable alternative. (Obviously, we will refrain from using profanity as a matter of course in this classroom.)

Writing Journal:

As part of this class, you will be required to maintain a writing journal. This can be kept electronically or by hand in the form of a spiral notebook. While you are encouraged to write whatever you want in the journal, you will, from time to time, be given specific writing assignments designed to encourage your creative writing. These assignments will require your journals to be collected for grading and spot-checking at least three times during the course of the semester. The graded journals may be retrieved during my office hours or the following class meeting. The journal will also be collected prior to finals week for final grading. If you keep your journal electronically, you must send me a weblink to your written journal (blog). If all you do in the journal is write the required assignments, the highest grade possible for the journals will be a B. In order to achieve an A grade, you must journal above and beyond the required assignments.

Grading:

Students can earn grades through academic work and participating in class discussions. A balance of homework, writing assignments, discussion, presentations, and class participation all affect grades.

<i>Grade Unit</i>	<i>%</i>
Class assignments	25%
Class Participation	20%
Mid-Term Exam	15%
Writing Journal	15%
Final (exam) Screenplay	25%

Grades	90 – 100 = A
	80 – 89 = B
	70 – 79 = C
	60 – 69 = D
	60 > = F

Late Work:

Assignments turned in late will be penalized one letter grade for each day that it is late. This includes classes missed due to an excused absence. Excused absences and official school events apply only to attendance policies and do not apply to assignments due. If an exam is missed due to an excused absence arrangements for taking them must be arranged in advance or be subject to academic penalty. Late exams and assignments are subject to academic penalty at the discretion of the professor.

Attendance:

Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. If you come in after attendance has been taken it is your responsibility to have your attendance registered. If I have to mark the attendance sheet for you, I will mark it as "late." Students will be allowed 2 class days of absences without penalty. Any Additional Absence over 2 class days will result in a final grade reduction of one letter grade from the final letter grade.

Doctor's excuses will be accepted for an excused absence. The note must be on official letterhead from their office.

Academic Dishonesty:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity 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. Sam Houston State University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings up to and including but not limited to cheating on an examination or other academic work that is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

If you fabricate content or violate ethical writing practices, you WILL fail this course.

Under no circumstances are you permitted to plagiarize the work of others. Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work, including the work of other students, as your own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source must be fully acknowledged. If you reference someone else's work, give them full credit. **Any student who plagiarizes will receive a failing grade on the assignment and is subject to an F in the course, disciplinary referral to the dean, even expulsion from this institution.**

Writing Center:

You should already know proper grammar and mechanics, including the correct use of punctuation. If writing is difficult for you, I urge you to visit the Sam Houston Writing Center, located in Farrington 111. Tutors are available to work with you one-on-one at no charge. To schedule an appointment, you can drop by the writing center or call 936-294-3680. Due to the nature of scriptwriting, many "proper" grammar and mechanical rules can be bent for artistic and creative purposes in this class.

Computer Use:

The computers in this classroom are for schoolwork only. You are not allowed to do personal business on the computer (such as checking your email, Instagram, Snapchat, or Facebook page) during class. During class exercises and discussions, you are allowed to use the computers to take notes or as directed to complete assignments. Students who violate this policy might be asked to leave and counted absent for the day.

Americans with Disabilities Act:

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely for reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs or 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, 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 a student has a disability that may affect adversely his or her work in the class, then the student is encouraged to register with SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with the instructor about how to best deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. Note: No accommodation can be made until the student registers 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>

Religious Holidays:

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 for that purpose. 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 absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under the Tax Code.

Visitors in the Classroom:

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, they can be admitted at the discretion of the instructor.

Instructor Evaluations:

Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

Classroom Rules of Conduct:

The Code of Student Conduct and Discipline is found at the following link:
<https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>.

Common courtesy is required of everyone. Students creating any type of disturbance, such as excessive talking, will be asked to leave and counted "absent" for the day. Students may also be told to leave if they are not paying attention. Students' cell phones must be turned off and out of sight during class. No texting.