

INTERMEDIATE SCREENWRITING

FMS 309

Fall, 2021

Professor: Christopher Bradley
Lecture Time/Place: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:00-7:15, Tempe PSH 130
Email: christopher.bradley.1@asu.edu
Telephone: 323-702-2183
Office: Ross-Blakely Hall Room 328
Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM

COURSE OUTLINE

This is an intermediate course that focuses on the essentials of narrative used in film, television and new media. Through a thorough study of structure, plot, character, and dialogue, students will develop an outline for film or television. They will complete the course having written and rewritten the first act of a feature film script (approximately 30 pages) or a spec script for a television series. These scripts can be for live action or animation.

Through analysis of film clips, scenes, and student work, we will explore the connection between plot and character. We will choose how race, class, and gender are represented and grow in awareness of what “message” our work may be sending to an audience.

Although this course is web delivered, it is neither automated nor self-paced. You are expected to engage in all learning tasks and attend threaded discussions on the eBoard. To access the class website and eBoard, you can use your personal computer, one in the library, and/or computer labs at ASU. Check the class website for a list of these labs and their hours of operation.

Readings: There are two books that need to be purchased for this course:

- McKee, Robert. Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting. New York: Harper Collins, 1997
- Trottier, David. The Screenwriter’s Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling Your Script. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2005.

You will likely need to purchase these books either at the [ASU bookstore](#) or from an online distributor such as [Amazon](#). If you are taking this course via distance learning and are not within driving range of campus, consider the fact that it will take at least two weeks for the book to arrive; so be sure to order it well before class begins.

You will also be reading a number of articles, all of which have been posted to the virtual classroom in the Learning Tasks section. To honor copyright law, they have been password protected. The teaching team will email you the passwords before the

first day of class. Read the books and articles carefully and on time, as they will form the basis of the online discussions and exercises.

Webliography: Your class will build its own Webliography of useful websites for screenwriters and will be located on the eboard. This will be voluntary, but will give you credit towards participation. Search the Internet for useful links, which can include screenwriting competitions, format guidelines, movie databases, screenplay sources, and creative sources for research (i.e. architectural terms or trends from the 1950's). Be creative but do not duplicate sites that have already been added previously.

Peer Critique and Feedback: An important part of becoming a writer is gaining insight to other writing and expressing that insight in an articulate and constructive way. Throughout this course you will offer your peers feedback and critique. The nature of your comments should be encouraging and supportive but also helpful and insightful. As the old proverb goes, "The sword of truth doesn't have to decapitate. It can simply point." (If you experience criticism that is not consistent with these goals, let your instructor know.)

Plagiarism Policy: You are expected to turn in original work for this course. Quotations or ideas paraphrased from other work must be properly cited. Taking credit for another's idea or writing is plagiarism, which is a serious violation of the University's [Code of Academic Integrity](#). Integrity is expected of every student in all academic work. The guiding principle of academic integrity is that a student's submitted work must be the student's own. This principle is furthered by the student Code of Conduct and disciplinary procedures established by ABOR Policies 5-308-5-403, all provisions of which apply to all Arizona State University students. If you are unsure how to credit your source, ask a member of the teaching team for clarification.

COURSE INFORMATION

This class follows the COVID-19 guidance and regulations of ASU.

Face coverings: ASU's current policy is that face coverings will be required in certain indoor settings, i.e., where distancing may not be possible. These include the following:

Classrooms and teaching or research labs where distancing is not possible.

All ASU clinical programs and centers that serve the general public, such as the ASU Health Centers, Child Development Laboratory, and Counselor Training Center (the "Programs"), whether on- or off-campus.

Meeting rooms, workshop, design or production studios, and other indoor settings where distancing is not possible.

Each of you is experiencing the pandemic in ways both familiar and unique. You may be grieving the loss of family and friends, or be disturbed by the conditions in which you now live, learn, work, etc. You may have health concerns, new or more intense responsibilities, food insecurity, housing instability, employment or financial pressures, etc. Some of you are living in town and others are located elsewhere, so the impact of the pandemic will

vary. ASU has its plan and resources (see, for example: ASU COVID-19 Guide, the ASU COVID-19 FAQ pages, ASU Health Services, ASU Counseling Services, and ASU testing information site, and you have your own priorities and needs to consider. I will be checking in with you all on a regular basis, but in the meantime, or at any point if your circumstances change, please let me know so that I can work with you to help you adjust or achieve your goals.

ASU continues to provide vaccines free of charge to students and employees. As noted on the EOSS's vaccine FAQs webpage: Anyone in Arizona who is 16 or older can sign up for a vaccination through the state website or the Maricopa County one. ASU students and employees can also sign up via My Health Portal for the on-campus distribution.

Illness: If you are feeling ill, please consult the Educational Outreach and Student Services (EOSS) website at: <https://eoss.asu.edu/health/announcements/coronavirus/faqs> where you may access help through your “My Health Portal” link and where you may find links to other ASU info about COVID-19.

Counseling: If you are experiencing increased anxiety or stress related to concerns for family or friends, please contact ASU Counseling Services at 480-965-6146 to speak with a counselor. They are there to help. In addition, ASU has a new counseling service that’s available 24/7 to ASU students anywhere in the world. It’s called “Open Call and Open Chat.” The URL is: <https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling/services/open-call-and-open-chat>

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Attendance and participation in class activities is an essential part of the learning process, and students are expected to attend class regularly. Some absences are, however, unavoidable. Excused absences for classes will be given without penalty to the grade in the case of (1) a university-sanctioned event [ACD 304-02]; (2) religious holidays [ACD 304-04; a list can be found here <https://eoss.asu.edu/cora/holidays>]; (3) work performed in the line-of-duty according [SSM 201-18]; and (4) illness, quarantine or self-isolation related to illness as documented by a health professional.

GRADED WORK

We expect every student to leave this course with a better -- more insightful -- understanding of screenwriting. Along the way, we ask that you complete several exercises and peer script critiques on our electronic bulletin board (eBoard).

Participation (100 Points): You are responsible for participating in the exercises and discussions that take place on the electronic bulletin board (eBoard). In addition to completing the exercise for each Lesson, you need to also post at least two substantive comments in the ongoing threaded discussion. Your posts must keep up with the progress of the course. You cannot, for example, go back to the eBoard and post to a Lesson after it has been completed and expect the posts to be counted toward your participation grade. Moreover, the teaching team will keep track of your participation, including assessing the value of what you bring to this interactivity.

A “substantive” comment is difficult to quantify, but as a guideline, it would be unlikely a student could say something productive about another student’s work in less than four sentences.

Assignment I: Treatment (100 Points): You will submit a three-page single-spaced treatment of your script. Think of it like a short story, but build it along the lines of the Structure Worksheet posted to the eboard. For the second part of this assignment you will need to give notes to at least one of your fellow writers on their treatments. Provide supportive and encouraging critiques, but also comment with respect to strengths and weaknesses.

Assignment II: First 10 Pages/ Peer Feedback (100 points): For the first part of this assignment you will post the first 10 pages of your screenplay to the eboard. For the second part of this assignment you will need to give notes to at least one of your peers on the discussion board, based on their first 10 pages. Give your peers supportive and encouraging critiques, but also comment with respect to strengths and weaknesses. You will also be asked to submit a response to your classmates’ feedback along with your final draft, explaining why you did or did not incorporate feedback into any revisions.

ASSIGNMENT III CUT FROM HERE. ASSIGNMENT IV IS NOW ASSIGNMENT III
Assignment III: Final Draft (100 Points): You will be turning in the first 30 pages or first act of a feature length screenplay, along with a 1 or 2-page examination of why you did or did not incorporate specific notes from classmates and the professor.

Grading Scale - 0 to 400 Points

A+	..... 400+ Points
A	..... 372 - 399 Points
A-	..... 360 - 371 Points
B+	..... 352 - 359 Points
B	..... 332 - 351 Points
B-	..... 320 - 331 Points
C+	..... 312 - 319 Points
C	..... 280 - 311 Points
D	..... 240 - 279 Points
E	..... 000 - 239 Points

LEARNING TASKS

This course is comprised of 15 lessons. Each lesson includes all or some of the following tasks:

1. Reading: Read a chapter from the assigned books
2. Reading Review: Reconsider Key Concepts from the Readings
3. Website: Contribute to a Webliography
4. Lecture: Listen to Streaming Audio Lectures with PowerPoint Slides
5. eBoard: Pose and Answer Questions on the Electronic Bulletin Board

Lesson 01: **Writing the Screenplay** (Thursday/Tuesday, 08/19, 8/24)

Reading:	“Introduction” (McKee, 1997) Reading Review
Media Clips:	<i>Dances with Wolves</i> (Costner, 1990) <i>Grey’s Anatomy</i> (Pilot Episode) (Rhimes, 2005)
Lecture:	Storytelling
eBoard:	Discuss with Classmates POST THREE STORY IDEAS TO THE EBOARD
<u>Lesson 02:</u>	<u>The Logline</u> (Th/T, 08/26, 08/31)
Reading:	Chapter 1, “Story Problem” (McKee, 1997) Reading Review
Media Clips:	<i>The Wizard of Oz</i> (Fleming, 1939) <i>The Exorcist</i> (Friedkin, 1973)
Lecture:	Story Ideas
eBoard:	SELECT A SINGLE STORY IDEA
<u>Lesson 03:</u>	<u>Character or Plot</u> (Th/T, 09/02, 09/07)
Reading:	Chapters 5, “Structure and Character” (McKee, 1997) Chapter 17, “Character” (McKee, 1997) Reading Review
Media Clips:	<i>Singin’ in the Rain</i> (Donen and Kelly, 1952) <i>Raging Bull</i> (Scorsese, 1980) <i>Tootsie</i> (Pollack, 1982)
Lecture:	It’s the Same Thing
eBoard:	CHARACTER SKETCH: PROTAGONIST & ANTAGONIST
<u>Lesson 04:</u>	<u>Structure and Plot</u> (Th/T, 09/09, 09/14)
Reading:	Chapter 7, “The Substance of Story” (McKee, 1997) Chapter 8, “The Inciting Incident” (McKee, 1997) Reading Review
Website:	http://www.wordplayer.com/welcome.html
Media Clips:	<i>Star Wars</i> (Lucas, 1977) <i>Alien</i> (Scott, 1979)
Lecture:	Compelling First Acts
eBoard:	DEFINE YOUR STORY STRUCTURE
<u>Lesson 05:</u>	<u>Scene Work</u> (Th/T, 09/16, 09/21)
Reading:	Chapter 10, “Scene Design” (McKee, 1997) Chapter 15, “Exposition” (McKee, 1997) Reading Review
Website:	http://www.atomfilms.com/home.jsp
Media Clips:	<i>Silence of the Lambs</i> (Demme, 1991) <i>Choose Me</i> (Rudolph, 1984)
Lecture:	What’s the point?
eBoard:	SCENE EXERCISE
<u>Lesson 06:</u>	<u>Dialog</u> (Th/T, 09/23, 09/28)
Reading:	Chapter 18, “Text,” pp. 388-400 (McKee, 1997) Book III, “Proper Formatting Technique” (Trottier, 2005)

Media Clips: Reading Review
 Double Indemnity (Wilder, 1944)
 Before the Devil Knows You're Dead (Lumet, 2007)
 Lecture: Subtext or Bust
 eBoard: DEMONSTRATE PROPER FORMATTING

Assignment 1: Your (approximately) 3-page treatment is due in class Tuesday, 9/23

Lesson 07: **The World of the Story (Th/T, 09/30, 10/05)**
Reading: Chapter 3 "Structure and Setting" (McKee, 1997)
 Reading Review
Media Clips: *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993)
 Citizen Kane (Welles, 1941)
Lecture: Location, Location, Location
eBoard: BEGINNINGS

FALL BREAK, OCTOBER 09 – OCTOBER 12

Lesson 08: **Theme (Th/Th, 10/07, 10/14)**
Reading: Chapter 6, "Structure and Meaning" (McKee, 1997)
 Reading Review
Media Clips: *Dead Poets' Society* (Weir, 1989)
 Harold and Maude (Ashby, 1971)
Lecture: The Controlling Idea
eBoard: POST THE THEME OF A FAVORITE FILM

Lesson 09: **The Middle (T/Th, 10/19, 10/21)**
Reading: Chapter 9 "Act Design" (McKee, 1997)
 Reading Review
Media Clips: *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991)
 One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Forman, 1976)
Lecture: Building the Tension
eBoard: Peer Critiques

Lesson 10: **Suspense and Surprise (T/Th, 10/26, 10/28)**
Reading: Chapter 16, "Problems and Solutions" (McKee, 1997)
 Reading Review
Media Clips: *The Thing* (Carpenter, 1982)
 Carrie (De Palma, 1976)
Lecture: Keeping the Audience in the Story
eBoard: POST ONE EXAMPLE EACH OF SURPRISE AND SUSPENSE

Lesson 11: **Dramatic Irony (T/Th, 11/02, 11/04)**
Reading: Chapter 11, "Scene Analysis" (McKee, 1997)
 Reading Review
Media Clips: *Tootsie* (Pollack, 1982)

Lecture: *Sweeney Todd* (Burton, 2007)
 eBoard: “It’s What They Don’t Know”
 POST 3 EXAMPLES OF DRAMATIC IRONY IN FILMS

Assignment #2: Your first ten pages (approximately) with story elements including your Opening Hook, your Ordinary World and through your Inciting Incident is due in class Tuesday, 10/2.

Lesson 12: Exposition (T/Th, 11/09, 11/11)
 Reading: Chapter 19, A Writer’s Method (McKee, 1997)
Screenwriter’s Bible, Pages 84-86, “Summon Your Muse”
 Reading Review
 Media Clips: *Ordinary People* (Redford, 1980)
Casablanca (Curtiz, 1942)
 Lecture: Writing Strategies / More on Exposition
 eBoard: POST AT LEAST ONE EXAMPLE OF GOOD FILM EXPOSITION

Lesson 13: Composition (T/Th, 11/16, 11/18)
 Reading: Chapter 12, Composition (McKee, 1997)
 Reading Review
 Media Clips: *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941)
Boys Don’t Cry (Peirce, 1999)
The Wizard of Oz (Fleming, 1939)
Apocalypse Now (Coppola, 1979)
 Lecture: Transitions
 eBoard: POST AN EXAMPLE OF AT LEAST 1 CONCEPT FROM CHAPTER 12

Lesson 14: Climax and Resolution (T/Th, 11/23, 11/25)
 Reading: Chapter 13 “Crisis, Climax, Resolution” (McKee, 1997)
 Reading Review
 Media: *Carrie* (De Palma, 1976)
Thelma and Louise (Scott, 1991)
Choose Me (Rudolph, 1984)
 Lecture: Move Them!
 eBoard: DESCRIBE THE CLIMACTIC SCENE IN YOUR SCREENPLAY

Lesson 15: The Rewrite (T/Th, 11/30, 12/02)
 Reading: Book IV “Writing and Revising...” (Trottier, 2005)
 Reading Review
 Website: <http://hubpages.com/hub/Best-Screenplay-Contests>
 Lecture: Sacrifice: Nothing is Wasted
 eBoard: DISCUSS CHANGES YOU’VE MADE TO YOUR SCREENPLAY SO FAR

Assignment #3: The first thirty pages of your screenplay (approximately) with story elements including your re-written Opening Hook, Ordinary World and Inciting Incident;

and now including your Mini-Crisis and Crisis/First Act Break) is due in class on Thursday, 12/2.