A screenplay is one of the most unappreciated forms of writing. It is also one of the most complex. The novelist or poet communicates directly with their audience. The screenwriter must initially communicate their ideas, emotions, and themes into a literary work that involves many intermediaries before it reaches an audience.

As a result the screenwriter must negotiate a path often crowded with problems that don’t arise for other writers. The screenwriter must communicate with a director, a production designer, an editor, actors, costumers, and a director of photography, studio executives, investors, etc.

At the same time, the screenwriter must intimately understand both the conventions of storytelling and the psychology of an audience, while never losing sight of the needs, desires, and human flaws of the characters in the story.

The ability to juggle these conflicting demands tests the most skillful of screenwriters and makes the creation of a first-rate screenplay a rare event. Thus begging the question – either as someone writing a screenplay or someone analyzing one – what makes a good story well told?

The aim of this class is to explore, analyze and understand the elements and approaches to screenplay writing. In order to accomplish this goal we will examine how a screenwriter utilizes structure, character, plot, theme, and symbolism to create a screen story well told.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the completion of the class, you will be able to achieve the following objectives:
1. Have a solid understanding of the “building blocks” and design of a screenplay.
2. Have an appreciation of the centrality of structure and character in the creation of a screenplay.
3. Have an understanding of various approaches to screenplay writing.
4. Have an understanding of how to write professional script coverage.
5. Have an understanding of what elements make a “good story well told.”

METHODOLOGY:

Each class will be divided up into lecture, discussion and screening; we will view films, clips, scenes and sequences.

ASSIGNMENTS – WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN CLASS WITH DUE DATES

You will be assigned feature and hour-pilot screenplays to read—available for download at simplyscripts.com or thedailyscript.com.

You will be asked to answer a) several specific questions or b) write coverage for each script that you are assigned to read. (I will let you know which scripts you will answer questions for and which scripts you will write coverage for.)

In addition, there will be assigned readings from books on writing – and you will be asked to answer questions regarding the reading.

All assignments are to be handed in the week after they are assigned, either a hard copy to me in class or an email before the class begins.

I expect all written assignments to be proofread for spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

SCHEDULE:

SEPTEMBER 17 – SESSION ONE
Introduction and overview of class and syllabus.
Job of the writer and/or script analyst.
Screen “Winter's Bone”

SEPTEMBER 24 – SESSION TWO

Screenplay structure - Beginnings.
Screen beginnings of three films.

OCTOBER 1 – SESSION THREE

Screenplay Structure - Middles
Screen the middles of three films.

OCTOBER 15 – SESSION FOUR

Endings.
Screen the endings of several films.

OCTOBER 22 – SESSION FIVE

WRITING PROFESSIONAL SCRIPT COVERAGE
Screenplay structure – multiple narratives.
Screen “The Godfather”

OCTOBER 29 – SESSION SIX

NON-LINEAR STRUCTURES
SCREEN “THE USUAL SUSPECTS”

NOVEMBER 5 – SESSION 7

CHARACTER DRIVEN STORIES
SCREEN “PAN’S LABYRINTH”

NOVEMBER 12 – SESSION 8

THE USE OF GENRE IN SCREENPLAY CONSTRUCTION
SCREEN “SEXY BEAST”

NOVEMBER 19TH – SESSION 9

TELEVISION PILOTS
SIMILARITIES/DIFFERENCES WITH FEATURE FILMS.

TOPICS TO BE COVERED IN THE LAST FOUR CLASSES WILL DEPEND ON A QUESTIONNAIRE THAT YOU WILL BE GIVEN IN SESSION 10 TO FILL OUT, AS WELL AS MY ASSESSMENT OF WHERE WE ARE AS A CLASS.
NOVEMBER 26 – SESSION 10
TBD

DECEMBER 3 – SESSION 11
TBD

DECEMBER 10 – SESSION 12
TBD

DECEMBER 17 – SESSION 13
TBD

GRADING:

Class participation: 20%
Assignments 50%
Final Paper: 30%

UGFTV’s Attendance policy:

Absence: The Department recommends that each student be allowed no more than two absences per course per semester, regardless of how often the class meets. This is a minimum standard.

For more than two absences to be excused, the student must hand in documentation which attests to the impossibility of attending class due to illness or genuine family emergency. The student is responsible for making up work which is missed. Finally, the faculty member may decide that too much time has been missed due to illness or emergency.

After the third absence, the student can no longer earn an A. A student with three absences who is producing A level work will receive a grade no higher than B. For each additional absence, the highest grade achievable will be lowered: from B to C, from C to D. If a student with five absences is producing B- level work, he will receive an F. Upon the sixth absence, an A student automatically fails the course.

Lateness: If a student is fifteen minutes late on three occasions, these will count as one absence.
UGFTV’S STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s original work as if it were your own. More specifically, plagiarism is to present as your own: a sequence of words quoted without quotation marks; a paraphrased passage from another writer’s work; ideas, sound recordings, computer data, or images composed or created by someone else.

ACCESSIBILITY:

Academic accommodations are available for students who with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 for further information.