

Spring 2017
W 2-4:50 (CAC 237)

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COMM 351: Writing for the Media: Writing for TELEVISION

Course Description

Course Goals

Requirements (total of 100 points)

Participation/attendance	15%
In-class exercises (<i>including revisions and critiques</i>)	20%
Homework assignments	20%
Beat Sheet	10%
Step-Outline/Treatment	10%
Final Screenplay	25%

Grading Scale

A: 94-100	B-: 80-83	D+: 67-69
A-: 90-93	C+: 77-79	D: 64-66
B+: 87-89	C: 74-76	F: 0-63
B: 84-86	C-: 70-73	

Readings

There is one textbook for this course: . It is available for rent and purchase through the bookstore. All other readings will be on D2L as PDF files or links. Readings should be completed by the day under which they're listed.

You are welcome to purchase Final Draft for this class, but it's expensive. Instead, consider using a free screenwriting program like Celtx (<http://celtx.com/index.html>). I don't care HOW you get your screenplay in the correct format—technically, you can do all of this successfully in Word—but it's up to you if you want to use software to make your life easier.

Attendance Policy

This class is collaborative, and only meets once a week. Attendance is mandatory, and will be taken at the beginning of class. **If you are late, it is your responsibility to come up and make sure I've marked you down as present.** If you need to miss class for an emergency, let me know *in advance*. Absences will be excused on a case-by-case basis. You are allowed one unexcused absence, then after that each unexcused absence reduces your participation grade by a point.

Furthermore, it's incredibly important that you show up prepared for class—do the readings, complete your assignments, and think actively about your screenplay even when you're not in class! If you're not prepared, you're hurting yourself AND your collaborators, and you're betraying your script and making it sad.

Assignments

Exercises: These will be evaluated on the degree to which you fulfilled the assignment, the quality of the writing (clarity, correctness, engaging voice), and the freshness and complexity of the ideas. This goes for in-class assignments (which will typically be graded on a check system) and homework assignments (which will typically be graded on a 5-point system).

Requirements for Written Assignments

Papers must be typed, page-numbered, and adhere to the proper format, when applicable. I reserve the right to deduct points for violations of these requirements. Late papers drop by 10% for each 24 hours it's late, whether it's the weekend or a weekday (i.e., a 100-point paper one day late will be penalized 10 points before I grade it). Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for personal emergencies, but ONLY if you ask me IN ADVANCE of the actual due date.

Class Environment

Students are expected to contribute to a respectful, productive learning environment. This includes being on time, being attentive, participating in class discussions, and being nice to everyone, regardless of their views. Technology is a big issue, but rest assured that it's pretty easy to tell whether a student is actually taking notes on a laptop or checking email/whatever. If you're going to use a laptop or tablet, please use it for class purposes, and please switch cell phones to silent. Also, no texting in class, please. Any violation of the above will impact your attendance/participation grade.

Guidelines for Assessing Participation Grades

- Tardiness; degree and frequency
- Not just frequency, but quality of comments. Is it evident that the student has done the readings and engaged with the material?
- Consideration and respect for other students and their points of view
- Engagement with the class (i.e., sleeping or excessive talking to others while the professor or another student is speaking)
- Technology use: disrespectful or reasonable?

Disability Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, check here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyInfo.pdf>

If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations, please register with the Disability and Assistive Technology Center and then contact me at the beginning of the course. I am happy to help in any way that I can. For more information, please visit the Disability and Assistive Technology Center, located on the 6th floor of the Learning Resource Center (the Library). You can also find more information here: <http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>

Statement of Academic Integrity

UW-Stevens Point values a safe, honest, respectful, and inviting learning environment. In order to ensure that each student has the opportunity to succeed, we have developed a set of expectations for all students and instructors. This set of expectations is known as the Rights and Responsibilities

document, and it is intended to help establish a positive living and learning environment at UWSP. Click here for more information:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Pages/rightsandresponsibilities.aspx>

Academic integrity is central to the mission of higher education in general and UWSP in particular. Academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) is taken very seriously. Don't do it! The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. For more information, see the UWSP "Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures" section of the Rights and Responsibilities document, Chapter 14, which can be accessed here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf>

Terms of Enrollment

This syllabus is a contract. By taking this class, you agree to the policies listed here. I reserve the right to change the syllabus, with timely notification to students.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week One: INTRODUCTION

Wednesday, 1/24

Ch 1 of Hilliard

Week Two: BASIC RULES OF WRITING A SERIES; THE SITCOM

Wednesday, 1/31

Readings:

"Concepts of Playwriting," Hilliard 390-398

Sitcom structure Sandler p 92-99

Newman, "From Beats to Arcs"

Creeber, intro to genre 6-12

Screening: *Community* and *Friends*

Week Three: SITCOM PART 2; TELEVISION STRUCTURE (SR); Writing "in character"

Wednesday, 2/7

Readings: Hilliard 430-431.

Rules of choosing ep plot. Sandler 37-47,

Hartley, "Situation Comedy"

Thompson, "Comedy Verite" (optional)

Do reading on pitch (Sandler); start prepping pitch

Week Four: PRIME-TIME SOAP/DRAMA; CHARACTER

Wednesday, 2/14 **PITCH FEST**

Readings: Hilliard, 410-423, Feuer, “Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today”, Douglas 8-23

Finding your story. Sandler Ch 4

Douglas, Ch3 (how to do breakdown)

Screening: *Scandal* or *The O.C.*

Week Five: PRIME-TIME SOAP/DRAMA PART 2; HOW TO PLOT

Wednesday, 2/21 **BEAT BREAKDOWN DUE**

Readings:

Sandler Ch 5. Theme/plot and premise line; Sandler Ch. 6 and 7 How to do a synopsis. Specifics vs. details. What does central character want, , who’s pro, who’s con, what’s the risk, what’s the fear (good set of questions). Write synopses of your sample scripts before you write your own. Give them LOTS of time to work together.

Week Six: PROCEDURAL; HOW TO PLOT PART 2

Wednesday, 2/28

Readings:

Sandler Ch 8 The plot thickens “Why is tonight/today different?” Let character lead you to plot. Obstacles are consequences.

Harriss, “Policing Propp”

Screening: *Psych*

Week Seven: PROCEDURAL PART 2; WHAT’S AN OUTLINE

Wednesday, 3/7 **SCRIPT SYNOPSIS DUE**

Readings:

Douglas 127-152—we’ll use that format for outlines.

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Week Eight:

Wednesday, 3/14 **CARY AT SCMS**

Readings:

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Week Nine: PEAK TV/LIMITED RUN SERIES; WRITING DIALOGUE

Wednesday, 3/21

Hilliard, 423-426

Mittel, "Narrative Complexity"

Work on beat breakdown of your own episode.

Scene structure. Sandler 118-125

Screening: *Stranger Things*

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Week Ten: SPRING BREAK

Wednesday, 3/28 **NO CLASS**

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Week Eleven: PEAK TV PART 2

Wednesday, 4/4 **SCRIPT OUTLINE DUE (one page minimum per act)**

Readings:

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Week Twelve: SCIENCE FICTION/TELEFANTASY, DIALOGUE AND EXPOSITION

Wednesday, 4/11

Readings: Sandler 128 (dialogue, exposition (8 ways to stop the exposition truck)

Screening: *Doctor Who*

Reading: Hockley, Johnson, Hills, "Telefantasy and Science Fiction"

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Week Thirteen: SCIENCE FICTION/TELEFANTASY PART 2; PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Wednesday, 4/18

Readings: Epstein, ch 4

Screening:

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Week Fourteen: THE BUSINESS

Wednesday, 4/25

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Week Fifteen: TABLE READS

Wednesday, 5/2

See Sandler, 157

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Week Sixteen: TABLE READS

Wednesday, 5/9

Stuff on the business of TV: Douglas, Ch 5 and 6

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Week Seventeen:

Thursday, 5/17, 12:30-2:30: **TURN IN SCRIPTS**