

Spring 2019
2-4:50 (CAC 204)

Dr. Cary Elza
Office: W 1-3, Th 2-3, CAC 311
Cary.Elza@uwsp.edu

COMM 351: Writing for the Media: TELEVISION FICTION

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce you to the process of thinking about, writing, editing, and collaborating on writing for a serial format. We'll cover the basics of structure, format, narrative and plot development, character development, and principles of conflict, and we'll think about audience, commercial considerations, and the act of writing in a collaborative community. As we go, we'll be watching and reading episodes of television in order to get a feel for the rules of structure, tone, character, setting, and dialogue that are unique to various televisual genres.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify and employ basic elements of successful media writing, including theme, narrative, voice, format, and audience.
- Apply their understanding of TV form, format, structure, and genre conventions to the production of their own creative work.
- Demonstrate critical reading and writing skills.

But in addition to these basic learning outcomes, we've got a few other goals:

- Think and create imaginatively within limits—work with RULES
- Willingly and thoughtfully edit, criticize, and rewrite both your own work and others'
- Collaborate to create and compose, to appraise and judge, and to make each work the best work it can be
- Produce creative work on a self-imposed (in addition to externally-imposed) schedule—in other words, think and create on your own time, making time for reflection

Requirements (total of 100 points)

Participation/attendance	15%
In-class exercises (<i>including revisions and critiques</i>)	20%
Homework assignments	20%
Beat Breakdown	10%
Script Outline	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

All readings will be on Canvas as PDF files or links. **Make sure you are checking CANVAS for readings, not D2L!!!!** Readings should be completed by the day under which they're listed.

Software

You are welcome to purchase Final Draft or Movie Magic for this class, but screenwriting software can be really expensive. Instead, consider using a free screenwriting program like **Celtx** (<http://celtx.com/index.html>) or **Highland** <https://quoteunquoteapps.com/highland-2/> or **Writer Duet** <https://writerduet.com/>. 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!**

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.
- Consideration and respect for other students and their points of view
- Engagement with the class
- Technology use: disrespectful or reasonable? Were you texting instead of paying attention to me or to your group members? Are they annoyed? Am I annoyed?

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

Tuesday, 1/22

Reading:

- Hilliard, Ch. 1

Screening: "Pilot," *Veronica Mars*

Week Two: BASIC RULES OF WRITING A SERIES; THE SERIALIZED DRAMA

Tuesday, 1/29

Readings:

- "Concepts of Playwriting," Hilliard 390-398
- Newman, "From Beats to Arcs"
- Creeber, 6-12
- "Pilot," *Veronica Mars*

Screening: "Pilot," *The O.C.*

Week Three: DRAMA 2; WHAT IS A SPEC SCRIPT?; THE PITCH

Tuesday, 2/5

Readings:

- Hilliard, 430-431
- Sandler, “What’s a Story” (37-47) and “The Pitch,” (especially 183-189)
- Douglas, “What’s So Special About TV Drama Series?” (8-23)
- Feuer, “Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today” (OPTIONAL)
- “Pilot,” *The O.C.* script

Screening: “Pilot,” *Scandal*

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Week Four: THE SITCOM; TELEVISION STRUCTURE

Tuesday, 2/12 **PITCH FEST**

Readings:

- Douglas, “How a Classic Script is Crafted” (especially 67-73)
- *Scandal*, “Pilot”
- Hartley et al, “Situation Comedy”

Screening: “The One with the Blackout,” *Friends*

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Week Five: SITCOM 2; HOW TO PLOT

Tuesday, 2/19 **BEAT BREAKDOWN DUE**

Readings:

- Sandler, “Theme/plot,” “Synopsis,” and “Turning Ideas into Stories” (61-77)
- Douglas, “Writing Your Own Episode”
- “The One with the Blackout,” *Friends*
- Thompson, “Comedy Verite” (optional)

Screening: “Pilot,” *Community*

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Week Six: HOW TO PLOT PART 2; PROCEDURAL AND CAUSE-EFFECT

Tuesday, 2/26

Readings:

- Sandler, “The plot thickens”

Screening: TBA, *X-Files*?

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Week Seven: PROCEDURAL 2; WHAT’S AN OUTLINE

Tuesday, 3/5 **SCRIPT SYNOPSIS DUE**

Readings:

- Douglas, “Writing Your Own Episode” (127-152)

Screening: TBA

Week Eight: PEAK TV/LIMITED RUN; FORMAT AND STYLE

Tuesday, 3/12

Readings:

- Mittel, “Narrative Complexity”

Screening: TBA

Week Nine: SPRING BREAK

Tuesday, 3/19 NO CLASS

Week Ten: PEAK TV/LIMITED RUN; SERIES BIBLES

Tuesday, 3/26 **SCRIPT OUTLINE DUE THIS WEEK** (one page minimum per act)

Readings:

- Series Bible, *Montauk (Stranger Things)*

Screening: “Chapter One,” *Stranger Things*

Week Eleven: SCIENCE FICTION/TELEFANTASY, DIALOGUE AND EXPOSITION

Tuesday, 4/2

Readings:

- Sandler, “The Script”
- Hockley, Johnson, Hills, “Telefantasy and Science Fiction”

Screening: TBA

Week Twelve: PROBLEMS/SOLUTIONS

Tuesday, 4/9

Readings:

- Epstein, “Bad Writing”

Screening: TBA

Week Thirteen: WORKSHOPPING; MORE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Tuesday, 4/16

Screening: TBA

Week Fourteen: TABLE READS; THE BUSINESS

Tuesday, 4/23

Readings:

- Douglas, "It's Who You Know"
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Week Fifteen: TABLE READS; THE BUSINESS

Tuesday, 4/30

Week Sixteen: FINAL TABLE READ; TURN IN SCRIPTS

Tuesday, 5/7