



SCREENWRITING I

COMM 203-X01 . SCREENWRITING I . SPRING 2024
LIB 202 & ONLINE . THURSDAYS 9:30-10:45AM . 3 CREDITS
BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

Filmmaking is a chance to live many lifetimes.
Robert Altman

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 12-2p / Thursdays 11a-12p
Maxwell Library 215B
Sign up at calendly.com/colleenkellypoplin

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the theory, craft, and business of short film writing.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through active instruction, writing assignments, and online learning modules, this course seeks to:

- Explain the key concepts of screenwriting, including industry-standard script formatting
- Develop storytelling skills with a focus on creating compelling characters, authentic dialogue, and well-paced narratives
- Provide a collaborative workshop environment for giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Enhance knowledge of basic genres and formats as a basis for exploring additional and original possibilities

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate proficiency in proper script formatting, including scene headings, transitions, action lines, etc.
- Construct narratives with clear three-act structures and effective plot points
- Articulate a cinematic story using compelling characters, authentic dialogue, and well-paced narratives
- Demonstrate proficiency in revising and editing work based on constructive feedback
- Understand professional standards in the field of screenwriting, including pitching and industry practices

PARTICIPATION / ATTENDANCE

This course requires informed and committed participation. You will get much more out of this course if you are fully engaged.

Research indicates that using laptops in class is a significant distraction that leads to a sharp decline in academic performance. This is true not only for the primary user, but also for students sitting nearby. As such, laptops are fine when we are researching or doing group work, but they are not allowed during lectures or screenings. Do your peers a solid and comply.

Since we only meet once per week and do a significant amount of work in class, I am compelled to have an attendance policy. Two absences or less is fine. Three absences wipe out all points allotted to your participation grade (15% of overall grade). Four or more absences means, in the wise words of Gandalf, you shall not pass.

COURSE READINGS / MATERIALS

We will be working from *Writing Short Films: Structure and Content for Screenwriters* by Linda Cowgill. All other handouts and readings will be available on Blackboard. Everything I distribute in class will also be uploaded to Blackboard.

You will need screenwriting software. If screenwriting is your primary interest, [Final Draft](#) is the industry standard. There is a [student license](#) for \$99. I personally use [Celtx](#), which offers both free and paid versions. [WriterDuet](#) also offers both free and paid versions. [WriterSolo](#) is free. Poke around and see which software feels best for you.

GRADING

This course is based on the principle that the more you practice, the better you become. Use every assignment to communicate what is important to you and take risks. You will earn your grade via the following:

Online Modules 25%

Script: The Collaborative Story 15%

- First draft
- Peer review
- Final revision

Script: The Childhood Story 20%

- First draft
- Peer review
- Final revision

Script: The Short Film 25%

- Logline
- First draft
- Peer review
- Individual script session
- Final revision

Participation 15%

93 to 100% = A
90 to 92.9% = A-
87 to 89.9% = B+
83 to 86.9% = B
80 to 82.9% = B-
77 to 79.9% = C+
73 to 76.9% = C
70 to 72.9% = C-
67 to 69.9% = D+
63 to 66.9% = D
60 to 62.9% = D-
0 to 59.9% = F

ASSIGNMENTS

Further details on all assignments will be shared in class. Blackboard will help you keep yourself organized.

Online Modules (25% of final grade)

Our online course material is organized into modules. Each module contains readings, screenings, writing prompts, collaborative activities, and/or quizzes. The completion of each module is required. Details will be shared in class.

- Fundamentals of Screenwriting (Week 2)
- Story Development and Structure (Week 3)
- Plot Development (Week 5)
- Creating Compelling Characters (Week 6)
- Writing Authentic Dialogue (Week 9)
- Advanced Storytelling Techniques (Week 10)
- Professional Practices and Pitching (Week 11)

Script: The Collaborative Story (15% of final grade)

You will practice proper formatting by writing a 3- to 5-page script based on the highest voted collaborative story from the first day of class. Details will be shared in class.

- First draft (2/8)
- Peer review (2/8)
- Final revision (2/15)

Script: The Childhood Story (20% of final grade)

You will practice plot structure and characterization by writing a 3- to 5-page script based on a childhood memory. Details will be shared in class.

- First draft (2/29)
- Peer review (2/29)
- Final revision (3/14)

Script: The Short Film (25% of final grade)

You will write a 6- to 12-page short film of any genre and subject. The parameters for this project are purposefully open so that you can develop your own personal style and voice. You will present your logline and script to the class for feedback. You will have an individual script session with me and incorporate the feedback we discuss into your completed script. Details will be shared in class.

- Logline (3/28)
- First draft (4/11)
- Peer review (4/11)
- Individual script session (TBD)
- Final revision (4/25)

DRAFT SCHEDULE

Syllabus is subject to change, but you will always be informed. See Blackboard for more details.

Week 1: January 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Get to know each other- Syllabus review- Writing the collaborative story
Week 2: January 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Online Module: Fundamentals of Screenwriting- Related lecture and discussion
Week 3: February 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Online Module: Story Development and Structure- Related lecture and discussion
Week 4: February 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Script: The Collaborative Story (first draft due)- Peer review of drafts
Week 5: February 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Script: The Collaborative Story (final revision due)- Online Module: Plot Development- Related lecture and discussion
Week 6: February 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Online Module: Creating Compelling Characters- Related lecture and discussion
Week 7: February 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Script: The Childhood Story (first draft due)- Peer review of drafts- <i>Next week is Spring Break; see you on 3/14</i>
Week 8: March 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Script: The Childhood Story (final revision due)- Script readthroughs
Week 9: March 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Online Module: Writing Authentic Dialogue- Related lecture and discussion
Week 10: March 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Script: The Short Film (logline due)- Online Module: Advanced Storytelling Techniques- Related lecture and discussion
Week 11: April 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Online Module: Professional Practices and Pitching- <i>I am traveling for the total eclipse. We will be fully online this week.</i>
Week 12: April 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Script: The Short Film (first draft due)- Peer review of drafts

Week 13: April 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual script session with Colleen - <i>Incorporate peer feedback in advance of our session</i>
Week 14: April 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Script: The Short Film (final revision due) - Script readthroughs
Week 15: May 1-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Script feedback sessions (details forthcoming) - Cry about how much we will miss each other

SUPPORT RESOURCES

In the words of the Beatles, we get by with a little help from our friends. BSU offers a host of magical support resources:

Academic Achievement Center and Student Accessibility Services

On the ground floor of the Maxwell Library, the Academic Achievement Center (AAC) provides [academic advising](#), [learning assistance](#) (both tutoring and academic coaching), and [testing services](#). There is also support available for English language learners. You can connect with [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) by [scheduling online](#), reaching out via [email](#), or by calling 508-531-2194.

Wellness Center

The [Wellness Center](#) (Weygand Hall) offers a range of vital services and support to help you achieve physical and emotional wellness. Whether you need physical or mental health advice, assistance in a crisis, tips for managing stress, or care for a specific condition, the Wellness Center will hook you up.

Maxwell Library

For borrowing or renewing items, access to computers, study rooms, and more, visit the [Maxwell Library](#).

Information Technology (IT)

For all technology questions and assistance, the [Information Technology Division](#) provides [Student Technology Support](#) on the ground floor of the Maxwell Library and through the [IT Self Service Portal](#).

Career Services

The [Career Services Office](#) can be found in the Rondileau Student Union. They offer appointments, programs, events, and resources for your future career. Side note: their website links to an external resource I recommend called [What Can I Do with This Major?](#)

Financial Assistance

The [Financial Aid Office](#) is on West Campus in the Welcome Center. They can assist you and your family in affording the cost of your education through grants, loans, student work programs, and financial counselors. There is also a [Student Emergency Fund](#) if you need help purchasing course supplies. If you are having trouble accessing food to eat, I highly recommend BSU's Food Pantry on the lower level of Rondileau Student Union.

Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX

The [Office of Equal Opportunity and the Title IX Coordinator](#) work to ensure that all members of the campus community flourish in a supportive and fair climate. Their [website](#) has a page for [Title IX](#) and a page for Discrimination and Harassment for reporting concerns of sexual violence, relationship violence, stalking, sexual harassment, or protected category-based discrimination and harassment. Additionally, the Sexual Violence Advocacy and Support Center is a *confidential* support resource for anyone who has experienced sexual, gender-based, or relationship violence or stalking. Seek support via this form: [SVAS Center Support Form](#)

Pride Center

BSU's Pride Center supports gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students and their allied peers to foster a campus climate of inclusion and equity. Visit the [Pride Center website](#) to learn more about their services and events.