

TFM 110
Beginning Scriptwriting for Television and Film
Fall 2008

Instructor: Mark Freeman
Classroom: DA 101
Class Times: Friday 12- 2:45 pm.
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Instructor: Lisa Franek
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Stuck? Writer's Block? Take 1 or 2 of these and call the doctor in the morning:
http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/
<http://www.observationdeck.com/>

A note about stories and sources of inspiration:

Students are challenged to create stories inspired by life, literature and art. For this class your original work should not refer to, allude to, or include references to film and television productions or video games. The goal is to ground your work in material and experiences that exist outside of the “mediasphere.”

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of TFM 110 is to introduce students to a variety of “story writing” styles, formats and skills used in feature films, documentaries, and short films & videos.

This course will be co-taught in 2 sections. There will be 3 UNITS of five classes.

Unit 1: The Creative Process
Unit 2: Writing Fiction
Unit 3: Writing Nonfiction

Mark Freeman will teach Writing Nonfiction alternately in each section. Lisa Franek will teach Writing Fiction alternately in each section.

Special Joint Classes

For field trips and special presentations, both sections may occasionally meet in a joint session.

CLASS 03 09/19 *Desire Under the Elms*
CLASS 11 11/14 *Hotel Cassiopeia*

Dramaturges for the plays will meet with us during our regularly scheduled class time. Both class sections will meet jointly in a room to be announced.

Field Trips

This course requires students to participate in field trips, research or studies that include course work that will be performed off-campus. Participation in such activities may result in accidents or personal injuries. Students participating in the event are aware of these risks, and agree to hold harmless San Diego State University, the State of California, the Trustees of the California State University and Colleges and its officers, employees and agents against all claims, demands suits, judgments, expenses and costs of any kind on account of their participation in the activities. Students using their own vehicles to transport other students to such activities should have current automobile insurance.

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

This is a writing intensive course. It requires closes attention to and analysis of readings, lectures and discussions.

Course Goals

Adapted from Creative Filmmaking from the Inside Out

To strengthen students' ability to conceive and develop ideas that will lead to compelling, authentic, personally meaningful films.

To facilitate the expression and development of their own unique artistic identity, cinematic voice and point of view through an exploration of personal experience, interests, concerns, values and inherent taste.

To motivate students to develop ideas for stories and characters through observation of, research into, and direct experience with real life.

To encourage awareness of the infinite possibilities for creative expression inherent in cinema, including documentary and experimental forms.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will demonstrate competence (at a beginning level) in writing scripts for fiction and nonfiction film and video productions.

Students will demonstrate their collaborative skills through group discussion, giving and responding to feedback, and collective brainstorming.

Students will be able to create a diverse portfolio of project ideas, outlines and synopses that they can draw on in future production classes.

Add/Drop

It is the student's responsibility to make add/drop/change grading basis or withdraw from the university within the specified time period. Criteria for dropping a class will be approved only when there are "verified serious and compelling circumstances." Approval will be made by Registrar's Office.

Plagiarism

Students should be especially careful to avoid “borrowing” from internet sources and each other. There will be “zero-tolerance” for plagiarism. Cheating or plagiarism will result in an “F” for the course and a report to the office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Be sure to cite all of your sources with page numbers and url’s as appropriate.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Bernard, Sheila . *Documentary Storytelling for Video and Filmamkers* **(B)**

Dannenbaum, Hodge & Mayer. *Creative Filmmaking from the Inside Out: 5 Keys to the Art of Making Inspired Movies and Television* **(D)**

Trottier, David, *The Screenwriter’s Bible* **(T)**

Reading Packet **(RP)**

Supplemental Texts (not required):

Developing Story Idea, Rabiger,

Producing & Directing the Short Film & Video, Rea and Irving

Directing the Documentary, Rabiger

The Artist’s Way, Cameron

Story, McKee

On-Line Resources

Celtx.com

AV Editor tutorial:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rLfruHzKkI&feature=related>

Additional Resources

You will need what is listed below as you progress through the semester. Start now. Making records and squirreling away what might come in handy is a writerly habit.

1. *Observational Notebook*

Keep a small notebook or sketchbook with you at all times and write down notes and create word and/or image sketches. Write at least a short paragraph every day in which you describe something you saw that day, and how you responded to it. Use the following categories to stimulate what you seek out to observe, and to help you organize what you find:

Senses Sense Impressions: smells, sounds, tactile sensations, tastes, visual images

Locations Places that are evocative

Objects Things that are suggestive of some deeper significance

Characters People you find intriguing or complex

Dialogue Comments or Exchanges you overhear that pique your interest

Situations Revealing Circumstances and Incidents

<i>Acts</i>	<u>Behavior</u> that is emblematic or provocative
<i>Titles</i>	<u>Words or Phrases</u> you encounter that seem like intriguing titles
<i>Themes</i>	<u>Beliefs, Ideas and Values</u> that seem basic to your understanding of life
<i>Questions</i>	<u>Questions</u> you have about what you observe, about your response, and deeper questions evoked in the process.

The goals of this exercise are for students to become better watchers and listeners; to develop sharper insights into human nature, behavior and relationships; to develop a habit of observing life and taking note of it; to become more attuned to their own distinctive interests and responses; and to have a storehouse of observations to draw on when creating stories, characters and dramatic or comic situations. (Idea of the categories originated with Michael Rabiger in his textbook *Developing Story Ideas*.)

You can also use this notebook for thoughts, reflections, dreams and fantasies. It can become a sketchbook that can be mined for themes, characters, settings and story ideas.

2. *News File*. Save good news stories in a folder for use in the News Story and documentary assignments. Go through old magazines and papers; you'll find noncurrent material that no one else is using.

3. *Picture File*. Save pictures from magazines and newspapers. Strong inspiration can come from your choice of a war photograph, crime report, fashion ad, or a landscape. Take still photographs of things and people that you encounter.

Grading

Class Participation/Attendance	10%
Students will be called upon in class to present their work.	

- Prompt arrival
- Active Participation
- Willingness to give and receive constructive criticism.
- Willingness to actively engage with readings, lectures, fieldtrips etc.

Notebook, News File, Picture File	10%
Limbering exercise	5%
Old Town Observations (Individual and Pair)	10%
Proof of Attendance and 2 –3 page paper <i>Desire under the Elms</i>	7.5%
Proof of Attendance and 2 –3 page paper <i>Hotel Cassiopeia</i>	7.5%
Short Film Treatment and Embedded Values Exercise	5%
Short Film Script	20%
Interview or Narration Exercise	5%
Documentary Treatment	20%

Extra Credit is due Class 12

You may attend 1 of the following museum shows for extra credit. Your report should include 2 or 3 paragraphs describing the exhibition you viewed and your reaction to it. In addition you should write a one-page treatment for a 5 to 10 minute film inspired by your experiences.

San Diego Museum of Art

Georgia O'Keeffe and the Women of the Stieglitz Circle

<http://www.sdmart.org/exhibition-georgia-okeeffe-stieglitz.html>

Note that this exhibition closes on 9/28

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego Downtown Jacobs Building And 1001 Kettner

Human/Nature: Artists Respond To A Changing Planet

<http://www.mcasd.org/exhibitions/upcoming.asp>

Museum of Photographic Arts

A Literacy of Images: Nancy Newhall and the Art of Photography and Writing with Light

<http://www.mopa.org/exhibitions/upcoming.htm>

Criteria For Writing Assignments •All work must be hard copy submitted to instructor on time. Late work is not accepted.

- All work submitted must be a copy. Save your original for your files.
- All work must be typed or word-processed. All work must be proofed. No hand corrections. No whiteout. Papers will be graded for grammar as well as for execution.
- Revisions and multiple drafts are encouraged. You are free to submit clearly identified 2nd, 3rd, and 4th drafts of written assignments. This is not a substitute for meeting the original deadline with a well-written submission.

Unit 1 THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The creative process: observation, visualization, intuition, self-exploration, emotional response, inspiration, aesthetics, meaning, impact, purpose, and cultural context. What do you want to express as filmmakers and why? What do you think film can and should be? This is all brought to bear through class discussion of the specific ideas you are originating and developing.

CLASS 1

Introspection

Introduction of Class and Review Syllabus

In-class exercises:

- Discuss “What is creativity?” “What are the elements of a conducive environment for creativity?” Consider the space your class meets in- could it be arranged differently? Can the lighting, wall space and noise levels be addressed in order to make the room more compatible for risk-taking and collaboration?
- 5-minute Autobiography
Write your autobiography in five minutes.
- “What tugs at your sleeve?” Write a brief essay on whatever has tugged at your sleeve up to this point in your lives: What has worried you, intrigued you, given you the greatest joy?

Assignments:

(D) Chapter One

(D) Limbering p.45 Choose 1 of the 4 exercises listed

Bring the writing and any other materials to class for presentation and discussion next week.

CLASS 2

Inquiry

What is a treatment?

Reading:

(RP) *Raymond's Run*

(D) Inquiry

(RP) Rabiger Chapter 11 Developing Your Story Ideas and Treatment
Handouts and “It Starts with a Pencil”

Discuss *Raymond's Run*

Assignment:

Due Class 6 Treatment for your final fictional script

DUE

Limbering: 1 of the 4 exercises listed

CLASS 3 9/19

Preparing for *Desire Under the Elms*

Dramaturge Joan Hurwit

Reading:

(D) Intuition

(RP) *Desire Under the Elms* Script and “Filming Literature”

Desire Under the Elms

1. How has the development of characters revealed time, place and setting?
2. How is the story structured? How does it adhere to or deviate from typical 3act structure?
3. Can you sense or discover a role for intuition, the unconscious, and/or dreams within the play, or within your reaction to the story? Are there emotional subtexts in the play that trigger your own personal reactions, memories, fantasies? How could you draw on your own experience and responses in understanding and appreciating the play? In adapting, directing or staging it? 4. How would you adapt this story for the screen?5.

How did your understanding of the play as presented in the script change as a result of the dramaturg presentation? After seeing the film excerpt? After seeing the SDSU performance?

Assignment:

Attend a performance of *Desire* and write a 3-page report discussing the questions above. This report and your ticket stub are due in class week 5.

CLASS 4

Observational field trip Old Town

We will take the trolley together from SDSU to Old Town. You will work in pairs. The idea is not to observe each other, but to spread out and become observers, if not voyeurs. Your work starts at the Trolley Station at SDSU and continues until you return from Old Town. Observe people as they interact with each other, enter and exit buildings, order or eat food, etc. You should observe the environment for ten minutes without writing, then take notes about all that their senses are aware of – the location itself, the quality of the light, the exchanges between people, the noises, the smells, etc. You want to gather many observable “facts.” This may include overhearing what people are saying. Also consider signs, flyers and other written materials.

Consider interviewing. Explain to tourists, servers, park rangers etc., that you are doing research for a possible film (fiction or nonfiction.)

Observation Notebook: Create several written observations in each of the ten categories: Senses, Locations, Objects, Characters, Dialogue, Situations, Acts, Titles, Themes and Questions. You may discover other categories that are appropriate. The idea is to benefit from the rich specificity of real people. You may use this material to develop a treatment for your fictional or nonfiction project.

Reading:

(D) Interaction

Assignment:

Working with your partner draw from your observations and notebook to develop a 1-2 page treatment for a short fiction or nonfiction film. (Drama or Comedy, Documentary or Mockumentary. Any Genre.)

Turn in 3 versions.

1 and 2 are original stories you each developed independently based on your Observations.

The third is a collaborative effort. It is not a cutting and pasting of 1 and 2. Rather it is an entirely distinct story, which draws from those elements and observation that you each feel most strongly drawn to.

CLASS 5

Observational Treatments

Reading:

(D) Impact

(RP) *Poisonwood Bible* pp 64-68

Due: Desire report

Observational Treatments (3)

Be prepared to present your treatments in class and in writing. We will consider them in terms of the Impact reading. Be prepared to present and discuss your work in class.

Due: Type up a basic summary of the plot of the fictional treatment that is due in class (about a paragraph). Be prepared to share your ideas in class.

DOCUMENTARY UNIT

The goal of this unit is to produce a treatment for a short five to ten minute documentary that could be produced in San Diego during a 15-week class.

CLASS 6

What is Documentary? How do documentary films tell stories?

Select 3 possible stories from news clippings or from 101 Ideas For Your Next Documentary (RP) that intrigue you, or from your Old Town Observation Notes, or from your own brainstorming. Describe your rationale for choosing to develop one of the stories.

After choosing one story idea to develop, write down five good questions that arise and then do beginning research with two sources. These sources could be books, articles, newspapers, internet sources (but not wikipedia), etc.

You should prepare a written synopsis of the topic, including the five or more questions you have, the research you've done, your approach and theme for this documentary.

Reading: (B) Story Design pp 13-46 and Research p 113 and Outlines, Treatments and Scripts p 151

(D) Review Getting Out of the Camera p 56

Due:

A typed treatment of one of the short fictional film ideas.

CLASS 7

Interviewing and Narration

Readings: (RP) "It Starts with a Pencil," interviewing articles, sample treatment

(B) Shooting Chapter 12 especially "Interviews"

(B) Narration and Voice Over p 211

Due:

Presentation of Research

Assignment

Identify and contact a content expert who can provide context for your documentary. This could be an SDSU professor or a community member. Tape-record your interview if possible. In the worst case ask your questions on the phone or by email. Be prepared to summarize your interview in writing and orally. The summary should include who you spoke with and when, a list of your questions, and direct quotes of at least 3 relevant bites that could be used in your documentary.

OR

Develop a visual sequence for your production that will include narration. The sequence should be approximately 30 seconds long. You will need to imagine approximately 7-10 shots. Your narration when read aloud at an appropriate pace should not exceed 30 seconds. Present this information in a 2-column A-V script. You can use the table function in Word or the A-V scrip editor in a Celtx. For extra credit you can import stills of your visuals. (See google images or Flickr <http://www.flickr.com/> etc.)

CLASS 8

Students Pitch and summarize their documentary treatment.

Presentations

Each student presents a very brief version of the documentary idea and the proposed approach, including brief references to theme, the research needed and the potential subjects. As part of his or her presentation, each student leads the class discussion about the proposed documentary. The idea is for students to practice staying connected to their intuitive approach to a topic while being open to others' ideas about it. Class members ask questions and offer feedback on the degree of clarity, the personal perspective and scope of the idea.

CLASS 9

Students bring drafts of their treatments for peer review. Bring a hard copy for the instructor and one for a partner.

Reading (B) Chapter 15 Checklist

How can the story be made more visual?
Is there sufficient research and context?
What are the strengths?
What still needs work?

Due: Interview or Narration assignment

Class 10

Treatments due

In class presentations

FICTION UNIT

CLASS 11

Preparing for *Hotel Cassiopeia*

Dramaturge Lauren Beck

Reading:

(RP) *Hotel Cassiopeia* Script

http://www.charlesmee.org/html/hotel_cassiopeia.html

Hotel Cassiopeia

1. How has the development of characters revealed time, place and setting?
2. How is the story structured? How does it adhere to or deviate from typical 3act structure?
3. Can you sense or discover a role for intuition, the unconscious, and/or dreams within the play, or within your reaction to the story? Are there emotional subtexts in the play that trigger your own personal reactions, memories, fantasies? How could you draw on your own experience and responses in understanding and appreciating the play? In adapting, directing or staging it?
4. How would you adapt this story for the screen?
5. How did your understanding of the play as presented in the script change as a result of the dramaturg presentation? After seeing the film excerpt? After seeing the SDSU performance?

Assignment:

Attend a performance of *Hotel Cassiopeia* and write a 3-page report discussing the questions above. This report and your ticket stub are due in class week 13.

Think of two ideas for a short fictional film. Type a paragraph or two summarizing the story. Be prepared to share your ideas in class.

CLASS 12 Script Writing

Elements of Story: Plot, realistic characters, basic story elements, subtext
Present and discuss short film ideas.

Reading:

Screenwriter's Bible pp. 3-12 and 43-59.

Assignment:

A typed treatment and script for one of one of the short film ideas presented. Treatment is due in Ms. Franek's mailbox before Thanksgiving break.

Extra Credit Due

CLASS 13 Happy Thanksgiving

CLASS 14

Discuss Genre, Theme, Story Conflicts, Basic Story Elements. Script Format.

Sign up for individual meeting time.

Reading:
(RP) Game

Due: Notebook, News File, Picture File
CLASS 15
Individual Meetings

Due
Final Treatment and any revised assignments.

Finals:
Students are expected to attend the Film Finals Festival Dec 18th.