

# **MRTS 3400 Intermediate Screenwriting**

**Summer 10W, May 18-July 24**

Department of Media Arts

Section - 400

Location – Online

Text – None. Online readings and links provided in Canvas

Instructor – Frances Perkins

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Intermediate-level study of the methodologies, theories, principles, formats, skills, and techniques of writing scripts for narrative features from concept to completed script using formatting-relevant software.

Prerequisite(s): MRTS/CBCM major status and MRTS 1330 and 2010

## **COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After completing this course, you will be able to:

1. Demonstrate mastery of the different elements of a script and how each is used.
2. Demonstrate the construction of a script, complete with plot, characters, action, and dialogue.
3. Identify and demonstrate individual style and creativity in writing a script.

4. Demonstrate industry knowledge of steps screenwriters must take to be successful.

## COURSE BASICS

### Structure

Online lesson, discussion, demonstrations, viewing of films and clips, critiques of professional and personal work.

### Film Rental Required

There is no textbook for this course, BUT you may have to rent a few films.

Check out [Film of Your Choice](#). Everyone should watch *The Prestige*, but then you'll be able to choose a second film from the list. That way, we all have seen the same films and read the same films to discuss during the lessons. Often you can find them for free, but you may need to rent. You'll also have 1 film to choose on your own for a script analysis, separate from the [Film of Your Choice](#) options. That may also require you to rent to film.

### Summer 10W Online

Course Schedule subject to change. Changes will always be announced in class and updated on the schedule in **RED**.

**\*All assignments and discussions due MONDAYS** as submissions in Canvas by 11:59 pm unless otherwise stated.\*

### Week 1 – May 18

- Topic – Screenwriting Formatting & Fundamentals

- Discussion - Warm-Up Exercise
- Assignment – Script Analysis 1

### **Week 2 – May 25**

- Topic – Screenplay Structure
- Discussion - Cringe Exercise
- Assignment – Script Analysis 2

### **Week 3 – June 1**

- Topic – Writing Strong Characters
- Discussion - Creating Atmosphere
- Assignment – Script Analysis 3
- Reminder – Short Film Script coming up soon

### **Week 4 – June 8**

- Topic – Writing Dialogue
- Discussion –Writer's Personal Thesaurus
- Assignment – Short Film Script
- Reminder - in Week 5, you'll be starting work on your Feature Film script elements, so you may want to start brainstorming ideas.

### **Week 5 – June 15**

- Topic – Plot and Subplots
- Discussion - Famous Characters
- Assignment – Character Bio
- Assignment - Peer Reviews of Short Film Scripts

### **Week 6 – June 22**

- Topic – Outlining
- Discussion - Subgoals Exercise
- Assignment – Feature Step Outline

### **Week 7 – June 29**

- Topic – Scenes as Concepts
- Discussion - Writing Cinematic Scenes
- Assignment – First Draft

## Week 8 – July 6

- Topic – Writing Beyond the Script
- Discussion – Logline/Treatment Exercise
- Assignment – Peer Reviews of First Draft

## Week 9 – July 13

- Topic – Rewriting and Editing
- Discussion – Writing Action Scenes
- Assignment – Final Assignment due July 24

## Week 10 – July 20

- Topic – Video of Guests (asynchronous, not live)
- Discussion – what did you learn from hearing guests?
- Reminder – Final Assignment due July 24

## Your assignments are:

Assignments and Points	
Assignments	Points
<b>Script Analysis (3 @ 25 pts each)</b>	<b>75 points</b>
Plot Breakdown Exercise	25 points
Character Bio Exercise	25 points
Short Film Script	50 points
Peer Reviews on Short Film Scripts	20 points
Feature Step Outline	50 points
First Draft Assignment	50 points
Peer Reviews of First Draft	30 points
Weekly Discussions (10 points each)	<b>80 points</b>
Final Assignment	100 points
<b>TOTAL CLASS POINTS POSSIBLE =</b>	<b>500 POINTS</b>

## Grading Scale

Grade	Percentage
A	90+ - The work is consistently outstanding.
B	80+ - The work is consistently strong and occasionally outstanding.
C	70+ - The work is adequate, fulfilling minimum requirements.
D	60+ - The work fails to meet minimum standards.
F	below 60 - The work is incomplete, or evidence of plagiarism.

## **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas or words as your own. It will not be tolerated. Even when you are paraphrasing, you must give appropriate (and formal) credit to the source of the ideas or the words. Plagiarism will result in a failing course grade.

## **Assignments**

\*Written instructions for each assignment will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.\* All assignments will be due as postings in Canvas in either MICROSOFT WORD (.doc, .docx) or ADOBE ACROBAT (.pdf) formats. PLEASE be responsible and check your email - I may have to contact you if I cannot open your assignment.

**Screenplay software files need to be saved at PDFs before uploaded.**

## **Grading**

Grades will be figured out of a total of 500 points. Late assignments will be accepted and graded at 70% of the total possible points for that assignment (so if an assignment is worth 10 points, the highest score a late assignment could receive is 7 points).

## **Grading Schedule and Comments**

You will have a full week to complete assignments and discussions. I also give myself a full week to grade and give comments, although it's usually done much sooner. Comments will always explain if something could be improved upon or done differently. I will happily discuss grades or grading comments at any time, either via email, phone call or Zoom.

## **Philosophy of Grading**

What I look for and care most about is the obvious thought and energy that goes into your work. Connecting the dots between lessons, readings, and your writing is what this course is all about. Doing literally what is asked for in an assignment usually requires the least amount of effort and care, and it comes across in your work. Putting thought and effort into an assignment also comes across in the work. I am **always** willing to read first drafts, watch cuts, give notes, or answer questions at any time. I am **always** frustrated by giving someone a lower grade who says, after the fact, "Well, I wasn't sure exactly what you wanted ..."

## **Late Work**

You are allowed TWO late assignments, graded at 70% of the total points, without prior permission. That means a 20 point assignment that is turned in late is only worth a maximum of 14 points.

## Overview

I consider classroom participation and discussion an essential part of the learning process. The give and take between you and me, and you and your peers, is where much of the work will take place as we explore this topic together. Since this course is entirely online, Discussion Entries will be a key element in the grade you will earn.

The weekly grade reflects the extent to which your entry demonstrates your ability to analyze the issue(s) in question or complete exercises in terms of course concepts. When discussing examples you should use terms and concepts from the course to analyze events rather than simply share events.

Discussion assignments should be completed **AFTER** having read all material for that week, including any lesson assignments or readings.

## How Discussions Work

Discussions will be conducted in small groups that change. That way, you'll be able to interact with different classmates each time.

Each discussion has three parts:

1. Reading all initial posts by your group mates
2. Posting your response to the discussion question
3. Making one meaningful, substantive response to a classmate's post.  
A meaningful response includes classroom concepts we have been covering, not simply a quick post commenting on a classmate's discussion.

**NOTE: YOUR DISCUSSION IS NOT DONE AND READY FOR GRADING UNTIL YOU HAVE DONE ALL THREE PARTS OF THE DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENT!**

Discussions can be done over a span of a week, so as long as you finish by 11:59pm on the due date, your discussion is considered "on time." Note: late posters are still held to the same requirements as early-bird posters. That means you still have to do all of the required aspects of the discussion, regardless of when you write your own discussion post.

## Discussion Grading

Entries are evaluated using the following system:

- A = 9-10 points = exceeds minimum requirements
- B = 8 points = meets requirements
- C = 7 = needs further development
- D = 6 and below = does not meet minimum requirements
- Total points possible per discussion: 10

Also, please consider your remarks as public, as if spoken in open class; use only appropriate language and be discreet with the use of names of people and organizations (omit if in doubt).

I'll be jumping into discussions as well. If at any point during the semester you would like specific feedback on an entry please let me know.

## Online Etiquette

Although this entire course takes place online, please conduct yourself as if you were in a classroom. That means that all discussion postings and assignments should be formally considered and submitted - online discussions \*are not blogs. \*Proper grammar and spelling is expected, just as it would be in any classroom assignment. The discussions are where some of the most interesting learning will occur, so let's all give each other the best possible environment for that learning. Be respectful and courteous, as you would if speaking to someone in person. Violations of etiquette will not be tolerated.