

INTERMEDIATE SCREENWRITING

MRTS 4460-001 Fall 2021
Instructor: Josh Gilbert (josh.gilbert@unt.edu)

Mondays: 10a-12:50p, RTFP 180I
Office Hours: Mon 1/6pm, by appt.

Course Description and Goals:

Here's the dry version: *This course focuses on real-world practices for feature development and the art of rewriting.* What that really means is: *we're going to be writing a lot.* I promise, that's a good thing.

Normally, when you think about the life of a writer, it probably seems like it's a pretty solitary existence. And a lot of the time, it can be - but writing for features and television is also a highly collaborative job. In order to go from words on a page to a fully produced, blockbuster movie or acclaimed TV series, there are going to be a lot of other people involved. (To be fair, the same goes for the worst movies and shows you've seen as well.) For a writer to be a part of that process - and to stay a part of it for as long as possible - it's critical that you're able to tell the best story you can and be true to yourself, while at the same time, impressing as many of those other people as possible. It's about understanding which ideas to pursue, how to take notes (and how to make even the worst notes work in your favor) and most of all, pushing yourself to create. Constantly.

Over the course of this semester, you will progress from loglines all the way through outlining and pitch creation, ending with a treatment and the first 15+ pages of an original screenplay. At the same time, we will learn how scenes evolve through notes, collaborations, and in various other fun/heartbreaking ways.

By the end of this class, each of you should have a better understanding of the skills and processes involved in professional screenwriting and see improvement in your ability and appreciation of the craft through practical writing experience.

Materials:

There are NO REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS for this class. The fact is, there are so many "screenwriting" books out there (too many, really), it's hard to pick what might be the best one for all of you. While the information is presented in different ways, they all basically say the same things - so, I'm happy to discuss recommended books and materials, but for this class, they won't be necessary.

Instead, you would be better served to spend your money on screenwriting software (if you don't have any already), and streaming services. Yep, you heard me right. If you want to improve as a writer, you've got to read scripts and watch movies. To that end, I will be assigning movies in this class for you to watch at home. We will discuss some potential streaming services you might want to try out, at least over the course of this semester, and I will also take into account any subscriptions you may currently have. *One free option I would suggest downloading is Peacock, NBC's streaming service, which has a good assortment of films.* (Movies will also be available in the Media Library, if you'd prefer to watch DVDs there.)

So, really, the only equipment you need for this class is paper and pen (or laptop) when we're in person, and a computer, webcam, and microphone when we do Zoom sessions.

All scripts and readings assigned for this course will be available on Canvas and/or on paper.

A Word About Screenwriting Software:

It is recommended that you use screenplay formatting software to save yourself time and headaches. Whichever program you use, **all assignments should be saved and turned in as PDFs only.**

Final Draft is the industry standard when it comes to screenplay software. If you plan on writing for film or television, this is the one you're going to be using in pretty much every job you ever have. It's not cheap, however – retails at almost \$250... which is ridiculous. Fortunately, they constantly run “sales” (right now it's \$199), but as a student, you can get it for \$99.

There are many other programs: Celtx (\$7.50/month), Trelby (free, Win/Linux), FadeIn (\$50), etc., so if you don't want to go all in on Final Draft, just be sure to find something for the duration of this class.

How the Class will work:

We will be using a combination of different formats for this class – meaning, we'll be doing it both in person and online. There are a couple good reasons for this: first of all, at this particular moment in history, working remotely and/or socially distanced is way is safer. I want you all to be happy and healthy, and there's no reason to put anyone at risk if there's no reason to. The second reason to do some parts of class remotely is because **that is exactly how professional writers are doing it right now.** Even when this current pandemic is over, Zoom will continue to be a significant part of the entertainment industry.

Also, this is a three-hour class. For safety's sake, to reduce the amount of potential exposure, some of the class time we would normally use to watch video content together, I will instead post that material online and you will be expected to watch at home. Again, my goal is to make this class as beneficial and creatively inspiring as possible, while at the same time keeping everybody safe and comfortable. School is important, but it's not worth getting sick over.

- **ASSIGNMENTS**

Most assignments will be due 24 hours before the next class session. This is so I have time to review your work, and so that everything can be organized for getting peer notes. It is crucial that you turn things in on time: 1) because it may mean you don't get feedback and could delay work being done on subsequent projects, and 2) because **deadlines are essential for writers.** If you don't turn scripts in on time in the real world, it can affect your ability to get jobs in the future. So, take it seriously. If nothing else, it's good practice for the future.

One universal truth – *without deadlines, most writers would never finish anything.*

- **PARTICIPATION**

Being present for our sessions is important – you won't get many opportunities like this where you can get immediate and wide-ranging feedback on your work, so take advantage of it! It's also imperative to stay connected between classes. We will use Canvas Discussion Boards, Messages, and lots of peer interaction, so don't be a stranger. Reach out, ask questions, and get involved. As the saying goes, the more you put into it, the more you'll get out.

- **ATTENDANCE**

There is a section on attendance later, but the main point here again, is **communication.** If you aren't feeling well, obviously, it's better to stay home. Whatever the case, I NEED TO KNOW AT LEAST 24 HOURS BEFORE CLASS if you will not be able to attend. This way we can try to work out a way so that you won't miss out entirely.

Just **keep me in the loop.** These are crazy times, so whatever the situation, we will figure out a solution.

Grading:

Participation and Workshop	[Peer notes, Discussion Board, In-class participation]	30%
Weekly Assignments	[Scene work, Loglines, Beat Sheets, etc.]	40%
Formal Pitch		10%
Final Rewrite – Treatment, Act 1 Outline and First 15		20%

The keys to doing well in this class are simple: do the work and stay involved. That's it.

Course Schedule and Assignments:

This schedule is subject (but not likely) to change. Any alterations will be discussed in class and/or updated on Canvas. Make sure to check for announcements during the week and keep an eye on your email as well.

- Week 1 - Overview and Introductions. Topics: Formatting and general script analysis.
ASSIGNMENT: 3-page Character Short, Script #1
- Week 2 - Topics: Idea creation, Inspiration and Loglines.
ASSIGNMENT: 4 Original Title/Loglines, Peer Notes
- Week 3 - -- LABOR DAY -- (No Zoom This Week)
ASSIGNMENT: Loglines Survey, Script #2
- Week 4 - Topics: Character, Story and Theme.
ASSIGNMENT: Research doc, Short Rewrite, Movie #1
- Week 5 - Topics: Act structure and “Rules”, Story and Character building.
ASSIGNMENT: 3-page treatment, Peer Notes
- Week 6 - Topics: Dialog and action.
ASSIGNMENT: Peer Treatment Notes, Movie #2
- Week 7 – Topics: Pitching, style, core elements.
ASSIGNMENT: Formal Pitch
- Week 8 - Topics: Pitch Session 1
ASSIGNMENT: Full Outline, Movie #3
- Week 9 - Topics: Pitch Session 2, Opening Scenes
ASSIGNMENT: First 5, Movie #4
- Week 10 - Topics: True stories and adaptations.
ASSIGNMENT: First 10, Movie #5
- Week 11 – Topics: Best Script Ever
ASSIGNMENT: First 15, Peer Notes
- Week 12 – Topic: Rewriting, Movies by Committee, Co-writing and Being Rewritten
ASSIGNMENT: Peer Coverage

- Week 13 – Topic: Handling notes, pleasing people, and staying sane.
ASSIGNMENT: Rewrite “final” draft of opening and materials
- Week 14 - -- *THANKSGIVING* -- (*Conference Week*)
- Week 15 - Topics: Revisit, The Industry, What’s Next...

Additional Opportunities:

Times being what they are, most of us could use some positive stuff to focus on, right? If that’s you, I’m happy to provide...

Along with the assignments every week as listed above, I will also have a folder available on Canvas with a multitude of scripts for you to read, if you choose to do so. (If there are any movie scripts in particular that you’d like to read but don’t see listed, let me know and I will see if I can get a digitized copy). Becoming a better writer isn’t just about writing. The more scripts you read – from the great to even the not-so-great – the more it will help you develop your own skills.

And go watch stuff! Now’s the time to check out all those movies you may have heard about but never bothered to see. We’ll try to find some good ones in class, but go out and experiment. You might just find a new favorite in the process.

Class Policies:

From the beginning of time, every script that's ever been sold has been subjected to notes. (Unless Clint Eastwood is directing your script. Then, as legend has it, he'll just shoot your first draft. You lucky dog.) That's how it works in Hollywood, and that's how it works in this class. So aside from your writing, you will also be required to offer constructive, beneficial assessments of your fellow classmates' material. Keep in mind - they're going to give you notes as well - so be honest, but be kind.

I understand the idea of sharing your own work with others might not be an entirely comfortable thing for some of you. But be assured - this class will be a friendly and encouraging place.

Use of Student Work

A student owns the copyright for all work he or she creates within a class and neither the University nor any other student is entitled to use it without the writer/creator’s permission. Otherwise, student work may only be used for class demonstration if all of the following criteria are met:

- The work is used only once.
- The work is not used in its entirety.
- Use of the work does not affect any potential profits from the work.
- The student is not identified.
- The work is identified as student work.

The point being, all work done in this class yours and yours alone.

Academic Dishonesty Policy:

We are required to say something about this, but for the most part, cheating is going to be a bit difficult in this class. That doesn't mean you should try it – please don't – but the nature of the writing we're going to be doing is pretty specific and it wouldn't serve you to try to substitute other people's work for your own.* Just so you're aware, if you do get caught, this is what happens:

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

*Pay no attention to Quentin Tarantino.

"I steal from every single movie ever made. I steal from everything." "Great artists steal, they don't do homages."

Acceptable Student Behavior:

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including discussion groups, etc. deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

ADA Statement:

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu

Retention of Student Records Policy:

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained on the Canvas online system in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about students' records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy.

Student Perceptions of Teaching Effectiveness (SPOT):

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13 and 14 to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the spot website at www.spot.unt.edu or email spot@unt.edu.

Technical Assistance

Part of working in the online environment involves dealing with the inconveniences and frustration that can arise when technology breaks down or does not perform as expected. Here at UNT we have a Student Help Desk that you can contact for help with Canvas or other technology issues.

UIT Help Desk: [UIT Student Help Desk site](http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm) (<http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm>)

Email: helpdesk@unt.edu

Phone: 940-565-2324

In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130 **Walk-In Availability:** 8am-9pm

Telephone Availability: Sun: noon-12am, Mon-Thurs: 8am-12am, Fri: 8am-8pm, Sat: 9am-5pm

Laptop Checkout: 8am-7pm

For additional support, visit [Canvas Technical Help \(https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328\)](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328)

Student Support Services

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center \(https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center\)](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center)
- [Counseling and Testing Services \(https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services\)](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- [UNT Care Team \(https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care\)](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care)
- [UNT Psychiatric Services \(https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry\)](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry)
- [Individual Counseling \(https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling\)](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling)

Other student support services offered by UNT include:

- [Registrar \(https://registrar.unt.edu/registration\)](https://registrar.unt.edu/registration)
- [Financial Aid \(https://financialaid.unt.edu/\)](https://financialaid.unt.edu/)
- [Student Legal Services \(https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services\)](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services)
- [Career Center \(https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center\)](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center)
- [Multicultural Center \(https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center\)](https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center)
- [Counseling and Testing Services \(https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services\)](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- [Pride Alliance \(https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance\)](https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance)
- [UNT Food Pantry \(https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry\)](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry)

Academic Support Services

- [Academic Resource Center \(https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources\)](https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources)
- [Academic Success Center \(https://success.unt.edu/asc\)](https://success.unt.edu/asc)
- [UNT Libraries \(https://library.unt.edu/\)](https://library.unt.edu/)
- [Writing Lab \(http://writingcenter.unt.edu/\)](http://writingcenter.unt.edu/)

Sexual Assault Prevention

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565- 2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

COVID-19 Impact

While attendance in class sessions is expected, it is important for all of us to be mindful of the health and safety of everyone in our community. Please contact me if you are unable to attend a class session due to a related issue regarding COVID-19 (or other health related issue). **It is important that you communicate with me prior to being absent so we can make accommodations.**

If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>) please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or askSHWC@unt.edu) or your health care provider. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Hotline at 844-366-5892 or COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure.

While attendance is an important part of succeeding in this class, your own health, and those of others in the community, is more important.

Transmission and Recording of Student Images in Electronically-Delivered Sessions

No permission is needed from a student for their image or voice to be transmitted live via videoconference or streaming media, but all students should be informed when courses are to be conducted using either method of delivery.

Zoom sessions may be recorded by the instructor in case anyone needs to revisit the material or discussion, but will only be available to students who are enrolled in the class, and will be deleted when the course is over. To protect everyone's privacy, if you are in this class, you must agree to abstain from recording or taking screenshots of our Zoom calls, Canvas discussion board threads, etc.

Other than that... please feel free to reach out any time. As always, I want this class to be an enjoyable and rewarding experience -- so any concerns or comments, don't hesitate to let me know.

Thanks for reading all this. Now, let's get writing.