

FI329-15 Screenwriting

23/24

Department

SCAPVC - Film & Television Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Michael Pigott

Credit value

15

Module duration

9 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

An intensive introduction to the practices of screenwriting

Module aims

This module provides an intensive introduction to screenwriting through a combination of writing, reading and analytic viewing exercises. The aim is to introduce the craft of screenwriting and enable students to develop their own creative expression through the medium of screenwriting through application and practice. The course mainly focuses on film, although discussion and clips may well include TV drama.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

This module provides an intensive introduction to screenwriting through a combination of writing, reading and analytic viewing exercises. The premise of the course is that you can learn the craft of screenwriting, but that the art of it is best mastered through application and practice. The course mainly focuses on film, although discussion and clips may well include TV drama. You will discover and explore the basics of how to tell a story for the screen by watching and

analysing carefully selected film clips and regular, practical written exercises that will not be assessed. Your learning will be enhanced by developing ideas and then writing an assessed short film script (15-20 mins length).

Week by week, we come to understand and appreciate the critical and functional elements of a screenplay and how different screenwriting tools can be used to dramatically craft a 'story well told'.

There will also be time for a guest lecture by a screenwriting professional and some discussions about how the industry works to help students understand the role of the screenwriter within a production team and the industry as a whole.

No previous knowledge of scriptwriting is required, though focus and engagement with the form is essential. Students will understand the techniques of screenwriting and be able to apply them in their own creative work.

A film club screening films relevant to your studies runs throughout the two terms.

Week 1: Introduction to the key functional elements of a screenplay – writing for the screen

- A close look at ASIF KAPADIA's *The SHEEP THIEF* script and David Mamet's "On Directing"
- Screening: *THE SHEEP THIEF*
- Outcome: Student will be able to identify and recognise the visual language of dramatic construction, and express how you can tell a story through the use of uninflected shots and action – i.e how to tell a story visually, and what that means.

Week 2: Introduction to dramatic structure and the language of screenwriting

- A look at the 3 act structure and Frank Daniel's definition of drama as "Somebody wants something badly, and is having difficulty getting it", and how this relates to Aristotle's 5 movements of drama.
- An examination of the difference between objective and subjective drama through clips such as *FRENZY*, *ELEPHANT MAN*, *DIE HARD*, *ALIEN* & *RIDICULE*
- Screening: *ELEPHANT MAN*
- Outcome: Student will be able to demonstrate their understanding of basic dramatic structure by writing a scenario with a defined character (protagonist), and a goal, some obstacles (internal and external) and a resolution.

Week 3: Managing Conflict: a closer look at protagonist, goals, obstacles and emotions

- Building on last week's session, we will look more closely at Character and Task, and what design and actions make a credible character for film.
- We will examine Terri Rossi's article on "The Task" and *LOOK AGAIN* at Asif Kapadia's *the SHEEP THIEF* as well as *THE WARRIOR* to see how action defines character.
- Screening: *THE WARRIOR* (Asif Kapadia)
- Outcome: Student will demonstrate their understanding of character through action further by combined writing exercises.

Week 4: Introduction to dialogue

- A look at the dramatic function of dialogue to convey information, develop character, drive drama, and to discern what distinguishes good dialogue from bad.
- We will use clips from *DELIVERANCE*, *THE DOCTOR*, *DJANGO*, *PULP FICTION*, *BLUE JASMIN*
- Screening: *DJANGO UNCHAINED*
- Outcome: Students will be able to identify the various dramatic functions of dialogue in a screenplay, and the pitfalls of over-reliance on dialogue in scripts.

Week 5: Students share and pitch their short film ideas

- Students will come prepared to share their first ideas for a short film with others based on a set of clear boundaries and restrictions (such as a limited number of characters, limited lines of dialogue – or no dialogue – and a theme to be decided).
- Focus of this session will be story-TELLING... it will include ideas on how to structure a pitch.
- Screening: SERIES OF SHORT FILMS: In My Shoes; Wet & Dry; The Voorman Problem; Inside Out etc.
- Outcome: Students will have developed an ability to pitch their ideas clearly, as well as to adjust their pitch based on feedback from peers and the tutor. We will cover how to give constructive feedback to a writer and how to receive it from others.

Week 6: READING WEEK

Week 7: FEEDBACK WEEK

- Students will deliver their short films scripts in advance of the session to 2-3 fellow students (TEAMS). Each will read each other's work and be prepared to ask useful questions about the screenplay during THIS session.
- By the end of the session each team nominates one film to be filmed (subject to tutor approval).
- Students will then have time to start writing their script and to ask questions.
- Screening: THE APARTMENT
- Outcome: Students will have developed an ability to condense their ideas into a step outline form and receive and give feedback with their peers.

Week 8: Guest Screenwriter - lecturer

- Students will come prepared to ask questions and engage with an active professional screenwriter. This will cover writing technique and as appropriate aspects of the industry.

Week 9: Creating believable worlds – The use of foreshadowing

- Students will understand the key features and major uses of foreshadowing in screenplays
- Clips will include: ALIEN, THE APARTMENT, HITCHCOCK'S 'FOUR O'CLOCK'
- Screening: AMADEUS
- Outcome: Students will be able to identify and understand the uses and potential abuses of foreshadowing, and reflect on how they may use it in their screenplay.

Week 10: Managing Audience Point of view: Dramatic Irony

- Students will look in close up at the powerful dramatic tool - Dramatic Irony
- Clips will include: THE APARTMENT, THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY, FRENZY
- Screening: THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY
- Outcome: Students will be able to identify and understand how to set up, exploit and pay off a dramatic irony or series of dramatic ironies in their screenplays. They will also be aware of the pitfalls of overuse.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Students will be able to demonstrate a reasonable skill in the main dramatic tools and techniques of writing for screen, as well as an ability to respond to editorial feedback.
- Student will be able to identify and recognise the visual language of dramatic construction, and express how you can tell a story through the use of uninflected shots and action – i.e

how to tell a story visually, and what that means

- Student will be able to demonstrate their understanding of basic dramatic structure by writing a scenario with a defined character (protagonist), and a goal, some obstacles (internal and external) and a resolution
- Students will be able to identify the various dramatic functions of dialogue in a screenplay, and the pitfalls of over-reliance on dialogue in scripts.
- Student will demonstrate their understanding of character through action further by combined writing exercises..
- Students will have developed an ability to pitch their ideas clearly, as well as to adjust their pitch based on feedback from peers and the tutor. We will cover how to give constructive feedback to a writer and how to receive it from others.
- Students will have developed an ability to condense and marshall their ideas into a dramatic step outline form.
- Students will be able to identify and understand the uses and potential abuses of foreshadowing, and reflect on how they may use it in their screenplay
- Students will be able to identify and understand how to set up, exploit and pay off a dramatic irony or series of dramatic ironies in their screenplays. They will also be aware of the pitfalls of overuse

Indicative reading list

Primary Reading:

There are many and varied 'how-to' guides about the process of screenwriting, but reading a wide range of scripts and watching a diverse range of films will offer you a broader, more instinctive understanding of the craft. That said, these foundational texts will provide a useful technical understanding to build on. All titles listed on this page are stocked in the university library.

The Tools of Screenwriting: A Writer's Guide to the Craft and Elements of a Screenplay, David Howard and Edward Mabley

Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting, Syd Field (Third Edition), Bantam Doubleday Bell, 1998.

On Directing, David Mamet

Reading Screenplays, Lucy Scher. Creative Essentials 2011.

Secondary Reading:

These titles offer interesting and useful broader frames of reference for your screenwriting and can also inform your developing responses to the aesthetics of film. How you watch a film can play its part in how you write a screenplay.

Poetics, Aristotle, Penguin Classics, 1996

On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft, Stephen King , Hodder & Stoughton, 2000

Adventures In The Screen Trade: A Personal View of Hollywood, William Goldman, 1983

Subject specific skills

This module develops skills of audio-visual literacy, through close textual and/or contextual analysis in relation to the moving image and sound. It may also develop understandings of historical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks relevant to screen arts and cultures.

Transferable skills

- critical and analytical thinking in relation
 - independent research skills
 - team work
 - clarity and effectiveness of communication, oral and written
 - accurate, concise and persuasive writing
 - audio-visual literacy
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Study

Study time

Type	Required	Optional
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)	
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)	
Tutorials	(0%)	3 sessions of 30 minutes
Other activity	13 hours 30 minutes (9%)	
Private study	118 hours 30 minutes (79%)	
Total	150 hours	

Private study description

wider reading, viewing and writing practice

Other activity description

screenings

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time
step outline	30%	
preparation for screenplay		
screenplay	70%	
15-20 minute screenplay		

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback on screenplay and written work; 1-2-1 sessions where appropriate, and peer feedback once students have learned more about how to give constructive editorial script feedback.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 4 of UHPA-RP43 Undergraduate Hispanic Studies with Film Studies

This module is Optional for:

- UFIA-W620 Undergraduate Film Studies
 - Year 2 of W620 Film Studies
 - Year 3 of W620 Film Studies
- Year 4 of UFIA-W621 Undergraduate Film Studies (with Year Abroad)
- UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature
 - Year 2 of QW25 Film and Literature
 - Year 4 of QW25 Film and Literature
- Year 4 of UFIA-QW26 Undergraduate Film and Literature (with Study Abroad)

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 4 of UGEA-RP33 Undergraduate German with Film Studies

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 3 of UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature
- Year 4 of UFRA-R1WA Undergraduate French with Film Studies