

COM FT 310 Workshop – Section C1

Spring 2018 | Mon., 12:20-2:05pm | COM B29

TA: Rebecca Semik | rsemik@bu.edu

Course Website: rsemik.wix.com/ft310workshop

Office Hours: By appointment

WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

We will cover screenplay formatting and story structure, but you will also learn how to give and receive criticism. However, the most important takeaway from this course should be that no script is ever finished, nor is it perfect. You may be rewriting more than you're writing, and that's okay. The art of screenwriting is a craft, and in order to improve upon a craft, you must practice both writing and rewriting. To do so means you truly care about your stories, and that's our ultimate goal: tell stories we care about.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

- To identify and define elements of a short film script from formatting to character and structure
- To compare/contrast the same concepts executed differently in various ideas/scripts/films
- To formulate outlines through the application of course concepts and terminology
- To justify choices for character, plot, action, and dialogue
- To test in workshop the effectiveness of short scripts
- To integrate feedback by experimenting with different macro revisions in new drafts
- To learn how to give and receive constructive, respectful criticism
- To become better filmmakers, storytellers, and humans

MY TEACHING TENETS

Practice: You can study all the screenwriting books in the world but nothing teaches you the craft quite like practicing it. Write, write, then write some more. It's the best way to grow as a writer and learn what works and what doesn't.

Inquiry: Think critically; Ask questions. Through asking questions, we can brainstorm so many more possibilities than we would if we just accept one solution to a problem. The main goal is to learn, so ask questions: of me about concepts that aren't clear to you; of your classmates about their work; of yourself about your own work.

Engagement: Participate. This class is a community. Show up. Be present, physically and mentally. And contribute. Share your perspective with the class because yours is a unique one. Show effort. Do the work. Engage with the material and each other. And of course, have fun.

Compassion: Be kind. To each other but also to yourself. Our workshop class is a safe space for everyone to create. So treat each other with respect: offer constructive feedback, without judgement or ridicule. And don't forget to have compassion for yourself: you're still learning; you won't be a perfect writer at the beginning or end of the class because there's no such thing as a perfect writer.

"A BIT OF LIGHT READING"

Required

- [Screenplay: Writing the Picture](#) by Russin & Downs
- [Writing Short Films](#) by Linda Cowgill
- [The Hollywood Standard](#) by Christopher Riley

Optional (but highly recommended if you're really into short scriptwriting)

- [Crafting Short Screenplays that Connects](#) by Claudia Hunter Johnson

HELPFUL LINKS

Script writing software

There are so many free script writing applications available for use that you really have no excuse for a poorly formatted screenplay. If you submit anything other than a properly formatted script in PDF form, I'll ask you to resubmit within a day in proper format lest your grade reflect your efforts (and know that your resubmission is strictly for formatting and not content; you can't sneak story changes in this way).

- trial.finaldraft.com/edutrial/
- www.storywriter.amazon.com
- www.screencraft.org/writerduet
- www.celtx.com
- www.slugline.co
- www.scriptreaderpro.com/free-screenwriting-software

Industry News

It's always a good idea to stay up to date with the latest trends and happenings.

- www.variety.com
- www.indiewire.com
- www.filmmakermagazine.com

Screenwriting & Filmmaking Resources

Just in case this class wasn't enough for you.

- www.thescriptlab.com
- www.screenwritingu.com
- www.filmcourage.com
- www.filmfreeway.com

BU-Specific Resources

Because the COM Writing Center and Career Services Office are wonderful (and very free) resources you should take advantage of. The COM Writing Center even has Screenwriting MFA students that can help you with your scripts. And Career Services can help you figure out your career path as filmmakers.

- www.bu.mywconline.com
- www.bu.edu/com/career-services

HOW YOU'LL KNOW YOU'RE LEARNING

First of all, grades are a social construct and do not have any real bearing on life success (please see Bill Gates, Walt Disney, Denzel Washington, and Elton John). But I recognize that that doesn't stop us from wanting high marks in class. But I don't just hand out A's. You have to earn your marks through consistent effort, active engagement, and an increased understanding of class concepts.

My grading philosophy really revolves around the idea of an "earning points" system versus a "taking away points" system. The end result grade is essentially the same, but I'm hoping the mentality surrounding grades will be different.

Basically, everyone starts at 0 points for each assignment with the potential to earn a max number of points for that assignment. The other system of "taking away points" would lead you to believe everyone

starts out with, let's say, 25 points, but you'll be penalized and lose points if you're lacking key elements. Again, this is more of a shift in mentality as the total points you earn during the semester will still be out of a max total of potential points possible.

Moral of the story: you get the grade you earn. Why is this particularly important beyond a mental shift? Because your participation grade depends on it (more on this below). In general, you will be graded on written assignments, in-class participation, and your in-class presentations of scripts for workshopping.

First Script

The first scripts should have no more than two characters and one location (meaning a single building, not necessarily a single room) and be no longer than 10 pages. Points will be deducted if these restrictions are not observed. If there's any uncertainty if your script follows these restrictions, just ask before submitting.

Revised Midterm Script

This assignment will be a revision of the first script you turn in. Your revision will be due two weeks after your script is workshopped. A revision is not just about correcting formatting or typos, but reassessing a story and character elements to create a stronger overall script.

The revision of your first script will be graded as a separate assignment and will not alter the grade you receive for your first script.

Second Script

This is a second original script that should be around 10-15 pages (15 pages max). For this script, there are no restrictions on character or locations, but use careful judgment.

Revised Final Script

The final revised script must be a revision of your second script, displaying an application of the topics and tools covered in lecture and discussion sections.

All scripts must be submitted on time and in PDF format via the class website (or emailed to rsemik@bu.edu if the website is down) the weekend before they are to be workshopped. Then I will email them to the class for reference after confirming your file is in good condition. A printed copy is not required. Grades will be based on how well you apply the tools and concepts learned in the lecture for telling a story.

Warning: Every script you turn in must be original material. This is not an adaptations course, so even if a work is in the public domain, you may not turn in your own version of that piece. Any submitted scripts that are not original works will be considered plagiarism.

Film Analysis Essays

The questions must be submitted on time and in PDF format via the class website (or emailed to rsemik@bu.edu if the website is down) the day they are due. There is no page count on these essays, but you must answer the question completely and thoroughly (typically answered in 1-2 single-spaced, 12 pt. font pages). These are a critical analysis of selected films.

Script Coverage

The coverage must be submitted on time and in PDF format via the class website (or emailed to rsemik@bu.edu if the website is down) the day they are due. Please provide at least one page of coverage, single-spaced, 12 pt. font. You start your coverage by writing a plot synopsis of the script, and then you write your comments about what you read. Aim for about 50:50 synopsis-to-comments ratio. Comments

should identify the protagonist, their main desire, and the major actions they take over the course of the script to achieve this desire. Please include your reactions to the script and discuss topics covered in lecture (i.e., character, story and structure, dialogue, and writing style). This is not a personal response to the script, but an attempt to judge the success or failure of the script as objectively as possible based on the storytelling tools and tactics discussed in class. Scripts will be available on the class website.

Participation

I recognize that participation is not strictly oral and that there is a variety of ways to participate. Some are optional (ex. attending special events) while others are mandatory (ex. revision self-reflection). Some—but not all—ways you can earn participatory actions include:

- attending special relevant guest lecture events at BU or around Boston
- sharing with the class an industry article, video, or helpful lesson from additional reading
- sharing a brief writing process self-reflection with the class
- visiting office hours
- vocalizing thoughtful commentary during the feedback portion of workshop
- volunteering to be an enthusiastic cast member during table reads
- showing up to class on time
- providing workshopers written feedback on their work
- and other actions/activities that contribute to the class's knowledge and experience

Because of the nature of workshops, individual and group participation is critical. Five individual participatory actions per week can earn you 1 participation point for that week; there are 13 classes and thus potential to earn up to 13 participation points. And it's through participation you have the potential to earn up to 2 extra credit points toward your final participation grade. But you must have at least 5 participatory actions for a single week to get that week's point; any surplus participation actions will be pooled together toward extra credit. Interim script checkpoints must be met first before you can earn the rest of your participatory actions for that week.

Grade Breakdown

First Script: 7%	One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest Essay: 5%
Revised Midterm: 20%	The Godfather Essay: 5%
Second Script: 13%	Ordinary People Essay: 5%
Revised Final: 30%	Participation: 10%
Script Coverage: 5%	Total: 100%

RULES/GUIDELINES FOR WORKSHOPS/CLASS BEHAVIOR

There will be 4 groups of 3 writers. Each group will have its own due date for scripts and workshops. After your piece is workshopped in class, you will have 2 weeks to submit your revision.

During workshop days, all 3 workshopers will have their piece read aloud by their peers in a table read. After which, the class will discuss the merits of the scripts and what areas to focus on for revision. The writers will simply take notes of the class discussion regarding their own script, but will have the chance to ask questions of the class at the end.

As part of the workshop experience, each workshoper will give the class a 1-2-minute self-reflection of their writing process. No PowerPoint or anything, just tell us clearly: what were you trying to do with your script/what were your objectives; and how did you feel about the execution of that intent? (Ex. "I was attempting to address [this theme] with [this person] as the protagonist with [these stakes]. I found it difficult to capture [this], but thought about it [this way] instead and it seemed to really help.")

Workshop Conduct

- be kind to yourself: the first draft of anything is shit so don't take it too hard when you're given feedback
- be articulate: if something in a script isn't working, explain why
- be respectful: realize that sharing creative work is a vulnerable process that the writer need not feel judged or self-conscious during
- be present: focus on the task at hand, like the day's lesson of the current script being workshopped
- look at all the angles: there's more than one possible solution to any problem
- address the problems: you don't have to take the class's suggestions, but you must address problem areas

NOT-SO-SECRET-SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Email Communication

I will respond to class emails between approximately 9:30-10:30am and 4:30-5:30pm daily. This helps me focus my time and gives you an idea of when you can expect a response. Emails will be answered within 24 hours. If you don't hear from me within 24 hours, feel free to send me a follow-up email to make sure I got your previous one. If you have an emergency (like you've got food poisoning or bronchitis or you're going to be late due to another appointment or class that ran late) simply put "URGENT:..." in the subject line of your email, so I can address it sooner.

Expectations About Office Hours

I am here for you as a resource, so please take me up on it. I have an "open (imaginary) door" policy; while I do not have a brick-and-mortar office, I'm available to meet on campus outside of class. We can meet in Mugar, the COM Lounge, Starbucks, or anywhere else within reason. I will provide the class a basic schedule of my unavailability (for those times I'm in my own classes, working, or have other commitments) so everyone has a good idea of when I'm available for office hours appointments.

Things we can talk about: clarification on assignments, questions on course concepts, career/academic advice, opportunities for growth, any struggles you're having in the class or as a filmmaker, ideas for scripts, the kind of pets you have. We can talk about practically anything school appropriate.

However, if you are looking for help regarding assignments, you need to show me what you've got so far; do not come empty-handed as I have no intention of doing the work for you.

If you'd like me to look at a working draft of a script prior to your submission deadline, I will. BUT I will not be offering the same extensive feedback as I will after you've officially submitted your work. I will read your selection, and then you can ask me about specific concerns you have during an appointment. Don't ask me, "Is it good?" or "Is this A+ quality work?"

To help us start the semester strong, everyone is required to meet with me one-on-one at least once during the first month of class. If you don't, your ability to earn anymore participation points come month two will be temporarily frozen until you meet with me. Don't worry; I'll make sure our meetings painless and helpful.

A FEW COURSE AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Attendance, Absences, Tardiness, oh my

For all of us to grow as writers, we all need to be present physically and mentally. Out of respect for me and your peers, I ask for open communication; if you're going to be absent, email me. If you're going to be tardy, email me. Of course, you may miss class for religious observances; again, just email me. Let me know what's up, so I know if I need to send a search party out for you or file a missing person report. Whatever the reason, it should be a good one (and not involving the Starbucks line taking longer than you were expecting).

DO NOT make poor attendance and tardiness a habit; it will negatively impact your grade. Fair warning: if you miss a workshop day, you will be responsible for providing written feedback to your classmates that workshopped that day. If you miss your own workshop day, your workshop grade will be negatively impacted AND you'll be responsible for providing written feedback to the other members in your workshop group.

Assignment Completion & Late Work

Assignment due dates are laid out in the table below. You are responsible for submitting assignments on time and in proper formatting via the class website (or to emailed rsemik@bu.edu if the website is down). Typically, assignments will be due Saturdays at Noon (ex. scripts) or the day of class (ex. essay questions). You won't be able to earn a half-letter grade (5%) worth of points for every day an assignment is late. After three days, you lose the ability to earn any points for that assignment. If you do not have your scripts turned in by the day of your workshop, you won't be able to earn any points for that assignment.

Laptop Policy

If you'd like to bring your laptops/tablets in order to view the scripts better during our table readings, feel free to bring them. But should laptops become a distraction and I suspect Facebook usage or Amazon shopping, you'll be asked to put them away. My goal is to make these table reads as smooth as possible, so bring them if you so desire.

Plagiarism: Don't Do It

Students are expected to abide by all university and departmental standards on plagiarism and academic conduct. It is REQUIRED that you read the University's ACADEMIC CONDUCT CODE in order to avoid any "mistakes." <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Any kind of academic misconduct (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) will result in the filing of academic misconduct charges. Any suspicious act/material/ etc. will be investigated to the fullest extent possible and those found guilty will be punished accordingly. For clarification of official standards, please read the university's universal Academic Conduct Code, which can be found at: [bu.edu/academics](http://www.bu.edu/academics).

Plagiarism is any attempt to represent the work of another person as one's own. This includes copying or substantially restating the work of another person or persons on any assigned work or any oral work without citing the appropriate sources, including film ideas, treatments, reviews, analyses, scripts, films or websites. It also includes collaborating with someone else in a creative endeavor without acknowledging his or her contribution, using audio or visual material without permission and/or acknowledgment, citing authorities that do not exist, citing interviews that never occurred, and lifting material verbatim without using quotation marks and/or citing the source. Students should also be aware that they cannot submit the same work or any substantial portion of the same work in more than one course without the consent of all the instructors involved.

University Statement on Recordings During Class

(Basically, if you need to record class, just ask first.) Classroom proceedings for this course might be recorded for purposes including, but not limited to, student illness, religious holidays, disability accommodations, or student course review. Note also that recording devices are prohibited in the classroom except with the instructor’s permission.

Sexual Misconduct

Boston University is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and our school policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which regards sexual misconduct – including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We understand that sexual violence can undermine students’ academic success and we encourage students who have experienced some form of sexual misconduct to talk to someone about their experience, so they can get the support their need. Confidential support and academic advocacy resources can be found with the Center for Sexual Assault Response & Prevention (SARP) at <http://www.bu.edu/safety/sexual-misconduct>.

HERE’S WHAT WE’LL BE DOING AND WHEN

You’ll find a schedule of events and due dates for assignments. Dates are pretty locked down, but if any changes to the schedule should occur, you’ll be notified in a timely fashion. These due dates can also be found on the class website calendar at rsemik.wix.com/ft310workshop. Also, your assignments are posted in advance, so if it fits your schedule better, start it sooner and turn it in early.

Class Date	Questions/Themes we’ll explore...	How to prepare for this class discussion...	Quick reminders...
Mon. 1/29	Who are we? What is this class? Choose Workshop Groups How do we format scripts?	Bring your Semester Start Questionnaire stories to share with class Suggested: Read Cowgill Ch. 1-2 by this class	Formatting Assignment due Mon. 2/05 @ Noon
Mon. 2/05	Idea Workshops for Group 1 In-Class Activities	Group 1: Bring outline for Script 1 Suggested: Read Cowgill Ch. 3-4 by this class	Group 1 Script 1 due Sat. 2/10 @ Noon
Mon. 2/12	Workshop Group 1 Script 1 Idea Workshops for Group 2 Discuss Coverage	Group 2: Bring outline for Script 1 Suggested: Read Cowgill Ch. 5-6 by this class	Group 2 Script 1 due Sat. 2/17 @ Noon
<u>Tues. 2/20</u>	Workshop Group 2 Script 1 Idea Workshops for Group 3	Group 3: Bring outline for Script 1 Suggested: Read Cowgill Ch. 7-8 by this class	Group 3 Script 1 due Sat. 2/24 @ Noon Group 1 Revision 1 due Mon. 2/26 @ Noon

			Coverage due Mon. 2/26 @ Noon
Mon. 2/26	Workshop Group 3 Script 1 Idea Workshops for Group 4 Discuss <i>Godfather</i> essay	Group 4: Bring outline for Script 1 Suggested: Read Cowgill Ch. 9-10 by this class	Group 4 Script 1 due Sat. 3/03 @ Noon Group 2 Revision 1 due Tues. 3/06 @ Noon
Mon. 3/05	No Class!	Have a safe Spring Break!	Group 3 Revision 1 due Mon. 3/12 @ Noon
Mon. 3/12	Workshop Group 4 Script 1 Discuss <i>Little Miss Sunshine</i> essay	Suggested: Read Cowgill Ch. 11-12 by this class	<i>Godfather</i> essay due Mon. 3/19 @ Noon
Mon. 3/19	Idea Workshops for Group 1 Mid-Term Course Evaluations	Group 1: Bring outline for Script 2 Bring your reflections on this semester's class	Group 1 Script 2 due Sat. 3/24 @ Noon Group 4 Revision 1 due Mon. 3/26 @ Noon
Mon. 3/26	Workshop Group 1 Script 2 Idea Workshops for Group 2	Group 2: Bring outline for Script 2	Group 2 Script 2 due Sat. 3/31 @ Noon <i>Little Miss Sunshine</i> due Mon. 4/02 @ Noon
Mon. 4/02	Workshop Group 2 Script 2 Idea Workshops for Group 3	Group 3: Bring outline for Script 2	Group 3 Script 2 due Sat. 4/07 @ Noon Group 1 Revision 2 due Mon. 4/09 @ Noon
Mon. 4/09	Workshop Group 3 Script 2 Idea Workshops for Group 4 Discuss <i>Ordinary People</i> essay	Group 4: Bring outline for Script 2	Group 4 Script 2 due Sat. 4/14 @ Noon Group 2 Revision 2 due Mon. 4/16 @ Noon
<u>Wed. 4/18</u>	Workshop Group 4 Script 2		Group 3 Revision 2 due Mon. 4/23 @ Noon
Mon. 4/23	Career/Beyond This Class Lecture and Q&A		<i>Ordinary People</i> essay due Mon. 4/30 @ Noon Group 4 Revision 2 due Mon. 5/02 @ Noon
Mon. 4/30	Course Evaluations Optional Workshops Course Wrap-Up/Partay!	Bring food and drinks to share	Good Luck with Finals!