LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO / COMM 202 Story for Film & TV: Fall 2023

COURSE INFORMATION

Course Number & Section	COMM 202 21 W
Class Time and Day	TUESDAY: 1:00 PM to 3:30 PM
Room Number & Building	School of COMM – Room 014

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Name	Miguel Silveira
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Email Address	msilveira@luc.edu
Office Hours	By Appointment
Office Location	Loyola University Water Tower Campus, 111 E. Pearson St. School of Communication, 9th Floor.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introduction to story concept, structure, and character development for film and television. Through in-class exercises, analysis of scripts and films/series, and writing assignments focused on storytelling fundamentals, students will learn what makes a compelling story, how to create characters we truly care about, and effective ways to build a narrative—fiction or nonfiction--for the big or small screen. **NOTE: You will be required to watch feature films and TV content as a group during class time at least twice during the semester.**

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this course, students will have created detailed story outlines or treatments for both an original short film or documentary and a spec episode (main "A" plot) for an existing half-hour series. Using these tools, students will draft a short script (~15 pgs.) the first half of the semester, and draft one or more key scenes (3-5 pgs.) of a TV series that will receive a live reading in our final class.

REQUIRED SOFTWARE

- Adobe Acrobat: **You will submit all assignments as PDFs.** No Word docs or other files.
- Free screenplay formatting software (sign up now using your @luc.edu email address):
- Final Draft Trial (18 weeks free): http://bit.ly/trialfinaldraft
- Other examples of screenwriting software:

  - Celtx
  - WriterDuet (3 Free Projects)
  - Arc Studio Pro (Free Options)

Note: Early in the semester, many COMM 202 assignments will not require screenplay format (bios, synopses, etc.). Submit this work in 12 pt. Courier double-spaced.

REQUIRED and SUGGESTED TEXTBOOKS & MATERIALS

- *REQUIRED: The Nutshell Technique: Crack the Secret of Successful Screenwriting,* **by Jill Chamberlain.**
- *REQUIRED: Write to TV out of your head and onto the screen (Third Edition), by Martie Cook.*
- *The Complete Screenwriter's Manual* [CSM], by Bowles, Mangravite, Zorn
- *Inside the Room: Writing Television with the Pros [ITR],* by Linda Venis
- *Poetics* by Aristotle
- Scripts & other materials are placed on SAKAI, handed out in class, or sent via email.

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

All student work must be wholly original. Academic dishonesty, such as cheating or plagiarism, will result in a failing grade. Please read the SoC *Statement on Academic Integrity* (linked here).

LETTER GRADE SCALE

100-95%	= A
94.99- 90%	= A-
89.99-87%	= B+
86.99-83%	= B
82.99-80%	= B –
79.99-77%	= C+
76.99-74%	= C
73.99-70%	= C –
69.99-67%	= D+
66.99-65%	= D
64.99%- and Below	= F

Your final grade will be calculated using the following formula:

1. Observation exercise = 5%
2. Observation screenplay = 10%
3. Character Sketches = 5%
4. Action Script = 10%
5. The Scene Script = 10%
6. The Rewrite = 20%
7. The Spec Script and outline = 20%
8. Web Series Bible and Pitch= 20%

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

The focus of this course will be on developing stories for an original screenplay or documentary treatment and a TV spec for a series.

Each student will develop his/her concepts through a series of cumulative assignments:

FIRST HALF OF THE TERM: FILM

- Original concept for a short film/doc
- Title, genre, theme, synopsis, and logline
- Detailed bios for your main characters
- Identifying your story's turning points
- Mapping out your story on index cards
- Complete draft of short film or documentary script

SECOND HALF OF TERM: TV

- Original "spec" story for existing series or nonfiction series
- Analysis of premise, characters, formula
- Episode idea, summary, title, and theme
- Identifying your spec's 7 Plot Elements
- Mapping out your "A" story's Six Scenes
- Detailed TV outline of your "A" story
- Polished key scene(s) for class table read

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

   *1. The Observation Exercise***:**

Go to an off-campus public location, sit in one spot for at least a full hour, and record in writing what you observe (see and hear). Describe the physical location, the "characters" who inhabit it, the actions they take, and the words (dialogue) that you overhear. Record your observations as accurately and succinctly as possible. Feel free to focus on behaviors, people, events, or conversations that you find interesting, but don't worry at this point about structure, order, or story. Simply record your observations freehand in a stream-of-consciousness style. Try to be as objective as possible in your observations. DO NOT invent, judge, conclude, or use metaphor to replace or supplement the accurate description. DO NOT write in the first person or describe what you're thinking. DO make sure you observe at least two people. When you are done, transcribe your observations into a 1–3-page type-written document using Word or Open Office, which you should deliver electronically as a PDF file via e-mail. Note: The Observation Exercise will be evaluated on three criteria: 1) Deadline, 2) Writing, and 3) Impact.

2. *The Observation Screenplay:*

Convert your observations into a properly formatted screenplay with scene headings, descriptions, action, characters, and dialogue. If you'd like, feel free to focus on the most interesting, dramatic, or visual elements of your original observation; however, once again you should avoid adding to, supplementing, or embellishing your original observations. Your Observation Screenplay should be 2-5 pages in length, completed in Final Draft or equivalent, and delivered as a PDF via e-mail. Note: The Observation Script will be evaluated based on three criteria: 1) Deadline, 2) Writing, and 3) Format.

3. *Character Sketches:*

Focus on 2 characters from your Observation Exercise. Create character sketches for the two characters inspired by your observations of them. Feel free to embellish, invent, and exaggerate as necessary for a scene including these characters to have the most dramatic or comedic impact. Make sure that your sketches include information covering: their look; their background; important relationships in their lives; their goals; obstacles (internal/external) to achieving their goals; their fatal flaws and/or best characteristics; their hobbies and quirks, their secret (sub-textual) drive; etc. Each character sketch should be roughly 1-2 pages long, completed in Word or Open Office, and delivered electronically as PDF file via e-mail. Note: The Character Sketches will be evaluated on three criteria: 1) Deadline, 2) Writing, and 3) Impact.

4. *Action Script:*

Take one or both characters developed in your sketches, place them in the original location from your Observation Exercises, and add conflict and action. Write a fictional scene in which your character confronts an obstacle or conflict WITHOUT using any dialogue (i.e., your script should consist only of scene headings, description, and action). Think about how to imply character information simply through action. Remember, the script should take place during one time and place (1 scene) and only contain a description of what the audience sees and hears— there can be no description of what a character is thinking, no voice-over, and NO DIALOGUE or descriptions of what a character says (i.e., no references to dialogue either). The scene should be roughly 2-3 pages in length, completed in proper screenplay format using Final Draft, exported as a PDF, and delivered electronically via e-mail.

5. *The Scene Script:*

Write a full scene, with a clear beginning, middle, and end, inspired by your original Observation Exercise and/or Character Sketches. If you'd like, you can simply flesh out your Action Script with dialogue OR you can write an entirely new scene. The scene should be 3-5 pages in length, completed in proper screenplay format using Final Draft (etc.), exported as a PDF, and delivered electronically via e-mail.

6. ***The Rewrite:***

Using the scene, you were provided in class, complete a revision, rewrite, or polish of said script, punching up the action and dialogue. Try to maintain the general action and spirit of the original scene, keeping the principal character(s) intact, but feel free to add, embellish, remove, edit, restructure, and otherwise revise the original. Be sure to address and fix the writing and formatting mistakes of the original. The scene should be 2-5 pages in length, completed in proper screenplay format using Final Draft or similar, and delivered electronically as a PDF via e-mail.

7. ***The Spec Script and Outline:***

After doing some background research (the assigned reading and screening) develop an idea for an episode of a favorite, recent (ideally) television show. Combining ideas and working with your assigned group, write a full draft of a spec script that follows industry and show standards for format, style, and length, contains a storyline for each family, and fits the tone and content of the show. You will complete a portion of the first draft individually, but your entire group will be responsible for the final draft of the script. The final draft should be 22-30 pages in length and should be delivered electronically via e-mail as a PDF document. Note: The Spec will be evaluated based on four criteria: 1) Group Work, 2) Writing, 3) Format, and 4) Impact.

8. ***Web Series Pitch Bible and Pitch:***

Working with your assigned group, complete a Bible/Pitch Doc and Outline for an original pilot and two additional episodes for a web series, containing no more than 3 principal characters, 3 principal locations (1 or 2 is better), and 5 total scenes per ep. (can be fewer). Plan on the Pilot and each ep. running 5-7 minutes. Your bible/pitch doc should include a 1-2 sentence logline, basic story, and plot information (the conflicts that drive the story and the show's franchise), brief (1-2 paragraph) character sketches, notes about the visual style, and information about the broader story arc (what might happen in future episodes) following the examples provided in class. To help clarify your vision, refer to films, TV shows, or Web Series, the actors you'd like to see in the roles of your principal characters, and information about your intended audience. Be prepared to pitch your idea in class using visual references where applicable. Your Outline (AKA Step-Outline) should run approx. 2 pages per episode and should break down the plot into beats, clearly demonstrating the conflict in each scene. You will work together as a group, and your entire group will be responsible for the Pitch Doc/Bible. Your Pitch Doc/Bible should be approximately 5 minutes long when pitched out loud. Your Outline should be approx. 2 pages per episode. Both the Bible/Pitch Doc and the Outline should be written using Word or Open Office and delivered as a PDF file via e-mail. Note: The Original Short Web Series Pitch Doc/Bible and Outline will be evaluated based on four criteria: Group Work, 2) Writing, 3) Format, and 4) Impact.

All assignments must be typed in 12 pt. Courier, double-spaced. Type your full name, assignment description (e.g., "logline"), and due date at the top of the first page of each assignment**.**

*** Please, always start your Assignment filename with your LAST NAME. ***

DEADLINES

The work in this class is cumulative, with every assignment building upon the last. Students are expected to complete all the assigned readings and writing projects on time. Late work will be automatically penalized five points for each day past the original due date. Moreover, *assignments will not be accepted more than five calendar days past due*.

ATTENDANCE

This class meets once a week. Attendance is critical. *Any in-class work missed due to absence cannot be made up.* Do not email the instructor asking for assignment details. It's your responsibility to obtain notes from classmates. All work is due on the day assigned in the syllabus

COMPUTER USE

Please be aware the occasional software bugs, viruses, human error, and/or hardware failure can result in damaged, corrupted, or deleted files. Therefore, it is your responsibility to routinely back up project files throughout your writing process and to deliver readable, uncorrupted files in the required PDF format. *Computer failure is no excuse for lost work or late assignments.*

* The instructor reserves the right to revise or change anything in this syllabus as the need arises. Work created in or for this course can be used by the instructors with other classes.

COMM 202 SCHEDULE: FALL 2023 (Subject to change. Updates will be posted.)

NOTE: BRING (or have easily available) a copy of homework to class for workshop use.

WEEK 1. TUESDAY AUG. 29

- **Introduce yourself: Why are you here?**
- **Class Overview. Intro to story Principles, vocabulary, and course expectations.**
- **Film Examples.**
- **Film Terms.**
- **Watch: Sidney Lumet's "12 Angry Men" and take your notes.**
- **Train your eyes and your heart to see, watch Agnes Varda's "The Gleaners and I" and Alfred Hitchcock's "Rear Window."**
- **ASSIGNMENT: Observation Exercise.**

WEEK 2. TUESDAY SEPT. 5

- **CLOSAT CARDS.**
- **Writer's toolbox.**
- **The character's nature.**
- **Comedy vs Tragedy.**
- **Antagonistic Force.**
- **Conflict.**
- **The 3 Acts and the 8 Sequences.**
- **Loglines: Why are they important?**
- **Public Domain Stories & Folk Tales**
- **READ: Logline Genre Examples Savethecat**

   DUE: OBSERVATIONAL EXERCISE. ASSIGNMENT: OBSERVATIONAL SCRIPT.

WEEK 3. TUESDAY SEPT. 12

- **Read handouts on Sakai (TBD) – Story Through Sound, Locations, Old Photographs & Memories.**
- **WRITE: Work on observational script/logline.**
- **Watch "The Hidden Fortress" by Akira Kurosawa and "Star Wars" by George Lucas.**

   DUE: OBSERVATIONAL SCRIPT. ASSIGNMENT: CHARACTER SKETCHES.

WEEK 4. TUESDAY SEPT. 19

- **How to build complex characters?**
- **The Character: Strength vs Weakness.**
- **CLOSATS Review.**
- **READING (TBD).**
- **Watch Francis Ford Coppola's "THE GODFATHER" and Marjane Satrapi's "PERSEPOLIS".**

   DUE: CHARACTER SKETCHES ASSIGNMENT: ACTION SEQUENCE.

WEEK 5. TUESDAY SEPT. 26

- **Have CLOSATS ready. Sequence Index cards ready. 3 acts ready.**
- **Who is the main character and what do they want? Will they get it?**
- **What's the nature of your scene? Who's scene is it?**
- **Scene Study: In Class Breakdown of a sequence in "The Godfather".**

   DUE: ACTION SEQUENCE ASSIGNMENT: THE SCENE.

WEEK 6. TUESDAY OCT. 3

- **The spine/blueprint/structure of your story.**
- **Discuss "Persepolis" and "The Godfather."**
- **READING (TBD).**

   DUE: THE SCENE ASSIGNMENT: FULL DRAFT OF SHORT SCRIPT.

WEEK 7. TUESDAY OCT. 10

***MID SEMESTER BREAK: NO CLASS. ***

WEEK 8. TUESDAY OCT. 17

- **Story/structure review.**
- **WRITE: opening first half of your script (through midpt.) + end scene. Instructor one-on-ones plus writing lab to give everyone the time and opportunity to flesh out their sequences into individual story beats and leave class with a solid screenplay treatment.**

   DUE: FULL DRAFT of short script (8-12 pages) w/ final title & logline on cover page.

WEEK 9. TUESDAY OCT. 24

*** WRITING FOR TV BEGINS***

- **Story for TV intro. Watch Hauge Five Turning Points video. Spec vs. pilot.**
- **READ (TBD). Erik Bork's 7 Viable Story PROBLEM points; Watch Grimm; Atlanta**

- **DUE: Watch Hague Structuring TV episodes. In-class, analyze Atlanta.**
- **ASSIGNMENT_WRITE: Watch/analyze 2 episodes of your chosen series. Identify 4-6 Acts (it varies) and major story beats in each episode.**
- **ASSIGNMENT_WRITE: Come up with an original episode idea that works within the premise, characters and formula of your series. Summarize in 1-2 paragraphs. In-class: Convert your plot elements to begin beat sheet.**

WEEK 10. TUESDAY OCT. 31

- **The Beat Sheet.**

- **DUE: Watch/analyze 2 episodes of your chosen series.** **Identify 4-6 Acts (it varies) and major story beats in each episode.**
- **DUE: Come up with an original episode idea** **that works within the premise, characters and formula of your series. Summarize in 1-2 paragraphs. In-class: Convert your plot elements to begin beat sheet.**

WEEK 11. TUESDAY NOV. 7

- **Structuring your story.**
- **In-class: refine your episode idea and main character driving it. Develop *your* episode's 7 major plot scenes (may be more or less). Include Act & Scene numbers, settings, and brief summaries of each scene's action. This is a rough cut of your episode's "A" story beat sheet; come up w/ your episode's title.**
- **ASSIGNMENT_WRITE:** **Finish developing your plot beats into story outline for entire episode (15 points). Workshop: Use a study buddy to help you i.d. your 1-2 BEST scene(s) (3-5 mins. run time) and get a solid outline / scene notes wrestled down in class.**
- **ASSIGNMENT_WRITE:** **1) Draft your scene(s) in format, bring to next class**

WEEK 12. TUESDAY. NOV. 14

- **Reworking/Revising.**
- **Workshop/lab: get feedback on your drafted scenes from at least two students.**
- **Troubleshoot with instructor.**
- **ASSIGNMENT_WRITE:** **Revise/polish your 3-5 pg. scene(s) for the read**

WEEK 13. TUESDAY. NOV. 21

- **TABLE READ/WORKSHOP PART 1: of each student's TV scene(s).**
- **Distribute digital copies to your actors.**
- **DUE: Scenes Ready for the Table Read.**

WEEK 14. TUESDAY. NOV. 28

- TABLE READ/WORKSHOP PART 2: of each student's TV scene(s).
- <mark>ASSIGNMENT:</mark> Submit your spec episode to Sakai!

WEEK 15. TUESDAY. DEC. 5

*** THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM FOR COMM 202***

- FINAL MEETING AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.
- WRAP UP: (TBD)
- <mark>DUE:</mark> Spec episode to Sakai!

DREAM!