

Carleton University

Fall, 2020

Department of English

ENGL 3902 Writing Screenplays // FILM 3902 (Screenwriting Workshop)

May the Force Be with You: Screenwriting in the Age of YouTube and Insta-Stories

Wednesdays; 8:30am-11:30am

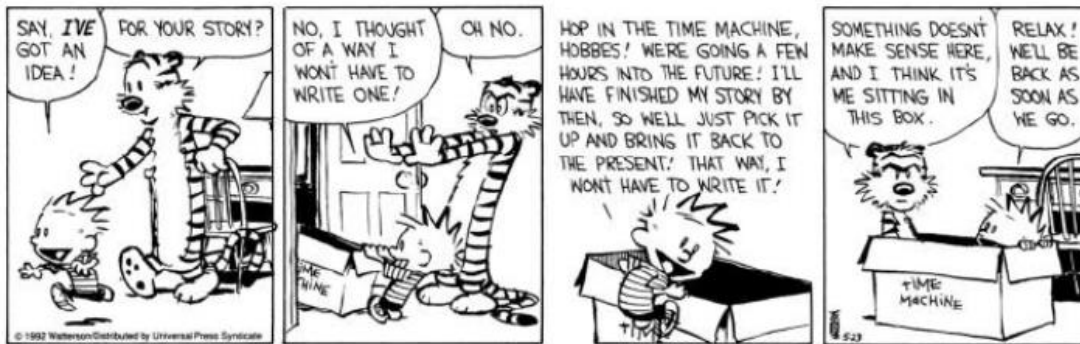
Professor Alice Neiley, M.F.A.

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Office Hours: by appointment

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What is this course about?

In a blended synchronous and asynchronous format, we will work as a group build on your previous knowledge and understanding of how stories work, honing your skills—dialogue, dramatic tension, character development—specifically for the world of film. This course will be heavy in both reading AND writing, as there is no better way to learn than by exemplary example (*American Beauty* by Alan Ball and *Casablanca* by Julius and Philip Epstein, Howard Koch, and Casey Robinson, for instance), and no better way to improve than practice! This course will be dedicated to discussing the age-old question of how to strike a balance between art and entertainment, as well as to producing new work: stylistic imitations, adaptations, and original scripts. Perhaps most importantly, we will workshop together, critically reading/performing/discussing each other’s screenplays in an effort to provide constructive feedback for future drafts.

** Blended Courses: An online course where there is a mixture of synchronous meetings and asynchronous activities. This means students need to be prepared to meet some of the time online via web conferencing tools at scheduled days and times. The specific dates will be communicated by the instructor in the course outline. The asynchronous activities are intended to provide flexibility to students when the class is not meeting synchronously. Students are expected to remain up to date with the deadlines and due dates provided by the instructor. These

courses require reliable high-speed Internet access and a computer (ideally with a webcam), and a headset with a microphone.

What will I accomplish?

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand more intimately how stories work and what narrative arc means in the film world
- Understand exactly why the screenplays you love most are so great, and apply those techniques to your own script
- Adapt a short story into a short (15-30 min) screenplay
- Balance form and technical knowledge with creativity and unique voice
- Write a treatment for a full-length screenplay of your own
- Flesh out / complete one act of your script and workshop multiple individual scenes

What books do I need to buy?

Field, S. (2005). *Screenplay: The foundations of screenwriting*. New York: Delta.

**All other readings, as well as the reading schedule and due dates for all assignments, will be provided in PDF form on our online platform. **

What assignments will I need to complete?

Weekly film responses / participation in online discussion threads – 30%, see [APPENDIX A](#)

Weekly writing prompts – 10%, see [APPENDIX B](#)

Apprenticeship Project – 20%, see [APPENDIX C](#)

Adaptation Project – 15%, see [APPENDIX D](#)

Original outline / scene workshop (both critique and creation) – 25%, see [APPENDIX E](#)

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Schedule of Material/Assignments

Weekly Schedule

Date and Topic	Read before class/ Discuss	Watching	Due
Week 1: Wed Sept 9			

<p>Course outline; discuss art vs. entertainment; discuss story basics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Black Panther</i> screenplay (on Ares) ❖ <i>PDF: About vs. 'about'</i> 	<p><i>Black Panther</i></p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Week 2: Wed Sept 16</p> <p>Character; Character Arc & Narrative Arc;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Syd Field: Ch. 1, 2, &3</i> ❖ <i>PDF: Nutshell</i> 	<p><i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i></p>	<p>Prompt exercises 1&2 due</p>
<p>Week 3: Wed Sept 23</p> <p>Conflict; motivation; stakes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i> screenplay on Ares ❖ <i>Syd Field: Ch. 4&5</i> 	<p><i>Shorts: The Phone Call; The Music Box; The Man Who Planted Trees</i></p>	<p>Prompts 3&4 due</p>
<p>Week 4: Wed Sept 30</p> <p>Setup/ dramatic tension/ change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Syd Field: 6, 7, &8</i> ❖ <i>PDF: Nutshell</i> 	<p><i>American Beauty</i></p>	<p>Prompts 4&5 due</p>

<p>Week 5 : Wed Oct 7</p> <p>Plot points; timing beats; Scene structure</p>	<p>❖ <i>Syd Field</i>: Ch. 9&10</p>	<p><i>A Fish Called Wanda</i></p>	<p>Pt. 1 of Apprenticeship project due</p>
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<p>Week 6: Wed Oct 14</p> <p>Dialogue/dialogue beats; subtext; Exposition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Wall-E</i> screenplay on Ares 	<p><i>Juno</i></p>	<p>Prompt 6&7</p>
<p>Week 7: Wed Oct 21</p> <p>Theme; sequence; storyline; About vs. 'about' review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Syd Field: Ch. 11,12,&13</i> ❖ <i>PDF: Nutshell</i> 	<p><i>Get Out</i></p>	<p>Pt. 2 Apprenticeship project due</p>
<p>Reading Week</p>	<p>Reading Week</p>	<p>Reading Week</p>	<p>Reading Week</p>

<p>Week 8: Wed Nov 4</p> <p>Adaptations; treatment structure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Syd Field Ch. 14&15 ❖ <i>Brokeback Mountain</i>: short story by Annie Proulx on Ares 	<p><i>Brokeback Mountain</i></p>	<p>Prompts 8&9</p>
<p>Week 9: Wed Nov 11</p> <p>Work Your Tail Off / Small Group Discussion week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>PDF:</i> _____ 		<p>Prompt 10 due</p> <p>Pt. 1 of Adaptation project due</p>

<p>Week 10: Wed Nov 18</p> <p>Originality; peer review/ official workshop/critique guidelines</p>	<p>Interviews</p>	<p>Scenes from <i>Monty Python and the Holy Grail; Elf;</i></p>	<p>Pt. 2 Adaptation project due</p>
<p>Week 11: Wed Nov 25</p> <p>Conferences with me, your loving Professor Neiley</p>			<p>Peer commentary on assigned Adaptations due</p> <p>Treatment for original script due</p>
<p>Week 12: Wed Dec 2</p> <p>WORKSHOP!!</p>	<p>Workshop Group A</p> <p>Act 1s</p>		<p>Group A Act 1 due</p> <p>Group B critique/commentary due</p>
<p>Week 13: Wed Dec 9</p> <p>WORKSHOP!!!!</p>	<p>Workshop Group B</p>		<p>Group A critique/commentary due</p> <p>Group B Act 1 due</p>

	Act 1s		
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How will my work be graded?

For every assignment, you will be given a list of criteria and/or a rubric. You will be assessed as to how well you fulfill those criteria based on the following ratings: **Superfantastic, Highly Impressive, Which Video Game Were You Playing While Working?, Do You Even Have Spell Check?, and Incomplete.** Your final grades will be based on the following scale: A 85-89%; A- 80-84%; B+ 77-79%; B 73-76%; B- 70-72%; C+ 67-69%; C 63-66%; C- 60-62%; D+ 57-59%; D 53-56%; D- 50-52%; F 49% and below.

Do I have to come to class?

Yes. You are expected to be present, prepared, and on time for all live class sessions. Some sessions will be pre-recorded lectures, in which case the class meeting itself will be either cancelled or shortened accordingly and there will be assignments to complete. Regardless, each class builds on the previous meetings -- this course is based on discussion of films and scripts, as well as important information about crafting narrative -- therefore, missing one class meeting or neglecting to view a full lecture impacts your own understanding as well as your classmates. *Then* I have to repeat myself, you all get irritated and bored with my repetition, and the whole situation is an epic fail.

So, more than **two unexcused absences in live class sessions** will result in a **final grade deduction of a half letter grade** per each additional unexcused absence.

Please note: *cumulative lack of participation during class will count as an unexcused absence as well. I will notify you via email if you are in danger of receiving a full letter grade deduction for any of the above reasons.*

If you are absent for any reason (excused or unexcused), **it is your responsibility to get any missed information from classmates, and to catch up on your reading and any work by the next class meeting.**

When are your office hours?

I will hold office hours by appointment --there will be a plethora of free times -- I can always work something out via telephone call, Facetime conference, or Zoom. Come chat! You can ask questions about the course materials, class discussions, or assignments, or bounce ideas off me. I'm happy to accommodate your schedules the best I can.

- Office Hours Initiation

I'd like to have a personal meeting with each of you by the end of September about your goals for life, for the course, and any burning (or breezy) questions you may have. In order to accommodate everyone's schedules, I'll set aside the second class period for these meetings. I'll pass around a list of time slots soon!

How are assignments supposed to be formatted?

- ❖ Download script writing software from celtx.com (it's free): celtx.com.

- ❖ All scripts should be in .pdf format (celtx converts it automatically for you).
- ❖ All writing should be **typed or word-processed in 12-point font, Courier New**.
- ❖ Type your name, the name of the assignment, class and section number, and the due date in the top left corner.

Can I turn in my work late?

Late or incomplete work puts us both in a rather unfortunate situation. If you want any credit for a late or incomplete assignment, I expect a perfect display of effort on said assignment, as well as an emotionally performed monologue to ensue at the beginning of a future class, of a poem, speech from a T.V. show, movie, or song lyrics—of my choosing of course—and an explanation of its dramatic structure. **Even in that case, the late paper MUST be turned in within a week of the deadline.** If you prefer not to be put in that position, please manage your time professionally and meet the deadlines. Turning anything in over a week late without a very, very, VERY good excuse (doctor's note, family emergency, etc.) will result in a 40% deduction. Turning anything in later than that is unacceptable.

** These policies do not apply to presentations or workshops where you will receive a zero for the assignment if you are a no show**

Can I skip assignments?

You may skip **two prompt submissions** and **two critical responses/discussions** because I realize that life happens. If you complete everything, I'll drop your three lowest grades on critical responses. However, **you MUST let me know you're using your "skip credit" beforehand** to avoid any confusion.

- **Extensions:** Extension requests must be made **before** the assignment is due (meaning at some point up till the beginning of our class on the due date). Extensions will be granted at my discretion, and I am very understanding of extenuating circumstances (stress, emergency, roommate problems, etc.), provided I know **AHEAD** of the due date. No extensions will be granted on or after the due date without a note from some authority on the state of your emergency. You can request an extension in person, via email, or via telephone.

Can I revise my work for a higher grade?

Yes. You can revise any of the major projects for up to a half letter grade higher **if you submitted the original project on time**. You must come and see me at my office and we will discuss room for improvement, and negotiate a due date for the revision. You cannot revise your work if you did not complete the first version in its entirety, if you turned your work in late, or if you didn't put forth the appropriate effort to complete the first draft as determined by me, your professor.

What do you expect in terms of participation?

A fully active class participant attends every class, has prepared the assigned reading, has thought about it, and OF COURSE brought the reading to class for our work together, thoroughly completes any in-class assignments, and *meaningfully* contributes to group work and discussions in a way that *further*s our conversations and considerations of the materials and questions at hand. Simply

showing up to class does not get you many participation points, although repeated absences will cause you to lose points. I will assign you a grade based on my assessment of the quantity and quality of your participation.

In order to fully participate, I therefore expect you to come to class **prepared** – meaning you **have read the required readings assigned for the day or for that week**, and are able to **discuss them and work with them in class** – and, of course, **that you bring the necessary book or reading to class**. That is the minimum requirement (or a C+ for participation).

- When engaging in class discussions, we will all be respectful of each other, even if we disagree. As part of this respect for each other, we will make sure to listen when a classmate or the instructor is speaking.
- The “Shyness” Caveat: if you are shy or uncomfortable speaking in public, please come see me at the beginning of the semester and we’ll work out a way for you to participate in discussions/show me you’re engaged with the material.

Note on the workshop dynamic: Over the course of the term, students will work towards writing a full scenes for their original screenplay. While the first half of the term is devoted to getting familiar with the conventions of screenplay writing, the second half is all about workshopping these scenes as a group. Here is how it works: on the second of class we will all sign up for a workshop. One week before their appointed dates, students will post their work on CU Learn for the group to read. The rest of the class then has one week to read the posted pieces and comment upon them. On the day of the workshop, we will read through and discuss the comments together as a group.

Student Resources

Plagiarism

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in “substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course.

Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520- 6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

APPENDIX A – Responses (posts about film/script & online discussion thread)

For each week, I have included a number of questions that should help you dig deep into the weekly film you watched and/or script you read. **Before** class, you need to write a short post that examines, asks questions about, and connects certain techniques used in the film/script to your own process. During class you'll have time to read through your classmates' posts before we either discuss via typed online chat or Zoom. These posts and your corresponding participation in the live discussion are worth 30% of your total grade. If you look on the schedule, there are **eleven** opportunities for you to submit a buzzword post **and you can skip two or, if you choose to write them all, the corresponding number of your lowest grades for these assignments will be dropped.**

The main goal of this assignment is to help you think more deeply about films and scripts before class by identifying specific examples and making relevant connections.

For each buzzword post you need to:

- Examine the film/script for the week for examples key concepts we've talked about in class – choose at least two to focus on in depth.
- Cite, at a minimum, two relevant quotes / scenes from the film to support your thoughts.
- Make at least one connection between the film and goals you have for your own work, **as well as** relevant techniques you'd like to explore.
- Make at least one connection between the film and the larger question of art vs. popularity.
- Ask at least one question the film has sparked for you.

APPENDIX B – Prompts/Exercises

We will begin class most days with a writing exercise relevant to the concepts we're digging into that day. You'll also be expected to complete the exercises at the end of each assigned chapter in the textbook (don't worry, you won't be reading ALL the chapters ☺). These exercises will NOT be letter graded, but I will mark them for completeness and thoughtfulness on a scale of check-plus, check, check-minus, or 0.

1. Prompt/exercise work should show effort and thoughtfulness – generally these things are evaluated based on ability to follow directions, face challenges, and...experimentation/play!
2. If you have questions or anxiety regarding a prompt, please reach out to me! I'd be happy to help you through it.
3. After the in class prompts, you will hopefully get a chance to discuss the process in break-out groups of your peers, and share your work if you feel comfortable.

APPENDIX C – Apprenticeship Project

Imitation isn't only the sincerest form of flattery; it's also the best way to learn the craft. For this class, I want you to choose a contemporary script (I will provide you with a list of suggestions--you may also suggest your own).

1. Watch at least 2 films or shows **and** read at least 1 script by your chosen screenwriter.
2. Write a 3-4 page report on your screenwriter's techniques. I don't really want this to include biographical information; instead, this bit of prose will investigate your screenwriter's work for its patterns. What are the similarities and differences between the films/scripts? Do you think the writer was focused more on art, popularity, or both? What does the writer do often? What kinds of pacing/dialogue does the writer frequently employ? Please do not bore yourself by reading academic criticism or book reviews. I only want to know what you think.
3. Write one scene that imitates your writer's work. (We will discuss the difference between imitation and parody.)

I encourage you to come to office hours to discuss your apprenticeship project! This can be really fun and helpful in your own process if you spend the time!

APPENDIX D – Adaptation Station!

This screenplay adaptation (6-7 pages) should be based on one or more scenes from a short story, novel, novella, or epic poem of your choice (I will provide possibilities, but you can also provide your own as long as I approve them!).

In addition to your script, please submit a brief analytical paper (2 pages, maximum) that contains the following discussions about your adaptation:

(A) what you changed and why

(B) what you kept the same and why.

****Please do NOT use a theatrical play as your source material. Also, try to pick a story to adapt that is a complex, multi-layered character driven story, rather than action driven (meaning little dialogue is required), or bodice ripping gothic romance (lots of sighing and pining for your heartthrob), or pure fantasy (no unicorns), or talking animals. As much as I LOVE all of those options on occasion, they often have less to teach us about the bare bones of technique.**

APPENDIX E – Original Treatment + Scenes

While you will not have time to write an entire full length script in this class, you WILL write the first bit (likely Act 1), and FIRST you'll write what's called a "treatment". A treatment helps you map out your story before you begin writing the dialogue, camera angles, etc. Screenwriters often forget that they are writing for actual people, so writing a treatment can help iron out the kinks and really decide whether the idea is worth delving into. The aim, as we will spend a lot of time discussing, is to combine stories told from your deep souls with an awareness of what people want or need to see.

Your treatment will be 2-5 pages and should read like a short story. It should be written in the present tense and cover the entire story including the ending. I will hand out more detailed instructions on how to write a treatment by week 4 or 5 of the course, but meanwhile...here are the basics!

1. A Working title
2. The writer's name and contact information
3. WGA Registration number
4. A short logline
5. Introduction to key characters
6. Who, what, when, why and where.
7. Act 1 in one to three paragraphs. Set the scene, dramatize the main conflicts.
8. Act 2 in two to six paragraphs. Should dramatize how the conflicts introduced in Act 1 lead to a crisis.
9. Act 3 in one to three paragraphs. Dramatize the final conflict and resolution.