Theater 311C
Fundamentals of Writing for the Stage and Screen

THEA 311C
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Class: T/R 3:35pm–4:50 /Comm 0024
Office Hours: by appointment
Office: 1033B Communications Building

Required Texts:
Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant by Julie Jenson
Screenwriting Updated: New (and Conventional) Ways of Writing for the Screen by Linda Aronson

Seeing Plays/Films
While this course will require seeing the Department of Theater plays of the semester, I recommend seeing as many performances/films as possible, and I will alert you to opportunities in Speech Communication, the CP department and other local venues. Writing for the stage and screen is not merely about words, but also sights, sounds, and actions. Seeing as much varied theater/film as possible is absolutely crucial to being a good scriptwriter.

Course Description:
This course introduces basic writing skills for playwrights, scriptwriters, and performance artists. It focuses on techniques—such as plot structure, dialogue, and the manipulation of images—used in all dramatic media. Written exercises are submitted and discussed weekly to identify dramatic events and techniques. For final projects, students write a script for either a 10-minute play, 10-minute film, or a 10-minute solo performance.

Goals and Objectives:
By the end of the course students will have completed writing exercises that will give them a practical knowledge of six fundamental elements of scriptwriting: conflict, character, story/plot, the six points of basic structure, and the three kinds of structure.

Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze a text according to these elements, through in class critique of other students’ writing exercises, and through writing a 10-minute play, 10-minute film, or a 10-minute solo performance.

Throughout the course, class members will perform each other’s writing assignments; this will give students a familiarity with hearing their words spoken out loud. When called upon to act, students will be able to recognize from an actor’s point of view what makes dramatic dialogue.

DoT Goals:
Goal #1- Demonstrate an understanding of the individual artist’s place in the role of theater as a collaborative art.
Goal #2- Understand and appreciate the process of production.
Goal #3- Demonstrate the relationship of theater to world history, societies and cultures.
Goal #4- Master skills, vocabulary and concepts necessary in today’s theater to understand and practice the art of theater.

Attendance:
Attendance and punctuality in this class are crucial because it depends on its participants in a workshop setting. Because of this, more than one absence will affect your grade, and more than three may result in failure. Save your absence for emergencies. The second absence lowers your final grade one letter. The third absence lowers your grade another letter. The fourth absence means you may fail the course.

Late Assignments:
Because workshopping in class is a necessary component of the course, no late assignments will be accepted.

Professionalism:
Because this is a writing workshop, it is imperative that you bring energy to the classroom. Your colleagues will depend on your critiques to help them grow as writers, just as you will depend on them. Likewise, writing is a difficult task and one naturally feels attached to one’s writing. Therefore, you must be courteous and respectful in your critiques. You may NEVER let your critique of a play become a critique of the author.
Assignments:
ALL DIALOGUE ASSIGNMENTS SHOULD BE FORMATTED IN STANDARD PLAY OR FILM FORMAT. (EXAMPLES IN YOUR TEXTBOOKS.)

Weekly Writing assignments
Each student will be responsible for weekly pieces of dialogue or short scripts.

Periodic In-Class Production assignments
Each student will be responsible for regularly self-producing his/her short scripts in class.

Periodic Pop Quizzes
In class quizzes asking you to define major concepts from the reading

Midterm:
Instead of a midterm, in week 11 each student will turn in an outline for a 10-minute play, 10-minute film, or a 10-minute solo performance. Individual conferences concerning your drafts will follow.

Final:
A final draft of your 10-minute play, 10-minute film, or a 10-minute solo performance is due on the day of the class’s final as well as a self-evaluation of your participation in class.

Grading Policy and Evaluation Procedures:

GRADE BREAKDOWN

A is demonstrating significant creativity and intelligence
B is fulfilling all requirements with some original thought
C is average and fulfilling all requirements
D is less than satisfactory work that nearly fulfills the requirements
F fails to meet the minimum requirements.

In-Class Discussions
• Do you come to class on-time and prepared?
• Do you contribute intelligently, diplomatically and with genuine care to your peers’ work?
• Do you give encouragement and support?
• Do you give constructive criticism rather than destructive criticism?
Possible total of 20 points.

Short Scripts
5 points each
• Do they demonstrate the element of playwriting discussed that week?
• Are they the appropriate number of pages, neither too short NOR to long?
Possible total of 30 points

Pop Quizzes
5 points each

Original 10-minute play, 10-minute film, or a 10-minute solo performance:
• Does it adequately explain how the story would function onstage?
• Does it demonstrate creative application of techniques discussed in class?
• Does it demonstrate intelligence, originality, and artistry?
• Is it limited to actions?
Possible total of 20 points.

Original 10-minute play, 10-minute film, or a 10-minute solo performance:
Final Draft
• Does it demonstrate creative application of techniques discussed in class?
• Does it demonstrate intelligence, originality, and artistry?
• Does it demonstrate understanding of a script for the stage?
• Is it rewritten based on comments from our individual conferences?

Possible total of 20 points.

The possible class total is 100 points. Grades will be calculated on a straight percentage, with 90-100% being an A, 80-89% being a B, 70-79% being a C, 60-69% being a D, and anything lower receiving a failing grade.

Course Schedule:
(THESE ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE BASED ON DEPARTMENT AND STUDENT SCHEDULES)

Reading and Assignments are due on the days on which they are listed below. There are no “make-ups” for IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES.

WEEK ONE:
Day 1: 1/19
Introductions
Explain syllabus;
Explain standard playwriting format and its importance (celtx.com offers free scriptwriting software)

Day 2: 1/21
From Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant
Format: 56-61
Dialogue: 1-5
Character: 6-12

Homework:
1 page of dialogue (stage or screen) that has at least one distinct character made through actions. Bring enough hardcopies to read in class (i.e., 2 characters and stage directions = 3 hardcopies brought to class).

WEEK TWO:
Day 3: 1/26
Read/discuss pages

Day 4: 1/28 COME TO BIG MUDDY SHORTS, 7:30pm MOE THEATRE TONIGHT
From Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant
Plot: 13-20
Sets: 21-27
Image and Issue: 28

Homework:
1 page of dialogue (stage or screen) that has at least one distinct character made through actions. Bring enough hardcopies to read in class (i.e., 2 characters and stage directions = 3 hardcopies brought to class).

WEEK THREE:
Day 5: 2/2
Read/discuss pages & Big Muddy Shorts
MDQ, Protagonist.

Day 6: 2/4
From Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant
So What Comes First?: 38-44
Writer’s Block: 45-50
Thinking Like a Playwright: 51-55
Homework:
2-5 page short play/screenplay with a clear MDQ, protagonist, character goal and whether s/he accomplishes it. Cast it from among your classmates. We will perform and discuss them in class during week 4, similar to Big Muddy Shorts.

WEEK FOUR:

Day 7: 2/9
Group 1) Perform scripts by____________________________

Day 8: 2/11 COME TO BIG MUDDY SHORTS, 7:30pm MOE THEATRE TONIGHT
Group 2) Perform scripts by____________________________

Homework:
Write an evaluation of your script. What worked? What didn’t? What went as you hoped? What did not go as you hoped? Why?

WEEK FIVE:

Day 9: 2/16
Turn in your evaluation of your script.
From Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant
The Rewrite: 62-67

Day 10: 2/18
Discuss Big Muddy Shorts

Homework:
Rewrite your short script.

WEEK SIX:

Day 11: 2/23
Conflict

Day 12: 2/25
Perception Shift

Homework:
Write a 1-2 page perception shift in either stage or screenplay format. Bring enough hardcopies to read in class (i.e., 2 characters and stage directions = 3 hardcopies brought to class).

WEEK SEVEN:

Day 13: 3/1
Read/Discuss perception shifts

Day 14: 3/3 COME TO BIG MUDDY SHORTS, 7:30pm MOE THEATRE TONIGHT
Read/Discuss perception shifts (cont)

Homework:
Read Part I of Screenwriting Updated (p. 1-35)

WEEK EIGHT:
Day 15: 3/8
Discuss Big Muddy Shorts
Day 16: 3/10
   Discuss Part I of *Screenwriting Updated* (p. 1-35)

**Homework:**
   2-5 page short play/screenplay with a clear MDQ, protagonist, character goal and whether s/he accomplishes it. Cast it from among your classmates. We will perform and discuss them in class during week 4, similar to Big Muddy Shorts.

**WEEK NINE: SPRING BREAK**
Day 17: 3/15

Day 18: 3/17

**Homework:** If rewrite, prepare scripts for performance in week 10

**WEEK TEN:**
Day 19: 3/22
   Group 1) Perform scripts by_____________________________

Day 20: 3/24
   Group 2) Perform scripts by_____________________________

**Homework:**
   Read Chapter 5 of *Screenwriting Updated* (p. 39-50)
   Begin outlining 10-minute play/screenplay/solo performance.
   Write 1-2 page perception shift with MDQ and Answer; bring enough hardcopies to read in class

**WEEK ELEVEN:**
Day 21: 3/29
   Discuss Ch 5 of *Screenwriting Updated*, lecture on outlining through questions.

Day 22: 3/31
   Read/discuss 1-2 page perception shifts in class

**Homework:**
   Continue working on outline 10-minute play/screenplay/solo performance in whatever method works best for you.
   See Big Muddy Play Festival readings and production / Take Part in Post-Show Discussions

**WEEK TWELVE:**
Day 23: 4/5
   Discuss Festival

Day 24: 4/7
   Continue discussing Festival

**Homework:**
   2-5 page short play/screenplay with a clear MDQ, protagonist, character goal and whether s/he accomplishes it. Cast it from among your classmates. We will perform and discuss them in class during week 4, similar to Big Muddy Shorts.

**WEEK THIRTEEN:**
Day 25: 4/12
Group 1) Perform scripts by ______________________

Day 26: 4/14
Group 2) Perform scripts by ______________________

Homework:
Finish outlines.
Read Screenwriting Updated Ch. 6, 51-100

WEEK FOURTEEN:

Day 27: 4/19
Turn in outlines
Discuss Screenwriting Updated Ch 6

Day 28: 4/21
Finish discussing Screenwriting Updated Ch 6

Homework:
Make appointment to discuss outline with Jacob
Write 1-2 page perception shift with MDQ and Answer; bring enough hardcopies to read in class

WEEK FIFTEEN:

Day 29: 4/26
Read/discuss 1-2 page perception shifts in class

Day 30: 4/28
Read/discuss 1-2 page perception shifts in class

Homework:
Start Writing first draft of ten-minute play/screenplay/solo performance

WEEK SIXTEEN: WRAP UP
Big Muddy Shorts Monday 5/2 location TBD; attend!

Day 31: 5/3
Discuss Big Muddy Shorts

Day 32: 5/5: Wrap Up

FINALS WEEK:
Draft of your ten-minute play/screenplay/solo performance is due to me via email during our finals period along with a self-evaluation of your work in this course.