

SCRIPT ANALYSIS
RTV 4930 / 25559
Wednesdays 4:05 pm – 7:05 pm

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Hunger has no business preceding ability, but it always does, no exceptions.

Creative people love to claim they know what works, but in reality, all they know is what worked. Fortunes are lost and hearts in that shift of tense.

– Richard Russo in his essay, “Getting Good.”

Course Description:

The impetus for this course dates back to the beginning of art: study what the masters in your field do: learn, copy, steal... and ultimately, make it your own.

In this course we deal only with the first step: *Learn*. Free of any pressure to create, we will study how other artists successfully build their characters and tell their stories. We will familiarize ourselves with the range of problems storytellers face, and look for patterns in the resolutions to these problems.

This course will give you a firm understanding of three-act structure, sequence and scene, character arcs, theme, plot and subplot. You’ll learn about specific techniques such as: planting and payoff, point of attack, twist, exposition, use of ellipsis, backstory, polarity, scenes of revelation and recognition and ways of creating audience identification.

This is not a class about learning formulas or plot-point-by-a-certain-page-number recipes for success—but about familiarizing yourself with techniques and tools used by filmmakers and assembling a toolkit for constructing and fixing your own work.

Course Objectives:

- 1) To become familiar with the structural building blocks of a screenplay.
- 2) To acquire an extensive vocabulary and understanding of concepts related to screenplay and story construction.
- 3) To learn to use this new knowledge to analyze a screenplay’s construction and recognize the techniques used to create engagement with the audience.

Overview

This course will be held for one night a week for three hours. We will attempt to screen each film twice: Once as viewers, and a second time, with multiple pauses for analysis and to discuss relevant concepts. We will also be reading script for some films. Watching. Reading. Discussing. You will not be turning in a lot of work for this class, but you will be working – your brain. We are grappling with, and ultimately internalizing -- an approach to storytelling, in this endeavor, attendance is crucial, as is attentiveness to the films and concepts and class discussions.

How You'll Be Evaluated:

Grading will depend most heavily on the mid-term in class exam, and a take-home final exam, which will be a breakdown of a feature film using the methodology modeled during the semester. There will also be credit given for a couple of homework assignments and in-class pop-quizzes.

Classroom discussion: 10 Points

Homework / Quizzes: 20 Points

Mid-term exam: 30 Points

Final exam: 40 Points

Recommended Reading:

The Tools of Screenwriting, David Howard and Edward Mabley

How to Build a Great Screenplay, David Howard.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy

Laptops are welcome for note taking purposes during lecture only. No social media or email please. Please turn cell phones off. No glow-y things during initial screenings.

Attendance

There are no official point deductions for missing class, but you will be responsible for any material that was covered. There will be three in-class quizzes or reading discussions which may or may not be announced. If you miss one of these, you will be allowed to make it up *only* if you notified the professor *before* the missed class, and can present verifiable evidence of personal illness or a family emergency.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

(NOTE: THIS IS A FLUID AND CHANGING SCHEDULE)

The films have been chosen to explore specific aspects of screen story telling, but each film we watch may demonstrate many techniques and patterns, so the weekly lecture will be fluid, with constant review and comparison.

Discussion for some films may flow into the next class period. In other cases, we might begin the following week's film at the end of a class. In some cases, you might be asked to screen a week's film or read its script before class. Films are subject to change.

Week 1 – 01/08/20 TOY STORY, 1995

81 minutes. Written by Joss Whedon, Andrew Stanton, Joel Cohen, and Alec Sokolow from a story by John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton, Pete Docter, and Joe Ranft. Directed by John Lasseter.

Introduction to class, discussion of three-act structure, and introduction of sequences.

Week 2: 01/15/20 TOY STORY (continued)

Character and tone, want vs. need, the ins and outs of dramatic tension.

Week 3: 01/22/20 ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, 1975

134 minutes. Screenplay by Lawrence Hauben, Bo Goldman based on the novel by Ken Kesey and the play by Dale Wasserman. Directed by Milos Forman.

Discussion of character, goals, sequences, planting-payoff, subplot, building a good antagonist, comedy vs. tragedy.

Week 4: 01/29/20 ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST (continued)

Discussion of character, goals, sequences, planting-payoff, subplot, building a good antagonist, comedy vs. tragedy, nature of first culmination and midpoint.

Week 5 – 02/05/20 LARS AND THE REAL GIRL, 2007

106 minutes. Written by Nancy Oliver, directed by Craig Gillespie

Discussion of character, suspension of disbelief, hope vs. fear, want vs. need, resolution, second culmination, resolution.

Week 6 – 02/12/20 TERMINATOR, 1984

107 minutes: Written by James Cameron, Gale Anne Hurd, William Wisher. Directed by James Cameron.

Discussion of openings, first sequences, routine and status quo of main character, point of attack / inciting incident, revelation vs recognition, dramatic irony.

Week 7 – 02/19/20 SOME LIKE IT HOT, 1959

121 minutes: Written by Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond. Directed by Billy Wilder.

Discussion of comic discrepancy, dramatic irony, revelation vs, recognition, want vs. need. Mid-term review.

Week 8 – 02/26/20 MIDTERM EXAM / SOME LIKE IT HOT, (continued)

Short answer questions reviewing concepts discussed thus far in the course.

Week 9 – 03/04/20 ***Have a great SPRING BREAK!*******

Week 10 – 03/11/20 DOUBLE INDEMNITY, 1944

107 minutes. Written by Billy Wilder, Raymond Chandler from the novel by James M Cain.

Review midterms. Discuss use of flashback, kinds of tension, mystery, dramatic irony.

Week 11 – 03/18/20 FRUITVALE STATION, 2013

85 minutes. Written and directed by Ryan Coogler.

Discuss use of flashback, kinds of tension, mystery, dramatic irony, foreshadowing.

Week 12 – 03/25/20 FROZEN RIVER, 2008

97 minutes. Written and directed by Courtney Hunt.

Discussion Buddy movies, Independent films. Set piece sequences.

Week 13 – 04/01/20 LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE, 2006

101 minutes. Written by Michael Arndt, directed by Jonathan Dayton, Valerie Faris

Trip with a Destination movie, parallel storylines, theme, ensemble pieces.

Week 14 – 04/08/20 BREAKING BAD PILOT / REVIEW Q & A

58 minutes. Written and directed by Vince Gilligan.

Discussion of techniques transcending to television. Reversals. Theme. Character arc.

Week 15 – 04/15/20 FINAL REVIEW / FINAL FILM SCREENING TBA

We will screen a film (TO BE ANNOUNCED). Students will do a take-home final exam which will be a breakdown in the mode we have been discussing in class throughout the semester.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

STUDENT EVALUATION OF COURSE AND INSTRUCTOR Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available.

UF HONOR CODE UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-studentconduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

HELP WITH COPING The UF Counseling and Wellness Center is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call 352-392- 1575.