

RTV 4930
(Summer B 2023)

THE WRITERS' ROOM

Instructor: Christy Stratton
Office: 2095 Weimer Hall
Office Phone: (818) 207-1781
Email: strattonc@ufl.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays after class and by appointment

Description of Course

This course is designed to teach the student how to pitch, break story, collaborate, and be a valuable participant in a comedy writers' room. In this immersive class, 2/3 of the time will be spent working as an actual room: group writing scenes, and pitching story, character, and series ideas. One series idea will be chosen, and we will break the pilot story together.

In addition, students will learn how to distinguish themselves in an already crowded marketplace; how to get feedback and do rewrites; the dos and don'ts of working in a creative environment; how to be effective in Zoom meetings and pitches; and practical information about the TV industry from someone currently in it.

Grading

Class participation	50%
Assignments	40%
Mock staffing meeting	10%

Please Note:

Late assignments will not be accepted.

One point will be subtracted from your final grade for each unexcused absence. The UF Attendance policy can be found in this link: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.asp> x

Required viewing

TV series *Abbott Elementary* and *Ghosts* for pitching assignments
Be familiar with TV series *Friends*, *the Simpsons*, *Ted Lasso*, *Hacks*, *Seinfeld*

Recommended reading/viewing

Robert McKee's *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*
MichaelJaminWriter on TikTok and Instagram

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive; therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

University Honor Code

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge that 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 (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-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. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

In-Class recording Policy

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section.

Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third- party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Campus Resources: Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care:

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392- 1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392- 1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS) Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

University Police Department, 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies). <http://www.police.ufl.edu>

Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1

07/06

Overview of the process of selling a ½ hour comedy, from inception to series. Also, what is story? What makes a good one? Discuss elements of story (characters, premise, story turns) and basic 3-act structure. The unwritten rules of comedy writers' rooms: the hierarchy; how to make yourself invaluable; the basics of what, when, how to pitch. Discuss how personal stories are currency in the entertainment business. Also, what is a logline? What makes a good one? ASSIGNMENT: Watch episodes of "Ghosts" and/or "Abbott Elementary" – study their story structures and come up with at least 2 story ideas for one of them (due next class). Create a logline for an original series idea (due 07/13).

07/day TBD *

(ROOM WORK) Students will pitch their episode ideas for the existing shows. I'll open up the room to pitch on them as if we were on those staffs. Observe room rhythms and dynamics and shine a light on them. Then, we'll "room write" a cold open for one of the story ideas pitched.

Week 2

07/11

Dig deeper into story and scene structure and discuss how to do new spins on old stories/characters. Discuss subjectivity of comedy. Explore different types of jokes: hard jokes, jokes that come from character, physical comedy, callbacks, scene blows, etc. How to lean into what you do best.

07/13

(ROOM WORK) Finish writing the cold open as a room. Pitch original loglines. Get feedback (notes). ASSIGNMENT: Revise original logline; create 200-word synopsis of your show (due 07/18).

Week 3

07/18

Turn in revised loglines and synopses. In the lecture, I'll discuss how to make choices to give yourself plenty of options, joke-, character- and story-wise. How to find heart without being treacly. How to find ways to get things across without stating them outright.

07/20

(ROOM WORK) I'll choose one of the series ideas as the one we'll be working on for the next few weeks and explain why from a buyer's perspective. We'll start building out that show, pitching on the characters and possible story ideas. I'll choose one story idea that is generated by the room and we'll start breaking that as the pilot story. ASSIGNMENT: Come up with pitches for how to fix whatever problems have arisen in the story-breaking process.

Week 4

07/25

What a beat sheet is vs. an outline, providing examples. Also, how to give the boss what they want and follow a show template while still trying to develop a distinct personal style.

07/27

(ROOM WORK) Continue to break the story. Pitch the fixes to the problems. Students will take turns writing the beats on the board. Students will form breakout rooms to solve various issues that come up in the story-breaking process, where those who volunteer will have a chance to run a room. A couple of students will create beat sheets from the board beats. When the story is broken, and the beat sheets are finished, I'll pick one and then get behind the keys and we'll start room writing the outline.

Also, we'll discuss how to deal with horrible/disruptive people.

Week 5

08/01

What a physical script should look like. What does and doesn't become dialogue/action/etc. The importance of great cold opens, Act 2 fun and games, and goal ol' block comedy scenes. I'll provide examples. How to answer the question: what is it about? ASSIGNMENT: What are your favorite comedies and what are they about in the bigger picture? Pitch them to me next class.

08/03

(ROOM WORK) We'll discuss the "what it's about" on various shows. Finish the outline. Time permitting, we'll create season arcs and character arcs for season one.

Week 6

08/08

How to present yourself and your original show ideas in the best way possible over Zoom, which is the way meetings and pitches will continue to be held for the foreseeable future. How to create a pitch deck and present it. How to keep the conversation going when a creative but not verbose person is the interviewer. Students will be given a script to read and must prepare to interview for a writing job on that show.

08/10

Each student will have a mock job interview (while the others observe).

** Because of the July 4th holiday, Week 1 will start with a Thursday (2 period) class. The “room work” for that week will be a one-period class to be scheduled on Friday 07/07 or Monday 07/10, depending on students’ availabilities.*