

CREATING CHARACTER

Cornell College, Third Term 2016

Instructor:

Prof. Brian Sloan
me@briansloan.com
Office Hours, 4:00-5:00pm

Course time:

Daily M-F, 12n – 3pm
Oct 31—Nov 23
College Hall Room 100

Goals:

Great stories rely on great characters. In this course, students will explore techniques for writing dynamic character-driven stories and complete a short film script by the end of the term. The goal of the class is to create clarity of meaning from idea to screenplay via character development, with additional focus on scene structure and visual storytelling film language. The course emphasizes the art of creating great characters that come to life in the hands of actors and directors. Actors are an integral part of the learning process and you will work with them to further develop your material.

Attendance:

On time attendance is mandatory for this class - **students must come to class on time**. Punctuality is crucial. Each unexcused absence/lateness will directly affect one's grade.

Academic Integrity:

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphases on knowledge, communication, and intercultural literacy.

Students with Disabilities:

Cornell College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Students should notify the Coordinator of Academic Support and Advising and their course instructor of any disability related accommodations within the first three days of the term for which the accommodations are required, due to the fast pace of the block format. For more information on the documentation required to establish the need for accommodations and the process of requesting the accommodations, see <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/disabilities/index.shtml>.

Assignments:

Students will be required to write a short screenplay (10-15 pages) which will be presented in class with actors at the end of the term. Each student will have an opportunity to show and rehearse their work with actors in class. All students will present material in class for discussion. **Class participation is mandatory.**

There will be assignments **every day** and work must be presented when due. **Given the demanding timeline it is crucial that the assignments be presented on the date they are scheduled. NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS.** We will be working with DropBox and **all written assignments are due in DropBox at start next class.** Later in the term, students will need to print out scripts for in-class readings in advance of class. Make sure you have

enough copies; 1 for each actor PLUS copies for 1 for an action reader and 1 for the professor. **WRITE YOUR NAME ON ALL ASSIGNMENTS AND TITLE YOUR DOCUMENTS WITH YOUR NAME AND ASSIGNMENT SO THEY ARE EASY TO FIND IN DROPBOX.**

Students must bring a charged laptop or tablet to class every day to read work from Dropbox. You must also bring in a pen and notebook to every class as well. Students must write in Proper Screenplay Format. Use FinalDraft or Celtx--and always export any final writing assignments to PDF format for ease of reading.

Required Reading:

David Mamet "On Directing"
Syd Field "Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting"

Required Listening:

ScriptNotes Podcast (on iTunes)

Grading Criteria:

attendance/punctuality	25%
participation	25%
assignment fulfillment and timeliness	50%

CLASS SCHEDULE – WEEK 1

Monday, Oct 31

- Intro of course and syllabus review. Students intro.
- Review DropBox and procedures, confirm emails
- Review "Show, don't tell" – film as a visual medium.
- Screen opening of "Junebug" – what do we know about the characters? Review the principles of non-verbal storytelling: what characters DO as opposed to what they say.
- Discuss short film structure and basics, "what is the dramatic question?"
- Layout final project 10-15 page short film script.
- Screen AFI short film, both silent and with sound.

ASSIGNMENT 1: "Two Character Descriptions"

Describe in 200-300 words, a favorite character from a movie. What you like about them, what makes this character visually specific, positive and negative qualities, and what's interesting about their situation in the film.

AND

Describe in 200-300 words, someone you know or have known in your life in the same way: what you like about them, positive and negative qualities, what makes this character visually specific, and what's interesting about their situation in life.

TUESDAY, Nov 1

- Each student presents both "Character Descriptions"
- Discuss "what is a protagonist"; "character vs. characteristic"
- Review Character Analysis worksheet as a tool for creating protagonist bio.

ASSIGNMENT 2: "Create Protagonist Bio"

200-300 word description/bio of the Protagonist of your short screenplay. What is his/her history? What is their situation? What does he/she want? What are his/her flaws? What is their dramatic question?

WEDNESDAY, Nov 2

- Each student presents Protagonist Bio in class.
- In-class assignment: "If This Person Were a..." Students are paired up and interview each other to discover more about their protagonist, using paper handout worksheet.
- Building story out of character, review concept of "Short Film Mad Lib"

ASSIGNMENT 3: "Story Mad Libs"

Write your "Short Film Mad Lib" – be prepared to present and discuss it in class.

AND

Read screenplay for "Curfew", short film

Thursday, Nov 3

- In-class screening of "Curfew", discussion of characters and changes from script to screen
- Review assignments of Short Film Mad Libs
- Review screenplay format/style with handouts
- Go over sample character monologue

ASSIGNMENT 4: "Character Monologue"

Write a short character monologue, no more than half a page.

Friday, Nov 4

- Review each student's character monologue.
- Review treatment format in general and short film treatment samples.
- Screen clip from "Pool Days", compare treatment to film
- Review 3-act structure, "Slogans for Screenwriting" and Billy Wilder handouts.

ASSIGNMENT 5: "Short Film Treatment"

1000-1500 word prose treatment of your short film; should include description of major characters, plot and themes. This will ultimately be your 10-15 page final screenplay.

WEEK 2

Monday, Nov 7

- Review treatments and discuss.
- Review opening scenes, "Jaws" & "Bueller", discuss.

ASSIGNMENT 6: “Treatment Revisions”

Group 1 revise treatments.

Tuesday, Nov 8

- Review treatments and discuss.
- Review Script Notes “3 Page Challenge” in class and discuss.

ASSIGNMENT 7: “Treatment Revisions”

Group 2 revise treatments.

Wednesday, Nov 9

- Review group 1 revised treatments and discuss
- Screen short film “Fair Play” and discuss in class
- Review character breakdown format

ASSIGNMENT 8: “Character Breakdowns”

Group 1 do a complete character breakdown of the major characters in your story. Keep them short, 2-3 sentences max.

Thursday, Nov 10

- Review group 2 revised treatments and discuss.
- Screen short film “Pool Days” and discuss in class.

ASSIGNMENT 9:

Group 2 do a complete character breakdown of all major characters in your story.

Friday, Nov 11

- Review character breakdowns for Groups 1 and 2.
- Screenplay formatting review.

ASSIGNMENT 10: “3 Page Challenge”

Everyone should begin writing your full short screenplay.

AND

On Monday, Group 1 will turn in the first 3 pages of their script.

On Tuesday, Group 2 will turn in the first 3 pages of their script.

NOTE: Bring in correct number of hard copies to read in class.

WEEK 3

Monday, Nov 14

Group 1, 3-page reading with actors.

ASSIGNMENT 11: “Script Scenes Revisions”

Group 1—revise scenes based on notes, continue writing full screenplay.

Group 2—keep writing your scene/full screenplay

Tuesday, Nov 15

Group 2, 3-page reading with actors.

ASSIGNMENT 12: “Script Scenes Revisions”

Group 2—revise scenes based on notes, continue writing full screenplay.

Group 1—keep writing your scene/full screenplay.

Wednesday, Nov 16

First Draft Full Script Reading

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____

NOTE: Those not reading must be prepared to take notes and provide valuable critique afterwards; 3 things that worked, 3 things that didn't work.

ASSIGNMENT 13: Keep on Writing

Thursday, Nov 17

First Draft Full Script Reading

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____

NOTE: Those not reading must be prepared to take notes and provide valuable critique afterwards; 3 things that worked, 3 things that didn't work.

ASSIGNMENT 14: Keep on Writing

Friday, Nov 18

First Draft Full Script Reading

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____

NOTE: Those not reading must be prepared to take notes and provide valuable critique afterwards; 3 things that worked, 3 things that didn't work.

ASSIGNMENT 15: Keep on Writing

Also, select a scene from your script that you are struggling with for Monday's class, up to 3 pages.

Monday, Nov 21

- Screenplay First Aid
- Scenes will be read with actors that need help/revisions.
- Review final questions/queries/status of all final revisions.

ASSIGNMENT 16: All Students Revise For Final Draft/Cast Your Screenplays

Tuesday, Nov 22

NOTE: This class will start at 10:30am and end at 2:30pm, with a break between 12-1 for lunch.

Presentation of Final Screenplays

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____

LUNCH BREAK 12-1p

- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____
- 11 _____
- 12 _____

ASSIGNMENT 14: Revise/Workshop Final Screenplays

Work on final screenplay.

Bring in baked goods/donuts for end-of-semester wrap party!

Wednesday, Nov 23 NOTE: This class will start at 10am and finish at 12n

Presentation of Final Screenplays & Party

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

END OF TERM