COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This class will further explore essential building blocks of writing for the screen - character, visualization, dialogue, scene structure, conflict, and sequence. We will also study the structure of a feature length screenplay.

This semester you will learn how to create a story that has logical cohesion and compelling characters.

As writers, you will learn to tell unique stories which “make the familiar seem strange” and the strange familiar. You will learn techniques and exercises that let you tap into inspiration at will and not wait for it to haphazardly or infrequently strike.

The craft of screenwriting and its essential role in filmmaking will be emphasized, because no good film ever came from a bad script.

Your main assignments this semester will be:

--Writing various short scene / film exercises to review craft.

--The class will culminate in you writing and revising a detailed step outline for a feature screenplay. Your outline will be 15-20 pages. And then you will write the opening pages of this feature script. Some of you may get to the end of Act One of the script, which is 25-30 pages.

--OR You may write a 10 page short film script with an eye toward production of your own work in TFM 560 or other class. You will then prepare a “pitch” of your project.

RECOMMENDED READING:

ASSIGNMENTS:

There will be in-class and take-home writing assignments, which will be read and discussed in class. Please have Xerox copies for each member of the class and the instructor, and be sure to keep a copy of everything you turn in.

All writing must be neatly typed and legible. Please be sure to put your name, the name of the assignment, the date, and number your pages.

Always proof your work!!! You will be required to write in standard script format that is PERFECT, and that means no misspellings, typos, or grammatical errors. This standard of excellence is no joke and not to be taken lightly. It is demanded in the professional world. If you want your script to be taken seriously, YOU must make sure its most basic mechanics are flawless.

WARNING: This writing course has a heavy workload. So pace yourself and don’t wait to finish your assignments the night before they’re due. Give yourself ample time to REWRITE and PROOF. Write every day. Again, this is what professional writers do.

All work is expected to be turned in on time. Paper copy to the instructor, not by e-mail. Consistently late work drops a grade. If it is impossible to make a class, find out the assignment from your classmate.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Completion of assignments, creative content, professional presentation and growth during the semester are of great importance. The assignments are cumulative and build upon one another.

Also important is your participation and promptness. That means if you don’t ATTEND CLASS, you deny yourself the opportunity to hear your classmates’ feedback. Even worse, you rob your classmates of your input. The class will be run like a professional “writers’ room.” So there will be constant, interactive discussions, not lectures.

Specifically, your grade will be based on these factors:
-- take-home assignments (30%)
-- in-class assignments (20%)
-- in-class participation, critiques (10%)
-- final project: from concept, to outline, to actual script, to rewrite (40%). You can’t write the final assignment the weekend before it’s due. Throughout the semester, you will go through the script writing or outline writing process.

Because this class is so dependent on in-class assignments and participation, you are only allowed one excused absence (that’s a call or an e-mail BEFORE class, preferably at least 24 hours in advance) and one unexcused absence.

-- Two unexcused absences (i.e. no participation) lower your final grade by a half letter.
-- Three unexcused absences lower your final grade a full letter.
-- Four unexcused absences will result in a dismissal from the class.
-- Be aware, two late arrivals (15 minutes or more) equal an unexcused absence.

***A word to the wise: Just because I don’t say anything doesn’t mean these policies are lax or your class conduct isn’t being noted.***

If you turn in all your work, if that work is on time, if it is competent, and if you consistently add to our class discussions, then you will earn no less than a “B.” I do not easily or frequently give out “A” grades. This is reserved for students who accomplish all of the above and whose work is of a high quality.

CONSULTATION:

Office hours by appointment Wednesdays 1-3PM, COMM 112, e-mail: akhoo@mail.sdsu.edu. Other times to meet are the hours before and after class. If that doesn’t work, we’ll arrange something else.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT:

“If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.”
CLASS SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1 – 1/18/17
--Introductions. Discuss syllabus. Discuss the writers’ room and the workshop method of critique.
--Keeping a 3 ring binder for class.
--The difference between screenplays and prose.
--Screenplay format.
--Where do we get ideas from?

--Review of building blocks of a screenplay: creating a world, compelling characters, thinking outside of the box, writing from the heart.
--Review of three-act structure: setup, complication, and resolution.

--Go over “Matrix” visual opening.
--In-class writing exercise: meditation on a character.
--If there’s time, watch opening of “Terminator”
--***Break class into THREE GROUPS for presentations***

ASSIGNMENT:
--Take your in-class writing exercise, the meditation on a character, and write a scene for that character using visuals only, no dialogue. Use screenplay format to write a brief, silent, single character scene 1-2 pages.
--Get screenwriting software.
--Get a 3-ring binder.
--Read “Tools” pg. 1-29, pg. 46 section on “Conflict.”

WEEK 2 – 1/25/17
--Review how to critique in the workshop format.
--Present character silent scenes

--Discussion of protagonist, character motivation, objective, obstacles, antagonist.
--Character arcs and the character’s journey.
--Film structure (beginning, middle, and end) through character. Master scenes.
--Scene structure.
--Twists and surprises.
--Theme.
--Exposition through action, “show don’t tell.”
--What is conflict? Film clips.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Write a CONFLICT SCENE, no dialogue. 2 pages
--Read “Tools.”

WEEK 3 – 2/1/17
--Present non-dialogue conflict scenes.
--What makes good DIALOGUE? How do we research dialogue? What makes it authentic?
--Film clips of dialogue

--In-class writing exercise:
Scene developing ATMOSPHERE, no dialogue: A character goes through same location; choose from horror, romance, or comedy.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Eavesdropping exercises: Listen in on a conversation for 3-5 minutes (or longer if the people aren’t talkative). Tape it and transcribe 1 page.
--Create your own 2 page CONFLICT SCENE WITH DIALOGUE using some or all of the “found dialogue.” Be sure to use correct screenplay format and employ the principles of solid scene writing.

WEEK 4 – 2/8/17
--Present eavesdropped, dialogue conflict scenes.
--More on scene structure: beginning, middle and end, conflict, visuals and actions. Enter a scene late and leave early.
--Go over short film structure.
--View short film clips
--What is a logline?
--How to write an effective short summary.

--If there’s time: In-class exercise: team writing dialogue.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Write up 1 short film idea (for a 10 page script), just a short paragraph.
--Write up 1 feature film idea, just a short paragraph.
--Read and watch “E.T.”

WEEK 5 – 2/15/17
--Go over feature screenplay structure, using “E.T.”
--Read short script “De’Sha”
--What is a “sequence of scenes?”
--Go over your short film idea and your feature idea in class.

If there’s time: in-class writing exercise:
--What is SUBTEXT? Go over script examples which use subtext.
--Write a scene where one character is leaving, but the second character wants him/her to stay. Use SUBTEXT to convey the characters’ feelings and intentions.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Write up 2 more ideas, a short paragraph each.
(1 feature idea, 1 short film idea)

--Read packet of “screenplay openings.”

WEEK 6 – 2/22/17
--Go over your short film and feature film ideas.

--What is an outline? How to write a short outline for your final project based on your main character’s goal.

--If there’s time: the comedic film.

--***GUEST SPEAKER, TBA***

ASSIGNMENT:
--Write a “beat sheet” (brief outline) for your feature script project or short film. For feature projects just give me the key “clothes line” plot points.
--Bring in pictures of your protagonist and antagonist for your final script.

WEEK 7 – 3/1/17
--In-class writing exercise exploring your protagonist and antagonist.
--Go over your “beat sheet” for your final project. Group work.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Revise the “beat sheet” for your short film.
OR
--Write the “detailed step outline” for sequence one of Act One of your feature script. This part of the outline is about 2 pgs.
--***Remember these are rough page guidelines, just to give you an idea of what to shoot for when completing an outline that is about 15 pages total. Nothing is set in stone.***

***THIS IS WHEN THE WORK LOAD BECOMES FLEXIBLE: THE SYLLABUS OUTLINES THE MINIMUM AMOUNT OF WORK YOU CAN DO (and still earn an "A"). BUT IF YOU WANT TO WRITE MORE AND FINISH MORE OF YOUR SCRIPT, YOU CAN MOVE FASTER. See me or ask in class for specific instructions.***

WEEK 8 – 3/8/17
--screen non-narrative film, alternate structures, mixing genres.
--Go over detailed step outline for sequence one of Act One of feature script. (2 pages)
OR
--Go over revised “beat sheet” for 10 page short film.

--If there’s time: in-class writing exercise:
Write a comedic scene with at least 2 comic character types and 3 comic devices.
--OR
***GUEST SPEAKER TBA***

ASSIGNMENT:
--Write pgs. 1-3 of your short film script.
OR
--Write detailed step outline for sequence two of Act One of feature script (2 pages. Your outline is now a total of 4 pages of work.)

WEEK 9 – 3/15/17 (no class)
*** NO CLASS OR MAKEUP CLASS***
***individual student meetings for those in need***

WEEK 10 – 3/22/17
--screen great feature screenplay openings
--Go over pgs. 1-3 of your short script.
OR
--Go over detailed step outline sequence two of Act One. (2 pages. Your outline is now a total of about 4 pages of work.)

ASSIGNMENT:
--Write pgs. 4-6 of your short script. (or finish the first draft, pages 4-10)
OR
--Write the “detailed step outline” for sequence three and four Act Two of your feature script. Your protagonist hits the “midpoint, turning point.” This part of the outline is about 5 pages of work. (Your outline is now a total of about 9 pages of work.)

***WEEK 11 NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK***

WEEK 12 – 4/5/17
--screen short film and go over script.
--Go over short film scripts pgs. 1-6 (or entire draft, pages 1-10)
OR
--Go over “detailed step outline” sequence three and four of Act Two, your “midpoint, turning point.”

ASSIGNMENT
--Write pages 7-10 of your short script. Finish your first draft.
OR
--Write “detailed step outline” for sequence five and six of Act Two. Get through the “dark night of the soul.” This is another 4 pages of work. (Your outline is now a total of about 13 pages of work.)

WEEK 13 - 4/12/17
--How to rewrite.
--Go over first drafts of completed short film scripts.
OR
--Go over “detailed step outlines” of sequence five and six of Act Two, through the “dark night of the soul.”

ASSIGNMENT:
--Rewrite short film scripts.
OR
--Write “detailed step outline” for sequence seven and eight of Act Three, the climax and resolution. This is another 2 pages of work. (Your finished outline is now a total of about 15 pages of work.)
--***Remember these page guidelines are just guide posts to give you some sense of pacing and the work load. They are not set in stone.***
OR
--(Challenge: Also begin writing the opening pages of your feature screenplay.)

WEEK 14 - 4/19/17
--What is pitching?
--Continue to go over completed and revised short film scripts.
OR
--Go over Act Three of your detailed step outline. Go over completed feature outlines.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Prepare to pitch your project: short film or feature film. This is ideal for people taking the production course TFM 560 next semester.
OR
--Write the opening 2-3 pages of your feature screenplay. (If you want to write more, go ahead. Challenge is 15 pages.)

WEEK 15 - 4/26/17
--Group work: Practice pitching.
--2 or 3 people pitch
OR
--Go over 2-3 pages of openings of feature screenplays.
--***GUEST SPEAKER, TBA***

ASSIGNMENT:
--All prepare for FINAL EXAM.
--Prepare to pitch your project: short film or feature film.
OR
--Write 2-3 more pages of your feature screenplay. (For those of you only writing, you’ll hit about 5 pages total by now. If you want to write more, go ahead. Challenge: get as far as you can. The end of Act One is 25-30 pages.)
OR
--If you pitched already, no homework.

WEEK 16: LAST DAY OF CLASS - 5/3/17
--All take FINAL EXAM
--Remaining people pitch.
OR
--Continue to present opening pages of feature screenplay.
SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE

--Final Draft 9 or 10:  
The industry standard. Buy it online. You won’t regret it. I can help you with creating production drafts if you shoot. Watch for coupons and free links on Blackboard.

--Movie Magic: used by line producers and assistant directors for scheduling and budgets also.

--Adobe software or free on the internet: Celtx

SOURCES FOR SCREENPLAYS & TELEPLAYS

--Free scripts
www.simplyscripts.com

www.script-o-rama.com

--Scripts for purchase
www.scriptcity.com

--SDSU’s main library, media collection, has DVD’s and scripts you can look at.