**Communication 351: Writing Long Form Mass Media**

Dr. John McHale Office: Fell Hall 451

Office Hours: M-W 4-5

Phone: [O] (309) 438-7056 Email- [jpmchal@ilstu.edu](mailto:jpmchal@ilstu.edu)

**Required Textbooks:**

**Field, S. (1994). *Screenplay: The foundations of screenwriting.***

**Snyder, B. (2005). *Save the Cat: The Last Book on Screenwriting That You’ll Ever Need*. Michael Wise Productions.**

**(I would try to buy used copies of these books online.)**

**Recommended: McHale, J. P. (2016). *Convergent Media Writing: Telling a Good Story Well*. 3rd Edition. Kendall-Hunt Publishing; Dubuque, Iowa.**

This course will challenge students in writing longer dramatic mass media forms such as feature films; film, video, and radio documentary; investigative news magazine television news reports; television and radio dramas and comedies; and other long dramatic media forms.

## Course Objectives

This course is an introduction to the variety of mass communication media students may encounter in their careers. Students will engage in preparation and presentation of various long, dramatic mass communication formats

1. To develop a critical understanding of quality dramatic video, television, and feature film writing. Students will demonstrate a substantial increase in general knowledge of Mass Media.
2. To develop writing skills sufficient to write for the television or film industries. Students will demonstrate ability to write professionally.
3. To acclimate the student to the demands of writing for a living. Toward this end, the student will be faced with seemingly incessant and fast approaching deadlines. Students will demonstrate evidence of professional competence in application of technical writing skills.

Students enrolled in this course should be prepared to write constantly and under much pressure.

**Required student tasks/assignments**

# Attendance

Attendance is essential for passing this course. Reading about the information is important but only part of the learning process. A quasi-Socratic approach is used to teach this course, which requires informed participation. Participation in class discussions and in-class assignments is extremely significant in understanding writing for the mass media. University sanctioned excuses are accepted.

Reading/ Participation

All reading assignments should be completed before class. Since classroom interaction is primarily in discussion form, the student’s ability to articulate ideas expressed in the text will be imperative.

Points will be awarded for participation in discussion.

Assignment Form

All assignments (except in-class assignments) must be typed and turned-in on time. Just as in the “real world,” not meeting deadlines can cost production organizations fiscal resources; missing class deadlines will cost you points toward your final grade (see section on grading). Late work will only be accepted in the event of a death in one’s family or an illness documented by a health professional.

Script Writing

Students will be required to write a final script of substantial length, depending upon the dramatic form in which they choose to write. Students will write according to the accepted format standards of that particular genre.

Sample Criticism

Students will be required to write informed and researched critiques of examples of dramatic presentations in topically applicable genres. These assignments should reflect the substance of lectures and readings as well as outside research.

Graduate Credit

There are additional requirements for graduate students taking this course. Graduate students who take this course will be required to write longer scripts, will write two additional critical evaluations of topical examples, and will be expected to include additional outside resources in these critical evaluations. The role of the course in the graduate program is that the course allows additional opportunities for students who are interested in Mass Media coursework. This is another way the Communication Department can expand mass media offerings to graduate students. Graduate students will be expected to have some background in writing for the mass media.

**Student performance evaluation methods**

Writing Guidelines

All assignments must be typed (or word-processed) unless otherwise noted. Hand-written assignments will not be accepted for credit. Typewritten guidelines: 1-inch margins and 12-point font in Courier are the preferred format standards. At the top of the first page or on the cover page, students will include their name, the assignment number, and the date of submission.

Grading

Accuracy and readability are such essential parts of media writing that writing errors that normally might be excused cannot be excused in this class (as they are not excused in the media professions we are studying).

All out-of class assignments will be graded in accordance with the style requirements of their particular writing format. In addition, spelling and punctuation errors (such as misspelling a source’s name, providing an incorrect address, writing run-on sentences, using sentence fragments when a full sentence is required, using inaccurate information) will result in an 8-point deduction from the overall grade for each error. Misspelled proper names will incur a 16 point deduction. Clearly, you will want to edit and re-edit your work before turning it in for a grade. If editing is not your strong suit, find a partner either in this class or a roommate/friend who is willing to read the piece.

All out-of-class assignments are due at the beginning of the class period. Out-of-class assignments are considered late ten minutes after the beginning of the class period in which they are due and will receive an automatic deduction of two full grades (20 percent) for that assignment. Late assignments will receive an additional reduction of two full grades (20 percent) for each additional day late (each 24-hour period after the due date and time), except in cases of an excused absence (see Attendance requirements). Predictable problems, such as printer glitches or running out of paper, are NOT excuses for turning in work late. Make sure to anticipate those predictable problems so that you can prevent them.

**Assignments**

Log Line 50 points

Synopsis (100 words) 50 points

Note cards (45) 50 points

Outline/Script Treatment 200 points

Proof Reading Script 50 points

Participation/ Attendance 100 points

Critical Evaluation 50 points

Pitch Presentation 50 points

Final Script 400 points

Total 1000 points

BEA Submission 5% Extra Credit

## Grading Scale

900-1000=A; 800-899=B; 700-799=C: 600-699=D: >600=F

We demand rigorous effort, but we are fair.

Tolerance is an ethical imperative, and must be reciprocal.

Notes for current or future Mass Media majors:

**Portfolio Artifacts**--One of the culminating experiences of a mass media degree is the completion of COM 396 Mass Media Capstone, a course that includes the preparation of a personal portfolio to organize and showcase your abilities. We encourage you to retain items from this class, whether produced independently or in groups, for inclusion as portfolio artifacts. Beyond the Capstone class, your portfolio may also prove a valuable tool as you seek entry into a graduate program or employment in your areas of specialization.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

**Academic Honesty/Plagiarism/Cheating**

Honesty in writing is critical to the media professions. Writers who lie, plagiarize, or are irresponsible in their writing not only reduce the credibility of their profession and themselves, but also usually will lose their jobs. Plagiarism includes using someone else's ideas, work, or words as one's own without providing proper citation. It can also include attributing information to a source that is really from another source. Student will be expected to be honest in their attributions of information, and accurate in writing and in all areas that challenge student in this class.

If student are caught plagiarizing or cheating, either by taking *or* giving work that belongs to someone else, they will receive a zero (0/F) on the assignment or exam. In accordance with Illinois State University procedures regarding misconduct, the accused student’s name will be given to the department chair and, likely, the Student Dispute Resolution Services office. This can result in failure of the class and, possibly, dismissal from the university.

**The things we care the most about are those into which we put the most effort.**

## Weekly Class Schedule

These dates and assignments are tentative. (Thinking people change their minds.)

Week:

**8-19** Course Introduction

Title and Log Line explanation

Thinking Dramatically: Dramatic Model & Structural considerations

Telling a Good Story

Table Read Feature Film Script

8-26 **Log Line Due**

Thinking Dramatically: Dramatic Model & Structural considerations

Feature Film

Field Introduction

Field Ch. 1: What is a Screenplay?

Snyder, front matter, Intro

Snyder, Ch. 1: What is it?

View Award winning example while critically evaluating script

9-2 Labor Day

9-9 **Synopsis (100 words) Due**

Field Ch. 2: The Subject

Field Ch. 3: Character

Snyder, Ch. 2: Give me the Same Thing, Only Different

Snyder, Ch. 3: It’s about a guy who…

Television Drama and Comedy

View Award winning example while critically evaluating script

9-16 **Note cards Due**

Save The Cat, Ch. 4: Let’s Beat it Out!

Field Ch. 4: Building Character

Field Ch. 5: Story and Character

9-23 **Outline Due:** Use Act Breakdown, identify plot points, mid-point, and aspects of the dramatic model.

Save The Cat, Ch. 5: Building the perfect beast

Field Ch. 6: Endings and Beginnings

Field Ch. 7: The Setup

View Award winning example while critically evaluating script

9-30 Field Ch. 9: The Plot Point

Field Ch 8: The Sequence

**Critical Evaluation Due**

10-7 Field Ch. 10: The Scene

Save The Cat, Ch. 6: The immutable laws of screenplay physics

Present Treatments: Pitches

**Project Proposal Due: Log Line, Synopsis, Outline**

10-14 **Note cards Due**

Field Ch. 12: Screenplay Form

Field Ch. 13: Building the Screenplay

Save The Cat, Ch. 7: What’s wrong with this picture?

Television Drama and Comedy

View Award winning example while critically evaluating script

**Critical Evaluation Due**

10-21 **Final Outline/ Script Treatment Due**

View Award winning example while critically evaluating script

First scene due

10-28 **First 25-30 Pages Due**

Save The Cat, Ch. 8: Final fade in

3 – 5 Minute Pitch/Class Workshop on Individual Projects

11-4 **First Half of Rough Draft Due**

Field Ch. 15: On Collaboration

3 – 5 Minute Pitch/Class Workshop on Individual Projects

11-11 **Script through Act II Due: 65-80 pages**

3 – 5 Minute Pitch/Class Workshop on Individual Projects

11-19 Group Workshop: Evaluation and Critical Suggestions

Field Ch. 11: Adaptation

Documentary

Structure and Character

Character

Telling a Visual Story

**Rough Draft Due**

Field Ch. 16: After It Is Written

3 – 5 Minute Pitch/Class Workshop on Individual Projects

3 – 5 Minute Pitch/Class Workshop on Individual Projects

11-26 Thanksgiving

12-3 Final Assignment Due

**Final Project Presentation**

**Final Script Due**

**Final Test** as scheduled by I.S.U.

Submit to BEA Festival of the Arts for 5% Extra Credit

Project Proposal: Com 351

Dr. John McHale

For your class project, you will have the freedom to choose your own emphasis. You can choose to write a variety of long-form mass media projects for your final project such as feature films; film, television dramatic programming and comedies; and other long dramatic media forms. This is a way to provide the opportunity to hone the writing skills which may best serve you in the future.

The first part of this proposal should be a short treatment. The treatment should begin with a paragraph that provides a thumbnail sketch of the entire project including genre, particular media form, and similarities to existing media texts. The rest of the treatment should tell the whole story. The treatment should also emphasize HOW you would suggest the story be told (techniques and/or style suggestions).

The second part of this proposal should be an in-depth outline of your entire story or stories. This assignment should be between contain a 15-to-20 page outline. This outline, single spaced in Courier font, is a detailed outline of your whole project. Use outline tools, such as Snyder’s beats, explicitly, in your outline.

Start each paragraph with a scene heading. Each paragraph describes exactly what will happen in the scene. A scene written out in a script, is generally 1-2 pages or 1-2 minutes, so 90 to 120 minutes of time should translate, generally into 45 to 60 scenes.

If you are writing episodic drama, the outline should be broken up accordingly.

This assignment is worth 100 points out of the 1000 total.

Critical Evaluation: Com 351

Students will be required to write informed and researched critiques of examples of dramatic presentations in topically applicable genres. These assignments should reflect the substance of lectures and readings as well as outside research. Cite our textbook authors.

Include 5- 8 outside sources. Use a standard style for research papers.

Assignment should be between 3-6 double spaced pages.

Review Guide for Mid-term Exam

**351: Long Form Writing for Mass Media**

Please do not inappropriately worry about our exam. There will be no surprises. You have done excellent work so far by applying key concepts from the text in your writing assignments. Most of the questions will deal with concepts with which you are familiar from your written work and your reading.

If you have kept up with your reading and applied the applicable material, you have an adequate background to begin your test preparation. It will take more extensive preparation if you have not kept up the reading or if you missed discussion of key concepts in class.

Preparation Hints:

1. Review Notes While I have attempted to allow a dialogic commitment to guide our classroom experience, our conversations about ideas about writing was informed due to our adherence to a course development plan and your commitment to read the applicable material in the text.
2. Review the Text It was clearly stated in the syllabus that you are required to keep up with that reading. I will assume you have.

You will be expected to know the key concepts from the texts. Review the material. The tables of contents identifies many of these key concepts. A working knowledge of explanations of these key concepts is essential for success on this exam.

This is a way to reward you for your class preparation and application of relevant concepts in your writing.

You owe it to yourself to study diligently.

You will need to study diligently…

Reference the syllabus for the rest of what will be covered.

Casablanca

Three act structure

Paradigm

Progressive Complications

Four structural considerations in mass media writing