BROADCAST/FILM WRITING
EMF 377

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Training and practice in writing non-fiction, fiction and commercial/PSA scripts for the broadcast media and film. Prerequisites: ENGL 102 and EMF 120. GenEd I.D.

COURSE MEETINGS: The course includes lectures and discussions, screenings, and in-class workshop sessions.

COURSE LEARNING GOALS (for an Advanced Writing Class):
Students will be able to:
1. Recognize and employ models and practices of written communication specific to a particular discipline or profession.
2. Recognize and employ techniques of formatting and documentation appropriate to a particular discipline or profession.
3. Integrate material effectively from outside sources into their own prose.
4. Analyze and evaluate complex discipline-based claims and current research questions.
5. Demonstrate a developed ability to compose clear, effective prose, including through the practice of revision.
6. Produce prose that follows accepted conventions of grammar, punctuation, and style.

SPECIFIC COURSE GOALS FOR EMF 377:
At the end of the course you should be able to:
1. Understand the fundamental tenets of dramatic storytelling and structure.
2. Develop skills for the expression of dramatic ideas, themes and/or story loglines in broadcast and film writing that have a desired effect upon target audiences.
3. Apply those tenets and skills in both written and oral creative proposals, as well as in a range of scriptwriting formats.
4. Demonstrate a technical grasp of professional scriptwriting formats.
5. Demonstrate comprehension of basic dramatic theory and its practice through critical analysis of contemporary professional works.
6. Develop strategies for learning how to “talk in pictures”; that is, how to conceptualize broadcast and film projects in visual terms.
7. Demonstrate a scriptwriting style that is clear, direct, visual and dramatically credible for production.
8. Research and adapt materials from other media to the needs of film and video.
9. Recognize the script’s role within the overall goals of the production process.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK: The Short Screenplay, Dan Gurskis, Thompson Course Technology.

THE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
More details about each of the writing assignments in this course are contained in the weekly details within syllabus, as well as in assorted supporting documents provided in class and via Blackboard. In all, you are required to write the following for EMF 377:
Script Treatments:
These are detailed prose works that articulate your creative ideas, goals and research plans for executing a variety of non-fiction and fiction assignments. All treatments must be written according to the professional styles/formats illustrated in the textbooks and in course handouts.

In total, you will write script treatments that range from approximately 5 pages to 10 pages over three different projects. Revisions of script treatments are anticipated and will be graded according to rubrics attached to the end of this syllabus.

Scripts:
You will write a variety of non-fiction and fiction scripts based on your approved and revised treatments. You will write these scripts in accordance with professional script formats as illustrated in the course textbooks and in course handouts.

In total, you will write scripts that range from approximately 20 pages. One page of script generally equals one minute of screen time. First drafts of all scripts are required. Revisions are encouraged to improve a student’s grade. Scripts will be graded according to rubrics attached to the end of this syllabus. NOTE: The grade for a revised script will be the final grade for that assignment.

All submitted work must be typewritten, 12 point font.

Required Screenings:
Over the course of the semester, students will be required to screen at home the following six feature films: The Sting, Roger & Me, Thelma and Louise, Scott Pilgrim vs. The World, Do the Right Thing and The Godfather. These are required viewings as the tenets of dramatic structure will be discussed commensurate with each film. Additionally, Back to the Future will be screened in its entirety in class.

Required Screenplay Readings:
Over the course of the semester, students will be required to read the Back to the Future early draft screenplay as well as two others to be distributed by the instructor.

Class Schedule of Topics/Assignments: (*Note: All work subject to change)
Week 1 (2/2):
INTRO
Discuss syllabus & class overview
What is a story?
Storytelling review & the basics of drama
Due Next Week:
Get the textbook for a reading assignment due in 2 weeks!!!

Week 2 (2/9):
In-class screening “Back to the Future”
Due Next Week:
Read “Back to the Future” early draft screenplay

Week 3 (2/16):
Dramatic Construction & revisiting the treatment
Character & Conflict
Due Next Week:
1- Read Gurskis book, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
2- Write a one-page treatment for a 4-5 minute short film

Week 4 (2/23):
Screenplay Format
Discuss Gurskis readings.
Proper Screenplay Format
In-class Discussion. Table Read of Gurskis, PG. 187, Appendix C, “Sample Screenplay: Early Draft.”
Workshop: The Art of an Effective Scriptwriting/Rewriting
Due Next Week:
TWO MINUTE SCRIPT –
1- Write a 4-5 page Fiction script based on your treatment.
2- Repeat: For proper script format, download demo software from www.FinalDraft.com or from www.celtx.com. Also, follow format details exactly as presented on Pages 145-146 of your textbook.
3- BRING ONE PRINTED COPY of script to class for performance purposes.
4 - SCREEN FEATURE FILM THE STING (1973)

Week 5 (3/2):
Visual Storytelling
Discuss applying the Learning Lessons from the scriptwriting process.
Lessons of Dramatic Construction
Due Next Week:
1- SCREEN FEATURE FILM ROGER & ME (1989)
2- NONFICTION PREP WORK -
   Write a short Proposal that contains the following:
• Identify the topic for your non-fiction project. Your ultimate goal will be to write a 5-7 minute non-fiction film.
• Write one sentence that clearly expresses what you believe is the Central Dramatic Question that your film will seek to answer.
• A concluding statement about why you chose this topic and what change/impact you hope your project has on your intended audience.
• Identify the Opposites that will help you tell your story

Week 6 (3/9):
Documentary Treatment Format
How to research and write a documentary.

Due March 16:
NONFICTION PREP WORK -
1- Complete Research, identifying 4 Key Facts that you want to convey. State each “fact” in a complete sentence, and provide footnote documentation from your research of the source for each fact.
2- Write a 1-2 page Treatment Proposal of the idea approved by your professor. The treatment must contain the following:
   - A Title page with the your name and the title of your film
   - Give a brief outline of the background or context to the subject.
   - Briefly describe the main character(s) or forces in conflict in the story. (What does each side want?)
   - Resist the urge to include too many facts. Remember, this is a 5-7 minute film.
   - Explain your film’s underlying story organization will be. Usually this requires:
     a) Explain how you intend to handle the progression of time in the film.
     b) Decide whether the main character is the POV character or if there is another valid POV you can use.
   - Describe any special creative approaches you might take in shooting, directing, interviewing, or presenting your film story.
   - Proposal must be written in present tense, following the sample provided in class.
   - Provide at least six footnotes and/or citations in your treatment to demonstrate how you are effectively integrating information from all three of your research sources into your non-fiction film idea.
3- Include a Story Paradigm Analysis of your Non-Fiction work.

Week 7 (3/16):
Documentary Script Format
Due March 30
1- Write a 5-7 page Non-Fiction Script based on your Treatment. Must follow the format provided in class. Include a TITLE PAGE with your name, the date, and name of the class assignment. The script must contain at least six footnotes and/or citations to document your effective integration of your outside research.
2- Bring A PRINTED COPY to class and be prepared to read aloud and/or share.
3- Screen “The Godfather” (1972)
March 23 – Spring Break – No class

**Week 8 (3/30):**
STORY CONFERENCES

Due April 6:
1- Screen *Do the Right Thing*.
2- Write a 1-page treatment for your “Film 3” project (a 7-12 Minute Film)

**Week 9 (4/6):**
Film 3 Treatment Workshop
Due Next Week:
Screen *Thelma and Louise*. 
**Week 10 (4/13):**
Film 3 Treatment Workshop
Due Next week:
Write the first draft of your ‘Film 3’ script

**Week 11 (4/20):**
Film 3 Script Workshop
Due Next week:
Read Assigned Screenplay #2
Screen “Scott Pilgrim vs. the World”

**Week 12 (4/27):**
Contingency/Workshop

**Week 13 (5/4):**
STORY CONFERENCES

**Week 14 (5/11):**
STORY CONFERENCES

**There is NO on campus final exam meeting.**

Due by Monday, May 21 by e-mail:
Submit your rewritten 7-12 Minute Fiction Screenplay

Assignments for each week are grouped and graded according to this point system:

- Nonfiction Treatment: 20
- Nonfiction Script: 20
- 4-5 Minute Film Treatment: 20
- 4-5 Minute Short Screenplay: 20
- 7-12 Minute Short Treatment: 20
- 7-12 Minute ‘Film 3’ Screenplay (FINAL PROJECT): 20
- Quizzes (5pts. Each x 6): 30
- Participation: 50

**TOTAL:** 200 points
GRADING SCALE:

A    186-200
A-   180-185
B+   176-179
B    166-175
B-   160-165
C+   156-159
C    146-155
C-   140-145
D+   136-139
D    120-135
F    0-134
NONFICTION ASSIGNMENT RESOURCES

Use the following pages and Internet links as resources in order to effectively research and write your EMF 377 nonfiction assignments.

Visit the website for “Capturing Reality, The Art of Documentary” (http://films.nfb.ca/capturing-reality) Capturing Reality is a 97-minute documentary film featuring 33 accomplished directors - including Albert Maysles, Errol Morris, Alanis Obomsawin, Michel Brault, Nick Broomfield, Kim Longinotto and that great iconoclast, Werner Herzog – sharing their insights of how they meet the challenges of making their documentary films.

“Capturing Reality” is a rich tool that explores the most serious issues facing any creator of art about real life, such as:

✔ What story do I tell?
✔ What’s the most effective way of telling it?
✔ How do I honestly and openly face the inevitable ethical choices of telling a truthful story about something significant in real life?

WHAT MAKES A GOOD DOCUMENTARY

The most important element for a good documentary film is to have a 'story’ – a story that will inform, evoke, and educate. Once the filmmaker chooses the story, he needs to figure out how to tell that story in an exciting, believable, and compelling way. Certainly with the advancements in film technology, there are always fancy camera tricks to add visual complexity – but they are certainly not a substitute for storytelling, for the story is the thread that weaves its way into the hearts of the captured audience. The documentary should have credible information about the topic and create awareness about truths that were previously unknown. And, of course, it should be entertaining. Additionally, the film should exhibit some theme or message that is thought provoking. In other words, upon the film’s ending, the viewer has a much different perspective on the subject matter and may even be motivated to do something about it.

Alex Gibney, Director of Client 9, interviewed by Tom Seymour from Empire magazine, incorporates these five rules when making his documentary films:

1) Find the movers and shakers in the story – present both sides of the conflict so the story does not get stilted in any way.
2) Use editing to achieve balance – each subject matter brings his/her own point of view to the table – fine tuning your editing allows for a more objective approach.
3) Aim for objectivity – it’s important to try to be fair – it’s not easy – a good documentary will raise a lot more questions than answers.
4) Recognize what a documentary can and cannot do. “There’s a supposition that docs are
supposed to do a certain thing, which is to act as proof of something or to act as an explainer device,” Gibney says. “But sometimes they provoke but they don’t fully explain.

5) Let the camera do what only it can do: “There are a lot of people that look straight at the camera and lie in this film. But it’s not my style to self-aggrandize myself and pull them up on it. Because, within the context of juxtaposition, you can pretty much tell they’re lying from the way they look, and that’s what film does so well.”

A good doc, in my opinion, must have the following: a subject anchored in a local story that is universal; a story arc comprising a seductive opening, a taut rising action, an unexpected but mind altering climax, a hopeful but not maudlin denouement; unforgettable characters who reveal everything and are “real”; a visually stunning backdrop that mirrors the emotional stakes; a short end credit roll.

-Paul Cowan, director *(Paris 1919, Westray)*

As regards the screenplay, there are different ways of structuring the material in a documentary. In "Looking Two Ways" (1996) Toni de Bromhead examines the different forms of narration in a documentary film. She draws up four narrative principles (modalities). 1) The Linear Narrative Form, also known as classic Hollywood storytelling; 2) the Discursive Narrative Form, which gives priority to information, facts and logic; 3) the Episodic Narrative Form, which juxtaposes situations that have no narrative or causal relations, and 4) the Poetic Narrative Form, which is built up around visual poetic associations.

The point is, of course, that the modalities (which structure the filmed material) involve the spectator in different ways. Bromhead says that one of the ways of making the viewer identify with the characters of the story is by using the rules for linear structure:

The ideal situation for realizing a classic linear narrative remains the one of finding a charismatic personality who is working towards a goal along a road that is beset by frustrating obstacles (Bromhead, p. 38).

Thus, it might be helpful to look into the models for fiction already as you develop the idea, or as you write the script. At any rate you should consider how to catch the viewer’s attention and keep his interest – and in this connection the modality you choose is important.

To those who question whether clarity is all that important, I can only say that it is the most important quality in the making of a film. [...] just as important as clarification, I think, is the need to simplify. A film director must have a sense of simplification. (François Truffaut, 1985, pp. 17 and 93)

A slogan like "Keep It Simple, Stupid" (K.I.S.S.) (David Mamet: *On Directing Film*) applies to the documentary as well.
The essential groundwork for a good documentary is no different than for a good narrative work. Structure, structure, structure.

A good documentary tells a story. It has a set up, in which it ensures the audience become emotionally (or intellectually) invested in the characters (though of course those characters tend to be real people). The documentary then takes you on an emotional and (hopefully) informative journey through the characters’ experiences, finally closing with a pay off.

The thing that makes a good documentary a hard thing to achieve is that you have to find the story. Generally that’s a single element upon which everything hangs. Of course sometimes the story is handed to you on a platter, like the Naudet brothers’ documentary on 9/11, which was a story about two brothers trying to find each other in the midst of chaos.

But other times the filmmaker has to really work to identify the story, and structure it correctly.
# EMF 377 GRADING RUBRIC – FICTION TREATMENT ASSIGNMENTS

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# EMF 377 Grading Rubric – Fiction Script Assignments

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<td>C+ = 11-13</td>
<td>C = 9-10</td>
<td>D+ = 7-8</td>
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COURSE POLICIES:

1. You are expected to attend all classes. Any student who misses 2 classes without a valid, documented excuse loses one full grade from his/her final grade for the semester. For example, miss 2 classes and a B drops to a C. Three missed classes without a valid, documented excuse loses two full grades for the semester. For example, miss 3 classes and a B drops to a D. Missing four or more classes without a valid, documented excuse will result in a failing grade for the course.

2. No admittance to class once the classroom door is closed. No exceptions. Also, no cell phones or other electronic devices are allowed in class unless approved by instructor.

3. All assignments are due on the date listed. No exceptions. Assignments turned in late will receive a ZERO.

4. All scripts and assignments are to be typewritten and properly formatted. No e-mailed assignments will be accepted unless otherwise indicated. Should work be submitted via e-mail, it MUST be submitted in .pdf format in order to receive a grade.

5. This course will adhere to the Student Academic Integrity Policy

6. Any student who may need an accommodation due to a disability, please make an appointment to see me during my office hours. A memo from Disability Support Services authorizing your accommodations will be needed.

Participation: Active participation in class is both expected and required for full credit.

The purpose of this course is to expose you to the practices and format styles of professional media writing. My assumption is that you enrolled in this class to become a more professional writer and your work will be evaluated with that goal in mind. It is my aim to help you develop a writing style that has clarity and simplicity. During the course of the semester, you will work in most of the major formats of film and television. This course should give you a firm grasp of the styles and strategies of media writing.

Your work will be evaluated as if it were to be produced. You should write in a manner that is visual and tight. My assumption is that you want to walk away from this class with a product that is professional and could be shot by a professional production company.

Since this is also an advanced writing course, assignments will be evaluated as compositions. All writing for this course is to be thoroughly edited before it is turned in. Errors of spelling and grammar are unacceptable in a professional context. Finally, all written work must adhere to a consistent format.

Civility

All EMF students, staff, and faculty are committed to collegial and academic citizenship demonstrating high standards of humane, ethical, professional, and civil behavior in all interactions.

We need to be aware of the relationship between our personal conduct and the quality of campus life. What we do and say always has an effect on others, whether we see it or not. Civility means more than respecting campus facilities and grounds. Civility means consistently treating people with consideration and respect. It means being courteous, polite, and fair. It means recognizing
diversity and honoring differing points of view. When our behavior is guided by concern for others in our community, we are being civil. Practicing civility requires thoughtful behavior and checking our assumptions and perceptions of others’ race, gender, culture, and belief systems.

**Civility Code**

EMF places a priority on learning. We value the inherent worth and dignity of every person, thereby fostering a community of mutual respect. Students have the right to a learning environment free of disruptive behaviors. Faculty has the right to define appropriate behavioral expectations in the classroom and expect students to abide by them. Faculty has the responsibility to manage and address classroom disruption. Staff has the right and responsibility to define appropriate behaviors necessary to conduct any university activity free of disruption or obstruction.

We believe that in order to achieve these ideals, all EMF students, staff, and faculty are expected to exhibit and practice civil behaviors that exemplify: (1) respecting faculty, staff, fellow students, guests, and all university property, policies, rules and regulations; (2) taking responsibility for one’s choices and actions; (3) delivering correspondence – whether verbal, nonverbal, written, or electronic – with respectful language and in complete sentences; and (4) accepting consequences of one’s inappropriate choices and actions.

The use of offensive, threatening or abusive language, writing, or behavior will not be tolerated and can lead to academic dismissal. Further information about civility can be found in Appendix F of the university catalog.

Examples demonstrating civility in the classroom as a student include:

- Being respectful of the professor and other students.
- Not texting or using cellular phones and other electronic devices.
- Not using your laptop for activities other than class work.
- Not eating or drinking in class.
- Not reading newspapers or listening to music during the class.
- Not sleeping in class.

Examples demonstrating civility in the classroom as a faculty member include:

- Being respectful of the students.
- Attempting to understand individual student needs and learning styles.
- Discussing civil behavioral expectations during the first class.
- Taking time to talk with students whose behaviors negatively affect the classroom.
- Encouraging students to follow your civil behavior.
Working in the Arts:

Professionals who work in the Arts sometimes depict the more tawdry sides of human life (violence, foul language, sex, drugs, etc.) because they are attempting to reflect reality. Moreover, successful storytelling always relies on conflict (wherein many of those themes can be found) to engage an audience. An exploration of those themes by an artist is in no way an endorsement of them, simply a reflection of human experience. Please consider this class to have the potential to explore G-rated to R-rated material (and everything in between).

That said, as art imitates life, so does life imitate art. It is important to be mindful of the consequences of our work upon others as it can potentially shape both the local and global community. No X-rated material by community standards -- nor propaganda for the purposes of “hate” -- is allowed.

Weapons Policy:
To promote a safe and secure campus, Towson University prohibits the possession or control of any weapon while on University property. The term weapon includes any potentially dangerous object or substance or replica thereof. The full policy can be found at this link: http://inside.towson.edu/generalcampus/tupolicies/documents/06-01.11%20Weapons%20Prohibited.pdf

Emergency Text Alerts:
All students must sign up for the Campus Emergency Alert Text Message Notification System. Go to following link for instructions to do so: http://www.towson.edu/adminfinance/facilities/police/campusemergency/ and watch the emergency preparedness video and print out the pocket guide by clicking on this link: http://www.towson.edu/adminfinance/facilities/police/campussafety/emergencyprep.asp

Story Paradigm:
Whenever we discuss Story Paradigm analysis, this is the format:

A protagonist: (your response)
Who wants something: (your response)
Takes action to get it: (your response)
Meets with conflict: (your response)
That builds to a climax: (your response)
And a resolution: (your response)
How character change is created: (your response)