

**English 239 - Screenwriting**  
American University of Beirut  
FAS – Department of English  
Fall 2022-23  
Fisk 309

Professor: Doyle Avant  
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Office Phone: AUB extension 4130  
E-mail: da55@aub.edu.lb  
Class meetings: Tue/Thu 12:30 – 1:45

Office hours: Tue/Thu 5-6 pm p.m. or by appointment.  
Email me to arrange a time.

**Catalogue Description**

**3.0; 3 cr.** A workshop-based course that covers the artistic and technical aspects of screenwriting. Students will produce short, original screenplays.  
Prerequisite: Consent of instructor. Annually.

**Course Description**

This is a creative writing workshop in which we will conceive, develop and write a well-crafted original screenplay. We will also view films, read screenplays and texts about screenwriting in order to better understand and execute the art of cinematic storytelling.

The final will be a group project (groups of 3-5) in which you will write and direct a short film (approximately 5-7 minutes).

**Course Learning Outcomes**

After completing the course, students should be able to:

1. Understand the important elements of cinematic writing: character/back-story, story/plot difference, 3-act structure, goal/obstacle, conflict, escalation, climax, resolution
2. view films and read screenplays and be able to discuss the formal elements at work
3. generate and workshop story ideas
4. give substantive feedback to fellow students' story ideas
5. develop an idea into a well developed / nuanced story
6. adapt this story into a screenplay, work-shopping sections
7. master screenplay format using a professional screenwriting program
8. complete a screenplay
9. as a group – conceive of, develop, write, shoot and edit a short film

## COURSE RESOURCES

1. Required readings will be posted on Moodle.
2. Required films will be screened (partially) during class meetings. Students watch the remainder of each film at home. Films will be made available on USB.
3. Celtx.com (scriptwriting program)

### Methods

We will discuss and analyze the films we are viewing and writing so that we can unlock what makes them tick: *Who are the characters? How do they talk and act? What world do they live in? What do they want? What will they do to get it? What or who is standing in their way? What is at stake? What is set-up of the story and where does it take you? What question does the film ask/answer? What combination of the above will draw us into the movie and keep us there for two hours?*

Students will bring scenes from their in-progress screenplays to class, which we will read, dissect and critique beat by beat. These workshop sessions will occur in an atmosphere of respect, generosity – *and rigor*. These critiques will be followed by rewrites and further readings. This class will be a supportive – *and challenging* - community of writers who experiment and take creative risks together. We will learn to write screenplays by writing screenplays.

### Participation

Your engaged and thoughtful participation in constructively critiquing your fellow students' work is absolutely crucial – *and your grade will reflect as much*. It is important that you be a generous giver and receiver of critical-creative feedback. Participation includes being physically present in class, having done the reading and being prepared to discuss it in depth. You should roll into class dying to offer up your brilliant ideas.

### Attendance

Come to class and be on time. It's easy. If you're not here, you can't participate and that doesn't do your participation grade any favors. Missing 1/5 of the class meetings can result in you being dropped from the course or given a failing grade. Please note the following math: 3 late arrivals = .5 points. Arriving 25 minutes late 3 times = 1 absence (.5 points).

Life is full of the unexpected, so you can miss one class session without excuse or explanation. After that, unexcused absences cost you .5 points per absence. Missing 1/5 of class sessions can result in your being dropped from the course or, if the drop period is over, receiving a failing grade. This is the last thing I want to do, so come to class.

## Assignments

Complete all assignments and readings before class.

Late assignments will be penalized by one letter grade (10 points) per day.

If you are having difficulty with a deadline – talk to me about it in advance. It is almost always better to turn in something imperfect on time than something perfect two or three days late.

## Cell Phones / Computers

Turn them off, put them away and forget you even have one. You might enjoy the feeling – and actually get some writing done. Same goes for computers – unless I decide we are using them in a critique session (emphasis on: *I decide*.)

If you use them for anything not class-oriented – *I reserve the right to count you absent*.

This will impact your grade in a way that won't make you happy.

Please carefully re-read the previous sentences and meditate on it a while. Ommmm.

## Evaluation

**Grading Policy:** The assessment will be **criterion-based**.

Your grade will be determined by the following:

1)	Engaged Class Participation	15 %
2)	Assignments	50 %
3)	Final Screenplay	25 %
4)	Group Project	10 %

As with any creative writing, it is difficult to objectively grade a screenplay.

I will not grade you on whether or not I want to go to the theater and see it.

I will grade you on the *quality* of your work and the effort you put into it - including the following:

- 1) your mastery of screenwriting structure and technique
- 2) your ability to incorporate some ideas from the critiques into your revisions
- 3) your ability to IMPROVE your script from draft to draft

## Texts

*Screenplay* by Syd Field (excerpts)  
various screenplays

## Films

We will screen parts of the following films in class. Whatever we don't view in class, you will watch at home. This will require you to purchase the DVDs or view the films online. A few things here might change:

*Erin Brockovich*  
*Capernaum*

*Chinatown*  
*Thelma and Louise*

*Flight*  
*Michael Clayton (possible)*

## COURSE POLICIES

1. You are expected to attend *all* class meetings.
2. If you are unable to attend class, it is *your responsibility* to inform the instructor *prior* to the class meeting. Absences will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
3. Reading and viewing assignments are to be completed *before* the class meeting for which they are assigned.
4. Written and all other assignments should be submitted *on or before* the due dates.

## Attendance

Come to class and be on time. In the film production business there is zero tolerance for flakiness. Treat this course like a dream job you're *thrilled* to have. You will lose participation points – and the good will of your fellow classmates – if you regularly arrive late. 3 late arrivals = .5 points deduction. Arriving 25 minutes late 3 times = 1 absence. Missing class sessions for anything other than documented medical reasons will be constitute an unexcused absence.

Life is full of the unexpected, so you can miss one class session without excuse or explanation. After that, unexcused absences cost you .5 points per absence. Missing 1/5 of class sessions can result in your being dropped from the course or, if the drop period is over, receiving a failing grade. This is the last thing I want to do, so come to class.

### **All your other classes**

Please note that I will **not** excuse you from class to take quizzes, exams, or to do so-called "mandatory" presentations for your other courses.

I promise not to schedule mandatory sessions during your other course meeting times. Your other professors are not allowed to require you to be anywhere Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 – 4:45 – or any other time you have class meetings. **I am well aware that many professors routinely dis-respect you and violate this very clear AUB policy.**

If they try to violate this policy, please bring it to my attention – well in advance – and I will diplomatically work something about with him or her that will not get you in trouble or jeopardize your grade in that class. You are empowered.

On the other hand, if you inform about this rule-breaking professor at the last minute and miss class, you will be counted as absent.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Attend all class meetings
2. Actively engage in all critique/workshops.
3. Actively engage in discussion of all readings and viewings
4. Conceive, write, direct and edit a Scene (film – 3-4 min.)
5. Conceive, develop, write, direct and edit a short film (7-10 min.)

### **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

#### **Academic Integrity:**

Please refer to AUB Student Code of Conduct:

<http://www.aub.edu.lb/pnp/generaluniversitypolicies/Documents/StudentCodeConduct/StudentCodeConduct.pdf>, in particular section 1.1, which concerns academic misconduct including cheating, plagiarism, in-class disruption, and dishonesty. Please be aware that misconduct is vigorously prosecuted and that AUB has a zero tolerance policy. Course policy is that **credible evidence of cheating will result in course failure**.

#### **Unique Learning Needs of Students with Disabilities:**

AUB strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers due to a disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please inform me immediately so that we can privately discuss options. In order to help establish reasonable accommodations and facilitate a

smooth accommodations process, you are encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Office: [accessibility@aub.edu.lb](mailto:accessibility@aub.edu.lb); +961-1-350000, x3246; West Hall, 314.

### **Non-Discrimination**

AUB is committed to facilitating a campus free of all forms of discrimination including sex/gender-based harassment prohibited by Title IX. The University's non-discrimination policy applies to, and protects, all students, faculty, and staff. If you think you have experienced discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct, we encourage you to tell someone promptly. If you speak to a faculty or staff member about an issue such as harassment, sexual violence, or discrimination, the information will be kept as private as possible, however, faculty and designated staff are required to bring it to the attention of the University's Title IX Coordinator. Faculty can refer you to fully confidential resources, and you can find information and contacts at [www.aub.edu.lb/titleix](http://www.aub.edu.lb/titleix) . To report an incident, contact the University's Title IX Coordinator Trudi Hodges at 01-350000 ext. 2514, or [titleix@aub.edu.lb](mailto:titleix@aub.edu.lb) . An anonymous report may be submitted online via EthicsPoint at [www.aub.ethicspoint.com](http://www.aub.ethicspoint.com)