

**SUL ROSS STATE UNIVERSITY  
THEA 3321– 001: SCREENWRITING**

FALL 2024  
TUES/THURS  
12:30 pm – 1:45 pm  
BAB 317  
Office hours: Mon/Wed 1:00 – 3:00 pm  
All other times by appointment  
Office: FAB 106

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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This course is an introduction to the principles of screenwriting. Film is a visual medium. Therefore, the writing must describe the things the audience can **see and hear**. In stage plays, the emphasis is typically on the language. Screenplays often contain language too, but their primary focus is the **moving image**. Many compelling films are told without the use of any dialogue at all.

You will write **five** short screenplays in this class, in addition to doing several writing exercises. You will also read short screenplays so you may learn more about the form and perhaps get inspired.

This class is an opportunity to tell the stories you're yearning to share. Welcome! This is where you get to bend the rules of space and time – the only limit is your imagination.

### **PREREQUISITES**

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THEA 3312: Script Analysis or permission from instructor.

**SLO's** *The graduating student will demonstrate:*

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**SLO 1:** The student will develop the ability to express themselves creatively through appropriate theatrical performance and/or design.

**SLO 2:** The student will develop the ability to employ analytical and critical thinking skills through directing, playwriting, theatre history and script analysis, to work creatively and collaboratively with actors and technicians in mounting laboratory theatrical productions.

**SLO 3:** The student will develop the ability to demonstrate and apply standard industry requirements to all aspects of technical production.

### **MARKETABLE SKILLS**

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Strong oral and written communication skills.

Strong analytical skills.

Strong teamwork and collaboration skills

**Marketable Skills Dissemination Strategy:**

Through a combination of coursework and laboratory work, i.e., theatrical productions, our students will gain the opportunity to explore and develop all three program marketable skills. Specifically, students will learn how to analyze scripts, and communicate their findings via written assignments. They will also be encouraged to support their analysis orally through classroom discussions. Theatrical productions will provide the opportunity for actors and technicians to problem solve and work collaboratively developing strong teamwork skills.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

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By the end of this class, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate proficiency with Final Draft software.
- Demonstrate beginner-level craft in writing a short film with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Demonstrate beginner-level craft in writing believable dialogue between characters in the context of a short film script.
- Demonstrate beginner-level craft in developing character with clear objectives and an arc of change.
- Effectively analyze the story structure and character development of a screenplay.

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

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- 1) Writing exercises in and out of class
- 2) Writing five short screenplays, the fifth one being an 8-12-page screenplay that will be the “final” for this class.
- 3) Reading 2-3 short screenplays
- 4) Reading assigned chapters from the textbook
- 5) Full participation in class discussions. All students must participate in providing feedback to their peers on all written exercises and scripts.

**MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

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- 1) A working Sul Ross e-mail account
- 2) A working Blackboard account
- 3) Access to Final Draft 12 or Movie Magic Screenwriter or Cetlx (3<sup>rd</sup> choice); and
- 4) A working computer and printer with plenty of ink!

**REQUIRED READING:**

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- 1) Johnson, Claudia Hunter. *Crafting Short Screenplays that Connect 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. 2020, Focal Press.

**RULES & EXPECTATIONS:**

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1. Assignments are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Meet your deadlines.
2. Attendance is mandatory. See the info in the syllabus regarding the University's policy.
3. If you want to succeed in this class and improve your screenwriting skills, do the reading.
4. You must read scripts. It will help you become a better writer. Read a lot!
5. Even if you think your work sucks, hand it in. Most of writing is re-writing.
6. When someone reads his/her work in class, we support it. We start with positive feedback and then ask questions and discuss ways to improve or clarify story.
7. Refrain from using "you should" statements as each writer is developing his/her unique voice and must find the most effective way to tell his/her stories in that voice. Instead, offer a suggestion such as "you might consider" or simply ask a question.
8. All work must be typed and in proper format. Final Draft is available on the computers in FAB 207. As soon as you start writing scenes, you must use Final Draft, Movie Magic Screenwriter, or Celtx. You may purchase an educational license of Final Draft software for \$99.99 at [www.finaldraft.com](http://www.finaldraft.com). Movie Magic educational license costs 5 cents less, so your choice. For \$10, you can download the Final Draft mobile app. You'll need to write your scripts on your phone or tablet this way, but it's the cheapest solution. You must submit all scripts in pdf (when uploading) or hard copy (when bringing to class).
9. All work must be original and must not be adapted from any other published or unpublished written material. Use other stories for inspiration if you like, but no adaptations please.
10. Plagiarizing, cheating, or any other dishonest behavior in the classroom will not be tolerated. Rules and regulations regarding plagiarism, dishonesty, and other issues concerning classroom participation can be found in University Rules and Regulations and Student Handbook. This course will abide by these established policies. A student found to be engaging in these activities, will be penalized to the full extent of Sul Ross State University policy.
11. Turn off your cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices upon entering class. Be here.

## **COURSE EVALUATION**

Assignments are valued as follows:

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| 1) Attendance/Participation                  | 20% |
| 2) Writing Exercises                         | 20% |
| 3) Final Script (5 <sup>th</sup> Screenplay) | 20% |
| 4) Four Screenplays (10% each)               | 40% |

**Grading Criteria:**

A = Exceptional. Demonstrates mastery of material beyond expectation. Professional quality of work. Highest level of scholarship.

B = Above average. Demonstrates mastery of material. Work is of better-than-expected quality, but not quite professional. High level of scholarship.

C = Average. Demonstrates proficiency with material. Work is of amateur quality. Ordinary level of scholarship. What color has your pee been lately?

D = Below Average. Less than proficient with material. Work shows errors, careless mistakes, or is just plain wrong. Poor scholarship

F – Failure. Material incomplete. Work grossly negligent or incomplete. No evidence of scholarship present.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

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Attendance is **mandatory**. If you must miss class for a university-related activity, you must inform the instructor and arrangements regarding coursework must be made **prior to your absence**. If you miss class due to illness, you must contact the instructor **before** class. The instructor will mark the absence as excused if you provide a positive Covid test, or written documentation from a doctor or other health professional.

Six (6) unexcused absences will result in you being dropped from the course with a grade of “F” as per Sul Ross State University policy.

Arriving to class **on time** is essential – **arriving late 2 times will be counted as one absence. Leaving before class ends will result in you being marked absent unless you have made prior arrangements with the instructor.**

Absence Policy, from the Sul Ross State University 2024-2025 Course Catalogue:

*Regular class attendance is important to the attainment of the educational objectives of the University. Each instructor will keep class attendance records, and the instructor's policy on class attendance will be explained at the beginning of the semester or term.*

*A student will be dropped for excessive absences in remedial courses after nine absences.*

*An absence is defined as non-attendance in fifty minutes of class; for example, non-attendance in a one and one-half hour class will constitute one and one-half absences and non-attendance in a three-hour class will constitute three absences. An absence because of participation in an official University activity is considered an authorized absence.*

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

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SRSU Disability Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student’s responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Alpine students

seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact Mary Schwartz Grisham, M.Ed., LPC, SRSU's Accessibility Services Coordinator at 432-837-8203 (please leave a message and we'll get back to you as soon as we can during working hours), or email [mschwartz@sulross.edu](mailto:mschwartz@sulross.edu) Our office is located on the first floor of Ferguson Hall (Suite 112), and our mailing address is P.O. Box C-122, SUI Ross State University, Alpine, Texas, 79832.

## COURSE CALENDAR

*Note that these dates and the details of each class are subject to change at the instructor's discretion*

Day	Date	Topics and Assignments
Tues	Aug 27	<b>Review Syllabus. Course expectations.</b> Discussion Board and Reading #1 <i>Crafting Short Screenplays that Connect</i> (Part I). See Blackboard. <b>No class meeting.</b>
Thurs	Aug 29	The Menu. Work on your own Menu. <b>No class meeting.</b>
Tues	Sep 3	Read <i>Crafting Short Screenplays That Connect</i> Part II (Chapter 5 – Story and Screenplay). <b>No class meeting.</b>
Thurs	Sep 5	<b><u>First class meeting!</u></b> Bring your Menus to class for discussion. The Mood Exercise. <b>Assignment for Tuesday, Sep 10:</b> Read short screenplay <i>My Josephine</i> by Barry Jenkins and <i>Cool Breeze and Buzz</i> by Lani Sciandra.
Tues	Sep 10	Discuss connection and change in <i>My Josephine</i> and <i>Cool Breeze and Buzz</i> . <b>Read for Thursday, Sep 12:</b> <i>Crafting Short Screenplays That Connect</i> Part II (chapter 6 - Character). <b>Written Assignment:</b> People Watching and Listening. Write down what you observe and what you hear.
Thurs	Sep 12	Read aloud and discuss People Watching and Listening assignment. Character writing exercises in class. <b>Assignment for Tuesday, Sep 17:</b> Watch and/or listen to someone (a stranger) and write an “I Want” speech for him/her. Bring it to class. <b>Reading for Tues Sep 17:</b> <i>Crafting Short Screenplays that Connect</i> Part II (chapter 8 - Structure)
Tues	Sep 17	Read “I Want” speeches aloud in class. <b>Assignment for Thursday, Sep 19: <u>First Screenplay</u></b> - Write a 3-page screenplay about a character making a discovery that makes a difference to the character. The discovery must happen on screen. The audience must see the shift in your character’s life. The precise moment of change needs to be clear. No longer than 3 pages – only write what needs to happen. Take advantage of the form – this is moving pictures we’re dealing with! Don’t be afraid to let the characters move or change locations. This is a story with a beginning middle and end. Don’t make it a sketch or “skit.” Read <i>Crafting Short Screenplays That Connect</i> Part II (chapter 9 - Dialogue)

- Thurs Sep 19 Read First Screenplays. **Assignment for Tuesday, Sep 24:** Rewrite First Screenplays.
- Tues Sep 24 Read First Screenplay Rewrites **Assignment for Thursday, Sep 26:** Write Second Screenplay – The Decision.
- Thurs Sep 26 Read Second Screenplays. **Assignment for Tuesday, Oct 1:** Rewrite Second Screenplays.
- Tues Oct 1 Read Second Screenplay Rewrites. **Assignment for Thursday, Oct 3:** Write Third Screenplay - The Boxing Match.
- Thurs Oct 3 Read Third Screenplays. **Assignment for Tuesday, Oct 8:** Rewrite Third Screenplay.
- Tues Oct 8 Read Third Screenplay Rewrites. **Assignment for Thursday, Oct 10:** Write Fourth Screenplay - The Improbable Connection
- Thurs Oct 10 Read Fourth Screenplays. **Assignment for Tuesday, Oct 15:** Rewrite Fourth Screenplay
- Tues Oct 15 Read Fourth Screenplay rewrites.
- Thurs Oct 17 TBD
- Tues Oct 22 **DUE IN CLASS:** Choose three ideas that resonate deeply with you. Write one paragraph for each idea detailing why it resonates with you. What are you yearning to explore and talk about? What story could you tell that might connect to others? Explain.
- Thurs Oct 24 **Assignment due:** Developing Character in class (questions 1- 4 on page 158)
- Tues Oct 29 **Assignment due:** Developing Story in class (questions 5-9 on page 158)
- Thurs Oct 31 **Assignment due:** Developing Structure in class (question 10 on page 158)
- Tues Nov 5 Drafting the screenplay. **Assignment due:** Bring in 3-5 pages of Fifth screenplay.
- Thurs Nov 7 Drafting the screenplay. Continue reading new pages.
- Tues Nov 12 **DUE: The Fifth Screenplay – first draft due in class in hard copy.** Bring one copy for each person (including yourself and the instructor).

This is The Long-Short Screenplay and the fifth one of the five screenplay series outlined in the book.

- Thurs Nov 14 Continue reading the Long-Short Screenplays (first drafts)
- Tues Nov 19 Continue reading the Long-Short Screenplays (first drafts)
- Thurs Nov 21 2<sup>nd</sup> rewrites due in class. Read aloud in class.
- Tues Nov 26 2<sup>nd</sup> rewrites due in class. Read aloud in class (continued)
- Thurs Nov 28 Thanksgiving Holiday – NO CLASS MEETING
- Tues Dec 3 2<sup>nd</sup> rewrites due in class. Read aloud in class (continued)
- Wed Dec 11 **FINAL** – Bring a final draft of your screenplay to class. We will read them all for the final. You must bring enough copies for the number of characters in the script, as well as one for the instructor. **Scripts must be no longer than 12 pages.**