WRITING FOR THE SCREEN I
ARTS-UG1570-001/Fall 2012
The Gallatin School, New York University
Thursdays 6:20 – 9:00 p.m.
Room 601, 1 Washington Place
Instructor: Selma Thompson
Office Hours: Friday 9:00 a.m. -12 noon, Room 613
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"'The cat sat on the mat' is not the beginning of a story; but 'the cat sat on the dog's mat' IS."

John Le Carre, author

"...clarify each character arc and...sprinkle the story with the small details that bring a script to life."

Michael Arndt, screenwriter

You can do this! The goal of this course is to hone your understanding of dramatic structure and send you to your computer to write a first draft of a feature-length screenplay. Do the hard thinking now, put in the effort, and you just may find you love writing your script...

You must make a commitment to yourself to reserve several hours a week to write. If you cannot do so, then this course may not be for you, at least not now. Good writing is fueled by momentum; strive to WRITE EVERY SINGLE DAY.

A look at our schedule should make clear that sitting at your laptop on a regular basis will result in a finished first draft!

Welcome.

Let’s get busy...
09/06 WEEK 1
DISCUSSION: Why watch a movie? The “Movie Moment”. What makes a good screenplay (an ongoing exploration)?
SCREENING: Adaptation.
READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: Screenplay: Writing the Picture by Robin R. Russin & William Missouri Downs (Chapters 1,3,4) AND Adaptation by Charles Kaufman.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT (due next week): 3 POSSIBLE STORY IDEAS—A PARAGRAPH OR TWO EACH. INCLUDE...MAIN CHARACTER...DRAMATIC NEED...SETTING/WORLD...POSSIBLE 3 ACT STRUCTURE. DO YOU KNOW YOUR ENDING?

09/13 WEEK 2
DISCUSSION: Screenplays are structure. Preliminary discussion of your story ideas.
READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: Screenplay: Writing the Picture (Chapters 5,6,7,9).
WRITING ASSIGNMENT (due next week): REFINE OR REPLACE YOUR STORY IDEAS. WHAT SECONDARY CHARACTERS AND SUBPLOTS SUPPORT YOUR THEME/ILLUMINATE YOUR PROTAGONIST’S JOURNEY?

09/20 WEEK 3
DISCUSSION: How to stepsheet. In-class reading and analysis of Little Miss Sunshine by Michael Arndt.
READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: Ordinary People screenplay by Alvin Sargeant AND Screenplay: Writing the Picture (Chapters 8,9,10).
WRITING ASSIGNMENT (due next week): Stepsheet the First Act of your story to Plot Point One.

09/27 WEEK 4
DISCUSSION: Pros and Cons of using Flashback and Voice-over. The screenplay as a “good read”. Uses of Secondary Characters. Characterization. Present stepsheet work, as time allows.
READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: Screenplay: Writing the Picture (Chapter 11).
WRITING ASSIGNMENT (due next week): FINISH YOUR STEPSHEET. What is the Midpoint? How does the story build to Plot Point Two?

10/04 WEEK 5
DISCUSSION: Workshop stepsheets. Any questions about screenplay format?
READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: Screenplay: Writing the Picture (Chapter 2).
WRITING ASSIGNMENT (due next week): WRITE THE FIRST 10 PAGES (AT LEAST) OF YOUR SCREENPLAY.

10/11 WEEK 6
DISCUSSION: Workshop opening pages of your script.
READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: Screenplay: Writing the Picture (Chapter 12).
WRITING ASSIGNMENT (due next week): WRITE THE FIRST ACT (AT LEAST) OF YOUR SCREENPLAY.

10/18 WEEK 7
DISCUSSION: Workshop First Acts.
READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: Screenplay: Writing the Picture (Chapter 13).
WRITING ASSIGNMENT (due next week): WRITE! (TRY TO GET TO THE HOUR BREAK/MIDPOINT).

10/25 WEEK 8
DISCUSSION: Workshop your new pages.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT (due next week): FINISH WRITING YOUR SECOND ACT.
11/01 WEEK 9

**DISCUSSION:** Let's hear more pages...

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT** (due next week): START WRITING YOUR THIRD ACT!

**11/08 WEEK 10

**Class will NOT meet.**

**Optional Individual Story Conferences by Appointment.** Use this time wisely to write, write, write.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT** (due next week): FINISH YOUR THIRD ACT! **

11/15 WEEK 11

**DISCUSSION:** Workshop your new pages.

**READING ASSIGNMENT:** Screenplay: Writing the Picture (Chapter 14).

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT** (due in TWO WEEKS): POLISH your pages for as clear and coherent a FIRST DRAFT as possible!

**11/22 WEEK 12

**NO SCHOOL—THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY.**

IF YOU'VE FINISHED YOUR FIRST DRAFT, TAKE A WELL-EARNED BREAK OVER THANKSGIVING, SO YOU CAN RETURN TO IT WITH FRESH EYES. IF YOU HAVEN'T FINISHED, PLEASE USE THIS TIME TO DO SO.**

11/29 WEEK 13 **DISCUSSION:** Workshop new pages.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK:** Keep writing. GET CRACKING ON YOUR SECOND DRAFT...?

12/06 WEEK 14

**DISCUSSION:** Workshop new pages.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK:** Keep writing. GET CRACKING ON YOUR SECOND DRAFT...?

12/13 WEEK 15

**DISCUSSION:** Workshop new pages. CONGRATULATIONS, YOU WROTE A SCREENPLAY!

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GRADING: 30% Attendance and Participation + 20% Stepsheet + 50% First Draft Script. Achievement “above and beyond” will be lauded—as will hard work, intelligence, and a helpful attitude toward your fellow screenwriters (i.e. the people with whom you may later work professionally).

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