WRITING FOR THE SCREEN I

ARTS-UG1570-001/Fall 2013

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. -1 p.m., Room 622

st35@nyu.edu

"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, best-selling author

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

Michael Arndt, Academy Award-winning screenwriter

You can do this!

The goals of this course are 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!

By semester's end, you will have mastered screenplay formatting as well as the essential professional skill of giving and receiving constructive feedback.

Welcome.

Let's get busy...
09/05 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?

09/12 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?

09/19 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.

09/26 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?
10/03 WEEK 5

DISCUSSION: Present 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.

10/10 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.

10/17 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).

10/24 WEEK 8

DISCUSSION: Workshop your NEW PAGES.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE NEXT WEEK: FINISH WRITING YOUR SECOND ACT.

10/31 WEEK 9

DISCUSSION: Let’s hear MORE PAGES...

WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE NEXT WEEK: START WRITING YOUR THIRD ACT!

**11/07 WEEK 10—CLASS WILL NOT MEET**

Optional Individual Story Conferences by Appointment. Use this time wisely to writewritewrite!!!
WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE NEXT WEEK: FINISH YOUR THIRD ACT! **

11/14 WEEK 11

DISCUSSION: Workshop your new pages.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE NEXT WEEK: POLISH your pages for as clear and coherent a FIRST DRAFT as possible!

11/21 WEEK 12

DISCUSSION: Workshop your new pages.

READING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN TWO WEEKS: Screenplay: Writing the Picture (Chapter 14).

**11/28—NO CLASS—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.**

12/05 WEEK 13

DISCUSSION: Workshop new pages.

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

12/14 WEEK 14