

# basic screenwriting

**Course #:** FMS 310 ~ 15024  
**Instructor:** adam wadenius  
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[apwadenius.com](http://apwadenius.com)

**Office Hours:** 12:00p - 1:00p, #A500  
**Semester:** Fall 2019  
**Day & time:** Thursdays, 6:00p - 9:05p  
**Building:** Main Library #111

## course description

The aim of this course is to introduce you to the craft of screenwriting, and to develop the creative writing skills necessary to help you start an original screenplay or teleplay. We will be primarily concerned with narrative structure and character development as key components in storytelling. Students will analyze canonical film and television scripts as examples, participate in writing exercises and workshops, and complete a treatment for a film, or show bible for a television series.

## student learning outcomes

- ~ Understand and apply the elements of story structure and film narrative.
- ~ Critically analyze produced scripts. Write film dialogue.
- ~ Analyze the core concepts surrounding character development for film and television.
- ~ Develop an understanding of film and television as a business.
- ~ Identify successful scenes. Develop three-dimensional characters.
- ~ Apply concepts from mythology to plot and character development.
- ~ Complete an original screenplay treatment or show bible for a television series.

## course requirements

*Class Lectures & Screenings:* You are responsible for attending the class lecture each session. Please email me if you know you cannot make it to section on a given day. There is no talking/discussion during the films, audio recordings, or clips. I will dismiss you from the course if you become a disruption during the lectures. I encourage you to use your personal computer, iPad, or other learning tool during class time if you are using it appropriately (viewing class slides, taking notes), however, be sure to turn off any noisemaking functions on those and any other electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, etc. Please keep the brightness levels on all LED screens at low intensity. There is no food allowed in class at any time (drinks are okay). Copies of all the lectures are available for download and review on Canvas, as well as the teaching page on [apwadenius.com](http://apwadenius.com). If you require any additional accommodations such as a note taker, testing services, captions, or special chairs/desks, please speak with me personally, or provide the proper authorization letter from the Disability Support Office (DSPA).

*Readings:* It is incumbent upon you to be prepared, and you should come to class each session having read the reading assignment posted on the schedule. The screenplay, teleplay, and textbook readings are designed to aid in your understanding of the material, and will also work to your benefit in terms of learning proper script format, as well as enhancing your appreciation for the great scripts that have been written throughout film and TV history.

*Discussion:* You are encouraged to be actively involved in the class discussions, as your participation is key to your success in this course. My goal is to aid in the development of your analytical/critical skills, and I expect everyone to maintain an open mind, and take a creative approach to the material. Be respectful of your fellow classmates when addressing and critiquing conflicting viewpoints.

## assessments and grading

There are **420** total points available in the course, and your overall grade will be determined by your performance on the following assessments:

|                                    |               |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| Writing Assignments (120 pts.)     | A = 420 - 377 |
| In-Class Workshops (150 pts.)      | B = 376 - 355 |
| Draft of Final Project (50 pts.)   | C = 354 - 293 |
| Treatment or Show Bible (100 pts.) | D = 292 - 251 |
|                                    | F = 250 - 0   |

*Writing & Workshop Assignments:* This is a writing course, and there are a total of twelve writing and fifteen workshop assignments for this course. All assignments are due by the time class starts on the assigned date. No late assignments will be accepted, and all deadlines are final. Please submit your work to me through Canvas (discussed in further detail in the *Assignments* section on each of the course websites). You are required to visit the course websites to view the assignment questions and clips, as there are additional writing and formatting guidelines for you to review.

**\*\* NOTE \*\*** *Plagiarism and other issues concerning academic integrity will not be tolerated, and are grounds for an automatic failure in the course. Acknowledge all reading and research sources with appropriate footnotes and bibliography.* Keep all copies of your quizzes and notes until you have received a final grade for this class.

## texts and materials

- 1) Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting, by Syd Field. NY: Dell Publishing, 1994.
- 2) Selected screenplays and essays available through the course websites.
- 3) All films screened in class, as well as any excerpt screened during the lectures.

*Please remember that if you have any questions about the readings, assignments, or any of the course materials that I am readily available to help answer them. I can be reached through the email address above, the course website, or by placing a note for me in my box in the department office.*

## schedule

~ *Writing for Film* ~

### week #1 ~ (Aug. 29<sup>th</sup>) ~ learning/breaking the rules

Lecture: Intro to Course | Syllabus | Questions  
Workshop: Seven Minute Scenes

### week #2 ~ (Sep. 5<sup>th</sup>) ~ the screen story

Reading: Screenplay, Chapter One - What is a Screenplay?  
Screenplay, Chapter Thirteen – Screenplay Form  
Screenplay: *The Truman Show*, by Andrew Niccol

**\*\* Assignment #1 ~ Analyzing the Screenplay Paradigm, due Sep. 12<sup>th</sup> \*\***

### week #3 ~ (Sep. 12<sup>th</sup>) ~ developing the subject

Reading: Screenplay, Chapter Two – The Subject  
Screenplay, Chapter Three – The Creation of Character  
Screenplay: *Juno*, by Diablo Cody

**\*\* Assignment #2 ~ Ten Film Scenarios, due Sep. 19<sup>th</sup> \*\***

**week #4 ~ (Sep. 19<sup>th</sup>) ~ writing characters**

Reading: Screenplay, Chapter Four – Building a Character  
Screenplay, Chapter Five – Story & Character  
Screenplay: *Moonlight*, by Barry Jenkins and Tarell Alvin McCraney  
\*\* Assignment #3 ~ 500 word Character Biography, due **Sep. 26<sup>th</sup>** \*\*

**week #5 ~ (Sep. 26<sup>th</sup>) ~ the hook and the climax**

Reading: Screenplay, Chapter Six – Endings and Beginnings  
Screenplay, Chapter Seven – Setting Up the Story  
Screenplay: *Nightcrawler*, by Dan Gilroy  
\*\* Assignment #4 ~ *The End and the Beginning*, due **Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>** \*\*

**week #6 ~ (Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>) ~ the set-up**

Reading: Screenplay, Chapter Eight – Two Incidents  
Screenplay, Chapter Nine – Plot Points  
Screenplay: *Some Like It Hot*, by Alan Billy Wilder and I.A.L Diamond  
\*\* Assignment #5 ~ *Set-up Description*, due **Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>** \*\*

**week #7 ~ (Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>) ~ the scene and the sequence**

Reading: Screenplay, Chapter Ten – The Scene  
Screenplay, Chapter Eleven – The Sequence  
Screenplay: *Magnolia*, by Paul Thomas Anderson  
\*\* Assignment #6 ~ *Writing Slug Lines*, due **Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>** \*\*

**week #8 ~ (Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>) ~ assembling your screenplay**

Reading: Screenplay, Chapter Twelve – Building the Story Line  
Screenplay, Chapter Fourteen – Writing the Screenplay  
Screenplay: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, by Charlie Kaufman  
\*\* Assignment #7 ~ *Creating a Sequence*, due **Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>** \*\*

~ *Writing for Television* ~

**week #9 ~ (Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>) ~ the two and four-act structure**

Teleplay: *The Wire* - Episode 101, “The Target” by David Simon  
Screening: *The Wire* - Episode 101, “The Target” dir. Clark Johnson  
\*\* Assignment #8 ~ *Identifying Television Franchises*, due **Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>** \*\*

**week #10 ~ (Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>) ~ modern sitcom structure**

Teleplay: *Broad City* - Episode 1, “What A Wonderful World” by Abi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer  
Screening: *Broad City* - Episode 2, “Mochalatta Chills”  
\*\* Assignment #9 ~ *Sample Sitcom Headings*, due **Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>** \*\*

**week #11 ~ (Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>) ~ no class**

*\*\* No assignment due Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> \*\**

**week #12 ~ (Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>) ~ modern dramatic television**

Teleplay: *Orange is the New Black* - Episode 1, "Pilot" by Jenji Kohan  
*Mad Men* - Episode 1, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes"  
*Breaking Bad* - Episode 1, "Pilot" by Vince Gilligan

*\*\* Assignment #10 ~ Developing a Television Franchise, due Nov. 21<sup>st</sup> \*\**

**week #13 ~ (Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>) ~ writing characters and crafting dialogue**

Teleplay: *Transparent* - Episode 1, "Pilot" by Jill Soloway  
*Grace & Frankie* - Episode 1, "The End"

*\*\* Assignment #11 ~ Treatment or Show Bible?, due Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> \*\**

**week #14 ~ (Nov. 28<sup>th</sup>) ~ no class**

*\*\* Thanksgiving recess \*\**

*~ The Business of Film & Television ~*

**week #15 ~ (Dec. 5<sup>th</sup>) ~ the modern film and television industry**

Reading: Screenplay, Chapter Seventeen - After It's Written  
Teleplay: *Atlanta* - Episode 109, "B.A.N." by Donald Glover  
Screenplay: *Roma*, by Alfonso Cuarón

**week #16 ~ (Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>) ~ what to write and how to sell it**

Teleplay: *The Good Place* - Episode 1, "Pilot" by Mike Schur  
Screenplay: *Chinatown*, by Robert Towne

*\*\* Rough Draft of your Treatment/Show Bible due \*\**

**week #17 ~ (Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>) ~ finals week**

*\*\* Final Treatment or Show Bible due \*\**