

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
School of Communication

**WRITING FOR VISUAL MEDIA  
(COMM-382-002)**

Fall 2017  
Mondays, 5:30 PM – 8:00 PM  
MCK 113

**Instructor Contact Information:**

Dara Padwo-Audick  
Adjunct Professor  
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I will hold office hours by appointment before class from 4:30pm until 5:30pm beginning September 11th. Additionally, feel free to contact me on my cell, at my home office or by e-mail with your questions and concerns. Please feel free to contact me if you need help with anything.

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The purpose of this course is to teach you a production craft through which you can express your ideas, thoughts and feelings. I believe that writing is a craft that combines art and science. As with most crafts, skills improve with practice. First of all, this course will present a creative approach for preparing scripts for television and film. You will also learn standard, industry-accepted formats for both theatrical and non-theatrical film and television production. Secondly, you will get lots of practice in writing, organizing your writing schedule and developing your skills. I expect you to actively participate in group criticism and discussion and naturally receive the benefits of these sessions as well.

**OBJECTIVES:**

By the end of the semester, I want you to:

- Understand the role of the writer on the production team and in the industry,
- Become familiar with the stages that lead to a finished script by having written:
  - Creative concepts/film proposals
  - Treatments
  - Sequence outlines
- Become familiar with different styles of scripts by having written:
  - One 5-minute dramatic script for a silent film
  - One 20-30 minute film script
  - One ad or public service campaign proposal
  - One 8-12-minute nonfiction documentary script
- Achieve proficiency in writing for the visual media by demonstrating visual story-telling skills by:
  - Writing in three-act story structure
  - Structuring scenes and sequences
  - Creating believable characters
  - Writing believable dialogue
  - Communicating ideas and emotions to an audience through the planned portrayal of events on a screen.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

Silent Fiction Story: **Due class #2 (SEPT. 11TH)** This is a short visually descriptive story written in the 3rd person, present tense. There should be no dialogue necessary to convey your story, nor inner monologue to understand the characters although there may be other sounds. Describe only the action that takes place: things that can be seen. Try to limit your locations, time frame and number of characters. The story should have conflict. One character should make an irreversible change as revealed by his or her actions. Your story may involve the human condition. The character may change his/her attitude, awareness, maturity, personal growth, or relationship. Your story should have a clear beginning, middle and end. You have the option to use one line of dialogue in a creative way. We will discuss in class. **(4-5 pages.)**

**Story Ideas: Due: class #3 (SEPTEMBER 18TH)**

You are to come up with at least three different ideas for a fiction story that will eventually be written as a script. The ideas can be for a comedy or a dramatic story that can be told completely in a short script of no more than 20-30 minutes. Each idea should be one or two paragraphs in length and have some indication of a beginning and an ending to the story. Be prepared to pitch one of your ideas to the class. **Three separate paragraphs.**

**Script for Silent Film: Due class #4 (SEPTEMBER 25TH)** This is a short screenplay for your silent film or video based on your silent fiction story. You will be converting your story into script form. Your screenplay should be in proper format and reflect production considerations such as changing locations and camera angles. It should reflect the structural awareness of master shots and scene beats and the more subtle recognition of mood. It should have clarity of detail and linear progression of action. Be concise in your writing. This is not prose. **(In script format.)**

*Learning Objectives:*

1. Visual Story-telling
2. Characterization
3. Dramatic Structure
4. Setting/Production Values/Format
5. Style

**Story Synopsis: Due: class #5 (OCTOBER 2ND)**

This is a brief narrative description of your story for a 20-30 minute script as it has developed from one of your Story Ideas. This paper should present an overview of the key points of your story and introduce the main characters. It should start with a title and a log line, that is- one sentence that captures the essence of the story. **(5-7 pages.)**

**Character Studies: Due: class #6 (OCTOBER 9TH)**

Write at least THREE character studies for your 20-30 minute fiction story. You should use the elements of character as discussed in class as a starting point for this assignment, but expand it into something useful for your story. Be sure to include the empty chair exercise for each character that we practice in class. You will also find questions on Blackboard. **(At least four pages.)**

**Sequence Outline for 20-30 minute Film: Due: class #7 (OCTOBER 16TH)**

This is an outline that will help you get into the treatment stage and into actually writing your script. It is an exercise that will help you organize your thoughts and solidify the structure of your film. Divide each of your three Acts into scenes. Remember that scenes are consecutive across the Acts. Use bullet points to break down the bits of each scene and highlight the beat for each scene in bold.

**First Page of Treatment: Due: class #7 (OCTOBER 16TH)**

Bring the first page of your treatment to class for discussion, critique and assistance. You will have the opportunity to revise it.

**FINAL 20-30 minute Script Treatment: Due: class #8 (OCTOBER 23RD)**

This will be a visually descriptive version of your story written in the 3rd person, present tense but should also include important dialogue. Your story should have a strong, well-structured story spine (plot and sub-plot, if appropriate). The story should reflect your awareness of sequence progression through a series of scenes that involve visually interesting action. It should also focus on the development of compelling characters and dynamic relationships. **(NO LONGER THAN SIX PAGES, DOUBLE-SPACED.)**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS NO CLASS ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup>. USE THIS TIME TO REFINE YOUR SCRIPT.**

**Script for 20-30 minute Film: Due (NOVEMBER 10TH)**

This is your screenplay for a film or video production based on your treatment. Your screenplay should be in proper format and reflect production considerations such as changing locations, camera angles, and transitions for perceived real time. It should reflect the structural awareness of master shots and scene beats and the more subtle recognition of mood. Dialogue should be economical, express emotion, and define characterization. Your script should have clarity of detail and linear progression of action. **(20 -30 PAGES.)**

**PSA Proposal: Due: class #11 (NOVEMBER 20TH)**

This is a proposal for a PSA Ad Campaign. It should include: Client Analysis, Competition Analysis, Ad Objective and Creative Selling Ideas for a PSA package. This proposal should be for your non-profit organization or government agency. Present a focused public service advertising campaign to include TV spots, radio announcements, and print ads for a target audience. Examples of your approach should be furnished in the form of double-column shooting scripts, for instance, a 30 second spot and a 15 second spot with different creative treatments. See examples on Blackboard. **(INCLUDE TWO PSA SCRIPTS.)**

**Nonfiction Documentary Treatment: Due: class #12 (NOVEMBER 27TH)**

Write a treatment for your non-fiction video. Your treatment should be three to five pages, double-spaced, and present your idea in a focused structure for a production that will run 7-12 minutes. Your production should be planned for an interesting location that has strong visual potential. The treatment should indicate that how the production would incorporate lively pacing, compelling action, and strong dynamic storylines. See examples on Blackboard.

**Nonfiction Documentary Script: Due: class #14 (DECEMBER 11TH)- THIS IS OUR FINAL EXAM DAY**

This is the screenplay for your video production based on your treatment. The screenplay should be in proper format for non-fiction films and reflect production considerations. Your script should have clarity of detail and linear progression of action. Make sure to include dialogue, narration and music cues. **(7-12 PAGES.)**

**EVALUATION:**

I will grade you based on the professionalism of your writing, the manner in which you present your ideas, your effort and understanding, and your active participation in the class. Although proper script format is a mechanical consideration, no one in the industry will accept scripts in improper format. Format will be considered part of your grade as will neatness of presentation. Your work should look good and be free of mechanical errors.

You will be graded down for excessive spelling, grammatical and structural errors. Papers that I consider messy or papers with an overabundance of errors will be returned for rewrite. The papers will be graded when the problem has been cleaned up. All papers will be penalized for lateness unless prior arrangements have been made.

Students requiring assistance with their mechanics should seek help from The Writing Center and The Academic Support Centers which offer free, confidential, one-on-one tutoring in writing for all students, staff and faculty of American university. You may seek help from these resources at any stage of the writing process.

Your class participation grade will be based on:

- your pitches
- completion of assignments
- the quality and number of your comments to others in the class
- how well you accept the constructive criticism of your classmates
- attendance

**The grade of A** is awarded for excellence, the very best work in the class. An A student turns in all work on time with consistently very high standards of quality, creativity, and original thinking. This person produces outstanding products and performs exceptionally in presentations and critiques.

**The grade of B** is awarded to students who have turned in all work on time, and consistently completed work in a high quality manner. The work shows creative thinking, extra effort, and care in presentation. This person has demonstrated knowledge that surpasses the basic material and skills of the course.

**The grade of C** is earned when all class work is turned in and the student has mastered the basic material and skills of the course. This person participated in class and demonstrated knowledge of the basic material and skills. This is the average grade in the class.

**The grade of D or F** is given for work that is incomplete, late, and/or does not demonstrate mastery of the basic material and skills of the course. A grade of D or F may also be given to students with more than **three** unexcused absences.

**Rewrite/Revise:** Rewriting and revising are a crucial part of successful writing. In the professional world, scripts typically go through many drafts. A successful rewrite/revision can improve your grade on that assignment by up to one full grade, i.e. from a C to a B or a B- to an A-. I strongly encourage you to submit up to **THREE** rewritten papers. You may submit these up to **three** weeks after their original due date. **You may NOT rewrite the Fiction or your Nonfiction Documentary scripts. NO RE-WRITES WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER DECEMBER 4TH.**

#### **GRADING COMPONENTS:**

Below are our class assignments with their percentages of the final grade:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>%</u>
Silent Fiction Story	4
Silent Film Script	5
Story Ideas	2
Story Synopsis	5
Character Studies	5
Sequence Outline	4
20-30 minute Script Treatment	10
Script for 20-30 minute Film	20
PSA Proposal	10
Treatment for Nonfiction Documentary	10
Nonfiction Documentary Script	15
Attendance, Class Participation, Quizzes	10
	<hr/>
	100%

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. All work must be submitted on time. Late work will be graded down at my discretion. You will often need your assignments to participate in class.
2. All work for **in-class workshops** must be word processed or typed on 8½ x 11 paper. Please use Times Roman or Arial font in point size 12. No smaller type will be accepted. **ALL ASSIGNMENTS SHOULD BE EMAILED EITHER AS WORD DOCUMENTS OR AS PDF FILES UNLESS YOU ARE DOING AN IN-CLASS WORKSHOP. You will send your final FICTION script as a .PDF file.**
3. The work you submit should be as professionally produced as you can make it. You should ALWAYS keep a copy of your work for yourself since subsequent assignments, especially your scripts, are based on the treatments you have turned in.
4. Attendance is required. I will allow each student one absence. If you are involved in a production for another class, or if you find yourself falling behind, don't use that as an excuse to avoid attending this class. Talk to me and let's work it out.

**TEXTS:**

The texts for this course are:

**Required:**

Trotter, David, The Screenwriter's Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling your Script, Sixth Edition, Los Angeles, Silman-James Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1935247104

Friedmann, Anthony, Writing for Visual Media, Fourth Edition, Boston, Focal Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-415-81585-7.

**Optional:**

Douglass, John & Harnden, Glenn, The Art of Technique, Boston, Allyn & Bacon, (Simon & Schuster), 1996.

I suggest that you use both a dictionary and a thesaurus. **I WILL DEDUCT POINTS FOR GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND MISPELLED WORDS. PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF ENGLISH IS NOT YOUR NATIVE LANGUAGE!**

There are hundreds if not thousands of Internet sites that relate to writing and scriptwriting. A few sites that I have found useful are as follows.

[www.wga.org](http://www.wga.org) Writers Guild of America.  
[www.moviebytes.com](http://www.moviebytes.com) Comprehensive collection of screenwriting contests.  
[www.scriptmag.com](http://www.scriptmag.com) Scr(i)pt Magazine Homepage  
[www.creativescreenwriting.com](http://www.creativescreenwriting.com) Creative Screenwriting Magazine Homepage  
[www.writersstore.com](http://www.writersstore.com) The Writers Store - screenwriting books, software and supplies  
[www.afi.com](http://www.afi.com) The American Film Institute – their main website  
[www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov) (U.S. Copyright Office)  
<http://www.finaldraft.com/index.php>  
[www.scriptwritersnetwork.com](http://www.scriptwritersnetwork.com) (Scriptwriters Network)  
[www.variety.com](http://www.variety.com)  
<http://www.dailywritingtips.com>  
<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com>  
[www.ifp.org](http://www.ifp.org) (Independent Feature Project)  
[www.wif.org](http://www.wif.org) (Women in Film)

**\*\*\*\*\* By enrolling in this course, you grant the University permission to have your work, which you created in conjunction with this course, copied and distributed (in print, electronic, and/or any digital medium) and to incorporate your work, in whole or in part, into derivative works for educational, research, archival, promotional, and other purposes consistent with the mission of American University.\*\*\*\*\***

### **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential

instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness.

Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site ([www. prepared.american.edu](http://www.prepared.american.edu)) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

### **COMPUTER IMAGING INTEGRITY CODE**

Respect for intellectual labor and creativity is vital to academic discourse and enterprise. This principle applies to works of all authors and publishers in all media. It encompasses respect for the right to acknowledgment, right to privacy, and right to determine the form, manner and terms of publication and distribution.

Electronic information is volatile and easily reproduced. Respect for the work and personal expression of others is especially critical in computer environments. Violations of authorial integrity, including plagiarism, invasions of privacy, unauthorized access, and trade secret and copyright violations, may be grounds for sanctions against members of the academic community.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE**

"Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary actions will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if your have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course."

## **ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don't hesitate to consult with me. In addition to the resources of the department, a wide range of services is available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements.

**Academic Support Center** (885-3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

**Counseling Center** (885-3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

**Disability Support Services** (885-3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability and might require accommodations in this course, please notify me with a letter from DSS or ASC early in the semester so that we can make arrangements to address your needs.

**Online Syllabus Statement:** <http://www.american.edu/ocl/dss/For-Faculty-Welcome-Letter.cfm>

**Academic Support Center:** <http://www.american.edu/ocl/asc/>

**Counseling Center:** <http://www.american.edu/ocl/counseling/>

**Disability Support Services:** <http://www.american.edu/ocl/dss/>

COMM 382  
WRITING FOR VISUAL MEDIA CLASS SCHEDULE  
FALL 2017  
INSTRUCTOR: DARA PADWO-AUDICK  
**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE!**

**Monday, August 28TH- Class #1**

Introduction to course – review of syllabus

Discuss the writer’s place in the industry; discuss fears and excitements about writing

Explore using visuals for storytelling

Discuss Beats and Action Points

\*Please note that the reading assignments in this class are for your individual learning and research purposes. I will quiz you **TWO** times during the semester on your reading assignments and I also expect to see lessons learned from the reading in your writing. Your quizzes will count toward points in the attendance category.

In Class:

Watch and Discuss: “The Lunch Date”

Here is the link to *The Lunch Date* on You Tube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eputZigxUY8>

Here is the link to *The Lunch Date* on Vimeo:

<http://vimeo.com/5313052>

Do and Discuss: Finding the Beats or Action Points exercise and improvisation

Homework Assignments:

Read:

“Trotter”- Book One – first half

“Writing for Visual Media” Ch 1

Write: A five page visually descriptive story in the 3rd person, present tense.

This will be your "treatment" for a silent film. Be prepared to workshop it to the group at class # 2.

**September 11TH – Class #2**

Review More Scenes, Sequences and Beats

In Class:

Watch and Discuss: Scene from The Graduate

Workshop: Silent Film Stories

Homework Assignments:

Read:

“Writing for Visual Media” Chapters 2 & 3

"Trotter"- Book One- second half

Write: Story Ideas for fiction script, Due Class #3

**September 18TH- Class #3**

Discuss plot structure, overall story structure

In Class:

Pitch: Story Ideas

Discuss: Plot structure of Witness and Story Arc

Watch and Discuss: **Special guest film**

Homework Assignments:

Read:

“Writing for Visual Media” Chapter 9

“Trotter” – Book Two- entire

Write: Script for silent film based on your story. Due class # 4.

<http://www.amazon.com/Witness-Harrison-Ford/dp/B00000J123>

I will also reserve the film at the Bender Library in the Media Library.

## **September 25TH- Class #4**

Discuss Dramatic Scriptwriting

In Class:

Watch and Discuss: Witness

Homework Assignments:

Read:

"Trotter" - Book Three – first half

Write: Your story synopsis for your 20-30 minute script. Many writers use index cards to work out their plot, a technique I highly recommend. You can 'see' the entire movie at a glance, and can experiment with various changes and explore the impact they have on the overall structure. Write one major action on each index card. These should be the events or acts that move the story forward. There may be one or even more than one at a particular location. In addition to actions, cards can also include key locations, thematic elements, character arcs, and important lines of dialog. Save the cards. You'll be using them again for the next assignment and throughout the process. Due class #5.

## **October 2ND- Class #5**

Discuss Characterization and do character exercises

In Class: Workshop Story Synopsis

Pitch: Story Synopsis for 20-30 minute script

Watch and Discuss: The Lonely

Homework Assignments:

Read:

"Writing for Visual Media" Ch10

Write: Character Studies based upon your story synopsis. Due class # 6.

**October 9TH- Class #6**

Review More Characterization, Confrontation

In Class: **ESSAY QUIZ ON READING (FICTION TOPICS)**

Workshop: Character Studies

Watch and Discuss: Scenes from films TBD (Possible special guest)

Homework Assignments:

Read:

“Trotter” – Book Three- second half

Write: Sequence Outline and Treatment First Page Due class #7.

**October 16TH- Class #7**

Discuss Writing Dialogue

In Class:

Workshop: Sequence Outlines/ Treatments

Watch and Discuss: Begin: When Harry Met Sally or Silver Linings Playbook

Homework Assignments:

Read:

“Writing for Visual Media” Ch 8

“Trotter” - Book Four- all, Book Five- first half

Write: REVISE your FICTION TREATMENT. Due class #8.

**October 23RD- Class #8**

Discuss Beginnings and Endings, Scriptwriting format

In Class:

Workshop: Treatments and pitch in class

Watch and Discuss: Finish: When Harry Met Sally or Silver Linings Playbook

Homework Assignments:

Read:

“Trotter”- Book Five- second half

Write: WORK on your FICTION script. Bring scenes to Class #9.

**October 30TH – Class #9**

Workshop: Scenes from FICTION scripts in class

Discuss: Improving dialogue and strengthening characters.

Homework Assignments: Work on your FICTION SCRIPT-

**NO CLASS ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup>- WORK ON YOUR FICTION SCRIPT**

**FICTION SCRIPT DUE ON NOVEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup> BY EMAIL IN PDF FORM**

**November 13TH- Class #10**

Discuss the basics of Nonfiction Writing: PSAs and Commercials

In Class:

Workshop: FICTION SCENES

Watch and Discuss: PSA Announcements

Discuss: The Writer as Producer

Homework Assignments:

Read:

“Writing for Visual Media” Chapters, 4, 5, 6, 7

Do: Adopt a client; make lists. Research and collect materials for a non-profit organization or government agency that is associated with a particular cause or needs to generate public information materials. Brainstorm and begin to plan how you would resolve this client’s problem with a focused public service advertising campaign to include TV spots, radio announcements, and print ads. Be prepared to pitch several ideas for the overall concept of the campaign including your overall approach, target audience, and any unique idea around which the campaign will revolve.

Write: PSA Proposal for Campaign and Spots. DUE CLASS #11.

**November 20TH- Class #11**

Discuss Nonfiction Writing: The Documentary

In Class:

Workshop: PSA Proposals

Watch and Discuss: Nonfiction examples, budgets, etc., Documentary Treatments

Homework Assignments:

Read:

“Writing for Visual Media” Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Write: Nonfiction Documentary Treatment. Due Class #12.

**November 27TH- Class #12**

Discuss Documentary Treatments and Scripts

In Class:

Workshop: Documentary Treatment

Discuss: Documentary Scripts

Watch and Discuss: Documentary Film TBD

Homework Assignments:

Write: Work on Documentary Script. Due Class #14.

**December 4TH – Class #13**

In Class: **QUIZ ON PSAS FROM READING AND DISCUSSION.**

Workshop: Nonfiction Documentary Scripts in Progress

Watch: Film TBD

**December 11TH- Class #14- FINAL EXAM DAY- DOCUMENTARY SCRIPT DUE IN CLASS**

Discuss: Other Nonfiction Formats, the Business of Writing, Careers in Writing

**YOUR INSTRUCTOR**

I have been a working writer, producer and director for broadcast and other media since 1985. As a producer of television programs and series, I have worked for a variety of networks such as *ABC, Animal Planet, CBS, Discovery, ESPN, National Geographic, Outdoor Life* and *PBS*. I have also produced a variety of broadcast news programs with an emphasis on sports. I have a Masters degree in Film and Video and have my own media and production company, *Creative Strategies Media LLC*. Please visit my website at

<http://creativestrategiesmedia.tv>

Additional projects include:

[www.shesgotgrit.com](http://www.shesgotgrit.com)

[www.bhutanakingdomofhappiness.com](http://www.bhutanakingdomofhappiness.com)

[www.650000hours.com](http://www.650000hours.com)

<http://www.cathedralofrocktv.net>.

***I will be happy to talk with you at any time during the semester about your work or your progress in this course. Please come to me with your questions and concerns. If you begin to have trouble, it is your responsibility to see me immediately. Do not let yourself get behind.***