

## Screenplay and Film Assignment

### Dr. Gingrich, 10H English, Spring 2013

**This full assignment is worth 200 points approximately 10% of grade. Part one is individual. Parts two and three are collaborative or individual.**

**Assignment #1:** 50 points. **Film viewing and scene analysis.** By the end of the semester view one entire film. This could be a film that is currently in theaters, a film you own or rent, or a film you watch a television. In the scene analysis you are going to focus on one scene which could be the beginning, the middle or the end of the film. The film can come from any of the genres. Focus on a scene from the beginning, middle, or end of the film. You can analyze the film based on one of the four areas or mix elements of each. Your film review should include the bibliographic information for the film.

1. How it fits into a particular genre
2. The technical aspects of the film (camera angles, sound, etc.)
3. The aesthetic, artistic aspects of the film (theme, drama, message, expression)
4. A personal “reader response” reaction to the film

In your critique explain how the area occurs and how effective the film has been  
The review should be approximately 500 words, or two pages, typed, double-spaced. **It will be due Friday, April 26th.**

**Assignment #2:** 100 points

**Write a screenplay for a short film.** The script should be between 4-15 pages or represent no more than 15 minutes of film. Generally one page of script represents one minute of screen time. This may be done individually or in groups of no more than 5. The hook is due the beginning of the period on March 27<sup>th</sup>. Your script may come from experiences, be completely made up, or be an adaptation based on historical or real events or a novel, play, story, or other source matter. Rough Draft is due April 9<sup>th</sup>. **Due end of period Monday, April 16th. In order to complete the film on time you may want to have completed your group’s screenplay earlier.**

The screenplay should incorporate the following key elements

1. Fit within a genre (comedy, science fiction, action, drama, romance etc.)
2. Establish the context
3. Have developed, interesting characters—dialogue should match the personality of the characters
4. Create a conflict
5. Ask a central question (this is a plot question, not a thematic question)
6. Incorporate each of the following areas within the film:
  - A. Stage directions (what characters should do)
  - B. Technical directions including Camera Angles (how the camera sees the images and what images are, background etc.), special effects, or sound
  - C. Narration: Description of what is going on
  - D. Dialogue

**Assignment #3: 50 points**

**Film the scene and present to class. Films should be between 4 and 15 minutes. One page of double spaced dialogue generally equates to one minute of film. Films are due April 29th. Films should be PG-13 or lower. They should not involve mimicking drug or alcohol use! No Haymitches! If you use younger siblings or pets in the video, please receive your parent's permission first. 3**

## **Handout 1 Hook Game what is the film. Why would they want to see this?**

A man is about to commit suicide when an angel shows him what his town would be like if he had never lived.

Two people who hate each other meet anonymously and fall in love.

A group of unemployed men decide to put on a striptease act to earn some money.

A lawyer suddenly loses his ability to lie.

Some Jamaicans decide to enter the Olympics as a bobsled team, although there is no snow in Jamaica.

Three filmmakers went into the woods to tape a documentary on a legendary witch. These are the tapes we found after they disappeared.

There's a bomb on a crowded city bus. If the bus slows below 50 miles an hour, the bomb will go off.

A colonel in the Air Force, stranded by himself, works to stop mutants who have taken over New York City during the night because of a virus that the colonel inadvertently spread.

A trash-talking streetwise woman masquerades as a nun to hide from gangsters.

A billionaire weapons builder, creates a metal suit he uses to fight terrorists.

An FBI agent has to solicit the help of a convicted murderer in order to capture a serial killer.

A superhero working as an insurance adjuster tries to hide the fact that he has been called out of retirement to save the world from a mad scientist.

Two young people fall in love on a Cruise Ship that is quickly sinking in the Atlantic Ocean

### What if's?

A fish searches for his son who has swum away from the protective school of fish toward Australia's Sydney harbor.

What if you could talk to animals?

What if a government agent had one day to stop a terrorist attack?

What if an actor had to pretend to be a woman in order to get a female role on a soap opera?

## **Handout 2: Whitcomb's Checklist for coming up with a story idea**

Taken from Writing Your Screenplay (2002)

- Is my central character active?
- What's the problem?
- Can this story be told visually?
- What are the locations?
- Is it basically an external story or can it be externalize?
- What is the time frame?
- When does it take place?
- Does it involve another reality?
- Is there an antagonist?
- Is there a love story?
- Who are the other characters you need to tell this story?
- What's it all about?

Do You LOVE it?

Is it CASTABLE?

Can you imagine the BILLBOARD?

## **Handout 3: Viewing Guide for a Film (Whitcomb Writing Your Screenplay)**

When you watch your films think about the following/or after you see them reflect on what you have seen.

### **Act One:**

#### **The Set-up**

- **What is the setting?**
- **What background are we given about the characters/**
- **How is it that we are brought into the film (is it the beginning, middle, end)?**
- **Why are we where the film takes place?**

#### **The Catalyst (initiating event)**

- **What is the problem that presents itself? (usually in first fifteen minutes of the story) How does this set the action of the film in motion?**

#### **The Central Question (a story question not a thematic issue)**

- **What is the question viewers are asking themselves to keep them interested in the film?**  
(Will Buzz and Woody get home safely? Will Nemo's dad find him? Does Forrest marry Jenny? Does Indiana find the Holy Grail? Is Darth Luke's father? Does Frodo destroy the ring?)

#### **First Turning Point**

- **How does the story turn the story in a new direction?**
- **What is the Set up to Act Two going to be? ( change in setting, a new character, a subplot)**
- **How does it raise the stakes again (if possible)? (A new consequence, problem, etc)**
- **Does it re-ask the central question? Has a different possible outcome been introduced?**

### **Act Two:**

#### **Second turning point**

- **Does the film turn the direction of the story again**
- **Are the stakes raised again**
- **Has the clock started ticking? (Will Marty McFly set up his parents by the time of the dance? How long until the meteor hits the earth? Will Ferris get back to his house before Three O'Clock?**
- **What is the central question again?**

### **Act Three:**

- **How are we being driven toward the final resolution?**
- **The Climax**
- **The Conclusion (usually within five minutes of the climax)**

## **Handout 4: Parts of the Screenplay (Whitcomb)**

### The Spine

- Choosing a story
- Research
- Three-act Screenplay Structure
- Scene Cards and Storyboards
- Subplots
- Character Evolution
- Conflict
- Ticking Clock
- Structuring Scenes
- Set-ups
- Screenplay Format

### The Heart

- Switching to the Right Brain
- Falling in Love
- The Protagonist
- Castable Characters
- Surprises
- Dialogue
- Heroes and Villains
- FADE IN: Great Movie Openings
- Act Two Blues
- Climaxes
- A Great Ending

### The Mind

- Polishing your script
- Disguising exposition
- Collaboration
- Writing and Rights

### The Spirit

- Truth
- Support Systems
- Inspirations

## **Handout Five: Three Act Screenplay Story Structure**

### **Three Act Screenplay Structure (Classical Greek Tragedy Format—Whitcomb )**

Exposition-rising action-climax-falling action-resolution

Act One:

The Set-up

The Catalyst (initiating event)

The Central Question (a story question not a thematic issue)

First Turning Point

Act Two:

Second turning point

Turn the direction of the story again

Raise the stakes again

Start a ticking clock

Ask the central question again

Act Three:

The Climax

The Conclusion (usually within five minutes of the climax)

## **Handout 6: Dialogue Tips from Joe Epstein's Crafty Screenwriting**

**“Characters appear to be people, but are really the raw materials of story.”**

**Dialogue has two similar aspects.**

- 1. It has to move the story forward.**
- 2. It has to be believable as something you character might say.**

**Moving the story forward**

**A. Dialogue carries the drama.**

**Drama is conflict:**

**Drama occurs when one character wants something and another characters is in his/her way. Put the emotion in the lines, not in the action.**

**B. Dialogue tells us things we need to know**

**Believability vs. Realism**

**A. “Dialogue is not the same as talk. Talk is what real people do. Dialogue is what characters say. Dialogue might sound like talk, but it is really closer to what we remember people saying than what they actually said.”**

**“We say dialogue is “on the nose” when a character says exactly what’s on his mind without any of the evasiveness of real conversation.”**

**“There should always be tension between**

- 1. what your character is literally saying**
- 2. what your character intends to communicate**
- 3. what your character is thinking**

**B. Realistic versus snappy dialogue**

**Great dialogue is not only realistic. It is striking, fresh, and expressive. It penetrates the audience’s heart, it’s something we haven’t heard before, and it says a great deal in a few words.**

**C. Finding your character’s voice.**

**Your character’s voice should be consistent (individual character);**

**All characters should not sound the same**

**Avoid making characters stereotyped or cliched**



## Handout 7: Cinematic Terms

**Action.** Instruction to the performers to carry out the action of a scene being filmed. **Actor.** Man who plays a character in a film.

**Actress.** Woman who plays a character in a film.

### **backlighting**

lighting cast onto the figures from the side opposite the camera. It creates a thin outline of light on the figures' edge.

**Back projection.** Background scene projected onto a screen behind the action so that they seem to be on location. A convention of classic Hollywood cinema that can now look somewhat dated, it became a source of great critical debate on Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964), where its perceptual use was both attacked for technical sloppiness and defended as expressively meaningful.

**Bio-pic.** A biographical film of a famous personality particularly popularised by Warner Brothers in the 1930s. *e.g.* *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1936), *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937).

### **camera angle**

the position of the frame in relation to the subject it shows. A high angle is when camera is looking down, low angle when looking up.

**Camera angle.** Looking up, looking down, tilted (the latter used particularly effectively in *The Third Man* to suggest a word out of joint)

### **Catalyst**

This is the initiating event. Something happens that sets the story in motion.

### **Central Question:**

A story question that has to be answered by the end usually in the climax. I.E. Will the comet destroy the earth? Will Luke defeat Darth Vader? Will the waitress marry the wedding singer?

**Chiaroscuro.** A notable use of light and shade.

**Cinema verite.** Literally meaning "cinema truth"; it signified a kind of documentary cinema that used light-weight equipment, minimal crews (cameras and sound) and interview techniques.

### **Climax**

Resolves the central question, the conflict coming to a head.

### **Conclusion**

Wraps-up the story.

**Crane shot.** A shot where the camera is mounted on a crane and rises above the ground to offer an aerial perspective. A famous example is the shot in *High Noon* where the crane shot of the Marshal in the empty street prior to his confrontation with the four gunman emphasises his isolation, rejection and vulnerability.

**Cut.** Change from one shot to another.

- **Cross cutting.** Cutting back, giving the impression of parallel action and the two events happening simultaneously. Famous examples include the finale of D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), where the chase to save the pardoned hero from execution in the modern story is cross cut with Christ's procession to Calgary; and the scene in *The Godfather* (1972), where the baptism of Michael Corleone's godson is cross cut with the violent elimination of Corleone's underworld rivals.

### close-up

a framing in which the scale of the object shown is relatively large, most commonly a person's head seen from the neck up, or an object of a comparable size that fills most of the screen.

### **cut-in**

an instantaneous shift from a distant framing to a closer view of some portion of the same space.

### **dialogue overlap**

in editing a scene, arranging the cut so that a bit of dialogue or noise coming from shot A is heard under a shot of a character B or of another element in the scene.

### **diegesis**

in a narrative film, the world of the film's story. It includes events that are presumed to have occurred and actions and spaces not shown onscreen.

### **dissolve**

a transition between two shots during which the image of first shot gradually disappears while the image of the second shot gradually appears; for a moment the two images blend in *superimposition*.

### **establishing shot**

a shot, usually involving a distant framing, that shows the spatial relations among the important figures, objects, and setting in a scene.

### **extreme close-up**

a framing in which the scale of object is very large; most commonly, a small object or a part of the body. Also called *detail shot*

### **extreme long shot**

a framing in which the scale of the object shown is very small; a panoramic view of an exterior location photographed from a considerable distance, often as far as a quarter-mile away.

### **eyeline match**

a cut obeying the *axis of action* principle, in which the first shot shows a person looking off in one direction and the following shot shows a nearby space containing what he or she sees. If the person looks left, the following shot should imply that the looker is offscreen right.

## **fade**

1. **fade-in:** a dark screen that gradually brightens as a shot appears.
2. **fade-out:** a shot gradually darkens as the screen goes black (or brightens to pure white or to a color)

**Film noir.** Are films with a grim, urban setting that deal mainly with dark and violent passions in a downbeat way. Especially associated with American thrillers of the 1940s and early 1950s.

## **flash cutting**

editing the film into shots of very brief duration that succeed each other rapidly.

## **flash frame**

a shot of only a few frames duration, which can just barely be perceived by the audience.

## **flashback**

an alteration of story order in which the plot moves back in time to show events that have taken place earlier than the one already shown.

## **flashforward**

an alteration of story order in which the plot moves forward to future events, then returns to the present.

## **frequency**

in a narrative film, the aspect of temporal manipulation that involves the number of times any *story* event is shown in the *plot*.

**Genre.** A type or class of film (*e.g.* the musical, the western, etc.).

## **interpretation**

the viewer's activity of analyzing the implicit and symptomatic meanings suggested in a film.

## **linearity**

in a narrative, the clear motivation of a series of causes and effects that progress without significant digressions, delays, or irrelevant actions.

## **McGuffin**

Alfred Hitchcock's term for the device or plot element that catches the viewer's attention or drives the logic of the plot, but often turns out to be insignificant or is to be ignored after it has served its purpose. Examples are mistaken identity at the beginning of *North by Northwest* and the entire Janet Leigh subplot of *Psycho*.

## **meaning**

1. **Referential** meaning: allusion to particular pieces of shared prior knowledge outside the film which the viewer is expected to recognize.
2. **Explicit** meaning: meaning expressed overtly, usually in language and often near the film's beginning or end.
3. **Implicit** meaning: meaning left tacit, for the viewer to discover upon analysis or reflection.

4. **Symptomatic** meaning: meaning which the film divulges, often "against its will", by virtue of its historical or social context.

**mise-en-scene**

all the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed, that is, part of the cinematic process that take place on the set, as opposed to *montage*, which takes place afterward. It includes the settings and props, lighting, costumes and make-up, and figure behavior. Mise-en-scene tends to be very important to realists, montage to expressionists.

**montage**

1. a synonym for *editing*.
2. an approach to editing developed by the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920's; it emphasizes dynamic, often discontinuous, relationships between shots and the juxtaposition of images to create ideas not present in either one by itself. Also called *montage of attraction*
3. dynamic cutting - a highly stylized form of editing, often with the purpose of providing a lot of information in a short period of time.

**montage sequence**

a segment of film that summarizes a topic or compresses a passage of time into brief symbolic or typical image. Frequently, dissolves, fades, superimpositions, and wipes are used to link the images in a montage sequence.

**motif**

an recurrent thematic element in a film that is repeated in a significant way.

**motivation**

the justification given in film for the presence of an element

**Narrative.** The structured series of events, linked by cause and effect, that provide the film's plots.

**Narration.** The various means by which the events of the plot can be placed before the viewer. Also used of voice-over narration, a technique particularly associated with the fatalism of the film noir, like that of the mortally wounded hero in *Double Indemnity* (1944) or that of the dead man in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

Neo-realism. Is connected with movement out of the studio, shooting on real locations, sometimes the absence of a script and/or non-professional casts - all designed simultaneously to cut costs and increase the impression of spontaneity. In fact inaugurated by Renoir, but associated with Italian post-war directors (Rossellini, Visconti, De Sica).

**New wave.** A loose, heterogeneous group of young French critics (Chabrol, Rivette, Truffaut, Godard), who went into direction in the late 1950s and 1960s. Much influenced by Hollywood action cinema, they relied heavily on hand-held cameras, a laconic and non-moralistic style, a general sense of existential amorality.

**Pan.** The camera looks around from a stationary position. Can be used for dramatic effect as in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) when a panning shot reveals the presence of Indians just as the stagecoach seems to be heading to safety.

**Point of view shot.** Is a shot where the action is seen through the eyes of a particular character, the shot generally preceded or followed by a shot of the character looking. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) structures its whole action around this principle and Robert Montgomery's *The Lady in the Lake* (1948) also experimented with a subjective camera by showing us only what the leading character himself saw and only showing the character himself in the mirror.

### **persona**

from the Latin for "mask", a character in a literary, cinematic, or dramatic work. More precisely, the psychological image of the character that is created, especially in the relationship to the other levels of reality.

### **plot**

in a narrative film, all the events that are directly presented in the film, including their causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations; as opposed to *story*, which is the viewer's imaginary construction of all the events in the narrative.

### **point-of-view(POV) shot**

a shot taken with the camera placed approximately where the character's eyes would be, representing what the character sees; usually cut in before or after a shot of the character looking.

**Screwball comedy.** Type of comedy popular in the 1930s Hollywood characterised by frantic action, verbal wit and a couple in a bizarre predicament, e.g. Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), Hawke's *Bringing Up Baby* (1938).

### **sequence**

a term commonly used for moderately large segment of a film, involving one complete stretch of action and consisting of one or more scenes.

### **Set-up**

The first 15 minutes/pages are where you set up your story. Tell the audience the basic facts. Who are your main characters? Where and when does the story take place? What genre or style of movie is it?

### **short**

a film usually less than 30 minutes in length.

### **shot**

1. in shooting, one uninterrupted run of the camera to expose a series of frames. Also called a *take*.
2. In the finished film, one uninterrupted image with a single (static or mobile) framing.

### **shot/reverse shot**

two or more shots edited together that alternate characters, typically in a conversation situation. In *continuity editing*, characters in one framing usually look left, in the other framing, right. Over-the-shoulder framings are common in shot/reverse-shot editing.

**Shot.** Single piece of film without cuts: long shot, medium shot, close shot or close up.

- **Tracking shot.** Is where the camera moves about in order to follow subject, a technique taken to its extreme in the continuous opening shot of Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958) or Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992) and in Hitchcock's use of ten minutes takes in *Rope* (1948)

### **special effects**

a general term for various photographic manipulations that create fictitious spatial relations in the shot, such as *superimposition*, *matte shots*, and *rear projection*.

### **surrealism**

a movement in painting and film during the 1920's best represented by Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel; also a film style reminiscent of that movement, either fantastic or psychologically distortive.

### **synchronous sound**

sound that is matched temporally with movements occurring in the images, as when dialogue corresponds to lip movements.

### **Turning Point**

Act one turns the story in a new direction. Set up what Act Two is going to be about. Raises the stakes (if possible). Re-ask the central question now with possibly a different outcome.

### **verisimilitude**

the quality of appearing to be true or real.

### **viewing time**

the length of time it takes to watch a film when it is projected at the appropriate speed.

### **wide-angle lens**

a lens of short focal length that affects the scene's perspective by distorting straight lines near the edges of the frame and by exaggerating the distance between foreground and background planes. In 35mm filming, a wide-angle lens is 30mm or less. Produces the opposite effect of *telephoto lens*.

### **zoom lens**

a lens with a focal length that can be changed during a shot. A shift toward the telephoto range enlarges the images and flattens its planes together, giving an impression of moving into the scene's space, while a shift toward wide-angle range does the opposite.

**Zoom shot.** A shot during which the focal length of the lens is adjusted and gives the impression of optical motion without moving the camera backwards or forwards. The zoom lens is a particularly favoured piece of apparatus of the directors such as Robert Altman and Stanley Kubrick.

## **Handout 7: Classic Films**

### **Action/Adventure/Mystery/Suspense**

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969)  
The Fugitive (1993)  
Independence Day (1996)  
Jaws (1975)  
Jurassic Park (1993)  
Lord of the Rings (2001-2003)  
The Magnificent Seven (1961)  
The Manchurian Candidate (1962)  
Men in Black (1997)  
Mission Impossible (1996)  
North By Northwest (1959)

Pelican Brief (1993)  
Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)  
Rear Window (1954)  
Saving Private Ryan (1998)  
Sixth Sense (1999)  
Spartacus (1960)  
Speed (1994)  
Star Wars (1977-1983; 1999-2005)  
Titanic (1997)

### **Dramas**

Amadeus (1984)  
Casablanca (1943)  
Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)  
Dances with Wolves (1990)  
Forrest Gump (1994)  
In the Heat of the Night (1967)  
On the Waterfront (1954)  
Rocky (1976)  
Schindler's List (1994)  
Titanic (1997)

### **Comedy**

Airplane (1980)  
American Graffiti (1973)  
Big (1988)  
Bruce Almighty (2003)  
Chicago (2003)  
Dr. Strangelove (1964)  
Finding Nemo (2003)  
Fish Called Wanda (1988)  
Ghostbusters (1984)  
Heaven Can Wait (1978)  
Monty Python's Holy Grail (1975)  
Monster's Inc (2001)  
Princess Bride (1987)  
Pirates of the Caribbean (2003)  
Nutty Professor (1963, 1996)  
Shrek (2001)  
Some Like It Hot (1959)  
Mrs. Doubtfire (1993)  
Sound of Music (1965)  
Tootsie (1982)  
West Side Story (1961)

Apollo 13 (1995)  
Cast Away (2000)  
Color Purple (1985)  
E.T. (1982)  
From Here to Eternity (1953)  
Malcolm X. (1992)  
Psycho (1960)  
Saving Private Ryan (1998)  
Sunset Boulevard (1950)

