

# advanced film & television writing

**Course #:** COMM 6 - Online  
**Instructor:** Adam Wadenius  
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**Course Website:**

<https://etudes-ng.fhda.edu/portal/site/!gateway/page/!gateway-400>

**Office Hours:** Email or online by appointment  
**Semester:** Spring 2009  
**Website:** [www.apwadenius.com](http://www.apwadenius.com)

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## course description

This course will focus on the art and craft of screenwriting for film and television. Specific attention will be paid to the study of film and television narrative, genre conventions, and the creation of well-written characters as a means toward an advanced comprehension of the screenwriting process. The ultimate goal for each student will be to write an original feature length screenplay or a full-length dramatic/comedic teleplay. The course will be broken into three parts. In the first section we will examine the nature of narrative, and analyze the significance of genre in film and television studies. In section B, we will explore the components needed to build believable characters, how to develop strong character relationships, and the ins-and-outs of writing effective dialogue. The final stretch of the course will focus on outlining, structuring, and writing your original screen/teleplay.

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## student learning outcomes

A collaborative learning environment is vital to the success of this course, and each of you will be required to respond to the work of your peers at various stages of the semester through written assignments and in discussion sessions. It is expected that upon completion of this course, you will have a solid understanding of the following:

- ~ Film and television as narrative mediums
- ~ The generic conventions of the film and TV industry
- ~ The core concepts surrounding character development for film and television
- ~ The writing process for completing an original feature length screenplay or teleplay

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## course requirements

**Attendance:** Because this course meets via the internet, there are no specific meeting requirements or scheduled lecture times. It is expected, however, that you log into the course website at least once a week to complete any assignments, workshop with fellow classmates, complete course readings, and check for any updates to the materials. You may find that you will have to log into the site multiple times per week to download readings, coordinate workshops, and submit assignments. ***You are responsible for completing the modules, screenplay/teleplay readings, workshops and assignments every week.*** Please email me if, for some reason, you cannot complete a section during any given week. Emergencies will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

**Script & Module Readings:** It is imperative that you read all of the script assignments each week. The weekly screenplay/teleplay readings are designed to aid in your understanding of the learning objectives for the course, and will also work to your benefit in terms of understanding proper screenplay format, and will enhance your appreciation for the great scripts that have been written throughout film and TV history.

**Discussion, Messages & Chat:** You are expected to be actively involved in the class workshops, message boards and chat room. Be respectful of your fellow classmates when addressing and critiquing conflicting viewpoints, opening message topics, and when chatting.

**Assignment Guidelines:** There are a total of eleven writing and six workshop assignments for this course. All assignments are due on the designated due dates without exception. No late assignments will be accepted. All emergency situations leading to late assignments will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Good writing skills are a must in this course. I encourage you to take a proactive approach to your work, and I'm happy to field any questions or concerns that you may be having about any of the assignments.

**\*\* 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 essays, exams, and notes until you have received a final grade for this class. ~

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assessments

Writing Assignments (11)	25%
Workshop Sessions (6)	25%
Original Screenplay	50%

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texts & materials

The required textbook for this course is available in the campus bookstore. All other readings will be posted on the course website:

***Required***

1. Creating Unforgettable Characters, by Linda Seger. Henry Holt & Co. LLC, New York: 1990.
2. Selected essays available through the course website in the **'Modules'** section.
3. Selected screenplays available through the course website in the **'Resources'** section.

***Recommended***

1. Screenplay, by Syd Field. Dell Publishing, New York: 1994.

*Please remember that if you have any questions about the scripts, assignments, readings, or any of the course materials that I am readily available to help answer them. I can be reached through the email address above, or through the email and messaging system on the course website.*

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schedule

~ Narrative Form & Genre ~

**week 1 ~ introduction to storytelling**

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Reading: "Ch. 1 – The Nature of Narratives", from Narratives in Popular Culture, Media and Everyday Life, by Arthur Asa Berger. SAGE Publications, London: 1997.

Screenplay: *The Sixth Sense* by M. Night Shyamalan

Assignment: Decide what kind of script you want to write for your final project, and write out a one-page summary of the idea you wish to pursue. Remember that you must complete one of the following three script assignments:

1. Write a feature length screenplay for a film
2. Write a one-hour long dramatic TV teleplay
3. Write two, half-hour long TV sit-com scripts

## week 2 ~ film narrative

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Reading: "Cb. 2 pgs. 25-29", from Television: Critical Methods and Applications by Jeremy G. Butler. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ: 2007.

"Part 4 – Cinema Narration", from Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video by John Ellis. Routledge & Keegan Paul, New York, NY: 2000.

Screenplay: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* by Lawrence Kasdan

Assignment: Write a 1-2 page analysis of the underlying structure of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, identifying the Set-up, Confrontation, Resolution, and Plot Points I & II. See the "Screenplay Paradigm" section for a review of the above concepts.

## week 3 ~ television narrative

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Reading: "Cb. 2 pgs. 55-48", from Television: Critical Methods and Applications by Jeremy G. Butler. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ: 2007.

"Part 9 – Broadcast TV Narration", from Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video by John Ellis. Routledge & Keegan Paul, New York, NY: 2000.

Screenplay: *Sex and the City* – Episode 201, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" by Michael Patrick King

Assignment: Write a 1-2 page analysis of each of the stories ('A', 'B', 'C', etc.) in *Sex and the City*. Is this a character-driven, or plot driven show, and what defines it as such? See the "TV Teleplay Structure" section for a review of the above concepts.

## week 4 ~ film genre

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Reading: "Genre", by Andrew Tudor. Film Genre Reader, Barry Keith Grant, ed. Austin : University of Texas Press, 1986.

"The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema", by Edward Buscombe. Film Genre Reader, Barry Keith Grant, ed. Austin : University of Texas Press, 1986.

Screenplay: *Some Like It Hot*, by Billy Wilder & I.A.L. Diamond

Workshop: Post a copy of your assignment from Week 1 in the 'Story Ideas' topic located in the 'Discussions' section. Read at least two ideas submitted by your fellow classmates, and write a 1-2 paragraph response for each. Offer any feedback you might have about the Material: your overall thoughts, what you feel works, what parts might need more polishing, any questions you may have, etc.

## week 5 ~ television genre

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Reading: "Introduction: What is Genre? pgs. 1-7", from The Television Genre Book Edited by Glen Creeber. BFI Publishing, London: 2001.

Screenplay: *Deadwood* – Episode 1, "Pilot" by David Milch

Assignment: Write a 4-5 page treatment for your screen/teleplay. Your goal is produce the narrative synopsis of your script, making sure to give a sense of your script's context and genre, a basic outline of its key characters, and all of the major plot points including the set-up, confrontation, and the resolution. Submit a copy to me as an 'Assignment', and post a copy in the 'Treatment' topic located in the 'Discussions' section to be workshopped by your fellow classmates.

~ Developing Characters ~

## week 6 ~ the importance of character research

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Reading: "Cb. 1 - Researching the Character" in Creating Unforgettable Characters

Screenplay: *24* – Episode 25, "Day 2" by Joel Surnow & Michael Loceff

Workshop: Read at least two treatments submitted by your fellow classmates, and write a 1-2 paragraph response for each.

### week 7 ~ fleshing-out your character

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Reading: “*Ch. 2 - Defining the Character*” in Creating Unforgettable Characters

Screenplay: *The Big Lebowski*, by Joel & Ethan Coen

Assignment: Write a 3-4 page character biography for your main character. Submit a copy to me as an ‘Assignment’, and post a copy in the ‘Treatment’ topic located in the ‘Discussions’ section to be workshopped by your fellow classmates. See the “*Creating Solid Characters*” section for a review of the above concepts.

### week 8 ~ understanding character history

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Reading: “*Ch. 5 - Creating the Backstory*” in Creating Unforgettable Characters

Screenplay: *Network*, by Paddy Chayefsky

Workshop: Read at least two character bios submitted by your fellow classmates, and write a 1-2 paragraph response for each.

### week 9 ~ character interaction

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Reading: “*Ch. 5 - Creating Character Relationships*” in Creating Unforgettable Characters

Screenplay: *Sports Night* – Episode 1, “Pilot” by Aaron Sorkin

Assignment: Turn in a draft of Act 1 of your screen/teleplay. Submit a copy to me as an ‘Assignment’, and post a copy in the ‘Act 1’ topic located in the ‘Discussions’ section to be workshopped by your fellow classmates.

### week 10 ~ the supporting cast

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Reading: “*Ch. 6 - Adding Supporting and Minor Characters*” in Creating Unforgettable Characters

Screenplay: *Traffic*, by Steven Gaghan

Workshop: Read at least two Act 1 drafts by *Wednesday, 10/29* and write a 1-2 paragraph response for each.

Assignment: Turn in a revised draft of your first Act by week’s end.

### week 11 ~ writing realistic dialogue

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Reading: “*Ch. 7 - Writing Dialogue*” in Creating Unforgettable Characters

Screenplay: *Jackie Brown*, by Quentin Tarantino

Assignment: Turn in a draft of Act 2 of your screen/teleplay. Submit a copy to me as an ‘Assignment’, and post a copy in the ‘Act 2’ topic located in the ‘Discussions’ section to be workshopped by your fellow classmates.

~ *Writing the Screenplay/Teleplay* ~

### week 12 ~ writing the second act

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Screenplay: *Being John Malkovich*, by Charlie Kaufman

Workshop: Read at least two Act 2 drafts by *Wednesday, 11/12* and write a 1-2 paragraph response for each.

Assignment: Turn in a revised draft of your second Act by week’s end.

### week 13 ~ approaching the third act

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Screenplay: *The Office – Episode 20, “The Carpet”* by Paul Leiberstein

Assignment: Turn in a draft of Act 3 of your screen/teleplay (If you chose to write two comedy scripts, this will be a draft of the first act of your second script. If you chose to write a dramatic teleplay, turn in Acts 3 & 4). Submit a copy to me as an ‘Assignment’, and post a copy in the ‘Acts 3’ topic located in the ‘Discussions’ section to be workshopped by your fellow classmates.

**week 14 ~ writing the third act**

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Screenplay: *Rocky*, by Sylvester Stallone

Workshop: Read at least two Act 3 drafts and write a 1-2 paragraph response for each.

Assignment: Turn in a revised draft of your first Act by week's end.

**week 15 - polishing your screenplay**

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Screenplay: *The Wire - Episode 510, "50"* by David Simon

Workshop: Use this time to workshop and finalize ideas with your fellow classmates.

Assignment: Continue writing and polishing the final draft of your screen/teleplay.

**week 16 ~ the finished product**

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**\*\*Final Screenplay/Teleplay due\*\***