



Master of Entertainment Industry Management

<p>Course Information</p>	<p>Introduction to Writing for Television Spring 2021 Course Number: 93.870 Semester Credit Hours: 3</p> <p>Class 1: Saturday, February 20 - 2:00 – 5:00pm Class 2: Saturday, March 27 - 2:00 – 5:00pm Class 3: Saturday, April 17 - 2:00 – 5:00pm Class 4: Saturday, May 8 - 2:00 – 5:00pm</p> <p>Instructor: Emily Skopov eskopov@andrew.cmu.edu, (724) 759-5658</p>
<p>Description</p>	<p>Television has become a constant in our lives. The variety of unique voices has produced some of the best storytelling in decades. Some critics have stated that television is going through a renewed golden age. The explosion of U.S. scripted content has increased the appetite for original stories both domestically and internationally. In addition, the expansion of streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon have further expanded the global content market. As U.S. networks and distributors seek content, more opportunities for new voices and new points of view are welcomed. This introductory class will focus on the fundamentals of writing for television with an emphasis on pitching and writing a television pilot. In addition to covering style and format, emphasis will be given to story ideas, outlines, structure, and marketability.</p>
<p>Class Sharing</p>	<p>Two of the most fundamental characteristics of television scripts are that they are: 1) ultimately intended to be produced by a large number of professionals, including actors, who will bring the dialogue to life; 2) written to be read by others, and if the writer is lucky, the script will go on to be read by many people. Consequently, this class takes the view that anyone interested in learning the craft of writing for television must be at least minimally comfortable (or willing to accept) that the work will be shared with others as a critical and necessary part of the process.</p> <p>Though there is no expectation that you will perform dialogue, some of our assignments and in-class exercises might include having dialogue referenced aloud as part of a discussion. Work will be shared not only with the instructor, but with one’s classmates. Anything less than complete respect for the work of every single student, regardless of experience level, will not be tolerated. Sharing one’s writing publicly is an act of trust, and even the most seasoned professional must frequently conquer their own feelings of vulnerability. Giving and receiving notes on a script are a fundamental aspect of the writing process. As such, feedback and critiques will be given -- and accepted -- with maturity, sensitivity, and in the positive spirit of wishing to help one another grow and improve. Regardless of the varying degrees of writing experience that each student brings to this class, the goal here is to advance beyond one’s previous knowledge and capabilities while learning the fundamental aspects of the craft of tv writing.</p>
<p>Required Viewings:</p>	<p>Prior to our first class on Feb. 20th: <i>Bridgerton</i> pilot (Netflix), <i>Resident Alien</i> pilot (SyFy). More will be posted as the class progresses.</p>
<p>Assignments</p>	<p>As this is an introductory class, lessons and assignments may build on one another, making it difficult to catch up if you fall behind. Additionally, due to its introductory nature, the importance of the assignments will be more about allowing students to learn and experience the vocabulary, artistic and technical elements, and processes of television writing, as opposed to an emphasis on the quality of output. Effort, intention and attitude, an interest in the creative aspects (and how they fit with the business issues), will be given more weight. This is an opportunity to tap into and explore your own creative impulses and vision, and you will be encouraged to enjoy the process of creating rather than stress about the end result.</p>

Learning/Course Objectives	By the end of the course, students should be able to:		
	Learning Objective	How Assessed	
	Identify the differences between writing for TV and writing for films	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In class discussions ● Written and oral pitches of individual series ideas. 	
	Analyze different television formats with an emphasis on limited series (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple +, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In class discussions 	
	Examine what makes marketable, compelling characters & stories; identifying different types of story and plot engines of episodic series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-class discussions ● Original series idea assignment ● Written and/oral pitch ● Character breakdown, written pilot episode treatment deliverable, written pilot outline deliverable 	
	Create and revise a treatment, outline, and first act of an original pilot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-class discussions ● Written treatment deliverable ● Character breakdown and story outline ● First act of pilot (with revisions) ● 	
	Analyze the content and structure of a pilot episode.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-class discussions ● Original series idea ● First act of pilot (with revisions) 	
	** If time allows: How to structure an entire season of a show, including character and story arcs, and how a good pilot lays the foundation for all that follows.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-class discussions ● Written breakdown of what a season of your proposed series would look like in terms of each episode's logline 	
Evaluation Method	The focus of the grading will be divided in the following areas.		
	Assignment/Test/Quiz (More information is available on Canvas)	Percentage	Due Date (may change depending on class schedule) Times are Eastern Standard
	1. Original Series Idea	5%	Feb. 15th
	2. Oral Pitch Presentation	5%	May 8th
	3. Character Breakdown	10%	Mar. 12th
	4. Story Treatment	20%	Mar. 12th
	5. Story Outline	25%	Apr. 10th
	6. Scripted Act One of pilot episode: 1st draft & revised draft	30%	May 1st/May 12th
	7. Class process, readings, exercises, participation and development	5%	On-Going

Class Participation Rubric	Grading for Class Participation				
		A Grade	B Grade	C Grade	D/R Grade
	Frequency and Quality	Attends class regularly via zoom and <i>always contributes</i> to the discussion by raising thoughtful questions, analyzing relevant issues, building on others' ideas, synthesizing across readings and discussions, expanding the class' perspective, and appropriately challenging assumptions and perspectives	Attends class regularly via zoom and <i>sometimes contributes</i> to the discussion in the aforementioned ways.	Attends class regularly via zoom but <i>rarely contributes</i> to the discussion in the aforementioned ways.	Attends class regularly via zoom but <i>never contributes</i> to the discussion in the aforementioned ways.
Grading Scale*	A+	99.0-100%	Exceptional		
	A	94.0-98.9%	Excellent		
	A-	91.0-93.9%	Very Good		
	B+	88.0-90.9%	Good		
	B	84.0-87.9%	Acceptable		
	B-	81.0-83.9%	Fair		
	C+	78.0-80.9%	Poor		
	C	74.0-77.9%	Minimum Passing		
	C-	71.0-73.9%	Failing		
Plagiarism and cheating notice*	<p>Plagiarism</p> <p>Plagiarism and other forms of academic misrepresentation are viewed as extremely serious matters. Misrepresentation of another's work as one's own is widely recognized as among the most serious violations. The violation is clearly flagrant when it occurs as plagiarism on a required paper or as cheating on an examination, including take-home as well as in-class examinations. The punishment for such offenses can involve expulsion from the MEIM Program and Heinz School.</p> <p>Cheating includes, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plagiarism (explained below); ● Submission of work that is not the student's own; ● Submission or use of falsified data; ● Unauthorized access to an exam or assignment; ● Use of a stand-in for an exam; ● Use of unauthorized material in the preparation of an assignment or during an examination; ● Supplying or communicating unauthorized information to another student for use in an assignment or exam; ● Unauthorized collaboration on an assignment. Collaboration must be explicitly permitted by an instructor for it to be considered authorized. ● Submission of the same work for credit in more than one course. <p>Plagiarism is the failure to indicate the source of work either with quotation marks or footnotes. The source can be a phrase, a graphic element, a proof, specific language, or an idea derived from the work of another person. Note that material on the web is another person's work and is therefore equally subject to the rules on plagiarism and cheating as any other source material.</p>				

	<p>Cheating and/or plagiarism on an essay assignment will result in a failing grade (0 points) for that assignment. The essay in which the cheating occurs will not be excluded from the offending student's assignments included in grade calculations; the points for that essay zero (0) will be factored into the grade.</p> <p>A cheating student's final grade will be impacted significantly. In addition, cases of cheating and plagiarism will be submitted to and reviewed by the Dean's Office; more severe penalties may be imposed, up to and including expulsion from the Heinz School.</p>
<p>Note About Sensitive Materials</p>	<p>Some of the films and TV shows we will be discussing might examine issues related to race, class, gender, violence, etc. If you find yourself uncomfortable with a particular topic and feel able to share this with me with enough advanced notice, I will endeavor to find alternative materials that are less upsetting. However, you will always be free to excuse yourself if for some reason a discussion brings up personal discomfort due to subject matter. Our classroom should be a safe space for you to explore and discuss material and you must do what you need to in order to take care of yourself and your classmates.</p>
<p>Diversity Statement</p>	<p>We must treat every individual with respect. We are diverse in many ways, and this diversity is fundamental to building and maintaining an equitable and inclusive campus community. We, at CMU, will work to promote diversity, equity and inclusion. It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit.</p>
<p>Course Policies & Expectations *</p>	<p>Absences/ Tardy: Due to the very limited time allotted to this course, <u>I cannot stress strongly enough how important it is that you do your best to attend all four class sessions</u>, though I recognize that emergencies do happen. If you know you are going to be late or have to miss a class, please contact me prior to class via email.</p>
<p>Mechanics of assignments and feedback</p>	<p>As you look at the below schedule for our class discussions, preparation work, and deliverables, you will notice that nearly all of your written assignments need to be submitted at a date that is somewhere <u>between</u> class sessions. This is to both allow you ample time to complete them (especially if you need to reach out to me and ask for any help or further guidance), and ample time for me to read them and give feedback prior to the following class session. This is especially important for your final assignment, which is the writing of the 1st act of your pilot script.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You will note from the below table that you will turn in the 1st draft of your Act 1 script on May 1st, which is a week before our final class. My aim is to provide feedback as quickly as possible, so that you have optimal time in which to do revisions. ● The revised draft will be due on May 12th, four days <u>after</u> our final class session, so that I have enough time to evaluate them before final grades are due for the semester. <p>For the most part, feedback will be given as written notes. Additional feedback can be given during office hours, which I will be announcing shortly.</p> <p>Unless you are instructed otherwise, submissions will be uploaded to canvas. I will be providing further information on this soon, once I have our canvas site more organized.</p>
<p>Course/Topical Outline:</p>	<p>PRIOR TO CLASS #1</p> <p>Prep work: To be completed by 1st class on Feb. 20th</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Watch pilots for <i>Bridgerton</i> (Netflix) and <i>Resident Alien</i> (SyFy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We will be discussing these in our first class <p>Deliverable: DUE 2/15</p> <p>3 Original scripted series ideas for a 1-hr. drama/dramedy. These can be for a traditional network (NBC, ABC, CBS, etc.), Cable (HBO, SHO, etc.) or for a streaming service. (Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, etc.). Note that none of these ideas should be for a project that you have done or are doing for a different class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Only a paragraph</u> for each series idea. (I will be posting examples to canvas asap). Each must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A working title (doesn't have to be perfect, just something we can use to refer to it; don't waste your valuable time getting hung up on this and feeling compelled to be witty, clever or a marketing genius).

- The main concept, ie: how you would briefly explain it to a friend, such as: “This is a show about...”
- A general sense of at least two main characters
- The world in which it takes place -- ie: a law firm, a hospital, a poor urban area, upscale suburbs, a college campus, a colony on Mars. And if it doesn’t take place in the present, please explicitly state the time period
- Submit in a written document to me with all three ideas.

BY FEBRUARY 18th, I will post a document compiling all students’ three ideas (without identifying names). They will be kept in their original sets of 3.

- Review document
- Make notes for yourself of which is your favorite series idea of each student, and which you feel they should work on for the purposes of this class. You must have these notes handy during our first class on Feb. 20th, as we will be voting IN CLASS to select the favorite idea of each student’s submissions. (Again, this will be done without names attached to the ideas, and your votes will also be anonymous)

Class 1 – Saturday, February 20 - 2:00 – 5:00pm

Topic

Discussion:

Looking at the medium of television from various angles:

- Episodic TV series vs. Feature Films
- Limited series vs. ongoing series
- Anthologies (such as *The Sinner*) are an interesting kind of hybrid between limited and ongoing series.
- Various storytelling modes even among ongoing series such as *The Crown* vs. *Law & Order* vs. *This is Us*

Which is more important: Story or Character?

Character Breakdowns:

- How to do them
- Why they’re important.

Thinking about your pilot’s story/plot engine:

- What is the central/ongoing conflict and engine of your series?
- Is it more or less a “day in the life of” a la *Grey’s Anatomy*, or is there a long-term, overarching goal, such as solving a particular crime, reaching a destination or escaping from prison?
- What is pushing/motivating our characters week after week?

Treatments & Outlines:

- In this class, we’ll talk about these two different types of documents and the structure of each, and how they will help you prepare to write your script.

In-class Poll

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the notes you kept after reviewing all students' submitted series ideas, you will vote on your favorite for each set of 3. I will reach out to students individually to let them know which of their ideas received the most votes, as this will be the idea the student will focus on and develop for the duration of the class. <p>*****WRITING IS REWRITING!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is perhaps the single most important lesson I will teach you about any kind of writing, but especially creative writing. If you really grasp this, it will make writing a somewhat less stressful endeavor (or at least minimize any self-criticisms and self-doubt).
		<p>DUE MARCH 12TH (+20 days from this session):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Character breakdown: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 paragraph per character Ideally identify protagonist and antagonist. If you have trouble identifying which is the protagonist and which is the antagonist in your story, please reach out to let me know, and we will discuss it outside of class. Identify a minimum of 4 characters. Treatment: 2.5-5 pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Really just a narrative prose version of the story you plan to tell in your pilot episode. (Note: This can change, but give it a go. Even thinking about it and writing it down will help you realize whether or not this is really the story you want to tell. You will be able to evolve this story prior to subsequent assignments.) Articulation of your plot's engine in 1 or 2 sentences. This will be written at the top of your treatment document.
Prep work for next class		<p>FOR NEXT CLASS ON MARCH 27TH (+5 weeks from this session):</p> <p>TBD: Readings and/or viewings</p>
Class 2 – Saturday, March 27 - 2:00 – 5:00pm		
Topic		<p>Discussion:</p> <p>Review differences between a treatment (which you just did) and an outline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> View sample outline Preparation for the next assignment. <p>Examine anatomy of a scene:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at examples <p>TV script format</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will share some examples Suggestions for screenwriting software <p>Elements of a good tv series</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Originality • Marketability • Story potential. <p>What were some memorable series?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you remember their pilot episode? <p>What were some bad TV series?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did they fail?
Deliverable	<p>Due Apr. 10th (+2 weeks from this session)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline: 5-10 pages • Written scene <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Must be from the 1st act of the pilot script you'll be writing as your final assignment ○ Minimum 1.5 pages long. ○ Something significant has to happen in it that makes us curious to read/see/know what comes next; must either drive the plot forward, or impart new information about your character(s), or both!
Prep work for next class	<p>BY APR. 17TH class session (+3 weeks from this session):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD: Reading and/or viewing of 1st acts I will be assigning.

Class 3 – Saturday, April 17 - 2:00 – 5:00pm

Topic	<p>Preparing to write the 1st act of your pilot:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share/discuss examples from reading and/or viewing I will have assigned at the end of last class. • Analyze the first acts of the viewing/reading material. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What did they accomplish? ○ How did they accomplish them? ○ Address form, structure. ○ Character, story engine. <p>How to pitch: (you will be pitching in the final class, +3 weeks from this session!)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of the pitch. • Structure • Format • What should be included • Things to consider, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The buyer ○ The target audience, ○ Are there other shows out there that are similar? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ If so, how is yours different/better? ○ Why is now a good time for this series? <p>Imagine the arc of your series' season: For the purposes of this exercise, <u>we will establish that all of your series have a run of 6 episodes.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Come up with a logline (a brief few sentences) for all episodes, 1-6.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Episode 1 should be easy, as this is your pilot! ○ Episode 6 should have a sense of finality, as though this is a limited series. ● In-class exercise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work on the loglines for episodes 1-3. You will finish this document at home and submit it by our next class session.
	Deliverable	<p>DUE MAY 1ST (+2 weeks from this session):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1st draft of Act 1 of pilot in script format. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can be a true first act (if it's a network show) or something that feels like it could be. ○ Must be a minimum of 12 pages, and no more than 20 pages. ○ The final scene should be one of significance, ie: a cliffhanger, not an arbitrary stopping point. <u>Something which changes things.</u> <p>DUE MAY 8TH by 12 pm EST (+3 weeks from this session)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Completed series arc document, with loglines for all 6 episodes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Length of 1-2 pages ○ Note: this will be evaluated as part of your class participation grade.
	Prep work for next class	<p>FOR MAY 8TH CLASS SESSION:</p> <p>Prepare to pitch your series!! Be sure to practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aim for a minimum 3 minute and no longer than 10-minute pitch. ● You can integrate props if you'd like! ● If necessary, you can use notes for yourself if you can't memorize it. ● Think about where you'd want to sell this, and why. <p>TBD: assigned readings on the art of the pitch, which should also help you prepare.</p>
Class 4 - Saturday, May 8 - 2:00 – 5:00pm		
	Topic	<p>Pitch Fest!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Along with me, students will take turns being the executives to whom the idea is being pitched. ● "Executives" will be able to ask questions and give feedback.
	Deliverable	<p>DUE MAY 12TH (+4 days from this session)</p> <p>Revised version of Act 1 script based on my feedback of your 1st draft and any discussions we might have.</p>