

London South Bank University

BA (Hons) Creative Writing

Writing the Short Film



AME-4-WSF – 2011/12

Department of Culture, Writing and
Performance

Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences

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1. MODULE DETAILS

Module Title:	Writing the Short Film
Module Level:	4
Module Reference Number:	AME-4-WSF
Credit Value:	20
Student Study Hours:	150
Contact Hours:	44
Private Study Hours:	105
Pre-requisite Learning (If applicable):	None
Co-requisite Modules (If applicable):	None
Course(s):	BA (Hons) Creative Writing; BA (Hons) English with Creative Writing
Year and Semester	Year 1, Semester 2
Module Coordinator:	Dr Karlien van den Beukel; Phil O'Shea
MC Contact Details (Tel, Email, Room)	Tel: 0207 815 5441 Email: vbeukelk@lsbu.ac.uk Room B462, Borough Road Phil O'Shea Email: osheap2@lsbu.ac.uk
Teaching Team & Contact Details (If applicable):	BA (Hons) Creative Writing and BA (Hons) English with Creative Writing
Subject Area:	
Summary of Assessment Method:	The pass mark for this module is 40% overall. Assessment 1 Step Outline (10%) providing a break-down of the script, due at the end of Week 5, Thursday 1 March 2012 Assessment 2 Students are asked to submit script for a five to ten minute short film (65%), due in the middle of Week 12, Wednesday 9 May 2012 Assessment 3 Reflective Essay (25%), due in Week 13, Wednesday 16 May 2012

2. SHORT DESCRIPTION

This module introduces you to the codes and conventions of writing scripts for short films. In the course of twelve weeks, we'll explore foundational concepts associated with the production of scripts for moving image media. The module builds upon semester one work in its exploration of structure, plot, dialogue and characterisation in relation to screen-based media. Writing the Short Film also explores script format, storyboarding and approaches to composition and editing. The module is assessed on the basis of a Step Outline indicating the structure of the script, the script itself and a Reflective Essay analysing the process.

3. AIMS OF THE MODULE

The aims of this module are to:

- Introduce you to the codes and conventions associated with writing scripts for short films
- Outline approaches to structure, plotting, dialogue and characterisation for short films
- Introduce concepts of moving image language, including visual composition, visual editing and use of sound
- Impress upon you the importance of rewriting

4. LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of this module, you'll be able to:

4.1 Knowledge and Understanding

- Illustrate some understanding of the specific characteristics of scripting the short film
- Demonstrate some awareness of the markets for short films in the United Kingdom and internationally

4.2 Intellectual Skills

- Understand the difference between story, structure and plot, building on complementary ideas explored in Writing for Performance
- Demonstrate awareness of visual methods of exposition

4.3 Practical Skills

- Evaluate critically professionally produced work
- Learn to layout script according to professional standards

4.4 Transferable Skills

- Indicate a critical vocabulary and analytical skills relevant to moving image narrative
- Show skills in structuring, writing and editing

5. ASSESSMENT OF THE MODULE

The pass mark for this module is 40% overall.

Assessment 1

- Step Outline (10%) providing a break-down of the script due Thursday 1 March 2012

Assessment 2

- You're required to submit a script for a five to ten minute short film (65%), due Wednesday 9 May 2012

Assessment 3

- Reflective Essay (25%), due Wednesday 16 May 2012

6. FEEDBACK

MARKING AND FEEDBACK

Work will be returned with feedback and a percentage grade between 0% and 100%. The grade remains provisional until confirmed by the July Examination Board. Any student who would like to discuss their coursework in more detail should make an appointment to see the Module Co-ordinator.

Feedback will normally be given to students 20 working days after the submission of an assignment.

MARKS FOR COURSEWORK SUBMITTED LATE

Coursework submitted within two weeks of the deadline will be **capped**. Coursework submitted more than two weeks after the deadline will be **failed**. The July Examination Board will decide whether the student is to be given the opportunity to redeem failure, provided that the student has submitted a claim for extenuating circumstances which has been accepted by the Board.

Refer to your Course Guide for more information on extenuating circumstances.

STUDENT FEEDBACK AND MODULE EVALUATIONS

Students are strongly advised to speak to the lecturer as soon as possible if they have any concerns about the module. This is the best way to ensure that the lecturer is aware of your concerns immediately and can address them as best as possible. Alternatively, students can see their Course Director.

Once a term, students may ask the student representative to raise specific issues regarding modules at the Course Board meetings.

Students will be asked to complete an anonymous module evaluation in Week 10, 11 or 12. Module evaluations are an important part of the University's quality assurance systems and provide a valuable mechanism for obtaining student feedback and identifying ways in which the module can be improved and updated. Module evaluations are distributed to the Module Coordinator, Course Director, Head of Department and the Dean of the Faculty.

7. INTRODUCTION TO STUDYING THE MODULE

7.1 Overview of the Main Content

Writing the Short Film introduces and explores some of the foundational approaches necessary to the creation of scripts for the short film. Along the way we examine the component elements of short films – their audiovisual grammar – as well as looking at the more technical aspects of laying out scripts. We'll contextualise our investigations with reference to a range of theorists from the realm of screenwriting, including notable figures such as Syd Field, Phil Parker, Christopher Vogler, and Robert McKee.

7.2 Overview of Types of Classes

Most classes will commence with an informal discussion of a given topic. Some time will then be given to writing exercises or to the setting of assignments. This will be followed by a group discussion of students' work.

This module will use a range of teaching and learning methods, summarised below:

7.3 Seminars - Seminars are a place for learning through the discussion and analysis of texts, which enable students to explore key issues in detail. Seminars are also used for the development of core skills such as effective reading and discussion. Seminars are student-led and all students are expected to participate fully and to come prepared each week with questions and comments on the readings and subject matter. All students will be expected to present individual and group research in seminars. Although not formally assessed, the work done in preparing for seminar presentations is essential for successful completion of the coursework and Work.

7.4 Blackboard - This Module Guide is also available online through Blackboard.

7.5 Self managed study - It is essential for the successful completion of this module that all students acknowledge the responsibility they have for their self-managed learning. Students will be given independent reading, research and other seminar preparation each week. You should aim to spend about 5-6 hours a week reading and preparing for this module. The more you read, the more substance you can bring to an issue or topic under discussion. **You should always read the core texts and any other material that is given out by the lecturer.** You should also try to seek out secondary works on the core texts and

issues and build a foundation of material on which your written work can be based.

7.6 For more information on study skills, refer to

- LSBU Learning and Development Centre Core Skills Survival Guide, available online
- LSBU Learning and Development Centre Level 1 book, Don't Panic, available online
- The LSBU Learning and Development Centre online Study Skills materials
- Or visit the Learning Development Centre in Caxton House on Borough Road.

7.7 Importance of Student Self-Managed Learning Time

It is vital all students should read the assignments before class, and the core materials are compulsory for this course. Reading leads to well informed and more provocative discussion. Students are encouraged to write and re-write material for their Portfolio throughout the semester rather than leaving it to the last minute. Students are strongly encouraged to submit work for group discussion, to share their own work; receive constructive feedback; and learn from the diverse work they are exposed to.

7.8 Presentation of Work

NB. The formatting below does not apply to the screenplays which must follow correct industry formatting. Screenplay industry layouts will be covered in the module.

- Works must be word-processed using one side of the paper only.
- Font size should be 11 or 12 pt.
- All work should be line spaced at 1.5 with enough space in the left and right margins for comments and corrections.
- Carefully proof your work before submission. Make sure that you have answered the question, you have identified the key issues clearly, you have used sufficient examples and references to support your points, the essay is well structured and ideas are appropriately linked, and the style is not too colloquial or flippant. Check the grammar and spelling carefully as errors make your work appear careless and will reduce your overall mark.
- Include a cover page which states your student identity number, your course, the name of the module, the name of the lecturer, the title of the assignment and the due date. This information must also be on the screenplay cover page.

Submission of Works

All work must be handed in to the Student Information Centre, Room 266, on the 2nd Floor of Borough Road by the deadline. When you hand in your work you will be asked to fill out a cover sheet and be given a receipt which you must keep. If the office or the lecturer loses your essay, your receipt is proof that you handed it in. It is a good idea to keep your work on disk and as a hard copy.

8.0 Employability

This module is designed to extend undergraduates' knowledge of professional writing, to explore the processes under which pieces of writing were produced and examine the wider context in which such writing occurred. For individuals seeking jobs in the media, publishing or education such contextual knowledge will make them more marketable as potential employees.

8. THE PROGRAMME OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Week One: Screenwriting 101

In the first week we'll introduce the module and take an overview of what we'll be looking at week-by-week. We'll explore the rationale for the module and the assessment criteria for **Writing the Short Film**. We'll examine some of the key theorists and practitioners in the area of screenwriting, explore how screenwriting differs to other kinds of writing, and look at genre. We shall also study what makes an original and viable premise for a short film, and for a feature film. We will look at differences between a premise and a logline, and at how the logline relates to a screenplay and to a produced film. *From week 1 onwards students will be expected to keep a course diary which will become the basis for the Reflective Essay.*

Week Two: Structure

You will be expected to bring to class a premise for a short film.

This week we'll examine ideas of structure in relation to different kinds of moving image narrative, from feature length movies and television serials, before concentrating on the specifics of short film writing.

We shall we also look that the requirements of screenplay layout.

Week Three: Writing what the camera sees

You will be expected to bring to class a logline for a short film.

In this session we'll be looking at the building blocks of moving image storytelling: we'll examine moving image grammar in relation to shot types, the interrelationship of shots, framing, *mise en scene*, editing, and the use of sound. We shall study the process of writing screen action.

Week Four: Group Tutorials

You will be expected to have expanded your logline into a half page outline for this week.

The fourth week of the module is dedicated to group tutorials focussed on workshopping students' story ideas in preparation for writing a step outline. We will be looking at the requirements of the step outline (or 'scene by scene').

You'll be placed into groups by your supervising tutor in the preceding week and should arrive on time and fully prepared to take notes during the session.

Assignment: prepare a Step Outline for week 5.

Week Five: Idea Presentations

This week each individual will present their Step Outline. The presentation is not assessed but every individual is expected to participate. **NB The Step Outline is due this week:**

Assessment 1

Step Outline (20%) providing a break-down of the script, due at the end of Week 5, Thursday 1 March 2012

Week Six: Self-Managed Study

The sixth week of **Writing the Short Film** is dedicated to self-managed study, so there's no formal session in this week. Instead, you should start writing the first draft of your script in time for the first read-through session in Week Nine.

Week Seven: Characterisation

In the seventh week of the module we'll examine approaches to the creation of convincing characters for short films. We shall look at physical appearance, character back story, character traits, levels and layers of character conflict, and character goals.

Week Eight: Dialogue

The maxim of visual storytelling is 'show don't tell'. In this session we'll explore screen dialogue in detail, examining the rights and wrongs of a variety of approaches, creating character voice, handling subtext, story beats, and strategies for avoiding exposition.

Week Nine: Script Read-Through #1

Everyone needs to have a first draft of their script ready through for read-through in this session. You need to prepare sufficient copies of the script so individuals in the group can read for specific characters, and so that someone can read the directions. *It is a course requirement that everyone has their script read aloud though this will not be assessed.*

Week Ten: Script Read-Through #2

In the tenth week we'll read-through the rest of the scripts. Again, everyone needs to attend this session.

Week Eleven: Script Read-Through #3

In this second group tutorial session you'll be able to talk through the script read-through process and explain the changes you've made.

Week Twelve: Writing the Reflective Essay

In the final week of the module we'll look back on the process of writing the Step Outline and Script and suggest some approaches for writing the Reflective Essay. The deadlines for the other two elements of assessment are as follows:

Assessment 2

You're required to submit a script for a five to ten minute short film (65%), due in the middle of Week 12, Wednesday 9 May 2012

Assessment 3

Reflective Essay (25%), due in the middle of Week 13, Wednesday 16 May 2012

9. LEARNING RESOURCES

Aristotle (2003) *Poetics*. London: Penguin

Aronson, Linda (2001) *Screenwriting Updated: New (and Conventional) Ways of Writing for the Screen*. London: Silman-James

Campbell, J (1993) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* London: Fontana New Press

Cooper, Patricia and Dancyger, Ken (2004) *Writing the Short Film*. London: Focal Press

Cowgill, Linda J (2005) *Writing Short Films: Structure and Content for Screenwriters*. New York: Lone Eagle

Dancyger, Ken and Rush, Jeff (2006) *Alternative Scriptwriting: Successfully Breaking the Rules*. London: Focal Press

Davis, Rib (2003) *Writing Dialogue for Scripts* London: A & C Black (Methuen)

Egri, Lajos (2004) *The Art Of Dramatic Writing* London: Touchstone (Simon & Schuster)

Field, Syd. (2005) *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* London: Delta

King, Stephen (2000) *On Writing* London: New English Library

McKee, Robert (1999) *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. London: Methuen Press

Parker, Phil (2005) *The Art and Science of Screenwriting*. London: Chicago University Press

Vogler, Christopher (2007) *The Writer's Journey* Studio City CA: Michael Wiese Production