

Tompkins Cortland Community College
Master Course Syllabus

Course Discipline and Number: ENGL 255
Course Title: *Writing Television Drama and Comedy*

Year: 2019-2020
Credit Hours: 3

Attendance Policy: *To maintain good grades, regular attendance in class is necessary. Absence from class is considered a serious matter and absence never excuses a student from class work. It is the responsibility of all instructors to distribute reasonable attendance policies in writing during the first week of class. Students are required to comply with the attendance policy set by each of their instructors. Students are not penalized if they are unable to attend classes or participate in exams on particular days because of religious beliefs, in accordance with Chapter 161, Section 224-a of the Education Law of the State of New York. Students who plan to be absent from classroom activity for religious reasons should discuss the absence in advance with their instructors. See college catalog for more information.*

Services for Students with Disabilities: *It is the College's policy to provide, on an individual basis, appropriate academic adjustments for students with disabilities, which may affect their ability to fully participate in program or course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Coordinator of Access and Equity Services, to discuss their particular need for accommodations. All course materials are available in alternate formats upon request.*

Course Description

Creative Writing Course: This course explores the process of researching and writing drama and comedy for series television. After close analysis of appropriate texts and series episodes, students develop and write scenes for a current sitcom and a current drama. In addition, they complete a spec teleplay for a current drama or comedy series. ENGL 255 fulfills the SUNY General Education requirement in The Arts. Prerequisites: Prior completion or concurrent enrollment in ENGL 100; RDNG 116 if required by placement testing. 3 Cr. (3 Lec.) Fall semester.

Course Context/Audience

This course is a required course in the screenwriting concentration of the Creative Writing A.A. degree and a restricted elective in the screenwriting. Certificate programs. It can be used to satisfy a liberal arts English elective, a humanities elective, or an unrestricted elective. ENGL 255 fulfills the SUNY General Education requirement in The Arts. Students with a general interest in television drama, creative writing, screenwriting, visual media, and the creative process will find this course of interest.

Basic Skills/Entry Level Expectations

Writing: WC College level writing skills are required. See course co-requisites or pre-requisites.
Math: M0 Course requires very little or no math.
Reading: R4 Before taking this course, students must satisfactorily complete RDNG 116 or have assessment indicating that no reading course was required.

Course Goals

As a result of completing this course, students will:

- a) Develop an appreciation of the drama teleplay and comedy teleplay through a close analysis of appropriate texts and episodes.
- b) Understand and develop creative story concepts and scenes for current television dramas and comedies.
- c) Write for existing characters within the world of a current show.
- d) Research, develop, and write a well-structured, spec teleplay for an existing drama or comedy.
- e) Understand and use correct teleplay format including developing a knowledge of appropriate software.
- f) Understand the collaborative nature of television series development.
- g) Understand how writers get staff writing positions on a dramatic television series.

Course Objectives/Topics

Objective/Topic	% Course
Analyzing texts and episodes	15%
Developing story concepts	15%
Writing for existing characters within the world of a current show	15%
Learning the structure of television drama and comedy	15%
Learning correct teleplay format	5%
Writing a spec script for a current drama or comedy	30%
Learning how a television series is developed and staffed	5%

General Education Goals - Critical Thinking & Social/Global Awareness

Critical Thinking Outcomes	How does the course address Critical Thinking (include required or recommended instructional resources, strategies, learning activities, assignments, etc., that must or could be used.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Students will be able to develop meaningful questions to address problems or issues. ➤ Students will be able to gather, interpret, and evaluate relevant sources of information. ➤ Students will be able to reach informed conclusions and solutions. ➤ Students will be able to consider analytically the viewpoints of self and others. 	<p>Students analyze teleplays and television episodes and apply what they have learned as they write spec teleplays.</p> <p>Students must learn how to write for existing characters in an existing show. Creating a teleplay that is original yet follows the “rules” of the world of the selected show presents unique creative problems to solve. In addition to learning characters, themes, and structure (including “a” stories and “b” stories), students have to think about how their spec teleplay story fits in the arc of the show’s entire season. Students also have to learn the conventions of the genre.</p> <p>The character study and development process requires students to explore multiple perspectives. Furthermore, students will participate in group discussion and critique their classmates’ work.</p>

Social/Global Awareness Outcomes	How does the course address Social/Global Awareness (include required or recommended instructional resources, strategies, learning activities, assignments, etc., that must or could be used)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Students will begin to understand how their lives shape and are shaped by the complex world in which they live. ➤ Students will understand that their actions have social, economic, and environmental consequences. 	<p>Television drama and comedy episodes often mirror current events and social issues. Students wrestle with the creative depiction of events and issues “ripped from the headlines” as they work within the structured and formulaic form of the drama or comedy series teleplay.</p> <p>Students study the business of television writing and how financial and legal concerns shape projects in today’s changing world of television series development, production, and distribution. Examples of current topics include new digital content distribution approaches, the role of social networking in the promotion of scripted entertainment, and the making of “green” productions.</p>

Instructional Methods

Course Sequence:

- 1) Analyzing teleplays and television episodes;
- 2) Developing story concepts, *scenes*, and outlines for specific, current shows;
- 3) Researching the characters and "world" of a specific, current show;
- 4) Writing the teleplay;
- 5) Pitching the teleplay episode;

Teaching Methods:

Lecture, discussion, self-study, peer editing/revision/critiques, problem-solving sessions, creative brainstorming sessions

Additional Material/Modes of Presentation/Interaction:

- 1) Online chat and discussion group;
- 2) Guest speakers (including online interaction);
- 3) Collaboration;
- 4) Screenplay formatting software;
- 5) Access to videos/DVDs;
- 6) Access to print and online teleplay manuscripts;
- 7) Access to appropriate periodicals.

Methods of Assessment/Evaluation

Method	% Course Grade
Drama or comedy teleplay (developing, writing, and revising)	50%
Marketing (plan for submitting project to industry as writing sample)	5%
Analysis of texts and series (response writing)	30%
Scene development and work-shopping (drama and comedy)	15%

Text(s)

Recommended:

Access to texts (including scripts) and television episodes provided by the instructor.

Bibliography

Breimer, Stephen, F. The Screenwriter's Legal Guide. 2nd edition, New York: Allworth, 1999.

Chase, David. The Sopranos: Selected Scripts from Three Seasons, Final Shoot Scripts. New York: Warner Books, 2002.

Desberg, Peter, and Jeffrey Davis. Show Me the Funny! At the Writers' Table with Hollywood's Top Comedy Writers. New York: Sterling, 2010.

Douglas, Pamela. Writing the TV Drama Series: With Inside Tips from the West Wing, ER, NYPD Blue, Deadwood, and Other Great Shows. Studio City, CA: 2005.

Finer, Abby, and Deborah Pearlman. Starting Your Television Career: The Warner Bros. Television Writers Workshop Guide. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2004.

Heil, Douglas. Prime-Time Authorship: Works About and by Three TV Dramatists. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002.

Litwak, Mark. Dealmaking in the Film and Television Industry: From Negotiations to Final Contracts. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2002.

Longworth, James L. TV Creators: Conversations with America's Top Producers of Television Drama. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Longworth, James L. TV Creators: Conversations with America's Top Producers of Television Drama, Vol. 2. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002.

Smith, Evan S. Writing Television Sitcoms. New York: Perigee Trade, 2009.

Sorkin, Aaron. The West Wing: Script Book. New York: Newmarket Press, 2002.

Trottier, David. A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling Your Script. 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Silman-James, 2005.

Other Learning Resources

Audiovisual No resources specified
Electronic TC3 library databases will give students in this course access to such relevant journals as Independent Video and Film, Televisionweek, Electronic Media and Billboard. Online access to Hollywood Reporter, Variety, Creative Screenwriting, Script Magazine, NYScreenwriter, the Hollywood Creative Directory, and others.
Other Library databases (Proquest, Infotrac, Worldcat, and others) used for research. Access to teleplays (online and print). Internet and email access. Appropriate instructional technology including VHS/DVD use, internet access and projection, and computer lab access (word processing and screenplay format software).