Introduction to Playwriting  
WRIT21800-23A1  
Autumn 2023

Thursdays at 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. from October 5 to November 30

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Designed for beginning playwrights as well as writers of other media, this class emphasizes what makes a scene work, how to develop character through dialogue and action, and how to think in theatrical terms. Weekly writing assignments will focus on points of attack, conflict, resolution, text and subtext. At the conclusion of the semester, students will have a full understanding of how to write scenes that are dramatic, engaging and entertaining.

Recommended books:


Week-by-week assignments:

October 5 – After introductions to each other and to the Graham School, there will a short lecture on plot, structure, character, theme and language, followed by in-class readings of scenes by three to five published playwrights.

Assignment #1 for the following week: Write a 4 to 5 page scene with one setting and two characters who are in direct conflict with each other and want things that are mutually exclusive. In other words, Stella wants Steve to leave the room and Steve doesn’t want to go, or Stella wants Steve’s suitcase and Steve refuses to part with it, or Stella is desperate for Steve’s water bottle and Steve would rather die than let her have it. By the end of the scene, the conflict should be unresolved.

October 12 – Read selections from Assignment #1 aloud and discuss.

Assignment #2: Write a 4 to 5 page scene with one setting and two characters who are in direct conflict with each other and want things that are mutually exclusive. Then a third character enters, has some interaction with the other two, and exits. By the end of the scene, the conflict should be resolved.

October 19 - Read selections from Assignment #2 aloud and discuss.
Assignment #3: Write a 4 to 5 page scene with one setting and two characters who are in direct conflict with each other. The two characters must say absolutely everything that they are thinking and feeling. Nothing is hidden or held back. The scene may end up sounding like bad writing with lots of shouting, screaming and cursing. If that happens, let it happen.

October 26 - Read selections from Assignment #3 aloud and discuss.

Assignment #4: Rewrite the previous assignment with two characters who are in direct conflict with each other. The two characters must say nothing of what they are actually thinking and feeling. Everything is hidden or held back. One way to communicate the subtext between characters is to make sure that your audience understands the things that they want or need or must have. These can be hinted at or they can be indicated through action. And there are, of course, a myriad of other ways to illustrate what’s actually going on underneath text.

November 2 – Read selections from Assignment #5 aloud and discuss.

Assignment #5: Write a 4 to 5 page scene with one setting and two or three characters. The emphasis of the scene should be on character, in that at least one of the people should be eccentric, extraordinary and someone you yourself would find fascinating. Be sure to be able to identify every person’s want.

November 9 - Read selections from Assignment #5 aloud and discuss.

Assignment #6: Write a 4 to 5 page scene with one setting and two to five characters. It can be based on an idea that came out of a previous assignment or it can be completely new. There are no limitations on the subject matter, choice of conflict, choice of resolution, use of text, subtext, etc.

November 16 – Read selections from Assignment #6 aloud and discuss.

Assignment #7: Based on comments received from the instructor and classmates, write a second draft of the scene.

November 30 – Read selections from Assignment #7 aloud and discuss.

This syllabus is subject to change.