

TH A 4303 Theory and Practice of Playwriting (3:3:0)

Spring Semester 2007

Admin 243

Tu/Th 3:30 – 4:50pm

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Office Hours: Tue/Thu 1:30pm – 3:30pm or by appointment

“When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.”

--John F. Kennedy

“The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers.”

--James Baldwin

Course Description: Study of the techniques of dramaturgy and script writing. Practical work in the writing of scripts for the stage with a focus on traditional dramaturgy and the one-act play. May be repeated for credit.

Prerequisite: A grade of C or better in TH A 3335 or permission of instructor.

Course Objective: By the end of the course, the student will write a one-act play to demonstrate comprehension of the playwriting process.

Expected Learner Outcomes:

- Establish a common language of playwriting and theatre terminologies
- Develop skills of playwrights such as awareness, listening and regular output
- Develop essential skills in such areas as dialogue, character, plot and structure
- Develop skills in responding to works-in-progress
- Develop skills in absorbing and utilizing constructive criticism
- Develop skills in rewrites and revisions
- Obtain information on playwriting resources

Methods for Assessing Learner Outcomes:

- Class attendance and participation
- Written and oral reports on reading assignments
- Quizzes
- Graded components of a one-act play
- Final examination

Text Books:

Deb Bert and Norman A. Bert, eds. *New One-Act Plays for Acting Students*. Colorado Springs: Meriwether, 2003.

Catron, Louis E. *The Elements of Playwriting*. Long Grove: Wayland Press, 1993.

Class Policies:

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Since timeliness and presence are crucial to excellence in the performing arts, the Department of Theatre and Dance has adopted the following attendance policy: Each student is allowed one week's worth of unexcused absences (in the case of a course meeting three days a week, the student is allowed three absences & in the case of a course meeting two days a week, the student is allowed two absences) before the final grade is affected. For each absence beyond this number, the student's final grade will drop a half letter grade. In addition to unexcused absences, three tardies or early exits will equal one absence. Note: The only university-recognized excused absences are for participation in official university business which must be documented appropriately prior to the event or for bona fide religious holy days. Participation in official university business must be documented by a written notice from the sponsoring faculty or staff member (OP 34.04 paragraph 4)

OBSERVANCE OF A RELIGIOUS HOLY DAY: Texas House Bill 256 requires institutions of higher education to excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day. The student shall also be excused for time necessary to travel. An institution may not penalize the student for the absence and allows for the student to take an exam or complete an assignment from which the student is excused. No prior notification of the instructor is required.

A.D.A.: Any student who because of a disability may require special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary accommodations. Students should present appropriate verification from AccessTECH. No requirement exists that accommodations be made prior to completion of this approved university procedure.

POLICY ON CIVILITY IN THE CLASSROOM: At the direction of the Provost, the Department of Theatre & Dance has adopted the following policy: Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment which is conducive to learning. In order to assure that all students have an opportunity to gain from time spent in class, unless otherwise approved by the instructor, students are prohibited from using cellular phones or pagers, eating or drinking, making offensive remarks, reading newspapers, sleeping, or engaging in any other form of distraction in the classroom.

In the case of a violation of this policy, the instructor will talk with the student about the inappropriate behavior immediately and will follow-up after class or with a scheduled meeting.

In the case of a second incident, the instructor will refer the student to the department chair who will schedule a meeting with the student. At this meeting or any subsequent meeting, the chairperson will inform the student that repeated deviations from expected classroom behavior will result in an immediate referral to the Office of the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with the *Code of Student Conduct* at Texas Tech University.

CONTENT DISCLOSURE: Courses within the Department usually deal with works of dramatic literature, both on the page and on the stage. Sometimes the situations, actions, and language of these works can be off-putting or offensive to some students, who might be offended on such grounds as sexual explicitness, violence, or blasphemy. As the Department is devoted to the principle of free expression, artistic and otherwise, and it is not the Department's practice to censor these works on any of these grounds, students who might feel unduly distressed or made uncomfortable by such expressions should withdraw at the start of the term and seek another course.

PLAGIARISM: Familiarize yourself with the university's policy on plagiarism by going to the TTU Operating Manual. Note that neither plagiarism (offering the work of another as one's own without proper acknowledgment) nor any form of cheating (e.g. illicit possession of examinations or other materials, using unauthorized notes during an exam, unauthorized presence in an office) will be tolerated. Students found to violate these standards of integrity are liable to serious consequences, including possible suspension and/or a grade of "F". Offering the work of another as one's own, without proper acknowledgment, is plagiarism; therefore any student who fails to give credit for quotations or an essentially identical expression of material taken from books, encyclopedias, magazines, and other reference works, or from the themes, reports, or other writings of a fellow student, is guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarizing from the internet is also prohibited.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

"It is the aim of the faculty of Texas Tech University to foster a spirit of complete honesty and a high standard of integrity. The attempt of students to present as their own any work that they have not honestly performed is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense and renders the offenders liable to serious consequences, possibly suspension."

CHEATING: Dishonesty on examinations and quizzes or on written assignments, illegal possession of examinations, the use of unauthorized notes during an examination or quiz, obtaining information during an examination from the examination paper or otherwise from another student, assisting others to cheat, alteration of grade records, illegal entry to or unauthorized presence in an office are instances of cheating.

LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW FROM SPRING 07: MARCH 21

Procedures:

1. You are responsible for the assigned readings and are expected to participate in class discussion. This includes asking and answering questions as well as initiating discussion. It is also important not to monopolize the limited class time and to allow fellow students the opportunity to participate.
2. You should plan on spending 6 hours or more per week working on playwriting outside of class. While procrastinating about writing does not count towards these 6 hours, observing the world and experiencing life towards the effort of writing does.
3. This is a class aimed, in part, at stimulating creativity. It is important that you be willing to share your ideas and visions. It is crucial that you respect yourself and your classmates.

Assignments:

1. Starts

You will complete and turn in six writing exercises, or starts, during the first half of the semester. You will have the opportunity to do ten starts, thus you will be able to miss four starts due to absences or lack of creativity, inspiration, muses, etc. I will provide guidelines for each start. Starts are required to be at least five pages in length. Grades for these exercises will be based on whether the writer genuinely attempts the spirit of the assignment, as well as on format and completion. No late starts will be accepted.

2. Reading of Starts

In order to assist you in determining which start to use as the basis for your project script each student will have the opportunity to have at least one start read for the class. The goal is for you to hear and better understand your own work. Minimal feedback will be given by the class and the instructor.

3. Project Script

You will complete a one-act script based on one of your starts with a playing time of 10 – 20 minutes. The script must be original and have its beginning and end within this class. Adaptations, works started prior to this class, or scripts intended to be full-length will not be accepted. **The script must adhere to the elements of traditional dramaturgy discussed in this class.** You must be able to provide an action statement and identify the inciting incident, point of attack, major dramatic question, crisis/climax, and resolution/denouement. Work must be properly formatted as is illustrated in the text and composed on a word-processor of your choice. Late scripts will lose 1 point per week day. Absences, excused or not, will not affect this policy.

4. Reading of Project Script

You will be assigned a class period to present and workshop your project script. You will organize the reading beforehand by acquiring readers and providing scripts for each character as well as someone to read stage directions. You are not allowed to read your own script, but may ask classmates. It is in your best interest to find good actors/readers. The script must have a playing time of at least ten minutes. Grades for this reading will be based on preparedness, length, and decorum while receiving feedback.

5. Feedback

You are responsible for providing constructive criticism and observations to classmates during the feedback sessions. You will take notes during the readings and feedback sessions to give to the writer at the end of class. I will observe each student's level of participation.

6. Playwriting Resources

I will assign each of you a specific playwriting resource to research. The goal is to provide the class with a useful list of resources available to playwrights on-line and in print. You will provide documentation (i.e. website url or bibliography) as well as a brief written summary of the resource to each member of the class and the instructor. Summaries must be one page in length.

7. Quizzes

For each of the ten chapters there will tentatively be a quiz. It will be taken at the beginning of class on the day the chapter is due. I will average these grades for the final score.

8. Final exam

Your understanding of reading assignments and playwriting terms will be assessed in a final exam.

Grades:

Starts (6 @ 5pts)	30
Reading of Start	5
Project Script	20
Project Script Reading	10
Feedback	5
Playwriting Resource	5
Quizzes	10
Final	15
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Total Points	100

A: 90 – 100; B: 80 – 89; C: 70 – 79; D: 60 – 69; F: 0 - 59

Tentative Course Schedule

Plays from Bert & Bert's One-Act Play Anthology, along with other short plays, will be assigned for reading throughout the semester. Plays not found in the anthology will be provided by the instructor.

Day	Date	Lesson	Due Today	Next Time
Th	January 11	Intro to Class Start #1		Chapter 2 "What Is A Play?"
Tu	January 16	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 2 Start #2 Last twenty minutes of class grads only to discuss Scenarios	Start #1	Chapter 9 "Script Format"
Th	January 18	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 9 Start #3	Start #2	Chapter 1 "Being a Playwright"
Tu	January 23	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 1 Assign Playwriting Resources	Start #3	Chapter 3 "The Size of Your Canvas"
Th	January 25	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 3 Start #4		Chapter 4 "Where Do You Start?"
Tu	January 30	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 4 Start #5	Start #4	Chapter 5 "Creating Characters"
Th	February 1	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 5		Chapter 6 "Building Plot"
Tu	February 6	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 6 Assign reading order for starts and final scripts	Start #5	
Th	February 8	Tentatively meet at TTU Museum Start #6		Chapter 7 "Constructing Dialogue"
Tu	February 13	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 7 Start #7	Start #6	
Th	February 15	Catch Up or Special Topics Start #8	Start #7	Chapter 8 "Evaluating and Revising Your Play"
Tu	February 20	Quiz Discussion of Chapter 8 Start #9	Start #8	

Th	February 22	Special Topics Start #10	Start #9	
Tu	February 27	Start Readings 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Start #10	
Th	March 1	Start Readings 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.		
Tu	March 6	Start Readings 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.		Chapter 10 “Playwright’s Resources”
Wed	March 7	Midsemester Grades Due		
Th	March 8	Quiz Undergrad Presentations of Playwriting Resources		
Tu	March 13	<i>Spring Break: No Class</i>		
Th	March 15	<i>Spring Break: No class</i>		
Tu	March 20	Play 1:		
Th	March 22	Play 2:		
Tu	March 27	Play 3:		
Th	March 29	Play 4 and 5:		
Tu	April 3	Play 6:		
Th	April 5	Play 7:		
Tu	April 10	Play 8:		
Th	April 12	Play 9:		
Tu	April 17	Play 10:		
Th	April 19	Play 11:		
Tu	April 24	Play 12 and 13:		
Th	April 26	Play 14 and 15:		
Tu	May 1	Grad Presentations of Playwriting Resources REVIEW		
Tu	May 8	Final Exam Grad scenarios due 4:30pm – 7:00pm	No Course Work Will be Accepted After the End of the Exam Period	