The third in a four-part sequence in writing a feature film screenplay, this course focuses on writing the next 45 pages of your script. You also refine your story outline; flesh out main and secondary characters; continue to develop the art of the scene as it pertains to type, choice, structure, and placement; and begin to discover each character’s unique voice. You learn the habits you need to sustain the work of writing a screenplay. The goal is to write up to 45 pages from beginning of Act II. May be repeated for credit.

Objectives

INTRODUCTION

This course is for people who want to write for film and/or television. Most of what we’ll cover is essential for writing both. In this course, you’ll take the story and first act you created in Writing the Feature Screenplay (WTFS) I and II and write the second act of your screenplay. The stated goal is to write the second act, which we’ll define as everything from the end of the first act to the beginning of the final act. In most finished screenplays, this middle section is approximately 45 to 60 pages.

In this course, the accent is on writing and discussing our writings. Since the average Second Act runs 45 to 60 pages there is more writing required in this course than in any other WTFS course section. As such, there will be fewer and shorter lectures and more time for writing -- plus reading and responding to the work of your classmates.

I'll help you overcome the psychological blocks we writers sometimes put in our way. These tend to be most pronounced during the long Second Act when it’s common to feel despair, and even hatred of our own writing. In a safe workshop environment, we’ll learn from one another by sharing our work. And we’ll watch some great movies so we can learn from the best.

Outcomes

The goals for this course are:

- Begin with the story you created in Writing The First Screenplay I, as modified after you wrote your first act in WTFS II.
- Write the second act, the middle section of your screenplay, generally 45 to 60 pages.
- Enhance your understanding of screenplay structure.
- Learn to propel your story and maintain interest through the long middle section.

Materials

The only required book for this course is "The Hollywood Standard," 2nd ed. by Christopher Riley. It is the best reference for correct screenplay formatting. If you use the index at the end you can find answers to most formatting questions/situations.

There is no textbook for this course. Required readings are posted by class week as "Handouts" and come from a number of books and articles.

You owe it to yourself to read Adventures in the Screen Trade by William Goldman. This is one of the few screenwriting books by a top screenwriter, the one book every working screenwriter I know has read. Essential.
If you’d like a better understanding of moviemaking I suggest you read *Making Movies* by Sidney Lumet, the single best book about the actual making of movies.

There are many, many books about screenwriting. Some writers find one approach useful, other writers prefer something different. Take what helps you and leave the rest. (But beware: some books are so formulaic in their approach they can be harmful.) Many screenwriters have found these titles useful:

- *Cut to the Chase: Writing Feature Films with the Pros at UCLA Extension Writers’ Program*, Edited by Linda Venis
- *Making a Good Script Great* by Linda Seger
- *Story* by Robert McKee
- *The Complete Book of Screenwriting* by J. Michael Straczynski

**Evaluation**

Doing the work is the basis for points earned. I do not grade the quality of your work. You’re still new at this. I’m looking for honest effort and that’s what I grade on. This reflects the world of professional writing where hard work and persistence are essential for success.

**Criteria**

For those who need or want grades, they’ll be based on completing the weekly assignments, class participation, and completion of the story outline. We’ll work on a 1000 point system with 100 points available each week. Points will be allocated as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Writing Assignments</td>
<td>500</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Screenplay Second Act</td>
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**Breakdown**

- **A (A- to A+) = 900 - 1000 points**
- **B (B- to B+) = 800 - 899 points**
- **C (C-to C+) = 700 - 799 points**
- **F = 0 to 699 points**

There is no sliding scale in this class. If everyone does “A” work, everyone gets an A. If you help one another, you’ll all get a better grade. Your competition is the blank page, not each other.

**Course Policies**

### CLASS FORMAT & REQUIREMENTS

Some weeks include a lecture. Our online classes and the homework for them will primarily involve writing pages of your screenplay’s second act, reading and responding to your classmates’ writings, and watching a Weekly Movie and commenting on it. There is no text for this course but there will be handouts you are required to read. We’ll post responses, discussion, Q&A and anything else that helps you.

Each Wednesday I will post a lecture and assignments. The assignments will include readings, writing assignments, and movies to watch. Plus you’ll be reading and responding to the writing assignments posted by your fellow students that week.

You will respond to a minimum of three of your classmates’ writing exercises/assignments on a weekly basis, though you can respond to as many as you wish. I’ll ask you to spread your responses evenly so everyone receives roughly the same number of comments.
Please read the lectures and complete all assignments, including your responses to the work of others students, no later than the following Tuesday at 8 PM Pacific Standard Time. Deadlines are strictly enforced.

Although this is an Intro class, I will treat you, and expect you to treat your classmates, like professionals. That calls for mutual respect. If you know you’ll be late with your homework please post that fact, the reason, and when you’ll have it ready. I can’t guarantee you’ll get feedback from me or others if you post your work late.

CLASS DISCUSSIONS & WORKSHOP GUIDELINES

It’s essential that you PARTICIPATE in our online classroom. You will learn as much from the responses that you make to the work of others as you do from their comments to you. Sharing different perspectives is one of the ways we learn from one another. These perspectives may involve differing opinions about the assigned readings, writings, or movies.

When we discuss one another’s work your responses can be any length but they should be specific and, ideally, constructive. You need to say more than just “This is great!” or “This sucks!” Try to pinpoint what you think is terrific or what doesn’t work for you and try to explain why. Developing this habit helps your own writing, too. You don’t need to fix what you think is wrong; simply identifying a problem area is helpful.

When responding to the work of others it’s easy to hurt the writer’s feelings even if it’s completely unintentional. Working online we lack our usual in-person communication tools -- voice tone, facial expression, gestures, etc. -- so it’s important to be polite and respectful. However, your comments don’t need to be weak or tepid. Honest disagreement and discussion are part of the creative process but personal attacks, insults, or harassment have no place in our discussions!

Words are one of our tools. We’re all aware there are words and word usages that offend people. There are times in our screenplays when these offending words or usages are exactly what we choose. The goal in the writing may be to offend, satirize, or stun an audience. There may be dramatically valid reasons for these choices.

The word and usage choices may be brilliant, stupid, offensive, provocative, thoughtful, insulting or whatever other tag an audience may choose. As creators we’re entitled to make those choices without censorship. However, we also bear the responsibility for our choices.

When discussing movies or the work of other writers we don’t have the same creative freedoms. Those same words and usages that may be valid dramatically have a different effect in discussion with a friend or colleague. As writers, we need to be aware of words and how they affect people in both creative writing and in daily usage.

Some words have the force of a punch in the face. That’s actually been shown via MRI brain testing. The brain registers some verbal assaults in exactly the same way as a physical assault.

Nothing wrong with discussing a potentially offensive section of text or movie, BUT we must do so with the sensitivity that we’re now in conversation. If we’re quoting offensive language we should put it in quotes to indicate that’s what we’re doing. Without quotes, the language becomes ours.

Before we use quotes we should ask ourselves if we need to use the offending language at all. Yes, the original writer did but that was for a different purpose in another context. Is there another way to reference the language? Would a euphemism -- the f-word, n-word, c-word, etc. -- be preferable? We’re writers. We need to understand and respect the power of our words.

As creators, we benefit from being uninhibited and uncensored in our work, particularly in first drafts. As colleagues we need to be sensitive to and respectful of one another. Our words can be tools or weapons. Rile the audience as much as you like but let’s be careful not hurt one another.

Every week there’s a movie to watch. Watching them will help you better understand how other writers successfully met the challenge of writing the second act. Watching them will improve the quality of your writing and these movies may be referred to in lectures. I also think you’ll enjoy them.

THERE ARE NO DUMB QUESTIONS. Q&A is an important part of this class. If you have a question someone else has that same question. If something isn’t clear to you, ask. If you’re curious about something, ask. If a question arose from a homework assignment, ask. I will respond to questions within 48 hours, though often much sooner.

I’ll log in every couple of day to check in on discussions, see how you’re doing, and answer any questions. I will post my comments about your writing assignments within 7 days after you post them. The sooner you post, the sooner I respond, and the
sooner you can move forward.

**Underage Students**

As UCLA's principal provider of continuing education, the majority of UCLA Extension courses are designed for the post-baccalaureate professional-level student. Enrollment is therefore normally reserved for adult students 18 years of age and older. The Writers' Program may consent to enroll younger students based on special academic competence and approval of the instructor. Minors who enroll in a Writers' Program course without first receiving permission from both the department and the instructor are subject to withdrawal. To request approval, please contact the Writers' Program at 310/825-9415.

**The Writers' Workshop**

Instruction in the Writers' Program follows the guidelines established by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) guidelines for the teaching of creative writing, which include a “challenging writers’ workshop” as a hallmark. They define this as

> ...a seminar in which students critique one another's work under the mentorship of an accomplished writer-teacher. The workshop is writing intensive, offering each student multiple opportunities for submission and revision of creative work. (AWP)

This method of instruction is considered the gold standard for developing writers at all levels of expertise, and workshopping is a key learning tool in nearly every course offered by the Writers' Program. Workshopping teaches you to read and respond to written work from a variety of perspectives, and hearing critique of your own writing will help you understand how successfully your work achieves your goals. Every student is expected to participate fully in workshopping activities as defined by and guided by Writers' Program instructors.

**Scope of Work for Instructors**

Each Writers' Program instructor has signed an agreement to teach the curriculum in their course, following a syllabus of their own design with approval by the Writers' Program director. Instructors are never obligated to read, review, critique, respond to, or otherwise address student work that has not been developed for their course or in response to specific assignments in their course. Individualized instruction like this falls into the category of a consultation, which is a separate service your instructor can provide through special arrangement with the Writers' Program.

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**Institutional Policies**

**Student Conduct**

Students are subject to disciplinary action for several types of misconduct or attempted misconduct, including but not limited to dishonesty, such as cheating, multiple submission, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University; or theft or misuse of the intellectual property of others or violation of others’ copyrights. Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with policy provisions which proscribe these and other forms of misconduct at:

[https://www.uclaextension.edu/pages/str/studentConduct.jsp](https://www.uclaextension.edu/pages/str/studentConduct.jsp)

**Services for Students with Disabilities**

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, UCLA Extension provides appropriate accommodations and support services to qualified applicants and students with disabilities. These include, but are not limited to, auxiliary aids/services such as sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices for hearing-impaired individuals, extended time for and proctoring of exams, and registration assistance. Accommodations and types of support services vary and are specifically designed to meet the disability-related needs of each student based on current, verifiable medical documentation. Arrangements for auxiliary aids/services are available only through UCLA Extension’s Service for Students with Disabilities Office at (310) 825-7851 or by email at access@uclaextension.edu. For complete information see:

[https://www.uclaextension.edu/pages/str/studentswithDisabilities.jsp](https://www.uclaextension.edu/pages/str/studentswithDisabilities.jsp)

**Incompletes**

Your instructor may post the interim grade *Incomplete/I* if at the end of the class your overall work is of passing quality but a portion could not be submitted for understandable reasons (e.g. illness). It is your responsibility to petition your instructor for permission to submit work late and to provide an explanation, and it is his or her sole decision whether to accept the explanation.
If permitted, the *Incomplete* grade will be posted and a time frame defined for you to submit the missing work, ranging from one to twelve weeks. *Incomplete* grades that remain unchanged after twelve weeks will lapse to *F*, *NP* or *U*. Receiving an *I* grade entitles you to submit only the missing work your instructor has agreed to accept late, and does not allow other work to be retaken or obliges UCLA Extension to provide continuing access to course materials via Canvas. The *Incomplete* grade is not an option for courses that do not bear credit, such as 700, 800, or 900-level courses. For complete information, see: https://www.uclaextension.edu/pages/str/grading.jsp

**All Grades are Final**

No change of grade may be made by anyone other than the instructor, and then, only to correct clerical errors. No term grade except *Incomplete* may be revised by re-examination. The correction of a clerical error may be authorized only by the instructor of record communicating directly with personnel of Student and Alumni Services.

**Sexual Harassment**

The University of California is committed to creating and maintaining a community where all individuals who participate in University programs and activities can work and learn together in an atmosphere free of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Every member of the community should be aware that the University prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence, and that such behavior violates both law and University policy. The University will respond promptly and effectively to reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and will take appropriate action to prevent, to correct, and when necessary, to discipline behavior that violates our policy.

All Extension students and instructors who believe they have been sexually harassed are encouraged to contact the Department of Student and Alumni Services for complaint resolution: UCLA Extension, 1145 Gayley Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90024; Voice/TTY: (310) 825-7031. View the University’s full Policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence at http://policy.ucop.edu/doc/4000385/SHSV.

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**Course and Instructor Evaluation**

UCLA Extension values your feedback on course and instructor evaluations. We ask all students to take a few minutes to complete an end-of-course evaluation survey. Updates to the course and instruction are influenced by your feedback. Understanding your student experience is essential to ensure continuing excellence in the online classroom and is appreciated by your instructor and the UCLA Extension academic leadership.

Your participation in a survey is voluntary, and your responses are confidential. After instructors submit grades, they will be given an evaluation report, but this report will not contain your name.

**About Your Online Course Materials**

Please note the following about online course components at UCLA Extension:

- Students must have basic computer skills, including the use of word processing software, email, and the ability to use internet browsers, such as Safari, Firefox, or Chrome.
- Students are responsible for meeting the technical requirements of Canvas and familiarizing themselves with the Canvas Learning Management System.
  - What are the basic computer specifications for Canvas? - https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10721
  - Which browsers does Canvas support? - https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10720
- Students are responsible for keeping a copy of all assignments and work submitted, and to be aware of all assignments, due dates, and course guidelines.
- Students are encouraged to keep and/or download a local copy of their assignment files, as access to the online environment of a specific course is limited to 30 days after the final course date, as listed in the course catalog.

If you need assistance downloading student materials from your course, please contact Canvas Support or the UCLA
UCLA Extension Canvas and Learning Support

For immediate 24/7 Canvas technical support, including holidays, click on Help (located on the menu to the left) where you can call or chat live with a Canvas Support representative.

UCLA Extension Instructional Design and Learning Support

The UCLA Extension Learning Support staff assists both students and instructors with Canvas-related technical support, as well as general and administrative questions.

Learning Support staff is available Monday through Friday, from 8 AM to 5 PM (Pacific Time), except holidays:

- Email: support@unexonline.zendesk.com
- Website: http://support.uclaextension.edu (http://support.uclaextension.edu/)

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| WEEK ONE | INTRO & REVIEW              | 1. Introduction  
2. Review  
   a. The Three Act Structure  
   b. The Second Act  
   c. Plot  
   d. Spine  
3. A few notes on CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM  
4. ASSIGNMENTS:  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
     i. Your Personal Introduction  
     ii. Your Story Outline & Completed First Act of Screenplay  
     iii. 3 Movies with 2nd Acts You Love & Why  
     iv. Respond to the posts of at least three of your classmates  
| WEEK TWO | BEGINNING THE SECOND ACT    | 1. Keep It Moving  
   a. Action & Response  
   b. Reversals  
2. Progressive Complications  
   a. Every solution creates a new problem  
   b. Throw rocks at your protagonist  
3. Subplots  
4. Secondary Characters  
5. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
     i. First 8 Pages of Second Act  
     ii. 3 Movies with 2nd Act Beginnings You Like & Why  
     iii. Respond to the posts of at least three of your classmates  
   c. Watch and comment on the Weekly Movie: MOONSTRUCK  

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| WEEK THREE | THE SECOND 8 PAGES            | 1. Raising the Stakes  
2. The Ticking Clock  
3. Scene Sequences  
4. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
     i. Second 8 Pages of Second Act  
     ii. 3 Movies you love that Raise the Stakes & Tell us How  
     iii. Respond to at least 3 of your classmates  
   c. Watch and comment on the Weekly Movie: HIGH NOON |
| WEEK FOUR  | THE THIRD 8 PAGES             | 1. The Point of No Return  
2. Adding Complexity – Multiple Levels of Conflict  
3. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
     i. Third 8 Pages of Second Act  
     ii. 3 Characters in Movies you love who have multiple levels of conflict and tell us what these are and why they work for you  
     iii. Respond to at least three of your classmates  
   c. Watch and comment on the Weekly Movie: THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES. |
| WEEK FIVE  | REACHING THE SECOND ACT       | 1. The Mid Act Twist  
   a. A Reversal  
   b. A Different Movie  
2. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
     i. Fourth 8 Pages of Second Act  
     ii. 3 Movies with great Mid-Act Twist & tell us why  
     iii. Respond to at least three of your classmates  
   c. Watch and comment on the Weekly Movie: A BEAUTIFUL MIND. |
| WEEK SIX   | THE FIFTH 8 PAGES             | 1. How to Avoid Giving Up  
2. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
     i. Fifth 8 Pages of Second Act  
     ii. 3 Movies with a point of no return & explain why  
     iii. Respond to at least three of your classmates  
   c. Watch and comment on the Weekly Movie: LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. |
| WEEK SEVEN | THE SIXTH 8 PAGES              | 1. Stay on the Spine  
2. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
     i. Sixth 8 Pages of Second Act  
     ii. 3 Examples of Movies and what your see as their spine  
     iii. Respond to at least three of your classmates  
   c. Watch and comment on the Weekly Movie: GODFATHER II. |
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| WEEK EIGHT | COMPLETING THE SECOND ACT         | 1. Have you set up the third act of your story?  
2. Have you fulfilled the second act requirements?  
3. Second Act Turning Point  
   a. May be mirror opposite of movie’s end but not required  
   b. May be protagonist’s low point but not required to be low point  
4. May resolve the main dramatic tension and shift the story to another problem  
5. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
      i. Seventh 8 Pages or completion of Second Act  
      ii. 3 Movies with strong 2nd act Turning Points and why you like them  
      iii. Respond to at least three of your classmates  
   c. Watch and comment on the Weekly Movie: REAR WINDOW. |
| WEEK NINE | REWRITES                             | 1. What you learned while creating your story, scenes or script  
2. Analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, and problems  
   a. Is there an objective for every scene and character?  
   b. Do the characters behave believably?  
   c. Is it interesting and exciting or boring?  
3. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read lecture and/or handouts  
   b. Post:  
      i. Your Revised and Corrected Second Act  
      ii. 3 Movies with great 2nd acts & why  
      iii. Respond to at least three of your classmates  
   c. Watch and comment on the Weekly Movie: DOG DAY AFTERNOON. |
| WEEK TEN  | STORY EVOLUTION & WHAT HAPPENS NEXT | 1. How has your screenplay changed from the story outline?  
2. How do those changes affect the rest of your story?  
3. Finishing your first draft screenplay  
4. Making the first draft great  
5. What happens next?  
6. ASSIGNMENTS  
   a. Read any lecture or handouts  
   b. Post:  
      i. Your Revised and Updated Story Outline  
      ii. Respond to the work of at least three of your classmates  