UCLA Extension Writers’ Program
Public Syllabus

Note to students: this “public” syllabus is designed to give you a glimpse into this course and instructor. If you have further questions about our courses or curriculum, please contact the Writers’ Program at (310) 825-9415 or via email at writers@uclaextension.edu. We are happy to answer any questions and to help you find the best class to achieve your writing goals.

VISUAL STORYTELLING FOR THE BIG SCREEN

Bill Boyle, Instructor

SYLLABUS

If in “Citizen Kane” you were told the meaning of the word ‘Rosebud’, rather than being allowed to discover it on your own, would it have the same impact?

A ‘fully realized’ screenplay reveals itself primarily through images, making use of what I call the “Visual Mindscape”. This allows the reader or viewer to ‘discover’ elements of the story rather than being told. By being able to actively participate in the unfolding of the story the overall experience for the reader becomes a more visceral and luminous experience.

The ‘Visual Mindscape’ is a style of screenwriting that seeks out metaphoric images that advance the story line, enhance the environment of the scene and offer an external visual representation of the character’s inner journey.

With examples from various well known screenplays and film clips this course will learn the various forms of the visual mindscape such as; withholding, discovery, the law of contradiction, location and circumstance as metaphor as well as seeking visual expressions for time, tense and flow of location.

By the end of the course writers will have worked and either completed the first draft or at least worked enough of their screenplay to be able to complete it on their own using the tools of the Visual Mindscape.

I believe that when a reader is allowed to discover elements of a story rather than being told, they participate in a far more intimate and impelling level. I feel this is the true magic of the screenplay.

Writers’ Program Contact Information:

If you have any administrative questions you should contact the UCLA Extension Writers’ Program directly. Their number is 310-825-9415 and their email is writers@uclaextension.edu

Refund Information:

In the highly unlikely situation you wish a refund for the course you will need to be in touch with the Writers’ Program directly. Contact information is listed above.
**Grading Criteria:**

Grades will be based on completion of written assignments, discussion, participation, willingness to learn, and upon degree of improvement.

Successful completion of this course will be based on the following grading scale:

Total points possible in the class = 180
Participation makes up 1/3 of the points possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>160 - 180</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>(89 - 100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140 - 159</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>(78 - 88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120 - 139</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>(67 - 77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 - 119</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>(56 - 66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99 or less</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>(55% or less)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students taking this course for credit will be required to complete all written assignments and completed significant work on their own screenplay. Non-credit students are encouraged to complete the same assignments, but are not required to do so.

**Workshop Guidelines:**

You will read the exercises of others, exposing yourself to an array of responses and strategies. You will comment on the writing of your classmates and receive from them comments on your own writing. You will also receive feedback from me, typically giving suggestions for using the Visual Mindscape tools more effectively.

When offering your comments try to focus on the technical aspects of the work and not on your evaluation of the psychology of the writer.

Whenever possible, when identifying flaws, search for some means by which to rectify the problem. Feedback is most helpful if it makes specific points. It’s least helpful when it deals in generalizations. Workshops can be heartbreakers or they can be truly effective problem-solving sessions.

When receiving feedback no matter how absurd you may think it is, simply take it in without feeling the need to defend yourself or your script. This is a great exercise of self control that will serve you well in dealing with the absurdities you will no doubt hear in the real world of script development.
Details about the weekly schedule:

Each week I will end each session with assignments which will also be filed in Black Board under Course Documents. (A schedule of weekly topics can be found later in this syllabus.) The assignments will involve reading screenplays, viewing films, writing original material (exercises), and commenting on fellow-student exercises.

Course Overview:

Film is first and foremost a visual medium. As such a fully realized screenplay exhibits its story through images; a “visual mindscape” told within the dramatic structure.

Many screenwriters choose to tell their stories rather than show them. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, telling the story is ‘sufficient’ to get the story across. Secondly, ‘telling’ a story is more accessible to the writer and easier than seeking out the ‘visual’ implications of the story.

But without exploiting the visual implications of your story, your screenplay will never rise to its full potential. It can’t. You limit it. You have deprived your reader/viewer of the real magic of what a screenplay can offer. That is the magic of visual discovery.

Even when you choose to ignore it there is always an image. It might be magical or it might be boring, cold and empty, but one absolute is that there is always an image whether you use it or not.

This course explores the various forms of the ‘Visual Mindscape’ and the numerous opportunities available to bring visual richness to your screenplay.

Here is a Quick Overview of what we will be covering in the one day course.
**Class Schedule & Topic Breakdown:**

**WEEK 1**

**INTRODUCTION:**
Instructor’s Background
Review of the Syllabus

**WHAT IS THE VISUAL MINDSCAPE OF THE SCREENPLAY?**
Achieving the Visceral Experience through the Visual Mindscape
Seeking an External Visual Representation of the Character’s Inner Journey

**Assignments:**
View: UP (At least up to the end of the Montage Scene.)
Read: Screenplay Handout: Opening Scenes from Quills and Memento
Do: Prepare a one sheet of your screenplay

**WEEK 2**

**SCRIPT NARRATIVE**
Writing in the Immediate Present Tense
Matching the pace and tone of the scene
Action/Reaction within the narrative
The white page controversy
The First Image
The CAPPING Controversy and how it relates to the Visual Mindscape.
The Ordinary World

**Assignments:**
View: Mulholland Drive
Read: Screenplay Handout: TBA
Do: Write or rewrite one scene incorporating the Narrative Guide lines.
    Be sure the narrative matches the pace, tone and genre of the scene.
    Write or rewrite at your own pace. Suggested Goal: 5 to 15 pages

**WEEK 3**

**THE METAPHORIC MINDSCAPE**
Seeking a visual metaphor of the character’s inner journey

One of the primary purposes of the Visual Mindscape’ is to seek out a proxy for the internal expressions of your story with external symbols be it the inner thoughts, feelings, motivation or emotions of your characters or the
foreshadowing of change and conflict. This is the role of the visual metaphor.

Assignments:
View:  
“Children of Men”
Read:  
Screenplay Handout: TBA
Do:  
Create a Metaphoric Image (Snap Shot)  
Identify various forms of Visual Metaphors in “Children of Men” and post.
Write or rewrite at your own pace. Suggested Goal: 5 to 15 pages

WEEK 4

LOCATION AS ALLEGORY
The location you chose to set a scene can have a significant visual impact on your story. It can often help in expressing the internal world of your script. And add a degree of richness to the scene.

Assignments:
Read:  
Screenplay Handout: TBA
Do:  
Be prepared to discuss “Children of Men” and the use of the Visual Mindscape as Allegory.
Write or rewrite at your own pace. Suggested Goal: 5 to 15 pages

WEEK 5

USING THE VISUAL MINDSCAPE TO INTRODUCE MEMORABLE CHARACTERS
Introducing the Central Character
Revealing the Inner Engine of your Characters

Assignments:
View:  
Memento
Read:  
Screenplay Handout: Opening Scene from Taxi Driver
Do:  
Write or rewrite a scene where the location is an allegory for either what is taking place or addresses the inner journey of the protagonist.
Write or rewrite at your own pace. Suggested Goal: 5 to 15 pages
WEEK 6

VISUAL ANCHORING
- Visual Anchoring to establish Time
- Visual Anchoring to establish Tense
- The Flow of Location through Visual Anchoring
- Discuss the Visual Anchoring in Memento

Assignments:
View: 21 Grams
Read: Screenplay Handout: TBA
Do: Find the visual and audio anchors used in 21 Grams to address the true chronology of the story.
Write or rewrite at your own pace. Suggested Goal: 5 to 15 pages

WEEK 7

CREATING A VISCERAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH VISUAL DISCOVERY
Most of our day to day information and communication comes to us verbally through conversation.

Occasionally we make a discovery based on something we see. When that happens the experience is personal, intense and consuming.

This opportunity to discover or deduce allows the reader/viewer to actively participate and makes the overall experience much more satisfying.

Assignments:
View: Usual Suspects
Read: Screenplay Handout: TBA
Do: Write or rewrite at your own pace. Suggested Goal: 5 to 15 pages

WEEK 8

CREATING A VISCERAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH WITHHOLDING

Assignments:
View: Hangover
Read: Screenplay Handout: TBA
Do: Write or rewrite at your own pace. Suggested Goal: 5 to 15 pages
CREATING A VISCERAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE LAW OF CONTRADICTION

THE VISCERAL LOG LINES

Purpose and importance of the Log Line
Creating an effective Log Line

Assignments:

Read: Screenplay Handout: TBA
Do: Create a Visceral Log line for your screenplay
Write or rewrite at your own pace. Suggested Goal: 5 to 15 pages

WEEK 10

FULL DRAFT OVERVIEW

WRAP UP