

**San José State University
School of Music and Dance
Theatre, Radio TV Film, Animation
Scriptwriting
TA 128 (#47005); ENG (#48627)
Fall, 2011**

Instructor: Dr. David Kahn
Office: HGH 110
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Email: David.Kahn@sjsu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-3 pm; ARR
Class Days/Time: Tuesday 3:00-5:45 pm
Classroom: HGH 118
Prerequisites: Prerequisite: Upper division standing or instructor consent.
Repeatable for credit.

Online Syllabus, Schedule, Resources

<http://www.sjsu.edu/people/david.kahn/courses/TA128/>

Course Description

Catalog Description- *Writing in dramatic form: plot structure, characterization, content and theme. Analysis of plays. Exercises in writing.*

The course introduces fundamental concepts and mechanics of dramatic writing. Our emphasis will be on stimulating the student's own script writing practices and abilities. Through various writing exercises and the completion of a major writing project, students will explore the components of script writing while being encouraged to develop individual approaches and voices as playwrights.

Departmental Student Learning Objectives

Tell meaningful stories through performance; understand how to plan, perform, produce, write and direct for stage and screen; relate performance to production; become literate in the language of stage and narrative screen performance; know how to analyze a script.

Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Format a stage script according to basic standards presented in class.
2. Apply a fundamental use of dramaturgical terminology in the analysis of narrative scripts by professional writers, fellow classmates and themselves.
3. Develop a story outline that employs the basic narrative requirements for scriptable **dramatic action** as explained in David Ball's *Backwards and Forwards* and other class materials.
4. Write dialogue and action shaped by a clear conception of the **world of the play** and the **identity and goals of the central characters**.
5. Complete a finished draft of a dramatic script that conveys a identifiable dramatic action expressed through **actable charcters** and an appropriate stage setting.

Required Texts/Readings

Ball, *Backwards and Forwards* (ISBN 0809311100)
Ruhl, Sarah. *Dead Man's Cell Phone* (ISBN 1559363258)
Sophocles. *Oedipus the King* (ISBN 0226307921)
Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Various: Arden, Folger, Manga, Film)

Various copied materials and posted to the class website:
<http://www.sjsu.edu/people/david.kahn/courses/TA128/>

Attendance at selected SJSU Theatre productions/events (see schedule).

Student Responsibilities

- **Regular attendance at class meetings.** Some form of active participation is required every session usually at the beginning of class. You lose three (3) percentage points from your grade for every unexcused absence. *Excused absences are for legitimate medical or personal emergencies which you are responsible for documenting.*
- **Participation in discussion and scene reading.** Responses to assigned reading/performances.
- **Weekly writing exercises dealing with specific aspects of dramatic writing.** Most of these assignments will be scenes will be a maximum of four pages and may be read and discussed in class. They must be printed out in appropriate [stage format](#), with a copy for me, a copy for you, and additional copies for each role in the scene.
- **Major Project Script:** A short stage play (10-30 pages), printed in the correct script format, as explained in class. *Due: Nov. 8 (first draft) and Dec. 6 (revision).*
- **Timely completion of writing and reading assignments.** *Late assignments will not be accepted and cannot be made up.*
- **Competence and care** in writing and completion of other course assignments.

Evaluation Items

Class attendance, participation and response	40%
Weekly writing assignments	30%
Major Project Play (Draft and Revision)	30%

Dropping and Adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [Information on add/drops are available at http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-298.html](http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-298.html). [Information about late drop is available at http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/](http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/). Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

University Policies

Academic integrity

Students should know that the University's [Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf). Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for [Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html).

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the DRC (Disability Resource Center) to establish a record of their disability.

TA/ENG 128 Scriptwriting, Fall 2011, SCHEDULE
(12/4/11; subject to revision to accommodate specific course agenda.)
Check for frequent updates posted on class website:

Week	Date	Topics / Assignment Due
1	Aug 30	Introduction: Course approach; in-class writing;
2	Sept 6	ASSIGNMENT: 1) bookmark class url; 2) email Prof. Kahn; 3) download Celtx or other format; 4) bring "found" scene (2-3 pages & copies)
3	Sept 13	ASSIGNMENT: 1) Read <i>Oedipus the King</i> (bring script to class); 2) dramaturgical vocabulary; dramatic action and story
4	Sept 20	ASSIGNMENT: Three germinal ideas The premise
5	Sept 27	ASSIGNMENT: 1) Study <i>Hamlet</i> 2) Transcribed dialogue READ: Ball (to p. 36)
6	Oct 4	ASSIGNMENT: Dialogue (SEE: <i>Dead Man's Cell Phone</i> Oct. 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15 at 7 pm)
7	Oct 11	ASSIGNMENT: Three actions READ: Ball (pp. 39-96)
8	Oct 18	ASSIGNMENT: Characterization and voice Discuss <i>Dead Man's Cell Phone</i> production
9	Oct 25	ASSIGNMENT: Scene from project play
10	Nov 1	ASSIGNMENT: Subtext
11	Nov 8	FIRST DRAFT DUE Continue reading subtext and project play scenes
12	Nov 15	Revisions and development processes:
13	Nov 22	Release for production viewing & conferences
14	Nov 29	The scriptwriting professions:
15	DEC 6	REVISED SCRIPT DUE
16	DEC 16 2:45 – 5 pm	FINAL Meeting – The good read

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Online Resources

Available on class website:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/people/david.kahn/courses/TA128/>

- [Celtx \(http://celtx.com/\)](http://celtx.com/)
Free all-in-one media pre-production software. Use for scriptwriting format
- [The Dramatists Guild \(http://www.dramatistsguild.com/\)](http://www.dramatistsguild.com/)
The professional association of playwrights, composers and lyricists.
- [The Playwriting Seminars \(http://www.vcu.edu/arts/playwriting/\)](http://www.vcu.edu/arts/playwriting/)
- [Script Development \(http://www.vcu.edu/arts/playwriting/development.html#sr\)](http://www.vcu.edu/arts/playwriting/development.html#sr)
- [US Copyright Information \(http://www.copyright.gov/\)](http://www.copyright.gov/)
- [Theatre Bay Area \(http://www.theatrebayarea.org/\)](http://www.theatrebayarea.org/)
publishes Callboard magazine, operates Tix Bay Area (the half-price ticket booth at Union Square)
- [Theatre Communications Group \(http://www.tcg.org/\)](http://www.tcg.org/)
The national organization for the not-for-profit American theatre. TCG publishes the monthly American Theatre magazine.
- [Actors Theatre of Louisville \(http://www.actorstheatre.org/\)](http://www.actorstheatre.org/)
Kentucky's Tony Award-winning professional theatre, home of the Humana Festival of new plays.
- [Writers Guild of America \(http://www.wga.org/\)](http://www.wga.org/)
Official site of the Writers Guild of America, west. The WGAw is the union representing writers in the motion picture, broadcast, cable and new media industries.
- [The Hollywood Creative Directory \(http://www.hcdonline.com/\)](http://www.hcdonline.com/)
Up-to-date, comprehensive info on executives in the film and television industry
- [Daily Variety \(http://www.variety.com/\)](http://www.variety.com/)

TA/ENG 128 PARTIAL READING LIST*

- **THE POETICS** (and Commentary) by Aristotle. 2400 years old and still guiding writers on how to create dramatic scripts.
- **TECHNIQUE OF DRAMA** by Gustav Freytag. This one's only about 130 years old, but its discussion of structure is still being used by the Hollywood writing gurus.
- **BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS** by David Ball. Ostensibly a book about how to read plays, but this little book provides perhaps the best discussion of "dramatic action," the essential building block for scripts.
- **THE ART OF DRAMATIC WRITING** by Lajos Egri. With chapters on film, plays, short stories, etc. A classic that everyone reads.
- **PLAYWRIGHTS TEACH PLAYWRITING** by Joan Herrington and Crystal Brian. Diverse essays by contemporary playwrights on the pedagogy of playwriting
- **SCRIPTWORK: A DIRECTOR'S APPROACH TO NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT** by David Kahn and Donna Breed. Okay, this is a shameless plug for my own book about how theatrical collaboration helps shape new scripts.
- **ADVENTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE** by William Goldman. A no-holds-barred look at the writer as artist and as business person, with many of his own experiences to demonstrate what you can expect. The latest edition includes his screenplay for "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid."
- **MAKING A GOOD SCRIPT GREAT**, 2nd Edition by Linda Seger. This is an excellent book on rewriting, structure, characterization, etc.
- **FREE FIRE ZONE: A PLAYWRIGHT'S ADVENTURES IN FILM AND TELEVISION** by Theresa Rebeck. Brutally honest, funny and exceptionally smart by a multi-faceted script writer with serious street credentials.
- **THE ART OF ADAPTATION: TURNING FACT AND FICTION INTO FILM** by Linda Seger. Not only adapting plays and novels but turning real life events into screenplays.
- **HOW TO SELL YOUR SCREENPLAY: THE REAL RULES OF FILM AND TELEVISION** by Carl Sautter. How Hollywood really works, both TV and film. What to expect. How to break in. Sautter's style is straight-forward and easy to read. This book is as entertaining as it is educational.
- **THE INNER MOVIE METHOD**. How to write a movie in 21 days by Viki King. Consider it 21 stages or steps and it's more believable. Includes her nine point structure and lots of moral support.
- **COMEDY WRITING, STEP BY STEP** by Gene Perret. Perret analyzes comedy without being overly dry and analytical. Easy to read, fun to do the exercises.
- **SCREENWRITERS ON SCREENWRITING** Edited by Joel Engel. It's great to read the opinions by these writers: Bruce Joel Rubin, Ernest Lehman, Amy Holden Jones, Nicholas Meyer, Ted Tally, Horton Foote, Caroline Thompson, Michael Mann, Charles Fuller, Robert Towne, Richard LaGravenese, Andrew Bergman and Scott Frank.
- **SELLING YOUR SCREENPLAY** by Cynthia Whitcomb. All the basics you should know about the business of script writing and selling. Answers the questions you didn't know you had.
- **ALTERNATIVE SCRIPTWRITING** by Ken Dancyger & Jeff Rush. It has great ideas for going beyond the "rules". It discusses structure, counter-structure, genre, working against genre, character (primary & secondary), tone and subtext. It uses MANY movies for examples and even compares popular movies with fictitious ones to illustrate topics. It's great for breaking out of derivative screenplays.
- **THE DRAMATIST'S TOOLKIT** by Jeffrey Sweet. It's primarily oriented toward playwriting, but he has quite a bit of insight into screen and TV writing as well.
- **THE SCREENWRITER'S BIBLE** by David Trottier. Includes a format guide that is the closest to what is universally acceptable to nearly every agent and studio in town. Chapters for new writers on writing and marketing your work.

Also: **DRAMALOGUE, AMERICAN THEATRE MAGAZINE, NEW YORK TIMES, AMERICAN FILM MAGAZINE, DAILY VARIETY, THEATRE BAY AREA.**

*(assist by Lou Grantt)