

Abilene Christian University
Sample Syllabus - Undergraduate
Fall 2013

English 331.01
Narrative for Film and New Media
3 credit hours

Meets MW 2:00p - 3:20p
Chambers 311

Professor Albert Haley
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University Mission

The mission of Abilene Christian University is to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

College Mission

The College of Arts and Sciences at Abilene Christian University educates students for worldwide Christian service and leadership through programs of study and other learning experiences that blend a liberal arts education with professional and career education.

Department Mission

The Department of Language and Literature at ACU believes in the importance of reading, reasoning, and writing effectively in order to serve God in an information-driven world.

Course Prerequisites

The prerequisite for this workshop is the successful completion of all sophomore literature requirements. This should give you mastery of needed skills in reading literature, analyzing rhetorical strategies, and conveying your thoughts clearly through writing.

Primary Audience

This class is intended for junior and seniors in all majors, including:

- Digital Entertainment Technology majors and minors (who currently are choosing the 3-hour credit Eng. 322: Fiction Workshop in lieu of Eng. 472: Film and Belief)
- English majors interested in creative writing
- Any student interested in acquiring writing and creative skills used in the entertainment industry.

Course Catalogue Description

Principles of storytelling, including myth and screenplay structure, as used in movies, graphic novels, and interactive gaming. Close study of fantasy and science fiction narratives. Workshop format involves peer review.

Course Synopsis/Goal

In this class you will be given the skills needed to create narratives in different media, including prose for the page, film, and video games. For each narrative you will apply foundational storytelling building blocks in a sequence that leads to maximum impact for the reader/viewer. These are critical skills for anyone today wishing to work in the entertainment industry either in film, video games, and emerging genres of storytelling. Even if your intention is to work in some area of CGI or coding video games, you will find it useful to understand the elements of story as they will allow you to collaborate more effectively with the storytellers involved in the project.

In addition, by looking at narrative possibilities through a Christian perspective, this class will direct you in ways to discover the options for storytelling aimed at both a general and a more spiritually inclined audience.

Outline/Main Topics

In our time together you will learn in a logical progression.

You'll begin by reading and analyzing excellent examples of science fiction and fantasy short stories. This will lead to your first major assignment: **write a story of your own**, aiming to achieve a similar high quality of writing with an **emphasis on character development**. (Note: Lack of characters who feel real and that we can empathize with is the number one criticism of most video games by those both inside and outside the video game industry.)

Next you will study the **stages of the "hero's journey,"** the template used for some of the most successful Hollywood films. You will apply what you learn by choosing a film and analyzing it using this terminology borrowed from the world of mythology. Another opportunity for application will occur when you write a short film script. This will also allow you to master **professional script formatting**.

The final major area of learning will concern **interactive storytelling**, in which the audience is in charge of the direction of the story, opening up the possibility of multiple paths and endings. You will have opportunities to develop your creative skills in the areas of decision points, branches and other interactive elements in a non-linear narrative suitable for a video game.

Class Format

Various combinations of learning methods that are designed to connect with different learning styles will be used in this class. Learning methods I use include:

- Mini-lecture
- Class discussion
- Small group discussion
- Writing in class
- Workshopping your writing and storyboards in order to get group feedback

Texts (Required)

1. Claremont, Chris and Brent Anderson. *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*. New York: Marvel Comics Group, 2003. ISBN 978-0-7851-5726-7
2. Horton, Rich, ed. *This Year's Best Science Fiction and Fantasy, 2010*. Prime Books, 2010. ISBN 978-1-60701-218-4

Texts (cont.)

3. McDonald, Brian. *Invisible Ink: A Practical Guide to Building Stories That Resonate*. Seattle: Librartary Editions, 2010. ISBN 978-0-9841786-2-9
4. Miller, Carolyn Handler. *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment*, 2nd Edition. Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-240-80959-5
5. Thompson, Craig. *Blankets, A Graphic Novel*. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2003. ISBN 978-1-60309-096-4
6. Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3rd Edition. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007. ISBN 978-1-932907-36-0

Christian Perspective

A crucial assumption of my teaching philosophy is that **any class taught at a Christian institution of higher learning should differ in some way from the same course that is offered at a public or secular private university**. This doesn't mean precluding consideration of ideas and texts discussed at the other institutions, but generally it does mean inviting a larger range of possibilities into the classroom, including asking the questions, "What does God think about this art or entertainment? (e.g., rated video games)" and "How can scripture and history of Christian practice guide us?" My goal in all things is to keep in mind the assertion of St. Paul who tells us, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Corinthians 2:16)

Another of my strongly held beliefs is that in the 21st century **Christian artists need to seriously "up their game."** Too often when the best creative projects enter the marketplace, Christians seem to be absent—except as consumers of what non-believers have produced. If we are offering our best to God in all things, then this should include the things we create. There is no excuse for unreflective, lazy, or mediocre works of art or creative attempts by God's people. Jesus sets the highest possible standard for us in whatever we do when he says in the Sermon on Mount, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

Lastly, at a Christian university there is the perennial issue of **questionable material**. This is more true than ever as entertainers in the world of video games and graphic novels seem every year to produce "edgier" stories, replete with sex, gore, and harsh language. Whenever we are going to encounter this kind of material in the class you will be given advance notice and told exactly what elements justify an "R," "M," "A," or unrated "caution." **It will be left to your personal judgment whether you wish to read or view this content or be given an alternative assignment;** however, you will be encouraged in the name of being wise about "the ways of this world" (Romans 2:12) to engage this material—not to emulate it—but to understand it and see it with the above-referenced "mind of Christ" and develop your own alternatives to these worldly elements of today's entertainment.

Course Competencies

By attending, participating and doing all the assignments in this course, at the end of 15 weeks you will be able to do the following:

	Competency	Measurement Instrument	Measurement Standard
1	Read current science fiction and fantasy short stories analytically to be able to locate character development and internal conflict and then be able to apply it to your own stories.	- Reading: Quizzes - Application: Write 2000-3000 word fantasy or science fiction story	Reading Quizzes: % correct (see grade scale below) Story Assignment: (see writing criteria below)
2	Identify the stages of the hero's journey (monomyth) and its major variants in modern narratives that incorporate it. Be able to articulate why these elements give the narrative its power and memorability.	Short paper discussing successive stages of hero's journey in a recent film or video game and how they affect the outcome.	- 50% of grade: Accurate use of terminology - 50% of grade: Thorough identification of all elements in the film
3	Identify the 3-act structure used by filmmakers to tell stories.	Short paper discussing the 3-act structure in three films.	- 80% of grade: Accurate analysis of 3-act structure - 20% of grade: Well-written expression of ideas
4	Create a screenplay integrating the 3-act structure to tell the story.	Write screenplay for a 4-minute film. Include a storyboard.	- 25% of grade: Incorporate 3-act structure - 30% of grade: Originality of idea and sustained character development. - 20% of grade: Audience (class) reaction to film as shown by anonymous polling - 10% of grade: Originality, development, and coherence of film idea - 10% of grade: Well-written expression (mechanics) of ideas. - 5% of grade: Visual quality of storyboard.
5	Use the professional screenplay format as rendered in a common program (e.g., Adobe Story).	Same assignment as No. 4	Adhere to checklist of elements of screenplay format
6	Distinguish between interactive narrative and conventional narrative and create an original interactive narrative that offers the viewer/player compelling and significantly different outcomes.	Diagram showing "web" of three alternative "paths" and endings for a recent film.	- 70% of grade: credibility and originality of alternate story paths - 30% of grade: diagram quality
7	Justify Christian participation in popular entertainments, especially video games, and distinguish moral issues that invite biblical scrutiny.	Group Project: Group members will role play as necessary and post on the class blog different views (pro and con) of a specific controversial video game or film. After the individual posts they will sift through and synthesize their various ideas to come up with a group consensus view, which will also be posted.	- 50% of grade: individual response - 40% of grade: group response - 10% of grade: worked effectively with group members based on anonymous post-project surveys

Evaluation Categories and Grading Criteria

Your performance in this class will be assessed using the following evaluative methods, which should provide you feedback on the progress you are making toward achieving the above competencies.

Attendance/Participation Grade

You are expected to attend class and participate in all in-class activities. In-class activities involve small discussion groups and writing exercises. Your in-class writing (e.g., try to imitate the style of an author) is usually performed in the computer lab. This “practice” writing will be graded A, B and F. These grades mean the following:

- A - Assignment or activity completed, is among one of the best responses generated by the workshop
- B - Assignment or activity completed according to the guidelines
- F - Did not follow guidelines or did not finish assignment/activity or made no attempt

At the end of the semester I will look at how many times you attended class and what you turned in. I will then assess an overall Attendance/Participation grade in terms of a letter grade of “A, B, C, etc.” This grade will count for 10% of your final grade. Obviously, if your attendance lags, your in-class participation will suffer as well. (See **Attendance Policy** for further information on the importance of coming to class).

Final Attendance/Participation Grade

- A - *Excellent*, 0-1 unexcused absences, did (or made up) all in-class writing with B or higher and participated in group work.
- B - *Good*, 2 unexcused absences, made up missed in-class writing with B or higher.
- C - *Fair*, 3 unexcused absences and/or some in-class writing not made up.
- D - *Barely Passing*, more than 3 unexcused absences, did not complete at least half of in-class writing and group work
- F - *Anything below “D” standard*

Quizzes

Quizzes are designed to let me know how much of the reading you did and retained. Your percentage of correct responses indicate the following:

- 90 - 100 = A – *Excellent*. You read, you remembered.
- 80 - 89 = B – *Good*. You likely read everything but your memory lagged in a couple of places.
- 70 - 79 = C – *Passing*. You read some of the material but you didn’t finish or read too quickly.
- 61 - 69 = D – *Serious cause for concern*. You didn’t read and your own writing/ideas will suffer because of lack of information and models to inform your work.
- F - *Anything below “D” standard*

Writing

Your creative assignments, which include a short story, storyboards, and a screenplay will be graded according to the criteria below.

A 90-100 – With minor touch-up, this work could be submitted and seriously considered as worthy of professional consideration, either in print, or on the web, as part of a job interview portfolio, or other media, depending on the genre you're working in. It shows a high level of professionalism in originality, character development, and correct use of English and formatting.

B 80-89 – You have promising material (character and plot) and you've used some important story elements. Pay attention to the feedback you receive from me and your classmates. Clean up excessive errors. If time permits, submit a revision.

C 70-79 – Pay special attention to my overview comments. They will suggest how to use narrative elements to strengthen the work as well as note parts of your narrative that seem underdeveloped, misordered, or unclear. I may also suggest that you look to see if you can make your story and character ideas more original.

D 60-69 – Your idea is weak, you're not applying the story elements learned in the class, and/or the writing has an unacceptable level of errors.

F – Did not submit assignment or wrote in an egregiously profane and/or violent manner or violated academic integrity policy.

Deriving Your Final Grade for the Course

All graded activities will be considered in developing your final grade. Each category of assessment will be given the following percentage weight of the final grade.

Attendance/Participation	10%
Quizzes	10%
Short papers, diagram of alternative paths	10%
Team blog project	10%
Story, film script, interactive script, and revisions	50%
Final exam	10%

Final Exam:

The final exam for this course consists of attending the scheduled final session (see ACU Schedule Bulletin) and giving a 5-minute overview/presentation of your final revision of your film script. This 5-minute presentation will receive a letter grade evaluation. You will then turn in the revision you have presented.

Policy on Late Papers: The only late papers allowed will occur under some version of the following scenarios.

- I am informed in advance that you wish to submit late and I pre-approve this action based upon a legitimate, artistically sound reason (e.g., you've already started writing, but you've discovered your piece requires additional research or a special interview that has to be scheduled close to the due date).
- You've been hospitalized, incapacitated, or are in the midst of a humanitarian crisis.

Attendance Policy

Department of Language and Literature policy requires that if you miss more than 6 classes in a MW class, you must be dropped with a WF or WP.

If you have to miss a class and are concerned about your grade, notify me ASAP. Do this by sending an e-mail to **haleya@acu.edu**.

Academic Dishonesty

This class will observe a policy of Zero Tolerance when it comes to plagiarism. Plagiarism is defined in the ACU Student Handbook as:

- Intentional or unintentional failure to give credit to sources used in a work in an attempt to present the work as one's own.
- Submitting for credit in whole or in part the work of others.
- Submission of paper(s) or project(s) obtained from any source, such as a research service or a club paper file, as one's own.

Distraction-free Environment in the Classroom, i.e, no texting, tweeting, emailing, surfing

Due to past abuses of mobile phones and smart phone technologies (which can distract the entire class, including the teacher), they are not allowed to be brought out into the open under any circumstances or for any uses within the walls of our classroom. This ban on texting, tweeting, emailing, and surfing the Web applies also to laptops and tablet computers. (The latter may be used for taking notes or consulting e-versions of your texts, but that is all.) If you absolutely need to text or phone, you must exit the classroom. If you violate this policy, you will be asked to leave the classroom and be given an absence for the day.

ADA Compliance

Abilene Christian University is dedicated to removing barriers and opening access for students with disabilities in compliance with ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The Alpha Scholars Program facilitates disability accommodations in cooperation with instructors. In order to receive accommodations, you must be registered with Alpha Scholars Program, and you must complete a specific request for each class in which you need accommodations. If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please call our office directly at (325) 674-2667.

Racial and Sexual Harassment

Racial and sexual harassment is a violation of the code of conduct as described in Section 2-02 of the ACU Student Guide and will not be tolerated during class or class-related activities. Harassment is any action, including a joke or suggestion that creates an intimidating, hostile or degrading environment and would have such an effect on a reasonable person of the alleged victim's status. Violators of Section 2-02 will be referred to Campus Life.

Course Calendar

Week/ Dates	Topic(s)	Readings	Assignments due on Thurs.
[1] Aug. 29 Aug. 31	- Learning about you - Your life as a story - Genres, conventions, and immersive entertainment		—
[2] Sept. 6 Sept. 8	- Basic tool: show don't tell - Basic tool: internal conflict	T: "Masque of the Red Death" (Poe) "The Fall of the House of Usher" R: "Hills Like White Elephants" (Hemingway)	
[3] Sept. 13 Sept. 15	- Time travel stories (<i>Best</i> anthology)	T: "Bespoke," "The Endangered Camp" R: "The Unbearable Vision of Harriett" Beecher Stowe"	
[4] Sept. 20 Sept. 23	- Fantasy/Historical (<i>Best</i> anthology)	T: "The Logic of the World" "Dragon's Teeth" R: "As Women Fight"	
[5] Sept. 27 Sept. 29	- Steam Punk/Mash-up (<i>Best</i> anthology)	T: "The Radiant Car..." R: "Technicolor," "Crimes and Glory"	
[6] Oct. 4 Oct. 6	- Science Fiction (<i>Best</i> anthology)	T: "Wife-Stealing Time" "Glisters." R: No reading	Story 1 Due Thurs.
[7] Oct. 11 Oct. 13	- The role of myth in successful Hollywood narratives	T: <i>The Writer's Journey</i> pp. 1-80 R: <i>The Writer's Journey</i> pp. 81-230	
[8] Oct. 18 Oct. 20	- The screenwriter's craft	T: <i>Invisible Ink</i> pp. 1-104 R: <i>Invisible Ink</i> pp. 105-129	Paper: Hero's Journey in a popular film or video game
[9] Oct. 25 Oct. 27	- Graphic novel	T: <i>X-men</i> (all including intro and afterword) R: No reading	
[10] Nov. 1 Nov. 3	- The Christian storyteller	T: <i>Blankets</i> (all) R: Group work, no reading	
[11] Nov. 8 Nov. 10	- Interactive Narratives -Intro	T: <i>Digital Storytelling</i> pp. 53-128 R: <i>Digital Storytelling</i> pp. 149-188	Group blog project
[12] Nov. 15 Nov. 17	- Interactive Narratives – Video Games	T: <i>Digital Storytelling</i> pp. 243-302 R: <i>Digital Storytelling</i> pp. 303-382	Interactive narrative flowchart
[13] Nov. 22	- Developing a script/formatting	T: No reading R: Thanksgiving	
[14] Nov. 29 Dec. 1	- Student film workshop	T: No reading R: No reading	Screenplay

[15] Dec. 6 Dec. 8	- Student film workshop - Using what you know to find a job or apply to grad school	T: No reading R: <i>Digital Storytelling</i> pp. 411-438	
Dec. 15 Thurs: 12-1:45	FINAL EXAM		Revision of screenplay