

Jackson State University
College of Liberal Arts
Department of Speech Communication & Theatre

FUNDAMENTALS OF PLAYWRITING

DR 314-01

Tuesday & Thursday 2:30-3:50

“The art of writing is rewriting what you’ve already written” -Unknown

“Writing is never done just due”- Dr. Roger Gross

Course Number and Title: DR 314-01 Fundamentals of Playwriting

Semester and Year: Fall 2016

Instructor: Professor Prince Duren

Office Location: Rose E. McCoy Rm: 114

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 9am – 12pm and 4pm – 5pm (Conference Hours)

Tuesday & Thursday 9am – 11:30am and 4pm – 5pm (Conference Hours)

Friday: By Appointment Only

College of Liberal Arts Meeting

Last Thursday of each month: 10am – 11am

Office Number: 601-979-3337

Main Office Number: 601-979-2426

E-mail: prince.duren@jsums.edu

Required Textbook: “*The Road to Your First Play*” by Prince Duren

ISBN: 978-1-988365-55-8

Other Requirements: Student will be required to pay any submission fees associated with playwriting contests.

Something to ease your worry

For a few special people playwriting becomes an art. For most of us, for all of our lives, playwriting remains a craft like cabinet making or plumbing. Do not forget that the word playwright is spelled *w-r-i-g-h-t*, just as in woodwright or wheelwright. It is spelled that way because a playwright is a maker of plays, just as a wheelwright is a maker of wheels. So this course is not designed to make you an artist but to teach you the wheel-making or perhaps, more aptly, the plumbing of drama. You are now an apprentice, who must do the reading, writing, and thinking necessary to learn the tools of your trade. This course will not ask you to be a Shakespeare or a Tennessee Williams; it will only ask you to apprentice yourself to the craft of playwriting; that is, do your work: write plays. If you do, you will fare well. If you don’t, you won’t. To that special one of you who has the gifts to become an artist, it is wise to remember that a life in art begins with the study of form and technique. –T.S. Frank

Course Description: A lecture laboratory course in the fundamentals of playwriting. Laboratory work consists of exercise in exposition, traditional scenes, builds, crisis,

resolution, etc. Lectures include script analysis, discussion of certain avant-garde plays and the works of the individual playwright. A scenario will be written. An important note, this course allows the creativity of the student to be showcased through their writing. Most importantly, this course will serve as a workshop for new work by the student.

Course Objectives: Playwriting will enable the students to think and write creatively and dramatically and will provide a foundation for more advanced dramatic writing and theatre courses. The course will enable the students to explore the writing process in and outside of class and place an emphasis on the re-writing stage of the process. The course will enable the students to be able to effectively and constructively critique not only their own work but also the work of their peers.

Goals:

- Dig deep and hit pay dirt.
- Get every question out on the table.
- Discover weaknesses and make them strengths.
- Identify your motives for writing and elevate them to the tenth power.
- Learn more about your own voice.
- Have several works in progress.

Writer's Block

- I don't believe in it.
- It won't work as an excuse.
- If you're having trouble writing, bring it to class and I'll create exercises/assignments to help you overcome it.

ATTENDANCE: Due to the cumulative nature of this course, attendance at every session is mandatory. In the world of writing, we work in the realm of deadlines. Therefore, it's imperative that you are in class on the day we are discussing your work. This also applies when we are discussing the work of your peers. Your final grade will be reduced by **one letter grade** after three absences; a letter grade of **F** will be given after five absences. **THERE ARE NO EXCUSED ABSENCES!** When you are absent, please do not bring me a doctor's note, an obituary, letter from a mechanic, or any other information in hopes of excusing an absence. Use your absences wisely.

Please arrive to class on time. Tardiness is unprofessional and is not fair to me or to your peers. You will receive an absence if you are not there for the entire class period. That is, staying for only half the class, coming in 5-10 minutes before the end of class, or consistently coming in 5-10 minutes late does not mean that you attended. **3 Tardies equals one absence.** If you come in after roll has been called or an attendance sheet has been passed, it is your responsibility to let the instructor know at the end of that particular class. Moreover, do not expect me to cover any missed material.

Late Assignments. Remember writing is never done just due. Therefore, I will not take any plays submitted late. All plays must be submitted via Blackboard the Sunday @ 11:59pm prior to the Tuesday reading date. No plays will be accepted late.

Extra Credit & Class Participation: There are no extra credit opportunities available. The professor has the right to amend this rule at his discretion. You are required to participate in every class discussion with feedback of **substance**. You can only receive all the participation points. There will be no partial points.

Classroom Etiquette There are certain basic standards of classroom civility that should be adhered to, particularly in a theatre course. Etiquette does not eliminate appropriate humor, enjoyment, or other features of a comfortable and pleasant classroom community. Classroom etiquette does, however, include the following:

- 1.) Displaying respect of all members of the classroom community, both your instructor and fellow students. As Erykah Badu once said, *"I'm an artist and I'm sensitive about my stuff."*
- 2.) Attentiveness to and participation in lectures and peer feedbacks.
- 3.) Avoidance of unnecessary disruptions during class such as private conversations, reading campus or any type of newspaper, and **DOING WORK FOR OTHER CLASSES**. This includes any and every aspect of communicating via social media.
- 4.) Avoidance of racist, sexist, homophobic, or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our campus and classroom community.

These features of classroom etiquette do not comprise an exhaustive list. Rather, they represent the minimal sort of behavior that helps make the classroom a pleasant place for all concerned.

Diversity Statement:

Jackson State University is committed to creating a community that affirms and welcomes persons from diverse backgrounds and experiences and supports the realization of their human potential. We recognize that there are differences among groups of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic area. All persons are encouraged to respect the individual differences of others.

Special Needs Learners:

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator and Compliance Officer, P.O. Box 1799, Jackson, MS 39217, telephone (601) 979-3704 as early as possible in the term.

Grievances:

Any student who has a grievance and/or complaint must first discuss the grievance and/or complaint with the professor. If there is no resolution at the student/ professor level, the student can then address his/her complaints through the appropriate channels of administration:

Coordinator of Theatre Studies: Dr. Nadia Bodie-Smith (Rose McCoy Building)

Department Chair: Dr. Mark Henderson, (McCoy Building)

Dean of College of Liberal Arts: Dr. Mario Azevedo (Liberal Arts Building)

Please note that documentation of a meeting at each level is required before the student may request a meeting at the next level.

Academic Honesty:

All acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating on exams, plagiarizing or presenting another person's work as one's own, having another person write one's paper, fabricating research data, presenting excuses, which are untrue for failing to meet academic and professional standards) are a violation of University Policy, which will entail appropriate penalties.

No cell phones, beepers, and/or pagers may be used during class. Do not attempt to be discreet in your phone usage. Just because I do not say does not mean I did not see. If you are expecting an emergency call, please see me before class. Please do not gather your belongings or prepare to leave until class is officially dismissed.

ASSIGNMENTS

Opening Play 1st Draft (25 points)

Opening Play 2nd Draft (25 points)

Chapter Quizzes (50 points each) =500

Social Injustice/Current Event Play 1st Draft (100 points)

Social Injustice/Current Event Play 2nd Draft (100 points)

Kids Say the Darndest Things Play 1st Draft (100 points)

Kids Say the Darndest Things Play 1st Draft (100 points)

Final Play (100 points)

Stage Readings (100 points)

5 Submissions (20 points each)= 100 points

Participation (100 points) ALL OR NONE

Total: 1350

A= 1350 – 1215 A= 100 – 90

B= 1214 – 1080 B= 92 – 85

C= 1079 – 945 C= 84 – 75

D= 944 – 810 D= 74 – 65

F= Below 810 F= Below 65

Method of Course Evaluation (e.g. SIRS, mid-semester evaluation by student, peer evaluation, faculty diary)

Class Schedule:

(Note: Schedule is subject to change throughout the semester at the professor's discretion)

Date	Daily Task	For Next Class Meeting	Notes
8/23	Introduction Syllabus Overview Play Order Drawing Opening Play Assignment	Chapter 1: The Introduction	Complete chapter 1 questions online prior to class. Opening Play is due on Blackboard by 11:59pm 9/4.
8/25	Discuss Chapter 1: The Introduction	Chapter 2: The Assumptions	Complete chapter 2 questions online prior to class.
8/30	Discuss Chapter 2: The Assumptions		
9/1	No Class	Opening Play (1 st Draft)	
9/6	Opening Play (1 st Draft)	Opening Play (1 st Draft cont.)	
9/8	Open Play (1 st Draft)	Chapter 3: How to Write A Play	Complete chapter 3 questions online prior to class. Opening Play 2nd Draft due on Blackboard by 11:59pm 9/18.
9/13	Discuss Chapter 3: How to Write a Play	Chapter 3 cont.	
9/15	Chapter 3	Opening Play 2 nd Draft	

9/20	Opening Play 2 nd Draft “Social Injustice” Assignment	Opening Play 2 nd Draft cont.	Social Injustice play is due via Blackboard by 11:59 10/2.
9/22	Opening Play 2 nd Draft	Chapter 4: Dramatic Structure	Complete chapter 4 questions online prior to class.
9/27	Discuss Chapter 4: Dramatic Structure	Chapter 5: The Beginning, Middle, and End	Complete chapter 5 questions online prior to class.
9/29	Chapter 5: The Beginning, Middle, and End.	“Social Injustice” Play 1 st Draft	City Theatre National Award for Short Playwriting Contest
10/4	“Social Injustice” Play 1 st Draft	“Social Injustice” Play 1 st Draft	
10/6	“Social Injustice” Play 1 st Draft	Chapter 6: Character Development	Complete chapter 6 questions online prior to class.
10/11	Chapter 6: Character Development	Chapter 7: Dialogue	Complete chapter 7 questions online prior to class.
10/13	Chapter 7: Dialogue	“Social Injustice” Play 2 nd Draft	
10/18	“Social Injustice” Play 2 nd Draft	“Social Injustice” Play 2 nd Draft	
10/20	“Social Injustice” Play 2 nd Draft	Chapter 8: Titles & Formatting	Theatre Oxford’s National 10 Play Contest 10/31
10/25	Chapter 8: Titles & Formatting “Kids Say the Darndest Things”	No Class	Complete chapter 8 questions online prior to class.

			“Kids Say” Play due via Blackboard by 11:59pm on 11/6
10/27	No Class	Chapter 9: Producing & Publishing	Complete chapter 9 questions online prior to class. Gary Garrison National Ten-Minute Play Award 11/1 National Ten-Minute Play Contest 11/1 KCACTF 10 Minute Play Festival 11/1
11/1	Chapter 9: Producing and Publishing	Chapter 10: Conclusion	Complete chapter 10 questions online prior to class.
11/3	Chapter 10: Conclusion	“Kids Say the Darndest Things” Play 1 st Draft	
11/8	“Kids Say the Darndest Things” Play 1 st Draft	“Kids Say the Darndest Things” Play 1st Draft	Stage Reading Auditions @4pm
11/10	“Kids Say the Darndest Things” Play 1st Draft	“Kids Say the Darndest Things” Play 2 nd Draft	
11/15	“Kids Say the Darndest Things” Play 2nd Draft Final Play	“Kids Say the Darndest Things” Play 2nd Draft	Final Play due via Blackboard by 11:59pm 11/27.
11/17	“Kids Say the Darndest Things” Play 2nd Draft		
11/21-11/25	Thanksgiving Break		
11/29	Final Play	Final Play	
12/4	Final Play		

12/7	Stage Readings 6pm Rose E. McCoy		
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Bibliography

Apple Jacki, "Art of the Barricades," *Artwork*, vol. 21, May 3, 1990

Duren, Prince. *The Road to Your First Play*. Top Hat Publishing 2016. Online Text.

Jones Edmond, Robert, *The Dramatic Imagination*, Theater Arts, New York, 1941

"All Bleeding Stops Eventually." : *Jose Rivera's 36 Assumptions About Playwriting*. N.p., 16 Jan. 2007. Web. 21 Aug. 2014.

Wilson, Edwin. *The Theatre Experience*. 12th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education

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