

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: College of Liberal Arts Rm 304 (Located inside of the Criminal Justice and Sociology Department.

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

Tuesday (Conference Hours)

Thursday & 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 Canvas the Monday @ 11:59pm prior to the Tuesday reading date. No plays will be accepted late. If we do not read your play on the day we are supposed to, your play will not count. Thus, you will receive a failing grade for that draft. Email submissions of your play are not accepted unless authorized by the professor.

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: Jimmy Mumford, (Art 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 or internet use that is not authorized by myself is allowed. Do not attempt to be discreet in your 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) =200

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

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

Hat Play 1st Draft (100 points)

Hat Play 2nd Draft (100 points)

Mid-Term= 100

Stage Readings (100 points)

5 Submissions (20 points each)= 100 points

Participation (100 points) ALL OR NONE

Total: 1050

A= 1050 – 945 A= 100 – 90

B= 944 – 840 B= 89 – 80

C= 839 – 735 C= 79 – 70

D= 734 – 630 D= 69 – 60

F= Below 630 F= Below 60

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
8/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Syllabus Overview • Play Order Drawing • Opening Play Assignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play Format • How to Write a Play 	Opening Play is due on Canvas by 11:59pm 9/4.
8/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play Format • How to Write a Play • Play Story Boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jose Rivera's 36 Assumptions to Playwriting • Discuss Story Boards 	Complete story board for your opening play. Read Jose's
8/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss Jose Rivera's Assumptions • Examine Story Boards • Submitting to Play Competitions 		Remember "Opening Play" is due via Canvas by 11:59pm on 9/4.
9/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Opening Play" (1st Draft) 	Opening Play (1 st Draft)	
9/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening Play (1st Draft) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read "Why Scripts Don't Fly" 	2 nd Draft of "Opening Play" is due via Canvas by 11:59pm on 9/18.
9/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz over "Why Scripts Don't Fly" • Discuss "Why Scripts Don't Fly" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Class 	
9/14	NO CLASS	"Opening Play" (2 nd Draft)	
9/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Opening Play" (2nd Draft) 	Opening Play 2 nd Draft	Social Injustice play is due via

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Social Injustice” Play 		Canvas by 11:59pm 10/9.
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9/21	Opening Play 2 nd Draft	Opening Play 2 nd Draft cont. Read Chapter 2 “Work those Ruby Slippers, Dorothy”	
9/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss Reading • Dramatic Structure 	Continue Chapter 2 Dialogue	
9/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz #2 over Chapter 2. 	Mid-Term Review	Social In Justice Play is due via Canvas by 11:59pm 10/9.
10/3	Mid-Term Review	No Class	
10/5	NO CLASS		
10/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Social Injustice” Play 1st Draft 	“Social Injustice” Play 1 st Draft Mid-Term	
10/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Social Injustice” Play 1st Draft 	Mid-Term	
10/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-Term 	“Titles Sell Tickets” Stream of Conscious	2 nd Draft of Social Injustice Play due via Canvas by 11:59pm 10/23.
10/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Titles Sell Tickets” • Stream of Conscious 	“Social Injustice” Play 2 nd Draft	
10/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Social Injustice” Play 2nd Draft • “Hat Play” Assignment 	“Social Injustice” Play 2 nd Draft	Hat Plays are due at 11:59pm via Canvas on 11/6.
10/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Social Injustice” Play 2nd Draft 	Playwrights and Play Genres	
10/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz #3 over Titles Sell Tickets • Playwrights and Play Genres 	No Class	

11/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Class 		
11/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hat Play (1st Draft) 	Hat Play (1 st Draft)	
11/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hat Play (1st Draft) 	My 10 minute Plays have been sucking. Why?	Hat Play (2ND Draft) due via Canvas at 11:59pm on 11/27.
11/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My 10 minute Plays have been sucking. Why? 	Quiz #4 over My 10 minute Plays have been sucking. Why?	Stage Reading Auditions @4pm
11/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz #4 	Hat Play (2 nd Draft)	
11/21 & 11/23	Thanksgiving Break		
11/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hat Play (2nd Draft) 	Hat Play 2 nd Draft	
11/30	Hat Play (2 nd Draft)		
12/5	Final Stage Reading in the McCoy at 6pm.		
11/21-11/25	Thanksgiving Break		
11/29	Final Play	Final Play	
12/4	Final Play		
12/7	Stage Readings 6pm Rose E. McCoy		

Bibliography

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

Garrison, Gary, "Perfect 10 Writing and Producing the 10 – Minute Play", Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 2001

Grebanier, Bernard. "How to Write for the Theatre," Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1961

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.

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