

**TH 325 01: Playwriting [3 credits]**  
TR 11:00am-12:15pm

**Spring 2020**

**Class Location: Shilling 320**

**Professor: Dr. Tom Robson**

**Office Hours:** Monday 1-4pm, Tuesday 10-11am, Thursday 10-11am.

**Course Description:** The writing of plays. Emphasis placed on plot, theme, dialogue, technical problems, and characterization.

**Learning Goals:** The five central learning goals of the Department of Theatre & Dance are to engage in analytical learning, technical learning, collaborative learning, professional learning, and the pursuit of a life of meaning and value.

**Course Objectives:** On successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Duplicate industry-standard formatting for a play script.
- Identify the aspects of a stage-worthy story.
- Develop a personal creative writing process.
- Appraise in-process creative writing using discipline-appropriate feedback system.
- Construct a ten-minute play.

**Student Well-Being:** The well-being of students is of primary importance. If you are facing any challenges related to your physical or mental health, or obstacles like food or housing insecurity, please do not hesitate to get in touch to discuss ways we can put you in the best possible position to succeed.

**Inclusivity:**

Every student in this classroom, regardless of personal history or identity categories, is a valued member of this group. Your experiences are valued and important, and you should feel free to share them as they become relevant to our class. No student in this class is ever expected or believed to speak for all members of a group.

In this classroom you have the right to determine your own identity. You have the right to be called by whatever name you wish, and for that name to be pronounced correctly. You have the right to be referred to by whatever pronoun you wish. You have the right to adjust those things at any point in your education.

If you find that there are aspects of course instruction, subject matter, or classroom environment that result in barriers to your inclusion, please contact me privately without fear of reprisal.

**Required Texts:**

- Michael B. Wright, *Playwriting in Process: Thinking and Working Theatrically, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*

- Louis E. Catron and Norman A. Bert, *The Elements of Playwriting*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

**Incompletes:** No incompletes will be given except for verified medical or other real emergencies. Theatre productions duties are not considered emergencies.

**Grading Breakdown (Out of 1000 points):**

Play #1, first draft:	50
Play #1, revised draft:	100
Play #2, first draft:	100
Play #2, revised draft:	200
Self-Assessment	50
Journal:	300
Formatting Assignment:	100
Participation/Feedback:	100

**Two Notes on Grading:** I will be using the Gradebook feature on Moodle. Grades will be posted to Moodle as I finish grading assignments, so you should always know where you stand in the course. I encourage you to keep track of your grades as they are posted.

Due to privacy concerns I will not discuss grades over email or in the classroom. If you would like a grade explained to you or have questions about your progress in the course, please set up an appointment with me. I will be more than happy to meet with you in my office.

**Exams/Quizzes:** There will be no exams or quizzes in this course.

**Writing Plays:** Every student in this class will write two ten-minute plays over the course of the semester. Each of these plays will be shared/workshopped in-class and then revised. Specific details about these plays will be issued in a separate handout.

**Self-Assessment:** Students will complete a self-assessment reflection activity roughly halfway through the semester, analyzing their work to that point of the semester and articulating strategies for the second half of the semester.

**Journal:** Students in this class are expected to keep a writing journal, and you are expected to write in it a minimum of ten pages per week. These pages can be dialogue, poetry, stream of consciousness, personal reflection, half-formed ideas for plays, character descriptions that interest you, etc. *The essential thing is that you **must** write at least ten pages per week. I will collect these journals every Tuesday to check that you are keeping up with them.* When I collect your notebooks I will *not* be grading for content. In fact, I won't even be reading everything that you've written. This assignment is designed to help get the writing juices flowing and provide you with the kernels of possible future plays. I encourage you to make these journals digital, but you may use a hard-copy one if you wish.

**In-class Exercises:** We will be writing in class nearly every day. The results of these exercises will then be shared with the class and discussed. Sometimes you may not finish a particular exercise in class. In that case, you need to finish it at home. I will be reading these in-class exercises periodically. Please keep these exercises in your journal and **clearly label them as in-class exercises.** *In-class writing exercises do not count as your ten journal pages per week.*

**Participation/Feedback:** In this class we will be responding to each other's writing. It is imperative that everyone share her/his own work and respond constructively to others. Your active participation in both your own development as a writer and that of your classmates will form a significant portion of your grade. Please remember the following important aspects of both giving and receiving feedback:

- Criticism of the work is not a criticism of the person. We have to be able to honestly respond to each other's writing without hurting feelings. *Everyone* in this room is trying to hone writing skills, and we are *all* trying to help and support each other.
- Please give feedback in the manner in which you would like to receive it. This does not mean you need to be overly positive and only praise pieces under discussion, but when giving critique please do so in a kind, respectful, and constructive manner.

We will be following the Liz Lerman Critical Response process given below, which has been taken from

<http://danceexchange.org/projects/critical-response-process/>

1. **Statements of Meaning:** Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work they have just witnessed.
2. **Artist as Questioner:** The artist asks questions about the work. After each question, the responders answer. Responders may express opinions if they are in direct response to the question asked and do not contain suggestions for changes.
3. **Neutral Questions:** Responders ask neutral questions about the work. The artist responds. Questions are neutral when they do not have an opinion couched in them. For example, if you are discussing the lighting of a scene, "Why was it so dark?" is not a neutral question. "What ideas guided your choices about lighting?" is.
4. **Opinion Time:** Responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. The usual form is "I have an opinion about \_\_\_\_\_, would you like to hear it?" The artist has the option to decline opinions for any reason.

**Technology:** As we will be writing in class, you are free to bring laptops or tablets into the classroom with you if you so choose. You are also free to bring headphones to listen to music while you write, if this helps your process, so long as no one but you can hear what is coming through the headphones.

**Attendance:** Students should view this class as a writer's workshop. In order to get the most out of the class, you need to be in the room. Additionally, in order for your classmates to get the most out of the

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class, you need to be in the room. You bring a unique perspective, and if you are not present to voice it, who will? Please do not deprive yourself or your classmates of your presence in our workshop. Students are permitted three absences for the semester, **including illness**. Any absences above that will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 letter grade off of your final course grade. Two instances of lateness to class will be considered the same as one absence. Students accumulating SEVEN total absences for the semester will automatically fail the course.

### Grading Scale:

A: 940-1000	A-: 900-939		
B+: 870-879	B: 830-869	B-: 800-829	
C+: 770-779	C: 730-769	C-: 700-729	
D+: 670-679	D: 630-669	D-: 600-629	F: 0-599

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**Tentative Course Schedule [Subject/likely to change]**

PIP = *Playwriting in Process*

EOP = *Elements of Playwriting*

T 1/21	Course Introduction	
Th 1/23	10-Minute Plays	<i>A Long Way to Fall, la luna, Waiting for Sid and Ethel, EOP 1-15</i>
T 1/28	Building Technique	<i>PIP 1-12, EOP 17-33</i>
Th 1/30	Building Technique	<i>PIP 23-28, <b>Formatting Assignment Due</b></i>
T 2/4	Generating Ideas	<i>EOP 47-57</i>
Th 2/6	Generating Ideas	
T 2/11	Creating Characters	<i>EOP 81-101</i>
Th 2/13	Creating Characters	
T 2/18	Incorporating Actions	
Th 2/20	Reading of First Drafts	<i>EOP 141-148, <b>First Drafts Due</b></i>
T 2/25	Reading of First Drafts	
Th 2/27	Reading of First Drafts	
T 3/3	Reading of First Drafts	
Th 3/5	NO CLASS --- TOM AT MID-AMERICA THEATRE CONFERENCE	
T 3/10	NO CLASS --- SPRING BREAK	
Th 3/12	NO CLASS --- SPRING BREAK	
T 3/17	Revision	<i>EOP 148-155</i>
Th 3/19	Revision	
T 3/24	Reading of Second Drafts	<b>Second Drafts Due</b>
Th 3/26	Reading of Second Drafts	
T 3/31	Reading of Second Drafts Unconventional Plays	<i>A Blinded Horse Dreams of Hippocampi and Patience on the Way to Daylight</i>
Th 4/2	Dialogue	<i>EOP 103-128, Self-Assessment Due</i>
T 4/7	Work on Play #2	<b>First Drafts Due</b>
Th 4/9	Work on Play #2	
T 4/14	NO CLASS --- ADVISING DAY	
Th 4/16	Premises	
T 4/21	Premises	
Th 4/23	Surprise	
F 4/24	DAY OF SCHOLARSHIP --- REQUIRED ATTENDANCE AT CLASS PRESENTATION	

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T 4/28 Surprise  
Th 4/30 Reading of Final Drafts **Second Drafts Due**

T 5/5 Reading of Final Drafts  
Th 5/7 Reading of Final Drafts

FINAL WEEK --- Reading of Final Drafts  
24 Hours After Final Exam Time **Final Reflection Due**

**A Note on Final Exams:** Please know that I have zero control over the scheduling of your final exam, nor do I have the ability to tell you when that exam slot will be scheduled before the Registrar releases the schedule. Please do not book travel until after that schedule has been released, or plan to stay through the entirety of Finals Week.

**10-Minute Play #1:**

For the first ten-minute play assignment, students must write a play with exactly two characters that is realistic in style. Beyond those restrictions there are no further limitations on content, but it must be a two-character, dialogue-driven play, that takes place in a realistic scenario.

The first draft of this play is due in class on **Thursday, February 21**. We will read these plays aloud in class that week and the next. Your classmates will read the roles in the play. All participants in this class will be expected to read characters at some point. Please bring enough copies of the play to class for:

- Each named character
- Someone to read stage directions
- Yourself
- Your professor

For the first play that means you would need five copies of your script. Following the reading of each script we will have a feedback session. After you have received feedback, each student is expected to revise and develop her play. These revised plays will then be read in class beginning on **Tuesday, March 26**. Again, please bring enough copies of your script for named characters, stage directions, and me.

*Students wishing to do so will be given the opportunity to present their revised plays as part of the Spring 2019 Celebration of Scholarship event. No one will be required to share their script, but interested writers will have the opportunity to have their works read. A maximum of three plays will be presented at this event. In the event that more than three writers are interested in sharing their work, we will take a secret ballot class vote.*

**10-Minute Play #2:**

For the second ten-minute play assignment, the only requirement is that the play must have more than a single character (no monologues). Beyond that, you may write whatever you wish: realistic or nonrealistic, two characters or five, etc.

We will use the same in-class reading and feedback process for this script as the first. Again, please bring enough scripts for every named character, someone to read stage directions, yourself, and me. These scripts are due on **Thursday, April 11**, and the in-class readings will occur that week and the next.

Second drafts of these plays are due on **Thursday, May 2**. Second readings will occur in class that week and during our finals week exam slot. For the final readings, students are asked to find readers *from outside the class* to come in and read their scripts. You should have at least one and no more than two outside rehearsals with your readers

prior to the in-class reading, with an *absolute* maximum of two hours of rehearsal time.

**Formatting Requirements**

There are industry standard formatting requirements for writing a play, and students in this class are expected to conform to those standards for drafts of their ten-minute plays. (You may journal and complete exercises in whatever format you wish, but I encourage you to get comfortable with the required style guidelines.) I have posted a set of instructions on how to format a script properly on Moodle. You will also find similar instructions on pages 158-171 of *The Elements of Playwriting*.

You must follow these formatting guidelines. No exceptions.