

ENG 407: WRITING FOR COMICS

SPRING 2018 TUES 2-4:50pm

JEN VAN METER

Classroom: 104 Deady Hall
Hours: Wednesdays 10:30-12:30, location TBA.
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Description

The comic script is a piece of creative writing with a very small and highly specialized audience. It is also a technical document, a blueprint or map for the comic you and your potential collaborators will create. In this seminar, we will consider the script as a production tool, in terms of its usefulness to the people who will work with it. Alongside those concerns, we will always be talking also about storytelling and creative choice-making; a map, after all, is meant to get us where we want to go.

Required Texts (UO Bookstore)

Panel One, Nat Gertler, ed.
Making Comics, Scott McCloud
Bingo Love, Tee Franklin & Jenn St-Onge
Friends With Boys, Faith Erin Hicks
Ms. Marvel VI: No Normal, G. Willow Wilson & Adrian Alphona

Additional Materials

At times I will make scripts and other materials available as handouts and/or through Canvas in the form of PDFs. I may at times also send a class email containing links to material available only online. I will be very clear when it is required that you print your own copy of canvas or online materials to bring with you to class.

Method Of Assessment

Proposals, Workshop Notes 10%
Script #1 (8pp) 25%
Script #2 (8pp) 25%
Script #3 (8pp) 30%
Final Pitch Document (1-2 pages) 10%

Anticipated Learning Outcomes

You should expect to put at least 8-10 hours per week into this course (in addition to time spent in class), with that number rising to at least 12-14 hours during weeks when large assignments are due. Assuming you are able to devote yourself fully to the tasks at hand, by the end of the class you will have at least two short comic scripts and at least one clean pitch/presentation document. In addition you will have gained experience of the following:

- Evaluating the work of others and offering constructive criticism
- Having your work evaluated by others and learning to accept their opinions, and understanding when the suggestions of others are valid and useful for your creative goals
- Evaluating a comic script from the perspective of many potential collaborators (artist, editor, colorist, letterer, licensed-property publisher, etc.)
- Developing your unique stories and finding room for your creative voice while considering the technical demands of production and publication.

Class Policies

- Late work will not be accepted without a valid medical excuse.
- Attendance is mandatory. If you miss more than one class without explanation, those absences will be considered “unexcused” and your grade will be lowered, at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. from A to A-) for each unexcused absence. You have been warned.
- In the event of illness, an unanticipated family commitment, or other approved University business (such as participation in a sporting event), some absences may be considered “excused.” I expect courteous students to contact me about these unavoidable absences, either before or, in the event of an emergency, as soon as is reasonable after the class in question. If it’s a matter of a single class, I will not require documentation to excuse you. However, if circumstances cause you to miss more than one class, you must contact me as soon as possible so we can make appropriate arrangements for make-up assignments. Otherwise, your grade will be lowered as per the policy above.
- There will be no second-chances on written assignments. You need to make it your best work the first time around. If you are concerned that you will underperform on a particular assignment, you need to come and see me beforehand; afterwards is too late.
- If you miss in-class work, there will be no “make-up” opportunities, except in the case of an excused absence.
- Electronic devices are to be turned off and put away at the start of class. If we need to reference material available only online, we’ll use the overhead.
- Always bring the reading material to class. Students without a text will be marked as “absent: unexcused” for the day in question.
- Plagiarism (presenting the intellectual or creative work of others as if it were your own) will result in automatic failure of the course. We are here, after all, for the express purpose of making our own work. If you are referencing someone else’s work within your own and are uncertain about how to handle it appropriately, please don’t hesitate to discuss it with me. But remember, it is ultimately your responsibility to familiarize yourself with this basic requirement of scholarly and artistic integrity. McCloud provides some terrific examples of in-comic credits.
- You should be aware that some of the comics and scripts we read, as well as some of the scripts your classmates write, may contain adult themes and subjects. Some may be violent; others may explore the range of human sexuality. Some may be unconventional in their treatment of political and religious issues. You are not required to like everything you read — indeed, I hope for a more complicated response than that — but please be ready to approach the creative work of others with an open mind if you choose to take this course.

Finally, if you have any questions about any of the above, feel free to ask. That is why I am here.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

- WEEK 1
APRIL 3
- Discussion: Introductions, Games & Exercises; What is the Script's Job?
- Handouts/Canvas: Syllabus, Sample Script Format, Handout for Script #1
- WEEK 2
APRIL 10
- Discussion: Technical v. Creative Choices
- Reading: *Making Comics* 1-154
- Due in class: Proposal for Script #1**
- Handouts/Canvas: Faith Erin Hicks script pages.
- WEEK 3
APRIL 17
- Discussion: Scripting for Yourself & Writing for the Web
with guest Faith Erin Hicks
- Reading: *Friends With Boys*
Adventures of Superhero Girl, Hicks; first 20 pages/screens.
<Webcomic at: adventuresofsuperherogirl.com>
Hicks script pages.
In *Panel One*, "Rose," Smith
- WEEK 4
APRIL 24
- Discussion: Now We Are Editors
- Reading: In *Panel One*, "A Prayer and Hope," Gaiman;
"Deus Ex Machina," McDuffie; "The Teacher from Hell," Robbins
- Due in class: Script #1 (3 copies, with proposal attached)**
- Handouts/Canvas: *Astro City* #1/2, short script samples, Handout for Script #2
- WEEK 5
MAY 1
- Discussion: Now We Are Artists & Letterers & Colorists
- Reading: *Making Comics* 128-154
"The Nearness of You," Kurt Busiek. *Panel One* pp. 106-122
Astro City #1/2
Your copies of Script #1 from last week.
- Handouts/Canvas: Whiteout: Melt #1; Lazarus X+66; others

- WEEK 6
MAY 8
- Discussion: Writing for an Artist, with guests Greg Rucka & Steve Lieber
- Reading: All handouts from last week; “Whiteout: Melt #1” script in *Panel One*
- Due in class: Proposal for Script #2**
- Handouts/Canvas: Script for *Ms. Marvel*, Wilson; possible additional.
- WEEK 7
MAY 15
- Discussion: Work for Hire/Licensed IP Considerations
- Reading: *Ms. Marvel V1: No Normal* + Script
- Due in Class: Script #2 (3 copies with proposal attached)**
- Handouts: Two peer scripts to read for next week.
- WEEK 8
MAY 22
- Discussion: Workshops
- Reading: Two peer #2 scripts.
- Due in Class: Two peer scripts with constructive notes.
Bring your Script #1 copies as well!**
- Handouts/Canvas: Proposals, Pitches, Outlines & Breakdowns;
More sample scripts. Handout for Script #3
- WEEK 9
MAY 29
- Discussion: The Simple Complexity of a “World”
- Reading: *Making Comics* 158-183; *Bingo Love*
- Due in Class: Proposal for Script #3 in Pitch form.**
- Handouts/Canvas: TBA
- WEEK 10
JUNE 5
- Discussion: Scale. Anthology Shorts, Sweeping Epics, Everything in Between.
- Reading: Prior week’s TBA Handouts
- DUE FINALS WEEK WED 2-5 Location TBA: Script #3, Final Pitch Document