

**FST/CRW 318-001**

**SCREENWRITING I: INTRODUCTION**

**Mondays, 2:15 pm-5:00 pm  
King 104**

**Dr. Lou Buttino**

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**Non-Class meeting times:** I will try to be early to class and stay afterward, for your small concerns. You can also meet with me privately on Tuesdays, from 11 am to Noon, in King 102C. Or, for an appointment, please contact Pat Torok ([TorokP@uncw.edu](mailto:TorokP@uncw.edu)).

I prefer the use of email, rather than telephone. Please contact me at:  
ButtinoL@uncw.edu

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**Required Texts:**

Rollo May, The Courage to Create;  
Michael Tierno, Aristotle for Screenwriters  
Syd Field, Screenplay

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**Recommended Text:**

Volger, A Writer's Journey

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**Teaching Philosophy:** I believe in you. I believe in your capacity to visualize and I want to help you understand how to tell a story, not just for now, but also throughout your life. No matter what you do in film, you will need to be able to analyze a story. No matter what genre or writing venue you land upon, the elements of a good story seldom varies by too much. I believe that you learn writing by listening to others and the authors who spent much of their lives studying creativity and screenwriting. Think of the years you will save if you listen to them carefully and with your full attention. I'm here to help. I'm more of a coach than a teacher. I'm here to inform, inspire and insist that you do the very best you can.

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**Course Description:**

FST/CRW 318 is an introduction to screenwriting format, craft and technique, with an emphasis on the fundamentals of storytelling. Students learn to make a story pitch and workshop multiple revisions of a short narrative script. The goal is to complete a polished script suitable for screenwriting competitions and for production in FST 495.

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**Learning Outcomes for this course:**

You will learn the fundamentals of story telling applicable to a variety of writing forms. You will learn how to plot a story, develop characters, and execute your work in the screenwriting format. You will learn about the creative process itself,

and learn about screenwriting from the maestro himself, Aristotle, and one of the most widely heralded screenwriting instructors. If you work at it, you will come have a polished, well-honed short screenplay suitable for student screenplay competitions and possible production in FST 495.

It is my hope that you will be able to analyze and edit your own work better as a result of this course. Since issues come up in your work that do not follow a neat or even coherent pattern, when I say “workshop” below, I intend to bring to bear story elements and other pertinent information as it has relevance to your own particular screenplay.

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**Course Reading and Assignments:**

You are to read all texts and make an effort to understand them. We will discuss all texts in class. You will be tested on all the texts.

You will also be making presentations to the class. These will include “pitching” and work shopping your story to the class and to me. We represent the people you are trying to convince to produce your story. This will occur on an ongoing basis throughout the semester. “Ongoing” here means your re-writes and revisions. We will draw names randomly as to the order of presentations. I will draw up a calendar of when you are to present. You will be evaluated on whether or not you are prepared and adhere to the assignment.

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**Other:** Not wanting to overwhelm you at this point, I will be giving you handouts throughout the class. These will aid you in your development and writing.

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**Attendance:**

You are required to be in class. You get ONE excused or unexcused absence. A death in the family and other MAJOR issues have to be addressed with me directly. You get one absence because one seminar absence is the equivalent of three absences in a three-day-a-week classes. Two absences and your grade is reduced by one letter grade. You will be asked to withdraw from class when the number of absences results in an “F.”

--If you should miss class, please get the material from your peers--

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**Regarding the use of personal electronics:**

Cell phone use will not be tolerated in this class. Turn off your cell phones prior to class. Laptops may be used in this class. Laptop users should sit in the back row to avoid distracting others. Laptops will be banned from the classroom for the rest of the semester the first time any laptop user is seen engaging in non-classroom related activity.

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**Method of Evaluation:**

30%: Short answer test on books. Key ideas articulated in the syllabus. There are two exams. The dates for both are indicated in the syllabus.

20%: Your in-class work: tardiness, absenteeism, attentiveness, presentations

50%: Your final screenplay and attendant assignments

You will know in advance when you are on deck to present. Your grade will be reduced if you are not prepared and not ready to present at your set time and date. Or, obviously, if you are absent.

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### **Class Schedule & Other Important UNCW Calendar Dates:**

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#### **August 24:**

Get acquainted, syllabi review, questions and answers. Introductory lecture on creativity, the importance of formatting, and the foundational aspects of story telling. Presentation order completed. Discuss story ideas.

#### Assignments for next class:

Log line and plot summary.

*Finish: May, Preface & Chapter 1; Tierno, Introduction, Chapter 1 & 2; Field, Introduction, Chapters 1.*

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#### **August 31:**

Screening and dissection of “Rocky” as a screenplay. Story Structure and plot points. Character Bio. Interior and Exterior of the Character. Begin workshopping story ideas.

#### Key text topics:

*May:* What is courage? What is “creative courage”?

*Tierno:* Who was Aristotle and why is he important to all writers? The argument for seeing movies rather than studying screenplays. What is “action-idea”? Hitchcock’s the ‘bomb under the table’ thesis.

*Field:* This is a what and not how-to-do book. What do screenplays have in common: the three-act structure.

#### Assignments for next class:

Finish relevance of “Rocky” to class. Finish Story ideas. Download screenwriting program Celtex.com and familiarize yourself with it. Importance of formatting.

*Finish: May, Chapter 2; Tierno, Chapters 3, 4 & 5; Field, Chapter 2 & 3.*

Key topic points:

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### **September 7: Labor Day; State Holiday No Classes**

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#### **September 14:**

Screenplay structure and formatting. Soul against soul.

Key text topics:

*May*: What is creativity? What is the nature of the creative encounter?

*Tierno*: A “through” line. Forget subplots. “Soul against soul.”

*Field*: Can you say it in a few words? The importance of research. Conflict. What is character? The Character Biography. The Interior and Exterior aspects of character.

Assignments for next class:

Review and familiarize yourself with Celtex.com screenwriting program. More on formatting the screenplay.

*Finish*: *May*, Chapter 3; *Tierno*, Chapters 6, 7 & 8; *Field*, Chapter 4.

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**September 21:**

Review, Log lines and plot summary, begin workshop of screenplays.

Key text ideas:

*May*: The unconscious and its delight in breaking through-breaking up—what we cling to most rigidly in our conscious thinking. Heightened consciousness. Alternating work and relaxation. The “artist” as a threat to dictators and tyrants.

*Tierno*: Keep the plot a simple ACTION-IDEA. Smooth flowing, evolving plot form. Genres.

*Field*: Sam Peckinpah and Character. POV and the main character as cause agent.

Assignment for next class:

*Finish*: *May*, Chapter 4; *Tierno*, Chapters 9, 10 & 11; *Field*, Chapter 5.

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**September 28:**

Review, Log lines and plot summary, begin workshop of screenplays. “Coverage” forms.

Key text ideas:

*May*: Something is born, comes into being, something that did not exist before. “We knock upon silence for an answering music.” To struggle with the meaninglessness and silence of the world until he/she can force it into meaning. Self-doubt.

*Tierno*: Why is learning playwriting important? What is the difference between a play and a screenplay? *The Poetics* and screenplay epics. “Destiny” and the tragic deed.

*Field*: Story and character. Character as cause agent for story. Exterior forces on character.

Assignment for next class:

*Finish*: *May*, Chapter 5; *Tierno*, Chapters 12, 13 & 14; *Field*, Chapter 6.

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**October 5: Fall Break**

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**October 12:**

Review, Log lines and plot summary, begin workshop of screenplays.

Key text points:

*May:* “en-theo (“in god”)—enthusiasm-- and its application to daily life.

*Tierno:* We make choices that cause our own fate. It’s poor reasoning and not primal urges that causes the hero’s misfortune. Right and wrong gets at the heart of being human. Happiness is what every human being wants; the hero’s pursuit of happiness is of keen interest to an audience. The ancient Greeks believe it was a human being’s moral obligation to pursue his or her own happiness, first and foremost, but to do so ethically. This is virtue. Have it all come down to one moment?

*Field:* Act I, II, III, Set-Up, Confrontation, Resolution (Trial by fire!)

Assignment for next class:

*Finish: May, Chapter 6, Tierno, Chapters 15, 16 & 17; Field, Chapter 7*

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**October 19:**

Screen and breakdown “The Dead Poets Society”

Key text ideas:

*May:* Creativity itself requires limits—physical and metaphysical limitations. Consciousness is born out of the awareness of these limits.

*Tierno:* The key is in the balance between what we are shown and what we aren’t shown. Improbable deeds should be kept in the back story. The Rolls Royce of Complex Plots.

*Field:* Elements of the Set-Up

Assignment for next class:

*May, Chapter 7, Tierno, Chapters 18, 19 & 20; Field, Chapter 8*

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**October 26:**

Review, Log lines and plot summary, begin workshop of screenplays.

Key text ideas:

*May:* “The human imagination leaps to form the whole, to complete the scene in order to make sense of it.” The passion for form is a way of trying to find and constitute meaning in life. Creativity is the struggle against disintegration, the struggle to bring into existence new kinds of being that give harmony and integration.

*Tierno*: Whatever causes action better be on the screen. Pity, fear and the need for catharsis. More action and less dialogue.

*Field*: “Incident: A specific occurrence or event that occurs in connection to something else.”

Assignment for next class:

*Tierno*, Chapters 21, 22 & 23; *Field*, Chapter 9 and 10

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**November 2:**

**Exam on Rollo May**

Review, Log lines and plot summary, begin workshop of screenplays.

Key Text Ideas:

*Tierno*, *Hollywood v. Aristotle*. Teach the audience what they already know.

*Field*, Plot points and the scene

Assignment for next class:

*Tierno*, Chapters 24, 25, & 26; *Field*, Chapter 11 and 12

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**November 9:**

Review, Log lines and plot summary, begin workshop of screenplays.

Key Text Ideas:

*Tierno*, What is tone in a screenplay? It has to be alive and right in front of you. Even if the characters are ghosts or the story takes place in the long ago.

*Field*, The sequence

Assignment for next class:

*Tierno*, Chapters 27, 28 & 29; *Field*, Chapter 13 and 14

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**November 16:**

Screen and breakdown “The Godfather”

Key Text Ideas:

*Tierno*, Good dialogue. What’s the “pitch” got to do with it? The non-linear and Tarantino.

*Field*, Screenplay form and writing

Assignment for next class:

*Tierno*, Chapters 30, 31 & 32; *Field*, (need to read chapter 15 for this class). Read Chapters 16 & 17.

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**November 23:**

Review, Log lines and plot summary, begin workshop of screenplays.

Key Text Ideas:

*Tierno*, Musicals, history and the importance of drama.

*Field*, Working with others and what to do when the screenplay is done to the best of your ability.

Assignment for next class:

*Tierno*, Chapter 33;

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**November 30:**

Review, Log lines and plot summary, begin workshop of screenplays.

Key Text Ideas:

Tierno, Aristotle and comedy.

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**FINAL EXAM and submission of your work: December 9, 3:00-6:00 pm, King 104. Test on Tierno and Field; all scripts due, no exceptions.**

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**December 12:** Fall Commencement

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**Academic Integrity.**

All members of UNCW's community are expected to follow the academic Honor Code. Please read the UNCW Honor Code carefully (as covered in the UNCW Student Handbook). Academic dishonesty in **any** form will not be tolerated in this class.

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**Statement regarding Plagiarism:**

Please be especially familiar with UNCW's position on plagiarism as outlined in the UNCW Student Handbook. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty in which you take someone else's ideas and represent them as your own. Here are some examples of plagiarism:

- a. You write about someone else's work in your paper and do not give them credit for it by referencing them.
- b. You give a presentation, use someone else's ideas and do not state that the ideas are the other persons.
- c. You get facts from your texts or some other reference material and do not reference that material.
- d. You take somebody else's idea for a story and/or use somebody's idea from this class in another class.

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**Students with Disabilities:**

Students with diagnosed disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services (962-7555). Please give me a copy of the letter you receive from Office of Disability Services detailing class accommodations you may need. If you require accommodation for test-taking please make sure I have the referral letter no less than three days before the test.

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**Statement regarding Violence and Harassment:**

UNCW practices a zero tolerance policy for any kind of violent or harassing behavior. If you are experiencing an emergency of this type contact the police at 911 or UNCW

CARE at 962-2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation can be located at <http://www.uncw.edu/wsrc/crisis.html>.

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**Campus Respect Compact:**

UNCW has recently instituted a Respect Compact to affirm our commitment to a civil community characterized by mutual respect. That Compact will soon be affixed to the wall of each classroom and can be access at

<http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/pdc/documents/SeahawkRespectCompact.pdf>

Individuals wanting more information about the respect Compact can contact the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion.

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**Personal Note:** Only about 30% of Americans have a college degree, it's around 2% worldwide. You being here at all is a privilege and should be given due honor. I speak with confidence that you will never have an opportunity like you will have in this class, and at this university. The worst thing to live with is regret. I'm here to help you grow as much as you are capable. I am glad you are in my class.

Good luck!