

Introduction to Playwriting

M/W, 3:30-4:50 Room: THEA 209

Professor: Caitlin Turnage

E-mail: cet30@txstate.edu

Course Number: 2355

Section: 004

Phone Number: 682-465-8220

Office hours: By Appointment Only (Please Email Professor with your class and work schedule to set up an appointment). All office hours will be hosted via Zoom or phone call for the fall semester.

Course Description

This course for theatre makers introduces students to the fundamental elements of playwriting. Students will study the construction of popular contemporary plays, analyzing act structure, scene structure and beat structure. Students will learn how to write monologues and short scenes and have them read and discussed in class. We will learn as a class how to best provide feedback in a constructive and caring manner. As a class we will learn the basics of story-telling and how to craft a narrative for the stage.

Learning Outcomes

I have designed this course with the following goals in mind:

- Identify the structural elements of a well-constructed play.
- Examine comedic vs. dramatic play components.
- Determine what constitutes a strong central character (protagonist)
- Explore the importance of strong oppositional characters (antagonists)
- Create original monologues
- Analyze the elements of a well constructed scene.
- Generate original scenes.

Required Texts

TEXT BOOK

The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri

PLAYS

Oedipus the King translated by David Grene

[https://www.amazon.com/Oedipus-King-](https://www.amazon.com/Oedipus-King-Sophocles/dp/0226768686/ref=sr_1_3?crid=36QQJU7H5MRZT&dchild=1&keywords=oedipus+the+king+translated+by+david+grene&qid=1595346888&s_prefix=Oedipus+the+king+translate%2Caps%2C168&sr=8-3)

[Sophocles/dp/0226768686/ref=sr_1_3?crid=36QQJU7H5MRZT&dchild=1&keywords=oedipus+the+king+translated+by+david+grene&qid=1595346888&s_prefix=Oedipus+the+king+translate%2Caps%2C168&sr=8-3](https://www.amazon.com/Oedipus-King-Sophocles/dp/0226768686/ref=sr_1_3?crid=36QQJU7H5MRZT&dchild=1&keywords=oedipus+the+king+translated+by+david+grene&qid=1595346888&s_prefix=Oedipus+the+king+translate%2Caps%2C168&sr=8-3)

Red by John Logan

[https://www.amazon.com/Red-Acting-Theater-](https://www.amazon.com/Red-Acting-Theater-Productions/dp/0822224836/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1AH0QYBVFQV0&dchild=1&keywords=red+by+john+logan&qid=1595346933&s_prefix=Red+by+John+Logan%2Caps%2C171&sr=8-1)

[Productions/dp/0822224836/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1AH0QYBVFQV0&dchild=1&keywords=red+by+john+logan&qid=1595346933&s_prefix=Red+by+John+Logan%2Caps%2C171&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Red-Acting-Theater-Productions/dp/0822224836/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1AH0QYBVFQV0&dchild=1&keywords=red+by+john+logan&qid=1595346933&s_prefix=Red+by+John+Logan%2Caps%2C171&sr=8-1)

<https://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=4229>

Hir by Taylor Mac

https://www.amazon.com/Hir-Play-Taylor-Mac/dp/081013358X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=WV7EHMF7QIOI&dchild=1&keywords=hir+by+taylor+mac&qid=1595346258&srefix=Hir+by+Taylor%2Caps%2C175&sr=8-1 (also available on Kindle)
<https://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=5367>

Disgraced by Ayad Akhtar

https://www.amazon.com/Disgraced-Play-Ayad-Akhtar/dp/0316324469/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2GWE53IIGZCMC&dchild=1&keywords=disgraced+ayad+akhtar&qid=1595346155&srefix=Disgraced+%2Caps%2C182&sr=8-1 (Also available in Kindle)

Ironbound by Martyna Majok

https://www.amazon.com/Ironbound-Martyna-Majok/dp/0822235218/ref=sr_1_2?crid=QWMC4DSZVKVZ&dchild=1&keywords=ironbound+martyna+majok&qid=1595345863&srefix=ironbound+by+Marty%2Caps%2C171&sr=8-2

<https://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=5392&keysearch=Ironbound&options=all&limitResult=all&limitResult1=allgenres&total=all&male=all&female=all&limitFull=&limitShort=&limitMusical=&limit1Drama=&limit1Comedy=&melodrama=&romantic=&tragedy=&farce=&satire=&thriller=&mystery=&dark=&historical=&single=yes>

Tiger Style by Mike Lew

<https://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=5926&keysearch=Tiger+Style&options=all&limitResult=all&limitResult1=allgenres&total=all&male=all&female=all&limitFull=&limitShort=&limitMusical=&limit1Drama=&limit1Comedy=&melodrama=&romantic=&tragedy=&farce=&satire=&thriller=&mystery=&dark=&historical=&single=yes>

In the Red and Brown Water by Tarell Alvin McCraney

https://www.amazon.com/Brown-Water-Tarell-Alvin-McCraney/dp/082226766/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=in+the+red+and+brown+water&qid=1595344980&sr=8-2

<https://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=4470&keysearch=in+the+red+and+brown+water&options=all&limitResult=all&limitResult1=allgenres&total=all&male=all&female=all&limitFull=&limitShort=&limitMusical=&limit1Drama=&limit1Comedy=&melodrama=&romantic=&tragedy=&farce=&satire=&thriller=&mystery=&dark=&historical=&single=yes>

Bright Half Life by Tanya Barfield

<https://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=5205&keysearch=Bright+Half+Life&options=all&limitResult=all&limitResult1=allgenres&total=all&male=all&female=all&limitFull=&limitShort=&limitMusical=&limit1Drama=&limit1Comedy=&melodrama=&romantic=&tragedy=&farce=&satire=&thriller=&mystery=&dark=&historical=&single=yes>

Fairview by Jackie Sibbles Drury

https://www.amazon.com/Fairview-Jackie-Sibbles-Drury/dp/1559369523/ref=sr_1_2?crid=34OAMT9HNTDHB&dchild=1&keywords=fairview&qid=1595345985&srefix=Fairview%2Caps%2C184&sr=8-2
(Also available on Kindle)

The Moors by Jen Silverman

https://www.amazon.com/Moors-Jen-Silverman/dp/0573705402/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3OWLZG38M8UVV&dchild=1&keywords=the+moors+jen+silverman&qid=1595346329&srefix=THE+MOORS+jen+Sil%2Caps%2C172&sr=8-1

<https://www.concordtheatricals.com/s/60712/the-moors>

The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity by Kristoffer Diaz

https://www.amazon.com/Elaborate-Entrance-Chad-Deity/dp/0573699674/ref=sr_1_1?crid=22M7Q322E2CHK&dchild=1&keywords=the+elaborate+entrance+of+chad+deity&qid=1595347384&srefix=the+elaborate+entrance%2Caps%2C166&sr=8-1

<https://www.concordtheatricals.com/s/598/the-elaborate-entrance-of-chad-deity>

Assignments and Grading

In this course students will read instructor assigned plays for discussion in class. Through written assignments, they will generate a compendium of short scenes. Selected student written works will be read out loud and discussed in class.

Final Grade Breakdown:

Written Play Analyses	20
Written Scene Work	25
Peer Review of Scenes	20
Class Participation	20
Final Exam	15

Total	100

Final Grading Scale:

A	94-100	C	74-76
A-	90-93	C-	70-73
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	84-86	D	64-66
B-	80-83	D-	60-63
C+	77-79	F	0-59

Attendance:

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Every absence above three will result in a letter grade drop. Acquiring material missed due to absence rests solely with the student. If you are late three times it will result in an absence. Proof of a doctor's note or any valid form of "excuse" will be forgiven. Failure to provide any such proof of absence will result in an absence.

***If you are not feeling well please email the instructor before class time and stay home!** It is important to take care of yourself and your health! If you are worried about missing material covered in class you can always choose to zoom in from home.

***If you have been exposed to someone with Covid-19** please stay home and self-quarantine for the time your doctor suggests. You will still be able to zoom into classes and participate in class discussions and reading of both the assigned work, and your written scenes. It is better to practice safety during this time. If you have questions or concerns about whether or not you should attend class please email cet30@txstate.edu and I will get back to you asap. If for some reason I don't respond promptly it is best to stay home and zoom into class for that day.

Campus Health, Wellness, and Safety:

10 guiding principles for Health, Safety, and Wellness:

<https://www.txstate.edu/coronavirus/road-map/health-and-safety-measures.html>

The Bobcat Pledge:

<https://www.txstate.edu/coronavirus/road-map/bobcat-pledge.html>

Student Roadmap:

<https://www.txstate.edu/coronavirus/road-map/student-roadmap.html>

Statement on Civility and Compliance in the Classroom

Civility in the classroom is very important for the educational process and it is everyone's responsibility. If you have questions about appropriate behavior in a particular class, please address them with your instructor first. Disciplinary procedures may be implemented for refusing to follow an instructor's directive, refusing to leave the classroom, not following the university's requirement to wear a cloth face covering, not complying with social distancing or sneeze and cough etiquette, and refusing to implement other health and safety measures as required by the university. Additionally, the instructor, in consultation with the department chair/school director, may refer the student to the Office of the Dean of Students for further disciplinary review. Such reviews may result in consequences ranging from warnings to sanctions from the university. For more information regarding conduct in the classroom, please review the following policies at [AA/PPS 02.03.02](#), Section 03: Courteous and Civil Learning Environment, and [Code of Student Conduct](#), number II, Responsibilities of Students, Section 02.02: Conduct Prohibited.

Mode of Class Delivery:

This section of Introduction to Playwriting is a Face to Face section. We will meet in person, in the classroom listed for the course. We will wear our face coverings correctly while on campus and we will practice social distancing in the classroom. Students will enter into the classroom space from one direction and exit from the other.

If at any point in the semester a student does not feel comfortable showing up to face to face classes the student can Zoom into the class during the appropriate class time. The classroom will be equipped with zoom technology to allow students to either attend in class or at home.

Important: If a student is choosing to zoom into class, they must let the instructor know at least 30 minutes before the class time starts so that the teacher will be prepared to set up the zoom device before the start of class time. Students can email the teacher at cet30@txstate.edu

Disruptions to Face to Face Delivery:

If for any reason over the course of the semester there are disruptions to the face to face delivery, we will switch to utilizing Zoom as our classroom with links to supplemental materials and lectures provided via Canvas. An email will be sent out prior to the switch over from the instructor to the students bobcatmail addresses.

If for some reason the teacher is unable to attend class in person that day, either a zoom lecture will be called or a qualified instructor will temporarily sub for the instructor.

Teacher Correspondence:

All vital emails from the teacher will be sent through bobcatmail to the class. This includes information about homework assignments, class times, and other important information. It is the student's responsibility to check their Texas State emails.

Emergency Management:

In the event of an emergency, students, faculty, and staff should monitor the [Safety and Emergency Communications web page](#). This page will be updated with the latest information available to the university, in addition to providing links to information concerning safety resources and emergency procedures. Faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to sign up for the [TXState Alert](#) system.

Office of Disability Services

It is the University's goal that learning experiences be as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible at 512.245.3451 to establish reasonable accommodations. Please be aware that the accessible table and chairs in this room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not usable.

Academic Honesty:

Students found guilty of academic dishonesty, which includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an examination, or other academic work to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion, or abuse of resource materials, are subject to disciplinary action. (Texas State Student Handbook) Fraudulent submission of a written assignment will also be considered a violation of the University Honor Code and will be reported as such.

Comportment:

"Students are full partners in fostering a classroom environment which is conducive to learning. In order to assure that all students have the opportunity to gain from time spent in class, unless otherwise approved by the instructor; students are prohibited from engaging in any form of behavior that detracts from the learning experience of fellow students. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom may result in a request for the offending student to leave class." (Taken from Student Justice brochure "Maintaining Civility in the Classroom".) Disrespectful behavior of any type will not be tolerated.

CONTACTING COURSE PROFESSOR

The following is a list of guidelines, procedures and tips for communicating with your Playwriting Professor and/or Teaching Assistant.

- By far, the most reliable and efficient way to contact me is by email.
- Please use the email addresses listed on the Syllabus or on Canvas
- **Always check the class syllabus, Canvas and all other course documentation before emailing. Many times, the answer to your question can be found in previously distributed material.**

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

In order to assure that all students have the opportunity to gain from time spent in class, students are prohibited from engaging in any form of behavior in the classroom that detracts from the learning experience of fellow students. The following guidelines have been established to assist students and faculty alike in fostering a positive, respectful and beneficial academic environment. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom may result in the removal of the offending student from the class.

-Be on time to class. If you arrive late to class, please sit down quietly in a vacant seat near the door where you entered the room. After class, be sure to check in with the class TA or professor so you can receive the attendance code.

-Be prepared to stay in the classroom for the duration of the class. If, on the rare occasion that you must leave class early, please sit near the exit so that your departure does not disturb the class. If at all possible, let the instructor know before class that you will need to leave early.

Do not start “packing up” until the instructor dismisses the class. We will dismiss class five minutes earlier than usual to dismiss by rows to limit contact with students passing by.

-Silence all cell phones, watches, etc.

-Store all electronic devices such as cell phones, tablets, e-readers, music players, portable games, etc. Listening to music, sending messages, playing games, watching videos, surfing the internet, etc., is distracting to those around you and particularly disrespectful to the instructor.

-You can have your laptop just make sure it is on silent and know that if it becomes distracting you will be asked to put it away.

-Similarly, do not read newspapers, magazines, textbooks from other courses, etc. during class. Do not sleep in class. If you are too tired or sleepy to stay awake in class, then you should stay home or find a more appropriate place to rest.

-Please be considerate of those that use the classroom after you and pick up after yourself. Please discard all trash (paper, drink cups, water bottles, etc.) appropriately.

Pronouns:

Students may share their name and pronoun with members of the teaching staff and fellow students, as desired, and these gender identities and gender expressions will be honored in this course. As the course includes group work and in-class discussion, it is vitally important for us to create an educational environment of inclusion and mutual respect. In this class, to be inclusive of all gender identities and expressions, students will be referred to by their first or last names, or by the pronoun of their choice, or by default, the pronoun “they.”

Course Outline *assignments may change during the course of the semester according to the professor) *

Class 1—Aug 24th- M

- Class Introduction—Meet & Greet
- Go over Syllabus
- Where does Playwriting come from?

HOMEWORK: DUE AUG 26th

-Read Oedipus the King Translated by David Grene

-Oedipus Written Play Analyses

Class 2—Aug 26th - W

1. Discussion of Aristotelian Form (And Oedipus)
2. Playwriting format
3. The “Math” of Playwriting

HOMEWORK: DUE AUG 31st

-Read Part 1: Premise in the Art Of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri

-Read The Moors by Jen Silverman

-The Moors Written Play Analyses

Class 3—Aug 31st – M

1. Discussion of Premise in Plays
2. Discussion of The Moors by Jen Silverman
3. Introduction of “Experimental Structures”

HOMEWORK: DUE SEP 2nd

- Read Part II: Character’s Chapter 1-The Bone Structure
- Read Red by John Logan
- Red Written Play Analyses

Class 4—Sep 2nd - W

1. Discussion over Character
2. How “Red” uses Character to fuel its conflict discussion

HOMEWORK: DUE SEP 9th

- Write down a premise for a play. ____ leads to ____ or ____ destroys ____
- Write out a bone structure for two different characters who will be the protagonist and antagonist of your scene.
- Write a two-character 5-page scene utilizing an Aristotelian structure with the vocab terms discussed in class.

Class 5—Sep 7th – M- LABOR DAY

LABOR DAY/ CLASSES DO NOT MEET

HOMEWORK: DUE SEP 16th

- Read pages Chapter 2: Environment in *The Art of Dramatic Writing*
- Read Hir by Taylor Mac
- Hir Written Play Analyses
- Written Assignment #1 Peer Review

Class 6—Sep 9th- W

1. Read Student Scenes in Class!

Class 7—Sep 14th - M

1. Read Student Scenes in Class!

Class 8—Sep 16th- W

1. Class Discussion of Hir
2. How Hir uses environment to negotiate its conflict.

HOMEWORK: DUE SEP 21st

- Write a 3 page scene between two people where the environment directly impacts the story. Utilize all five senses: Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight, and Sound.

Class 9—Sep 21st -M

1. Read Student Scenes in Class!

HOMEWORK: DUE SEP 28th

- Read Fairview
- Read chapter 3: The Dialectical Approach *The Art of Dramatic Writing*

- Fairview Written Play Analyses

Class 10—Sep 23rd-W

1. Read Student Scenes in Class!

HOMEWORK: DUE SEP 30th

- Read Chapter 4 and 5 of Part II character in the Art of Dramatic Writing
- Read The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity by Kristoffer Diaz
- The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity Written Play Analyses
- Writing Assignment #2 Peer Review

Class 11—Sep 28th- M

1. Class discussion of Fairview and the Dialectical Approach.
2. Break down of Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis in Fairview vs. Hir.
3. What is the reverse Essay play?

HOMEWORK: DUE OCT 5th

- Read Chapters 6-9 of Art of Dramatic writing (Plot or character-The Antagonist)
- Read Ironbound by Martyna Majok
- Ironbound Written Play Analyses

Class 12—Sep 30th-W

1. Discussion of Wants, Needs, And Risk In a Play
2. In “The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity” What are the characters willing to lose to get what they want?
3. Discussion of Character Growth, Arc, and Strength of Will in a pivotal character

HOMEWORK: DUE OCT 7th

- Create two characters and do a bone structure for each of them
- Write a 3 page scene where one of those characters chooses to reveal a secret, risking everything in order to obtain their goals.
- With the same characters write a different 3 page scene where the Character without a secret has an arc and transforms (Think back to our conversation about the dialectical approach and your text book.)

Class 13—Oct 5th - M

1. Discussion of Ironbound in class
2. What Makes a “Character Driven” play?
3. What do non-formulaic plays look like?
4. In choosing a non-Aristotelian structure for her play what ideas is Majok trying to reinforce in Ironbound?

Class 14—Oct 7th-W

1. Read Student Written Scenes!

HOMEWORK: DUE OCT 14th

- Read Chapters 10 and 11 of Part II Character of the Art of Dramatic Writing
- Read Chapters 1 and 2 of Part III Plot of the Art of Dramatic Writing

- Read Tiger Style by Mike Lew
- Tiger Style Written Play Analyses
- Writing Assignment #3 and #4 Peer Review

Class 15—Oct 12th-M

1. Read Student Written Scenes!

HOMEWORK: DUE OCT 19th

- Read Part III Conflict Chapters 3-6 of the Art of Dramatic Writing
- Read Bright Half Lives by Tanya Barfield
- Bright Half Lives Written Play Analyses

Class 16—Oct 14th-W

1. In Class Exercise Day***
2. Discussion of Tiger Style by Mike Lew

Class 17—Oct 19th -M

1. In Class Discussion of Bright Half Lives
2. Discussion over “Play-Stallars” and how to keep your conflict moving
3. Discussion of Horizontal vs. Vertical play movement
4. Discussion of Subtext

HOMEWORK: DUE OCT 21st

- Read Chapter 7-10 of Part III conflict in the Art of Dramatic Writing
- Read “In The Red and Brown Water” by Tarell Alvin McCraney
- In the Red And Brown Water Written Play Analyses

Class 18—Oct 21st-W

1. Class Discussion of Poetry Plays
2. How does “In The Red and Brown Water” Use what Aristotle would call Music and Diction to further its story?
3. What is a poetry play?
4. How can we create contemporary myths for the stage?

HOMEWORK: DUE OCT 26th

- Create Two Characters with voices unfamiliar to your own. (I.E. if you're from South Florida maybe you're choosing to write a character who's Canadian) Make sure to do research to best understand how these characters might sound different than your own voice.
- Write out the bone structure for each of these characters
- Using the characters, you created Write a 5 page scene that can only be “Theatrical”. Consider what it means to be theatrical. Think about Aristotle's poetics.

Class 19—Oct 26th-M

1. Read Student Written Scenes!

HOMEWORK: DUE NOV. 2nd

- Read Chapters 1-6 of Part IV General of The Art of Dramatic Writing
- Read Disgraced by Ayad Ahktar
- Disgraced Written Play Analyses
- Writing Assignment #5 Peer Review

Class 20—Oct 28th- W

1. Read Student Written Scenes!

Class 21—Nov 2nd- M

1. Discussion of Disgraced
2. Discussion of Utilizing Entrances and Exits to fuel conflict
3. Discussion of contemporary theatre and the future

HOMEWORK: DUE NOV 9th

- Read Chapter 7-11 of Part IV: General of the Art of Dramatic Writing

Class 22—Nov 4th- W

1. In-class Monologue exercise
2. In-class Elements exercise

HOMEWORK: DUE NOV 16th

- Create four characters
- Write out a bone structure for each character
- Write a 5 page dinner table scene where 4 characters have a “fall out” over a dinner table. Think about Disgraced and how argument and conflict are different tools in playwriting.

Class 23—Nov 9th-M

1. Teach me how to write a play week!
2. Collaboration discussion
3. How to write in teams

HOMEWORK: Due Nov 18th

- Write out a list of 10 pitches for play ideas, identify characters, wants, obstacles to those wants, and a rough draft of dramatic premise.

Class 24—Nov 11th-W

1. Teach me how to write a play week!

HOMEWORK: DUE NOV 18th

- Read chapter 12 and 14 of Part IV: General of the Art of Dramatic Writing

Class 25—Nov 16th-M

1. Read Student Written Scenes!

HOMEWORK: DUE NOV 23rd

- Writing Assignment #6 Peer Review

Class 26—Nov 18th-W

1. Read Student Written Scenes!

Class 27—Nov 23rd-M

1. Read Student Written Scenes!

HOMEWORK: DUE NOV 30th

- Create however many characters you wish!
- Write a bone structure for each character you create!
- Board your five page “Your choice” scene before you write and after you write it.
- Write a five page scene about absolutely anything! You have free reign on your final scene! It can have as many characters as you want, as weird of a location, insane dialogue, no dialogue, all dialogue, it can have dragons and ghosts, it can have a delayed point of attack! GO CRAZY! Experiment and play!

Class 28—Nov 25th- W- THANKSGIVING BREAK STARTS

CLASS DOES NOT MEET

Class 29—Nov 30th- M

- Read Student Written Scenes!

Class 30—Dec 2nd- W- LAST DAY OF CLASS

- Read Student Written Scenes
- Class wrap up day!

HOMEWORK: DUE DEC 7th

- Writing Assignment #8 Peer Review
- Study for Final Exam

FINAL EXAM

****TBA**