

Mark W. Travis

SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Film Directing from Script to Screen

A 12 – 15 week program that will take students through the entire creative process of directing a feature film from script to screen

**Using the following books by
Mark W. Travis**

DIRECTING FEATURE FILMS:
The Creative Collaboration Between Writers, Actors and Directors

THE FILM DIRECTOR'S BAG OF TRICKS:
Get What You Want from Writers and Actors

DIRECTING FEATURE FILMS guides the reader through the entire creative process of directing a feature film. There are three well-known films (*Forrest Gump*, *Diner* and *American Beauty*) that are examined and used as examples in this book. These films can be shown during the semester in order to enhance the learning process.

THE FILM DIRECTOR'S BAG OF TRICKS is designed to introduce the student/director to specific and manageable tools that can be used when working with writers and actors. Each 'trick' is an exercise and to be fully appreciated needs to be experienced. Also, each chapter is followed by additional exercises that will help guide the student/director into a deeper experience of the power of these tools.

The following syllabus incorporates both books giving the instructor and the students a richer experience through the process.

Film Directing from Script to Screen

Week	Title: Areas of Focus:	<i>Directing Feature Films</i> Chapters	<i>The Film Director's Bag of Tricks</i> Chapters
1	<p>The Director and the Script This is where it all begins, and where we must begin exploring the process.</p> <p>Focus: establishing a creative and personal connection between the director and the story ... and the script. The second chapter of DFF will introduce the student to all of the key terms and phrases needed in order to communicate clearly with writers and actors.</p>	One and Two	
2	<p>Working with Writers This is the first leg of the Creative Triangle (Writer, Director and Actor). How the director and writer collaborate and communicate is crucial to the success of the film. This chapter is full of practical approaches and techniques that will enhance this delicate relationship.</p>	Three	
3	<p>Working with Writers (Tricks) And now for the more advanced tools for the director as he/she is working with the writer. Remember, these 'tricks' are actually tools that the director can use to help the writer get past any resistance or emotional blocks as they are both working toward improving the script. Creating actual relationships between directors and writers and employing these techniques in the classroom will expose the power and efficiency of these 'tricks'.</p>		One
4	<p>Script Breakdown This is a very lonely and essential task for every director. This chapter outlines how a director can take a script apart, piece by piece, in order to better understand how this delicate machine is really working. Without this knowledge and experience, the director will be lacking the solid foundation needed to direct this film.</p>	Four	

5	<p>The Creative Team Now we are beginning to add other artists to the process. How these selections are made is a crucial factor in being a successful director. It's the Creative Team that makes the movie under the Director's direction. Students need to learn how to interview prospective collaborators. And how to assess their personal creative connections to the story.</p>	Five	
6	<p>The Casting Process And here is the third leg of the Creative Triangle, the actors. Many directors have said that 'casting is 80% of the directing process' which means they all know how great casting can make a great film, and weak or inappropriate casting can destroy a film. Also, most directors are afraid of or intimidated by actors. This chapter will give the student director strong and confident tools to use in the audition and selection process.</p>	Six	
7	<p>The Casting Process (Tricks) And because this process is so crucial, two weeks are dedicated to Casting. And from "The Bag of Tricks" there are many tools and exercises that can be explored and experimented with by both instructor and students. And the exercises at the end of this chapter will guide the student through the process.</p>		Two
8	<p>The Rehearsal Process The reason so many directors are afraid of or intimidated by actors is simply because they don't know how to work with them. Meaning, they don't know how to rehearse in a way that engages the actor's impulses in a creative way. In this chapter the rehearsal process is designed and broken down, step by step. The student/director is guided through this most delicate process with the intention of giving them tools that are manageable and reliable.</p>	Seven	
9	<p>The Rehearsal Process (Tricks) And in "Bag of Tricks" there are even more refined techniques, subtle, yet powerful, that will help the director guide the actor to the desired performance. And, again, there are additional exercises at the end of each chapter.</p>		Three

10	<p>The Rehearsal Process (Advanced) And for the rehearsal process we have dedicated three weeks. This is such a rich territory and what is accomplished in rehearsal will determine the power and authenticity of the final film.</p> <p>Continue experimenting with tools and techniques from both books. Just as much as the actors need time to rehearse to find their characters and the power of each scene ... the student/directors need time 'rehearsing' with these techniques in order to master them.</p>		
11	<p>Production We have finally arrived at that moment where way too many directors feel the real directing begins: Shooting the film. It is difficult to simulate the realities of production in the classroom. Yet, there are so many potential pitfalls, obstacles and challenges during production that this part of the process must be explored thoroughly. The first week (chapter eight in DFF) is dedicated to looking critically at this process to clearly understand the sequencing, the objectives and many of the obstacles.</p>	Eight	
12	<p>Production (Tricks) And in the second week of Production, we return to the task of working with the actors. Too many films suffer because the performances that were achieved in the rehearsal process somehow were lost or diluted under the pressures of production. These 'tricks' in this chapter give the director powerful tools for stimulating and maintaining authentic performances under the most trying of production pressure.</p>		Four
13	<p>Production (Advanced) A third week focusing on production. There is never enough time to focus on production.</p>		
14	<p>Post Production This is where the film is finally made. This is where the student/director begins to truly see what has been accomplished up until now. In this chapter, the students are led through a typical Hollywood post-production sequence. It is crucial to understand each step and each process, to understand limitations and where there are still opportunities to produce new material that can be used in the film.</p>	Nine	

15	<p>Post Production (Advanced) Here I suggest you select scenes from the films you have been watching (<i>Forrest Gump</i>, <i>Diner</i>, <i>American Beauty</i>) and watch them and deconstruct them. Explore Staging (page 221), Camera Placement (page 243) and Editing (page 269). One of the most powerful ways to understand the post-production process is through the analysis of other films.</p>		
	<p>Additional Assignments DFF Chapters 10 – 11 These two chapters reflect further develops in the director process now labeled “The Travis Technique”. This technique has evolved considerably since the publication of this book and will be the subject of my next book. Yet, it’s very helpful for the student/directors to be aware of this progress. And in Chapter Eleven there are several exercises and examples of how this process works. DFF Chapter 12 DBOT Chapter 5 These two chapters are great interviews with some very successful and insightful directors. An additional assignment might be to read these interviews and be prepared to discuss the theories and practices of these talented directors.</p>	Ten, Eleven Twelve	Five