

## SUGGESTED SYLLABUS

### **THE WRITER'S ADVANTAGE: A TOOLKIT FOR MASTERING YOUR GENRE**

A text that assists writers in examining the evolution of their ideas through rational tools of analysis.

By Laurie Scheer

#### Course Title:

#### **Mastering Your Genre Within a Transmedia Universe**

#### Course Description:

Learn practical techniques for avoiding prequels, sequels, remakes, and reboots. When a writer masters their genre and understands how their genre can work for them, new fresh ideas emerge to create a totally new storytelling environment to pitch within today's rapidly changing transmedia universe.

#### Course Goals/Objectives:

By the end of this course you will understand the state of our fragmented media, the transmedia marketplace, and how to master the genre you are writing within. By understanding media overall and by understanding how your genre has emerged within that media, you will develop your own authentic texts and perhaps a new hybrid genre. Fresh, genuine concepts are then readied for the transmedia universe and a new storytelling arena is born.

#### Course Lessons/Topics:

#### **1. Introduction to Course**

Course is divided into three sections: Know What Has Been Done Before, Arming Yourself, Getting Your Work Out Into the World

An overall look at the current state of media and transmedia

A basic introduction to the definition of genre

Being a fanboy vs. being a fan of the media

#### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Establish the genre you wish to work within while plotting your basic storyline and answering the question "what will my material bring to the transmedia universe?"

#### **2. Brief Inquiry Into Mass and Not-So-Mass Media**

Media Consumption

Movies

Television

Unfragmented Audiences

Limited Amount of Texts

The Cable Revolution

Fragmented Viewership  
Web Channels  
So Many Options, So Little Time  
A Mention About the Publishing Industry  
Content Is King

Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Man Behind the Curtain* and a Classic American Text
- Exercise: Identify the ways different generations consume popular culture. Study the four feature film versions of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, research how those versions have been accepted by their contemporary audiences. Think about the future of this material - will Baz Luhrmann's 2013 version hold up against other versions for the future? Could (or should) there be another version for the future?

### **3. Fragmentation**

We're Not Getting the Whole Picture Any Longer  
Was It An Evolution of Dance or Rather a Confusion of Dance?  
References are Completely Off  
Mashed Up  
Generational Gap  
Some Brief Notes About Each Generation  
So There You Have It

Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: *Popeye the Sailor Man*, Longevity or Travesty?
- Exercise: Nicholas Sparks' novel *The Notebook* (1996) has been highly popular among Gen X and Millennial readers, yet the story involved an aged couple dealing with health issues. Research why and how this seemingly Baby Boomer-orientated book and movie appeals to younger generations.

### **4. Transmedia**

Publishing in a Transmedia World  
Movie Transition in a Transmedia World  
TV and the Transmedia World  
Television's Third Golden Age  
Talk of the Town  
Transmedia Summary

Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* (1976-78), Perfect as a Web Series?
- Exercise: Re-image the 1946 Capra film *It's A Wonderful Life* for today's marketplace. (You can work with the material as a prequel, sequel, remake, or reboot).

### **5. With So Many Options, What's a 21st Century Writer to Do?**

Three Questions

The Now Factor  
Who Cares, Who Really Cares?  
A “Baby at 43” Pitch  
Authentic Ideas  
What We Need  
Wonderment  
What We Don’t Need  
Naive or Just Plain Stupid?  
Stormy Weather Pitches

Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: How to Reach the Status of a Lynchian, Spielberg-like and Tarantino-esque Body of Work
- Exercise: Take a recent remake or reboot of a movie and compare and contrast the different versions of the material.

**6. The Genre Toolkit List**

What’s Your Genre?  
Genres  
More about Development Departments  
The Cream Rises to the Top  
Why You?  
Lack of Confidence  
Know It. Own It. Make the Genre Better

Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- 1st of 3 in-class tests - terminology and brief question & answer format
- Exercise: Identify your favorite writer. List five to ten elements that emerge from their work. You’ll also be looking at how this writer influenced other writers.

**7. Identify Your Genre’s Quintessential Text**

36 Plots  
The Quintessential Text  
How to Find the Quintessential Text  
An Abundance of Generational, Ethnic, and Subjective Differences  
Room for Debate  
Game Changers  
Sifting and Winnowing

Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: A Look at Vampire Literature and Finding the Quintessential Text of That Genre
- Exercise: Disaster-rama. Disaster movies of the 1970s provide a great scenario to study Quintessential Text energy. This is the golden age of disaster movies, and by doing the research see if you can determine the Quintessential Text of this genre.

## **8. Identify the Traits of Your Genre and How They Relate to Your Story**

How to Identify Traits

Traits That Morph Between Genres

Characters have Traits Too

‘Good’ Traits and ‘Bad’ Traits

‘Good’ Traits- The Scream Franchise

A Fan of Mad-slasher movies

What Williamson Did

‘Bad’ Traits-The Cabin In The Woods Example

### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: Non-Utopian Worlds - Know Your Traits in Dystopian Literature
- Exercise: Identify the traits of fish-out-of-water television series, everything from the iconic *Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971) to *Third Rock From the Sun* (1996-2001) and *The O. C.* (2003-2007).

## **9. Identify the Mass Production History of Your Genre**

Run The History

Hybrid Genres

Manuscripts vs. Scripts

### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: Steampunk, a Hybrid Genre, New Kid on the Block
- Exercise: Research the Western genre to understand why some genres shine consistently and others fade away.

## **10. Analyze Audience Reaction-Mass or Cult?**

Mainstream or Cult

And Speaking of Lists

### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: Brian De Palma and His Obsession with Hitchcock
- Exercise: Identify some films from the past two decades that have achieved cult status (include Tommy Wiseau’s *The Room*). Why are they considered cult films? Why didn't they reach the mainstream audience?

## **11. Trends and Patterns of Your Genre**

Nobody Knows Anything

Spotting Trends

Copying Genre Traits

Two Ways To Go

### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Case Study: Why Reality TV Has Been All the Rage (There’s a Very Obvious Reason Why)

- Exercise: Identify your favorite writer again and make a list of all of the questions you would ask them if granted a two hour meeting with them (base those questions upon all of the research you have completed so far for this course).

## **12. Check Listing Your Authentic Material**

Checking and Checking Again

The Writer's Advantage Checklist

Your Checklist is Now Completed

What Would An Authentic Version of Your Text Look Like Within Your Genre? (The answer is your work.)

Don't Hesitate, Own this Information with Confidence

### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Provide a checklist for your material

- 2nd of 3 in-class tests - terminology and brief question & answer format

## **13. Defending Your Work**

Some Basic Questions to Ponder

Become Your Own Private Development Department

Some Deeper Questions to Ponder

### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Exercise: Testing Your Idea Until It Is Foolproof

## **14. What Mastering Your Genre Can Do For You**

Like-minded Awareness

Altering

Put It On Hold

Tools You'll Need To Sell Your Authentic Text(s)

Log line

Synopsis

Going Out

Pitch Fests and Conferences

Mastering Your Genre

### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Exercise: Write Your Log Line and Synopsis

## **15. What Else Have You Got?**

Players Vs. Pikers

Don't Be A Tease

Authentic Writing

What Now?

No Fear of Success

### Assignments, Exercises, Tests:

- Final 3rd of 3 tests - Essay format

Text:

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By Laurie Scheer

Author:

Laurie Scheer, Media Goddess, is a former vice president of programming for WE: Women's Entertainment. She has worked as an assistant, d-girl, and producer for ABC, Viacom, Showtime, and AMC-Cablevision. She has also been involved in producing digital based forms of entertainment. Laurie has been an instructor at numerous universities across the U.S. from UCLA to Yale. She is the author of a book about working in Hollywood entitled *Creative Careers in Hollywood* and her DVD *How to Pitch and Sell Your Screenplay* has been a perennial favorite at screenwriting events. As a professional speaker, she has appeared at annual industry conferences. She has served as a judge for numerous screenplay competitions, film festivals, and the International Emmys. She is part of the faculty at UW-Madison's Continuing Studies Writing Department and the Director of their annual Writer's Institute. In 2013 she became the Managing Editor of the *The Midwest Prairie Review* Journal. Her current interest is in exploring ways to preserve good storytelling within the 21<sup>st</sup> century transmedia marketplace with her book *The Writer's Advantage: A Toolkit for Mastering Your Genre* (Michael Wiese Productions, 2014).  
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