

Plot Twists & Popcorn: Introduction to Screenwriting for Web Series

Instructor Information

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Class Time:

Classroom:

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description:

Do you love watching Web series? Have you been watching web series for the past five years or more? Have you noticed that the seasons of many web series have fewer episodes these days? Have you ever wanted to write a webisode but couldn't? Do you enjoy thinking about plots and characters? Did you ever want to understand how plot works in web series like Season One of *Paatal Lok* and *Family Man*? Perhaps you wanted to work on a draft of a web series. Did you ever want to create a character who is smart and determined like Himmat Singh in *Special Ops*? Or perhaps flawed but resilient like Hathiram in *Paatal Lok*? Or maybe someone like Vartika Chaturvedi from *Delhi Crime*, who is tenacious and efficient and not afraid to stand up for justice? If you are, then this may be a course for you. If you are wondering why I am naming Hindi web series and not English ones, then I would say that's a valid question. I noticed in my fiction writing courses that students can relate more to stories written by Indian authors than to those written by foreign authors. So, in this course we will be perusing scripts of two award-winning Hindi web series – *Paatal Lok* and *Delhi Crime*. We will also go over the first episode of the award-winning FX mini-series *Shogun*. In this course, you will study and practice essential elements and conventions for writing a webisode, including but not limited to concept, target audience, dialogue, character, and plot/structure. You will start the class with lessons in how to design a plot and then move on to characters, dialogue writing and other elements in screenwriting. This will be a workshop-based class, so you should be ready to write a lot and have your work reviewed by your peers. The assignments you will need to submit for this course may include a detailed plot structure for a six-episode web series, a detailed character sketch of a protagonist and for the final project, you will submit the script of a pilot webisode.

Caveat:

If you have already taken **OEFL-CWS E 2 Introduction to Screen Writing** course offered by Dr Pankaj Challa, then you are not allowed to take this course because you would not learn anything new in my course.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will practice the essentials of plotting a web series

- Students will analyse the aspects of successful web series as models for their own work.
- Students will learn and practice dialogue writing for screen
- Students will learn building complex characters with character arcs.
- Students will practice the essentials of strong visual storytelling.
- Students will understand the constraints of and write specifically for the web series format.

Required Texts:

All readings will be posted by the instructor on Teams.

In this course, we will primary use the following text:

Scriptwriting for Web Series: Writing for the Digital Age by Marie Drennan, Yuri Baranovsky and Vlad Baranovsky

However, we will be reading selectively from the following texts:

Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting by Robert McKee

Dialogue: The Art of Verbal Action for the Page, Stage and Screen by Robert McKee

Character: The Art of Role and Cast Design for Page, Stage and Screen by Robert McKee

Required Software:

You will need access to one of the following software:

- Writer Duet

Writer Duet is a screen writing software that allows you to have three projects for free without any limitations to pages generated or watermarks. **Please do not dabble with this software until I ask you to do so.**

- Storyboarder

Storyboarder is a free, open-source software primarily for **storyboarding**.

Access to OTT Platforms:

A discussion of screenplays work well when one gets to watch sections of web series episodes. **Hence, to be successful in this course you would need access to access to Netflix and Amazon Prime.** It would be great if you have access to Jio Hotstar. I will play sections from these web series in class. However, you will need to watch these episodes on your own as a part of your homework.

Structure of the course:

This class is not lecture-based; it is centred on discussion and activity. My role is to act as a facilitator for our discussions and guide our activities, but your participation is essential to making the class run and keeping it fun. Our study of the scripts of web series will rely on two main elements: **exposure and emulation**. One of the best ways to understand how script

writing works is to watch some episodes of web series, read the scripts, discuss, and respond to an assortment of scaffolding exercises that would help you to draft a pilot episode of a web series. Examples of web series scripts that would be read and discussed in class would be two among the following three web series – Netflix’s *Delhi Crime* (Season 1), Amazon Prime’s *Paatal Lok* (Season 1), and Jio Hotstar’s *Shogun* (Season 1).

Please save all the drafts of your assignments and my comments on them. You will have to submit your drafts and my feedback along with your submissions at the end of the semester.

You will notice that our class meetings are devoted to reading, discussion, and in-class writing activities. Each week you will be assigned readings. Each reading highlights particular literary techniques and provides several illustrations of those techniques using examples from fiction.

In addition to the required weekly reading in the course text, you will be taking quizzes on Teams. I will also announce your homework in class.

You are also expected to attend at least one conference with me. You **MUST** attend these conferences because it will allow you a one-to-one feedback session with me and improve your draft.

Scheme of Evaluation and Grading Evaluation Breakup

In your analytical work, I will look for *clarity, precision, accuracy*, and whether or not you apply *relevant* ideas/concepts from class to the material you are analysing.

In your creative work, I will look for the standard requirements for effective screenplay writing (clear characters, original dialogue, effective plot structure, etc) as well as that you demonstrate an understanding of the medium of web series for which you are writing (especially in terms of concept and audience).

A Note on No Screen Policy:

Note-taking is becoming a lost art. To ensure that students learn and remember the skill of note-taking, the instructor will follow a strict no-electronic device policy. Students would not be allowed to have their phones, laptops or tablets or any other electronic devices in class. When the class starts, the instructor will politely ask the students to put their cell phones on the instructor’s desk and to keep their laptops in their backpacks or side bags. Suppose someone has a medical condition that would require a student to use a laptop or a tablet in class. In that case, the student should get a doctor’s note from a doctor employed at JGU’s Health Center clearly stating the student would need to use a laptop or a tablet in the classroom.

Preparing for class:

You are responsible for reading all assigned readings from your course text **in advance** of the class period they are due and bringing the course text with you to class. We cannot have a meaningful conversation about these texts unless we have them in front of us.

Writing assignments:

This course would require students to write both analytically (analysis essays) and creatively (writing exercises & web series screenplay). I expect all formal compositions to be typed, properly formatted, and carefully proofread. Please note that your creative assignments will undergo multiple drafts.

A Note on Workshop:

I will ask you to sign up for a Workshop on a particular date. The date for your story workshop will be final, and it cannot be changed. Moreover, you will need to share a draft of your story with the entire class before the draft is scheduled for the workshop. For example, if your draft is scheduled for workshop on 08/03/2026, then you will need to share copies for the entire class on 01/03/2026. **If you are not present on 01/03/2026 or do not distribute copies of your workshop draft, you will not get any points for Writer's Note + Workshop Draft.**

Grade Distribution:⁺

Script Analysis Essay Assignment	30% of the total grade
Writer's Note + First Draft of the Script	10% of the total grade
Pitch for a Web Series	10% of the total grade
Plot Structure Or Story Boarding of the six episodes Web Series	20% of the total grade
Peer Review Workshop	10% of the total grade
Final draft of the first episode of the Web Series and	20% of the total grade

+ These are approximate grade distribution and are subject to changes.

Grade Definition

JSLH approves the use of this rubric for FINAL ASSESSMENT grading as indicated below:

O (80% and Above) [8.0]	Outstanding	Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesise ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability
A+ (75%-79%) [7.5]	Excellent	Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesise ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability

A (70%-74%) [7.0]	Very Good	Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organisational capacity, ability to synthesise ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing materials and originality in thinking and presentation
A- (65%-69%) [6.0]	Good	Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills
B+ (60%-64%) [5.0]	Fair	Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills. Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills
B (55%-59%) [4.0]	Acceptable	Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of study and reasonable critical and analytical skills
B- (50%-54%) [3.0]	Marginal	Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials and, poor critical and analytical skills
F (Below 50%)	Fail	Poor comprehension of the subject matter, poor critical and analytical skills, and marginal use of the relevant materials. It will require repeating the course

Academic Integrity

A Note on Classroom Punctuality/Conduct:

JSLH conducts all classes on a foundation of professionalism. Please also note that a classroom is a place for free expression and critical thinking. This comes with a responsibility on the part of students to respect opinions expressed and actively participate in the classroom discussion.

A Note on Plagiarism:

In line with JGU policy, JSLH operates a zero-tolerance approach to Plagiarism. The unacknowledged use of material by others within your work is a violation of academic integrity. All reported cases will be investigated before potential disciplinary action. Instructors will address methods of citation and presentation within written work.

Disability Support and Accommodation Requirements:

JGU endeavours to make all its courses accessible to students. All students with a known disability needing academic accommodations are required to register with the Disability Support Committee dsc@jgu.edu.in. The Committee has so far identified the following conditions that could possibly hinder student's overall well-being. These include physical and mobility-related difficulties, visual impairment; hearing impairment; medical conditions; specific learning difficulties, e.g. dyslexia, mental health. The Disability Support Committee