

# ENGL 4330

Short Film  
TR 9:30-10:45  
Classroom Hall 305

Dr. Scott Gage  
Student Hours: M-F 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
Office Location: Classroom Hall 322  
Please contact me Blackboard messages

## Welcome to ENGL 4330!

My name is Dr. Gage, and I'm thrilled to be working with you all this semester. Although my Ph.D. is in Rhetoric and Composition and I do a lot of work in that area, I also have a creative writing background. Specifically, I have an MFA in Screenwriting (although I took more fiction workshops than I did screenwriting workshops). So storytelling is what got me into this profession, and it's ultimately what I'm most passionate about. I'm excited to share that passion with you all this semester.

So, yes, we're focusing on storytelling in this class. To be more specific, we're going to focus on cinematic storytelling in the form of short film. This means we're going to learn not only how to write screenplays but also how to translate those screenplays into film through cinematography, performance, and editing. And we're going to do that work collaboratively as I'm going to ask you to work in groups to produce a 15-minute short film. You're going to work on the development of that film all semester starting Week 1.

This may be the first time you've done anything like this, and that's okay; it's the first time I've taught a class like this. So let's experiment, and let's have fun. And let's be storytellers.

Welcome to ENGL 4330...

## Course Outcomes

I've designed this course to help you develop key skills and abilities as cinematic storytellers, a.k.a., filmmakers. By the end of the semester, you'll be able to:

1. analyze film from the perspective of a screenwriter, a cinematographer, and a film editor;
2. develop characters;
3. develop plot and narrative structure;
4. write scenes and sequences for film;
5. demonstrate an understanding of screenwriting conventions;
6. use the techniques of cinematography to translate a script into a film;
7. edit a film, including the use of sound;
8. perform a character in a film;
9. compose a collaborative 15-minute film; and
10. reflect on your creative processes.

## Course Materials

I believe many of you took Dr. Ayres's film studies class last fall. I'd like us to use the same textbook Dr. Ayres required:

*Film Studies: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., by Ed Sikov.

I'm using the same book for our class (1) because many of you may already own a copy and (2) because I'd like you all to experience how the ability to analyze film intersects with the ability to produce film. So we're going to cover a lot of the same topics Dr. Ayres covered, but we're going to approach those topics from the standpoint of storytelling rather than critical analysis.

In addition to *Film Studies*, we'll read chapters from Syd Fields's books *Screenplay* and *The Screenwriter's Workbook*. I'm going to print copies of those chapters and share them with you all in class.

We're also going to watch at least one short film each week, mostly in class. I'll make links to those films available to you all in Blackboard.

## Course Requirements

As I noted above, you'll work in groups this semester to produce a 15-minute short film. We're going to work on that in steps. I'll specifically ask you to complete the following assignments, all of which will lead to the final cut of your film:

- Character Biographies
- Short Film Paradigm
- Short Film Sequence
- Short Film Script
- Mise-En-Scene Image
- Mise-En-Scene Film
- Mise-En-Scene Film Revision
- Short Film: First Cut
- Short Film: Second Cut
- Short Film: Final Cut with screenplay
- 3 Team Member Evaluations

While you do that work, I'm going to ask you to track and reflect on your creative process. Doing so is vital to becoming a more effective storyteller. I'll ask you to do that work through two ongoing assignments:

- Process Journal (11 total submissions)
- Process Reflection (3 total submissions)

In addition to producing a short film, I'm going to ask you to write three short film analyses. Importantly, I'll ask you not to write these analyses from the perspective of a critic but from the perspective of a storyteller. Each analysis will focus on a different aspect of filmmaking:

- Film Analysis #1: Screenwriting
- Film Analysis #2: Cinematography and Performance
- Film Analysis #3: Editing

So that's 30 total assignments, many of you'll complete and submit as a group.

Please check Blackboard for instructions on each assignment, and please be sure to let me know if you ever have questions about what I'm asking you to do.

## **Grading Contract**

As an instructor of writing, I treat all writing and composing as a recursive and exploratory process involving continual drafting, revision, and reflection. I'm also committed to rewarding my students for all of the work, or labor, you do for my courses. For these reasons, I'm going to use a labor-based approach to grading. Labor-based grading assesses you on the quality of your labor rather than the quality of your writing, meaning that I'll grade your work this semester both on the amount of work you complete and on the time and effort you put toward achieving course outcomes. Yes, I'll address the quality of your work when I respond to it. I'll also expect you to put forward the substantial time and effort it takes to improve upon the quality of your work; that is, I'll expect you to demonstrate growth and improvement in your work over the course of the semester. But I'm not going to award you an "A" or a "B" etc. on individual assignments based on the quality of the assignment. Rather, I'll grade you on whether or not your labor is "complete," "partially complete," or "incomplete."

For every assignment you or your group submits that is "complete," you'll earn 1 point toward your overall grade. "Partially complete" assignments will earn 0.5 points, and "incomplete" assignments will earn 0 points. I'll provide criteria for what makes each assignment "complete," "partially complete," or "incomplete." Please note that you may revise and resubmit "partially complete" and "incomplete" assignments as many times as is necessary to make them "complete," and you may do so up to Thursday, April 30.

In short, the more work you complete, the better your grade—and the better you'll position yourself to learn and grow.

## Class Attendance

Please note that we'll dedicate significant class time this semester (1) to developing your skills as filmmakers, and (2) to completing your Short Film Project. For that reason, attendance in class will be one of the most important forms of labor you'll complete this semester, and if I am grading you on the quality of your labor, then I have to grade you on your attendance.

You'll earn 1 point toward your grade for every week you attend all of our classes. You'll earn 0.5 points for every week you attend only one of our classes. You'll, then, earn 0 points for every week you miss both of our classes.

You may make up points for missed classes. We can discuss on an individual basis what you can do to make up for lost points.

Also, please note that I can excuse absences at my discretion, but I need you to communicate with me about why you're not attending. (NOTE: You do not need to disclose specific details about your situation when communicating with me about your attendance.) Also, per university policy, I'll excuse absences for military service, for any religious holy days you may be observing per your individual faith, and for documented participation in university-sponsored events.

### Negative Team Member Evaluations

At the end of each unit, I'm going to ask you and your group members to reflect on and evaluate your contributions to your group's Short Film Project. I'm asking you to do this (1) as an invitation to reflection, (2) as a way to ensure your group's collaboration is healthy and productive, and (3) to assess the labor each group member is putting in on the Short Film Project. If a majority of your group members demonstrate that you are not adequately contributing to the group, I'll consider it a "negative" evaluation. If you receive a "negative" evaluation, I'll request a meeting with you. If after that meeting I determine that the "negative" evaluations are warranted, you'll receive 0 points for that month's Team Member Evaluation, even if you turn in your own evaluation, as well as 0 points toward any assignments your group can prove you did not contribute to. Note that you can't make up for "negative" evaluations.

To avoid "negative" evaluations, please make sure you are an active, engaged, and contributing group member.

### Final Grade

I'll determine your final grade by adding up the total number of points you earned through the labor you completed over the course of the semester. Taking your attendance and assignments together, you're eligible to earn a total of 45 points in our class.

### **Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)**

I expect you to generate your own content this semester, so I ask that you and your group not use GAI technologies such as ChatGPT. We can talk as a group in class about why I'm opposed to your use of GAI for this course. Please let me know if you'd like to have that conversation.

### **Student Services and Support**

As you all well know, being a college student is hard: You're taking a range of different classes that are asking you to complete a lot of work, often at the same time. You're trying to balance that work with other responsibilities you might have like a job (or two or three), like family, etc. And you're doing all of that while you may be struggling with some real issues involving mental health, food insecurity, academic success, etc. It's not easy. Thankfully, you don't have to handle all of that on your own. The university provides important services that can help you make it as a student. Please check out the list below, and *please* reach out to any that you might need. There's no shame in getting help.

Academic Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, Disability Support Services is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us <https://www.tamusa.edu/Disability-Support-Services/index.html> or email us at [dss@tamusa.edu](mailto:dss@tamusa.edu). Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services as soon as possible.

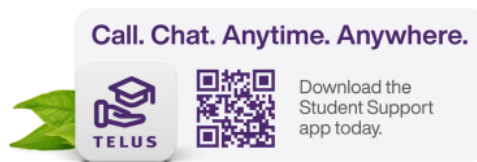
Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the *Tools* section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing [tutoring@tamusa.edu](mailto:tutoring@tamusa.edu), calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.

Counseling/Mental Health Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120.

All mental health services provided by the SCC are **free and confidential** (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information on SCC services visit <http://tamusa.edu/studentcounseling>

***Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331.***

Additionally, the TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources to including support for in the moment distress, an anonymous peer-to-peer support network, mental health screenings, podcasts, and articles to improve your mental wellbeing.



Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://www.tamusa.edu/academics>.

Meeting Basic Needs: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to submit a CARE referral (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities/file-a-report.html>) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if

you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources.

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any question involving federal or state VA Education Benefits. Visit the Patriots' Casa building, room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at [military.va@tamusa.edu](mailto:military.va@tamusa.edu) or (210)784-1397.

## **University Policies**

Please review the following for information on the university policies we will have to follow this semester:

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended by the published Census Date (the first week of class). Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend prior to the published Census Date (the first week of class) will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided with an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or course work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

The Six-Drop Rule: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equal opportunity, and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual on our campus and within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees are to be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have

experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the University's Civil Rights Officer at 210-784-2061 or [titleix@tamusa.edu](mailto:titleix@tamusa.edu).

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking based on sex, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other related sex-based misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator ( [titleix@tamusa.edu](mailto:titleix@tamusa.edu), 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students: Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide such reasonable modifications to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with temporary medical condition that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status ([titleix@tamusa.edu](mailto:titleix@tamusa.edu); 210-784-2061; CAB 439K). Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources.

Young Jaguars: can support parenting students with daycare who meet this criteria: Must be enrolled in classes at TAMUSA in the current semester. Must be Pell eligible or a single parent. They serve children ages 3 to 12-years-old. Children must be enrolled in Pre-K-3 through 6th grade. [youngjaguars@tamusa.edu](mailto:youngjaguars@tamusa.edu) (210) 784-2636.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country.

### *Students' Rights*

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and pregnancy/parenting or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university students' rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

### *Students' Responsibilities*

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, [Student Code of Conduct](#), on our website, and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with federal, state, and local laws.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notifications.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or disability. Conduct that infringes on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the Student Code of Conduct (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/documents/Student-Handbook-2022-23.pdf>) or visit the resources available in the OSRR website (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academic-integrity.html>)



## **Final Note**

On a more personal note, I'm deeply committed to you and your success, so please know that I'm part of the team rooting you on this semester. This means you can reach out to me any time you have a question or a concern. It also means you can reach out to me if you ever feel like you're falling behind. Let me know if that's happening as soon as you can, and we can work together to figure out how to get you where you want to be. You can also let me know if you're finding any parts of our class exciting or interesting. In other words, you don't just have to reach out if you're having trouble. I want you to succeed as a filmmaker this semester, and I'm going to do what I can to help make that happen.