



ELA Virtual Learning

Creative Writing

May 21, 2020



Creative Writing

Lesson: Thurs., May 21

Objective/Learning Target: Students will write their own spec (or original) script based on their practice.



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Review: Students following along the past couple of weeks have studied existing sitcoms, created outlines, brainstormed ideas, and familiarized themselves in general with writing stories for the screen. This week, we will put those ideas into practice by writing a full teleplay (or screenplay specifically for television).



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Warm-up/Review: Yesterday we considered the issues with a story's second act, which is notoriously problematic to write.

Read [this breakdown](#) (or revisit, if you followed yesterday's lesson) of the common elements of a second act. Take notes in your journal as you read, defining terms with which you may be unfamiliar.



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Lesson: As we've learned during this unit, subplots help in terms of pacing, and they can relate thematically to the episode as well, allowing for a sense of unity and cohesion. (In animated sitcoms, this isn't always the case, but viewers don't typically expect the same level of sophistication in animated shows.) To refresh, you may wish to revisit this [video from Robert McKee](#) about subplots, which we studied earlier in the unit.



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Lesson (cont'd): Over the past couple of days, we watched a couple of clips ([here](#) and [here](#)) from *The Office*. In Act One, new email surveillance allows Michael to learn he's not invited to a barbecue (inciting incident). In Act Two, he attempts to guilt his employees into inviting him (which doesn't work, obviously).



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Lesson (cont'd): But what can you do, as the writer, to keep the protagonist busy when his initial attempts to get what he wants (an invite to the party) fail? This is where a subplot can come in. In Act Two, while the party is getting started (there's a subplot here involving Jim & Pam's office romance), Michael [goes to an improv class](#). Watch the linked clip, and as you do, consider the ways in which this scene complements the main plot.



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Lesson (cont'd): What do we learn about Michael? First and foremost, if you weren't sure already, we understand now why his employees are reluctant to invite him to a party. We also understand more about Michael's character. He's so desperate for belonging, he presses too hard and, as a result, puts people off. This can make for some cringe-inducing moments (a hallmark of *The Office*...comedy gold!) that also provide characterization and thematic resonance.



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Practice: As you work into Act Two of your script, focus on the subplot! Ideally, today you'll have Act Two complete. As you read back over the script, think about pacing. Are there places where an additional scene could make the progress of time more logical to the viewer? Do the scenes that focus on subplot complement the main plot?



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Model: [The Office \(“Email Surveillance”\) script](#)



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Additional Practice/Resources:

[Screenwriting Glossary](#)

[Screenplay Formatter Add-On for Google Docs](#)

[Act One: The Set-Up from *The Script Lab*](#)

[Act Two: Obstacles from *The Script Lab*](#)