



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Creative Writing

Faculty of Arts

Course Syllabus: Writing the Romantic Comedy: The Outline

Week by Week Breakdown

Every week, students will watch instructor videos and interviews with screenwriters, executives, and others. From there, assignments will explore the construction of the building blocks of your script's world, bit by bit. Regular group discussion topics will help you connect with your fellow learners and get where you're going. While the class will roll out a new module each week, you're welcome to work at your own pace and write as much as you can in between them. You will have access to this course indefinitely after it ends, but we won't be monitoring it or answering questions after the last module is complete.

Note: this course is not a writing workshop and we will not be giving feedback on your work in process. It's a craft-based experience, designed to get you writing and provide you with writing and rewriting tools that will serve you long after the class is over. Zac will be available during the course for a student Q&A session, recorded as a lively podcast.

Module 1: We Start at the Beginning

We'll start this module with a video lecture and a writing exercise that helps you narrow down what you'll be writing by taking a look at the history of the rom-com. From there, a video lecture and an exercise will help you understand your main character, while a handout on story beginnings will set you off in the right direction. We'll also watch *Bringing Up Baby* with Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn and talk about how the screwball comedy came to be. We will finish your first module with a little video and discussion on main characters.

Module 2: We Skip to the End

Surprise! Because of the way rom-coms are structured, we're going to look at how the beginning and the end work together. In this module's lectures, we'll look at the love interest, and how conflict works within the world and relationships of your story. We'll also expand your main character's world with a worksheet on the love interest. From there, we'll screen 2018's *Crazy Rich Asians* (directed by Jon M Chu, script by Adele Lim and Peter Chiarelli, based on the novel by Kevin Kwan). We'll look at how rom-coms often handle their endings and what happens to bring the love interests together. We'll hear some thoughts on love interests from several writers and various industry figures as we roll into the discussion.

Module 3: We Journey Through the Middle

We begin this module by opening up your world to secondary characters – the people your main and love interest characters will talk to. You'll do an assignment in creating interesting and refreshing characters and consider how to add them to the world you're building. We'll also take a look at your setting, and how the genre of rom-coms can blend with other genres. We'll watch one of the three Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan movies (1998's *You've Got Mail*, directed by Nora Ephron). And then, still a bit out of order, we'll talk about the middle of your story as we go into perhaps the most fun part: getting out the notecards and “boarding” your story.

Module 4: We Put it All Together

This module, we'll problem-solve everything we've put together and try to unlock a chronological throughline for your story with a lecture on the beginning, middle, and end. We'll review the three-act (and nine-act!) structure and the concepts of want/desire/need, and we'll diagnose our own stories for plot holes and problems that need solving. This is where the rubber hits the road and our outline begins to take on a new life of its own. Finally, we'll take a look at how writing anything contributes to the overall theme of the piece, and discuss *your* favorite rom-com.

Module 5: We Write the Outline

Here's where it all comes together: the outline itself. Combining all of the pieces of storytelling and character traits you've put together, we'll go back to the start and look at how to write a professional outline. We'll discuss what to include and what to leave out. And we'll also do a quick review of how story structure is a “backbone” to hang your story on. Finally, you'll watch a surprise rom-com with fresh eyes and hear what makes a compelling outline from working rom-com writers and industry figures. We'll wrap up class with a discussion on how to move from outline to script.