

THTR 411 Special Topics: Directing for the Camera
Monday, Wednesday 11:30am - 12:50pm
KUPFRIAN HALL 110

Instructor: Rodney Reyes

Email: rodney.reyes@njit.edu

Office Location: Kupfrian Hall 113

Office Hours: Thursdays 1-3pm

Office Phone: (973) 596-3457

Course Mode: Face-to-Face

Course Description:

THTR 411, Directing for the Camera, is a course that delves into the art and craft of directing for cinema, guiding students through the essential phases of filmmaking: pre-production, principal photography, and post-production. Students will engage with key directing concepts, including mise-en-scène, script analysis, actor collaboration, blocking, and camera movement, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the director's role in bringing stories to life.

Course Learning Outcomes:

- **Understand Directorial Concepts:** Develop a strong grasp of fundamental directing principles, including mise-en-scène, pacing, and storytelling through visuals.
- **Script Analysis:** Learn to break down scripts to identify themes, character motivations, and visual storytelling opportunities.
- **Collaborating with Actors:** Gain skills in working with actors to elicit authentic performances and communicate directorial vision effectively.
- **Scene Blocking and Staging:** Master the art of blocking scenes and coordinating movement for visual clarity and dramatic impact.
- **Camera Techniques:** Understand the principles of camera placement, movement, and framing to enhance storytelling and emotion.
- **Pre-Production Planning:** Learn to create shot lists, storyboards, and production schedules to ensure a seamless production process.
- **Directing on Set:** Develop strategies for efficient communication with the cast and crew during principal photography.
- **Visual Storytelling:** Explore how to use lighting, color, and composition to convey mood, tone, and narrative meaning.
- **Post-Production Collaboration:** Understand the director's role in post-production, including working with editors and sound designers to shape the final film.
- **Critical Analysis and Reflection:** Build the ability to critique your own work and others', incorporating feedback to grow as a filmmaker.

Course Requirements:

- Basic knowledge of camera operations, editing software, and filmmaking terminology.
- Active participation in class discussions, workshops, and collaborative projects.
- Proficiency in operating filmmaking equipment, such as cameras, lights, and sound gear.
- Responsibility for reserving and returning equipment used for projects.
- Analyze films or scenes assigned by the instructor, preparing detailed critiques.
- Collaborate with classmates in various crew roles (e.g., cinematographer, editor) to complete projects.
- Provide constructive feedback during peer critiques and project evaluations.
- Class participation and engagement.
- Quality and creativity of assignments and projects.
- Adherence to deadlines and professionalism in submissions.
- Growth in understanding and application of directing concepts.

Required Course Materials:

- A YouTube account for uploading and submitting video projects.
- A smartphone or digital camera capable of recording HD video.
- Editing software, such as Adobe Premiere Pro, Final Cut Pro, or DaVinci Resolve (available for free).
- Final Draft software. A student trial version is available, and I will provide the link for access.

Instructional methods:

The course will incorporate diverse instructional methods to provide a well-rounded learning experience. Students will watch and analyze films and videos to explore directing techniques and storytelling approaches. Lectures and class discussions will deepen theoretical understanding and encourage collaborative dialogue. Screenings will be accompanied by creative exercises, fostering practical application of concepts. Throughout the course, students will engage in directing exercises and assignments designed to build their skills progressively. The experience will culminate in a final project, where each student will direct a short film based on an original screenplay, showcasing their mastery of the craft.

Grading Scale :

100 - 92.5 A, 92.4 - 85 B+, 84.4 - 80 B, 79.9 - 77.5 C+, 77.4 - 70 C, 69.9 - 60 D, 59.9 - 0 F

Grading Policy & Assessment Categories:

In-Class Participation (15%)

Students are expected to show up on time and ready to participate in in-class activities & discussions.

Homework Assignments (20%)

Weekly assignments will include a variety of activities, such as reading materials, watching videos or films, writing response papers, and completing video-based projects.

Amelie Response Video (10%)

Students will attend the theatrical production of *Amélie* (scheduled for April 10–12, 2025) and create a video presentation. In this video, they will reflect on their experience of the production and propose how they would reimagine it as a film, presenting a unique adaptation that distinguishes itself from the original 2002 movie.

Directing Exercises (25%)

Throughout the semester, students will complete four directing assignments, each building on the previous one and delving deeper into key concepts covered in the course. These assignments will involve producing videos designed to strengthen their understanding and application of directing techniques for the camera.

Final Short Film Project & Presentation (30%)

For their final project, students will create a short film that demonstrates the skills and techniques they have developed throughout the course. Upon completion, they will present their films to the class in a film festival-style screening. This presentation will include a Q&A session, where students will discuss their creative choices, directing process, and overall experience. This format provides an opportunity to receive constructive feedback, reflect on their growth as filmmakers, and celebrate the culmination of their work in a professional, collaborative environment.

Generative AI:

This course expects students to work without artificial intelligence (AI) assistance in order to better develop their skills in this content area. As such, AI usage is not permitted throughout this course under any circumstance.

Feedback:

I will provide detailed feedback on each major course assessment through the comments feature in Canvas. Feedback will be delivered within one week of the assignment's submission to ensure timely and constructive guidance.

Exam Information and Policy for Late Work:

Instead of a traditional final exam, the course will conclude with a final video project and presentation. All assignments scheduled for a specific class date must be completed and submitted on that day. Late submissions will be accepted only with prior notification and approval and may incur point deductions.

Academic Integrity Statement:

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [NJIT Academic Integrity Code](#).

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu

Class Etiquette:

Students are expected to follow [NJIT's Code of Student Conduct](#). Students should be polite, active participants and respect their instructor, classmates, as well as ideas or opinions that differ from their own. While scholarly debates are encouraged, they should not become personal attacks.

Participation:

Attendance and participation are essential to your success in this course. In class, we will consistently engage in exercises and discussions, share perspectives, and challenge ourselves to think creatively while applying the tools introduced in each lesson. My goal is to create an environment of curiosity and openness, and I ask that you approach this course with effort and courage.

This course may differ significantly from others you've taken at NJIT. Film is an art form, and while it involves techniques and methodologies that we'll explore in depth, these are not rigid, one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, they are tools designed to help you delve deeper into your creative process, allowing you to discover new ways of connecting with yourself and your audience. There isn't one definitive path forward in this art form—there are many. The techniques we learn will guide you, but ultimately, it's up to you to forge your own unique path.

Participation in this course isn't just about showing up; it's about your willingness to commit fully to the assignments and exercises. Each student's journey will be unique, as the discoveries you make will be personal to you. As your instructor, I will be observing your level of commitment and effort, not reading your mind. The work you put in—the exploration, effort, and bravery you bring to each class—will be the foundation of your success.

Show up authentically, engage with curiosity, and commit wholeheartedly to the process. By doing so, you'll not only succeed in this course but also carry meaningful lessons and insights with you long after it ends.

Absences:

Unexcused absences will count against your participation grade. Three unexcused absences will result in a full letter grade deduction from your overall participation grade. If you have extenuating circumstances for any reason and miss a class you must contact the Dean of Students Office.

Student Absences for Religious Observance:

Students must notify their instructors in writing of any conflicts between course requirements and religious observances, ideally by the end of the second week of classes and no later than two weeks before the anticipated absence.

Accommodations:

The Office of Accessibility Resources and Services works in partnership with administrators, faculty, and staff to provide reasonable accommodations and support services for students with disabilities who have provided their office with medical documentation to receive services.

If you are in need of accommodations due to a disability, please contact the [Office of Accessibility Resources and Services](#) to discuss your specific needs.

Weekly Course Schedule:**Week 1: Jan 22, 2025**

Introduction to the Course, Syllabus Overview, Course Expectations

Week 2: January 27 & 29, 2025

Thunder Road screening and breakdown of film; How to read an image/mise-en scene discussion

Week 3: February 3 & 5, 2025

Mise-En Scene workshop; Genre discussion

Week 4: February 10 & 12, 2025

Camera Movement discussion & workshop

Week 5: February 17 & 19, 2025

Directing Exercise #1 Presentation;

Week 6: February 24 & 26, 2025

Day in the Life Video presentation; Screenplay Format introduction

Week 7: March 3 & March 5, 2025

Screenplay Format part 2; Group Work: Write a Short Film

Week 8: March 10 & 12

Directing Exercise #2 Presentation; Pitch-Deck Discussion & Workshop

Week 9: Spring Break**Week 10: March 24 & 26, 2025**

Pitch Deck Presentation; Working with actors discussion

Week 11: March 31 & April 2, 2025

Production Design Workshop; Preparation for Principal Photography

Week 12: April 7 & April 9, 2025

Directing Exercise #3 Presentation; Introduction to Sound Design

Week 13: April 14 & April 16, 2025

Sound Design Workshop; Lighting and Color Discussion

Week 14: April 21 & 23, 2025

Post-Production: Editing discussion and Workshop

Week 15: April 28 & 30, 2025

Directing Exercise #4 Presentation; Screening of Short Films & Critique

Week 16: May 5, 2025

Final Short Film Projects presentation with Q&A

Canvas Accessibility Statement:

Instructure is committed to ensuring its products are inclusive and meet the diverse accessibility needs of our users. Canvas LMS strives for WCAG 2.1 Level A/AA and Section 508 conformance. Regular testing (both internal and by a third party) is conducted to identify conformance issues, with processes in place for timely remediation of accessibility issues that are identified. Canvas is a complex and broad system. The statements below are accurate as of the date indicated.

Canvas has been evaluated by Instructure and WebAIM according to WCAG 2.1 standards. Testing is regularly conducted using automated tools, assistive technology (such as screen readers, keyboard testing, etc.), and coding best practices. Third party accessibility evaluation occurs regularly with internal audits conducted with each release. Mechanisms are in place for logging and fixing accessibility defects.

This syllabus may be subject to updates throughout the semester.