

# TH 134: Introduction to Playwriting

Seminar Leader: Cory Tamler

Course Meeting Time: Wednesdays 3:45-7pm

Email: [c.tamler@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:c.tamler@berlin.bard.edu)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-3:30pm (by appointment)

## Course Description

In this course, students will learn the fundamentals of writing for text-based theatre. The course has a two-fold structure: First, writing exercises both within and outside of class, as well as readings from recent published playscripts by contemporary German playwrights, will introduce students to the basics of crafting dialogue, pacing, building dramatic tension, and the particular challenges and opportunities of storytelling for the stage. Students will learn about and try out different possibilities for the role of the playwright in the contemporary theatremaking process, from solitary author to co-writer, from collaborator in a development process to interpreter of research material and beyond. Reading and responding to one another's work will provide students with a glimpse into how performers and directors might approach a playwright's text, strengthening their abilities to write for performance. Second, students in this course will work together throughout the semester with students in the "Introduction to Directing" seminar, instructed by Julia Hart. In a workshop setting, students will form teams of directors, playwrights and actors to explore different forms of collaboration in the rehearsal room. Students will work on staged readings and short scenes that will culminate in a theatre presentation in the Factory at the end of the semester.

## Requirements

Students are expected to:

- Turn off phones during class time.
- Initiate appointments with the Professor or arts staff outside of class time.
- Always allocate extra time for work preparation and clean-up for independent production.
- Respond to emails from their professors in a timely manner.
- Inform their professors at the beginning of the semester if photos of student's identity, artwork, works in progress are NOT to be taken and / or used for Bard College Berlin.
- Remove all artworks, art materials, and / or any personal belongings before the end of the semester. Failure to remove works or return spaces clean and empty may result in final grade penalization. Donating unrequested artworks and / or art materials is not permitted and will still be considered student property, expected to be removed by your inspection deadline. Please contact Studio Arts Manager Joon Park for more information: [j.park@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.park@berlin.bard.edu)

## Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

***Artificial intelligence-related policies for this class:*** You are welcome to use AI generators *as an artistic tool*. If you've collaborated with an AI generator substantially on a piece of creative writing, I expect you to notify me (or for it to be extremely clear in the writing itself). I will take this into account in assessing your work. Using an AI generator to generate writing prompts is perfectly acceptable. In written/presented work that is intended to represent your own research and learning (i.e. informational essayistic writing, group presentations, etc.), you must be able to show spoken fluency with the concepts in your writing. That means: don't use an AI to write something if you can't speak about it extemporaneously. If you misrepresent your own fluency with the contents of your written work and this turns out to be because of your reliance on AI, you will be asked to redo the assignment or risk a failing or substantially lowered grade. *These policies are subject to change! We're all learning about how this new technology affects our work as artists and thinkers.*

## Attendance

- Attendance at ALL classes is expected.
- More than one absence (that is, absence from one three-hour session per week) in a semester will affect the participation grade for the course.
- Students who are unable to attend some in-person classes due to travel restrictions, quarantine measures, or illness should discuss remote participation options with me as early as possible.
- Students are expected to attend all off-campus classes punctually, from start to finish. If there is a scheduling / travel conflict, you must inform me in advance.
- If you arrive to class more than five minutes late, this will be considered an absence.
- Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

## Assessment

- Students will be graded on preparation, participation, and completion of assignments, and their ability to discuss primary concepts/elements of playwriting (dramatic structure and plot, character, dialogue) and their ideas about their own and their peers' writing, in class discussions and in workshops.
- Students will also be assessed on their use *in their own writing* of these primary concepts and other elements of playwriting discussed or discovered in class.
- Each student will be workshoped twice by the full class. One of these workshops will be of their final script project.

## Assignments

### PLAYWRITING EXERCISES (#1 due 15.2 , #2 due 1.3, #3 due 15.3)

- You will follow prompts and instructions given and explained in class to write, at home, short and mid-length scenes and/or short plays. At least one of these assignments will be workshopped in class.

### FINAL PLAYWRITING PROJECT (due 12.4)

- The final written project for this class consists of an excerpt from a longer potential script (recommended) or a full self-contained play, 10 minutes in length.
- After turning in a draft, you will be paired with a student from the directing class, who will stage your work as their own final project.
- You are expected to attend at least 3 hours of rehearsal for your scene (outside of class time).
- Your final project will be workshopped in class.

### FINAL GROUP PROJECT (presentations 3.5, performances 10.5)

- You will work in a small group to research and present material on a contemporary playwriting form that you have not had the chance to work with yet in the semester (i.e. docu-drama, adaptation, research-based writing, etc.), including leading a writing exercise; *or*
- You will research, rehearse, and perform a role in one of your classmates' final scenes and share reflections with the class on how experience as an actor can shape or inform your playwriting practice.

### IN-CLASS WRITING EXERCISES (various dates, part of "participation" grade)

Writing in class will be a regular part of the semester. Students are expected to bring writing materials to class (and will be encouraged to use the writing method that is most comfortable and conducive to their own writing—pen/paper or laptop are both acceptable; voice memos will be made possible for students who prefer this method). Students are expected to actively participate in the in-class written assignments and will be encouraged, but not required, to share material written in-class with the rest of the class.

### DAILY WRITING PRACTICE (not graded; extra credit possible for "participation" grade)

We will all experiment with a daily writing practice for the duration of this class. For this practice you commit to writing for 15 minutes every day, beginning after the first day of class and continuing at least until you have turned in your final writing project. This writing can be freewriting or for a class assignment (including for other classes). I will host a session via our Google Classroom page every day to support this practice (time TBD, attendance not required).

## Grade Breakdown

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Class participation (including workshopping, attendance, communication):        | 25% |
| Written assignments (3 playwriting exercises) and in-class writing assignments: | 30% |
| Final playwriting project:  | 30% |
| Final group project:  | 15% |

## Policy on Late Submission of Artworks / Presentations

This is a writing course. **Timely submission of your writing assignments is crucial**, especially if it is your turn to be workshopped.

Assignments (including playwriting assignments, performances, oral presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (example: B+ becomes C+). I am not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. If I agree to accept a late assignment, we will agree on a new deadline together and this new deadline will become binding. If you fail to turn in the assignment on the revised deadline, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to you in a timely fashion. You are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during my office hours.

Bard students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. You are entitled to make an appointment with me to discuss seminar participation, or I may ask you to meet with me at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

## Schedule

*The spring semester runs from Monday, January 30 and runs until Friday, May 19, with spring break planned from Monday, April 3 – Friday, April 7. The academic calendar can be found here: <https://berlin.bard.edu/for-students/academic-calendars/>*

### 1.2 Intro class

#### In class:

- Overview of syllabus
- First writing exercises
- Assignment 1 explained
- Meet directors (last half of class)

### 8.2 Dramatic structure: reading plays

#### Reading/Viewing:

- “Visit to a Small Planet” by Elinor Fuchs
- “Sense” (2007) by Anja Hilling

#### In class:

- Factory and A/V orientation (first 30 minutes of class)
- Discuss Fuchs text with directing class
- Discuss “Sense” (second half)

**13.2 MONDAY! Theatre visit with directors: Elfriede Jelinek, “Angabe der Person,” Deutsches Theater**  
<https://www.deutschestheater.de/programm/spielplan/angabe-der-person/6616/>  
Show starts 8PM. Meet at 7:15 in front of the theatre (Schumannstraße 13 A, 10117 Berlin).  
If you cannot attend, you are **required** to read *The Princess Plays* (otherwise optional).

15.2 Dramatic structure: plotting

Reading/Viewing:

- “Northern European Theatre to 1800,” Brockett
- “Elements of Style,” essay by Suzan-Lori Parks
- *The Princess Plays* by Elfriede Jelinek (optional if you attend the play on 13.2)

Due: Assignment 1

In class:

- Intro to workshopping
- Assignment 2 explained

22.2 Conflict

Reading/Viewing:

- “Crazy Blood” (2010) by Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje

In class:

- Cross-purposes improv, conflict games
- First workshop (4 writers)

1.3 Character

Reading/Viewing:

- *We Are the Ones Our Parents Warned Us About* by Tanja Šljivar

Due: Assignment 2

In class:

- Visit from Tanja Šljivar
- Assignment 3 explained
- Continue first workshop (4 writers)

8.3 Dialogue

Reading/Viewing:

- [TBA] by Nora Schüssler

In class:

- Visit from Nora Schüssler
- Second workshop (4 writers)

15.3 No class, writing time.

INTENSIVE WEEKEND WITH DIRECTORS (SATURDAY-SUNDAY):

**18.3**

CLASS: 2-5pm

THEATRE VISIT: evening, time/location TBA

DUE: Assignment 3

**19.3**

CLASS: 12-3pm

*Full schedule TBD. When not with the directors, we will continue the second workshop (4 writers).*

22.3 Revisions

Reading/Viewing:

[TBD]

In class:

- Third workshop (8 writers, separate groups)

29.3 No class, writing time. Midterm grades/progress report shared with students.

5.4 Spring Break

10.4 **MONDAY! Final playwriting projects due for first 4 writers being workshopped.**

12.4 Workshopping final projects (first 4 writers)

Due: Final playwriting project (for remaining 8 writers)

19.4 Workshopping final projects (4 writers)

*Outside of class:* Rehearsals begin. Playwrights attend rehearsals as agreed with their director.

26.4 Workshopping final projects (4 writers)

*Outside of class:* Rehearsals continue. Playwrights attend as agreed with their director.

3.5 Final group presentations

*Outside of class:* Rehearsals continue. Playwrights attend as agreed with their director.

10.5 Performances of final projects (with directing class)

12.5 Performance Factory

## Facility Guidelines:

### “The Factory” (Eichenstrasse 43) Policy Agreement

- 1) “The Factory” at BCB (Eichenstrasse 43) has space and facilities available to BCB students with an academic purpose for using the building. Mandatory in-class orientations are required to retain chip access to the Factory. Chip access to The Factory is from 7am to 10pm everyday during the semester. At 10pm students will be asked to leave the building by BCB security personnel.
- 2) Students agree to only use the common spaces that are available for their needs, and must respect private spaces that are off-limits. For requesting to reserve the dance / theater space and / or Seminar Room 6, please fill out the online [Factory Reservation Form](#). The Factory Staff will get back to you within two weekdays. (Monday - Friday).
- 3) No smoking is allowed anywhere inside the building. There are to be no projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) inside any part of the building.
- 4) Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
- 5) Spray painting and handling of any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not allowed inside the building. Contact the Studio Arts Manager concerning working with these materials. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be properly protected with a drop cloth or a packing paper provided by the workshop.
- 6) No sandals, flip-flops, or bare feet will be allowed inside the workshop and studio 6.
- 7) Students must make sure all lights are turned off and doors are closed when leaving the building. No windows or doors are to be left opened or cracked. All electrical items must be unplugged when not in use.
- 8) If BCB workshop tools must be borrowed for a purpose outside of the building, please contact The Studio Arts Manager (by appointment).
- 9) There are to be no architectural changes to studios or any areas inside or outside of the building without first speaking with the Studio Arts Manager.
- 10) During completion week, any space used by a student must be returned empty with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be bagged (or boxed) and properly disposed of. Final grades may be penalized and / or fines imposed if items are left (or renovations unfinished) by the inspection deadline.
- 11) Contact Studio Arts Manager directly with any questions: [j.park@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.park@berlin.bard.edu)

### AV Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)

- 1) BCB’s AV (Audio / Visual) facilities provide a limited quantity of AV equipment to support those students enrolled in arts classes that require specific items. AV facilities do not include any black and white or color printing services for students.
- 2) The opening times may change every semester to adapt to specific course times and social distancing conditions. Borrowing equipment is currently implemented by scheduling an advance appointment through this link: <https://janinaschabig.youcanbook.me/> AV facilities are ONLY available during days when classes are held (closed during official BCB holidays).
- 3) All items checked out are due back during AV hours the following day, unless other

- arrangements have been made in advance directly with AV Staff.
- 4) Items to be reserved on a specific date should be requested at least one week in advance. Without reservation, availability is limited to a first-come, first-serve basis.
  - 5) The AV Staff may exclude students from borrowing items at any time, if the student:
    - failed to return items in time
    - failed to return items in person (pick up and/ or return by friends is not allowed)
    - returned items with missing pieces
    - returned items damaged or in poor shape
  - 6) AV equipment will be given out only to those students responsible in organizing, picking up as well as returning their items IN PERSON. No exceptions.
  - 7) All items returned late, regardless of patron's position at BCB, will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day.
  - 8) Any item returned without accessories (such as cables, SD card, batteries, tripod head, lens cap, etc) will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day (the same as late returns).
  - 9) Any items missing will be subject to patron reimbursement for its value (or under special circumstances, replacement, at the discretion of AV Staff). Any items damaged or malfunctioning are expected to be reported to Staff upon check-in.
  - 10) Please use the AV email to inquire about equipment or policy, as well as to reserve (av@berlin.bard.edu). Do not contact AV Staff through their personal emails.
  - 11) We strongly suggest personally visiting the facilities to inquire and reserve before borrowing equipment!
  - 12) AV equipment is limited at BCB. Whenever possible students are encouraged to use their own devices (computers, cameras) for production purposes.
  - 13) Contact AV Staff directly with any questions: av@berlin.bard.edu

Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)

Computer Pool and Media Lab – Kuckhoffstrasse 24 (upstairs)

\*\* Guidelines to be offered during orientations.