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Technology for Teaching Project Proposal

[1] Project Title.

## Screenwriting Software: Revising Creative Writing Pedagogy

[2] Statement of the Project's Goals.

To allow a significant shift in pedagogical emphasis in St. Lawrence's Screenwriting courses (English 244 and 306). Software can be obtained to address the vital issue of industry formatting, thereby allowing greater emphasis on, and development of, content of work by student writers in the courses.

[3] A Brief Descriptive Narrative.

Our introductory course, Techniques of Screenwriting (English 244), works to teach students about technical film analysis while also developing their understanding of the genre sufficiently to begin practicing it. Students are taught accepted industry format for screenplays at the beginning of the semester, and are required to employ it as the structure for all of their screenwriting exercises as well as for the short script (50-70 pages) that is the culmination of the first semester's work. Typically, they struggle with the specific elements of layout and formatting throughout their semester—the vast majority of the marks I make on their individual exercises address formatting concerns. Because of the time it takes to mark their exercises in this manner, I have had to abbreviate my comments to them concerning the issue of "narrative potential" in their daily work. I wish to propose that we adopt the Final Draft 5.0 software for screenwriters as a solution to what now appears as a poor investment of student and instructor time.

Here's an analogy to illustrate what this software will do for us: while a mathematics instructor might argue that it is good discipline for student mathematicians to learn to manipulate a slide rule as a calculation tool, it is simply impractical to rely on this now outmoded instrument when hand-held calculators can enable students to begin calculating much more quickly and efficiently. The need to memorize screenwriting format is negated by the Final Draft 5.0 software—meaning that students can automatically begin using proper format from the time of their very first exercise. This gives them a more immediate contact with the real creative issues facing screenwriters (such as how to reimagine written narrative as spoken/visual narrative, or how to learn to create compressed narratives, writing scenes that imply action in the same way that comic strip writers create narratives that imply action *between* cartoon panels while also portraying action within them). It also means that my written evaluations of their work will be able to address creative issues exclusively, without first taking time out to correct format errors.

I would control the software, installing it on specific computers in the computer classroom we use (this fall, for example, Richardson 302), and entrusting the disks to student writers during the semester. I would collect them at the end of the course, and would employ them again in the spring during the Advanced Screenwriting Workshop (English 306)—where they would have a tremendous impact as timesavers for the student writers. This is no small matter, as for that course they are required to prepare two 90-120 page screenplays which undergo a series of revisions and assessments. To save them time on formatting by making it automatic is to ensure higher quality projects as a consequence.

[4] A List of Resources Needed.

Two licensing packs from Final Draft ([www.finaldraft.com](http://www.finaldraft.com)):

- a 5-pack, which can service 10 computers, @ \$249.00
- a 2-pack, which can service 4 computers, @ \$149.00

The representative I spoke with (at 1-800-231-4055) informed me that we could actually license 15 computers with the two packs listed above, and this would be necessary since the cap for the fall course (English 244) is currently 15.

[5] Summary of the Project's Curricular Impact.

I will be able to spend significantly more of my evaluative time on issues of plotting, character development, visual motifs, and scene directions. My students will be able immediately to spend all of their energy on the narratives they are creating, paying more attention to nuanced details, since they will not have to consult their notes continually to ensure the consistent application of required formatting to their exercises.