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THE CRAFT AND BUSINESS OF SCREENWRITING

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## Will Chandler: Blogging from Southampton

*Will Chandler will be blogging from the [Stony Brook Southampton Screenwriting Conference](#) over the weekend.*

This morning, at the Stony Brook Southampton Screenwriting Conference, I had a great time sitting in on a workshop with Frank Pugliese, Obie Award-winning playwright for *Aven'U Boys* and screenwriter on dozens of projects, including *Shot in the Heart*. He worked with students, listening to their ideas and asking probing questions. Pugliese reminded students that, if their scripts were instead formatted as standard prose text, "A screenplay is roughly 35 pages long. When you think about that real estate, that's not a lot to work with. ... Your story needs to be really simple and small, but expansive in the same moment."

When a student was struggling with her adaptation of a true story, Pugliese asked what she thought made a successful script adaptation of a novel. The student suggested that it happens when the screenwriter understands the essence of what the story is and serves that while letting the rest fall away. Pugliese agreed, affirming "Novels don't tend to make great screenplays, it's more like pieces of novels make great screenplays. The screenwriter finds the section of the novel that best illustrates the central theme of the book and uses that."

With his extensive background in theater, Pugliese added that adapting a play for the screen is equally challenging. "Playwriting is about form and rhythm, screenplays have to translate that into pictures. The foundation of screenplays is about images ... and you have to juxtapose images as part of storytelling."

Sharing some of his own secrets, Pugliese told students that when he's working on a project, he keeps a notebook, filled with themes and ideas, but after he has outlined his story and begins to write, he closes the notebook and puts it away. He suggested that by the time he is ready to begin writing, his characters, their conflicts and motivations, and the story itself have been so internalized that releasing his notebook allows his characters more freedom to breath and come to life. To pore over notes while writing can kill spontaneity and make the writing feel flat.

Pugliese reminded students that "Films have a hunger for movement and a hunger for story. All of my characters are trying to do something. Even if they're static, they're active in trying to remain static."

The 2009 Stony Brook Southampton Screenwriting Conference is in only its second year, but its outstanding faculty are all working screenwriters who also teach at NYU, Columbia, USC and UCLA. Some of this year's teachers are Andrew Bienen (*Boys Don't Cry*), Christina Lazaridi (Academy Award-nominee for *One Day Crossing*), Malia Scotch Marmo (*Once Around, Hook*) Ken Friedman (*Heart Like a Wheel*), Stephen Molton (*Live by the Sword*) and actor Peter

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Riegert (writer-producer-director of *King of the Corner*).

Each three-day workshop focuses on a key element of screenwriting, from story development to scene structure or adaptation. In the afternoons, a wide variety of elective courses are offered, from quick ways to outline your script to developing the psychological underpinnings of your characters.

Tomorrow I'll be sitting in on "Understanding Film Structure" with Christina Lazaridi and at night there's an interview with Peter Hedges (Academy Award nominee for *About a Boy*).



Will Chandler, an AMPAS Nicholl Fellowship screenwriter, is the director of the Young American Writers Project (YAWP) through the M.F.A. in Writing & Literature Program at Stony Brook Southampton University. YAWP sends artists into schools across Long Island to teach screenwriting, playwriting, fiction, poetry, and personal essay. Chandler is also a screenwriter, having worked for a variety of studios and production companies as well as selling scripts on spec. Chandler also works as a script doctor with private clients. More information:

[Writers911.com](http://Writers911.com), [Twitter.com/ScreenWrite](https://twitter.com/ScreenWrite).

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