

GEORGE LUCAS AND RANDAL KLEISER
IN ASSOCIATION WITH

USC **SCHOOL** *of* **cinematic** arts

PRESENT

THE **NINA FOCH** COURSE
FOR FILMMAKERS AND ACTORS



EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS PRODUCER RANDAL KLEISER
GEORGE LUCAS, MARTHE AND ARENT FOCH-FENTER VAN VLISSINGEN, DIRK DE BRITO, TED BRAUN

COURSE GUIDE
BY CRAIG MOTLONG

HOW TO USE THIS SERIES:

This series of lectures are excerpts from Nina Foch's directing class conducted at the University of Southern California in 2002. The lectures, organized into sections, cover script analysis, casting, directing, and acting. Spend some time watching Nina, learn from her and implement her ideas into your own work. You'll be amazed how far she can take you.

Who can benefit from Nina Foch's course? Directors? Absolutely. Actors? Yes. But, it's equally valuable for writers, editors, producers, and anyone with more than a passing interest in the art and craft of filmmaking. This material can be used for an entire course, as part of a course, or a rich reference source to immerse yourself in your craft.

There is much material to choose from. Use the following as a guide to help hone your particular experience with the Nina Foch Course.

FOR DIRECTORS

Nina's course is one of the most thorough and fundamental foundations to the craft. Directors need to deal with thousands of details on their film, from the first draft of the script to the final screening. They need to know how to spot talent and how to nurture it. They must understand the subtext of a screenplay that will help them decide what they want to film, and why. Ultimately, they must communicate with actors in ways that bring out the best performance.



FOR ACTORS

Nina was an acting coach for many years. Her notes are geared toward the detail-oriented professional, and include points that not found in other places. An actor can find hours of lifelong advice simply by viewing the "actors" section.

Nina's fundamental building block for the professional actor is script breakdown. Once you master the art of breaking down a script into actions and intentions, you are able to bring your own unique performance to the lines and are on your way to being totally prepared for the director's input on the set. It is indispensable training for a life in front of the camera.



FOR WRITERS

Nina's USC and AFI class, "Directing Actors for Film," was a required course for students in the writing department. The reason? Scene breakdown. Nina's technique helped generations of writers understand not only the words they were writing, but the reasons they were writing them.

One of the most important skills for a screenwriter to acquire is that of understanding subtext. Scene breakdown brings subtext to life on the page. As a writer, you learn to examine every word you commit to the page, and understand its deeper meaning. A phrase that may have thought was unimportant acquires an intention and an action, and suddenly it's critical to the scene. The scene breakdown allows a writer to understand and articulate subtext in a way that's not possible anywhere else.





FOR SINGERS

Nina coached many singers not only in stage presence and technique but in breaking down songs much the way an actor breaks down a script. Every line can be given a separate action, and there is an intention for every song. These techniques have helped many famous singers keep their songs fresh and interesting as they perform them with meaning.

FOR PRODUCERS

Understanding Nina's concepts will help producers realize the director's requests for a rehearsal period and how this could actually save time during the shoot. Any creative producer needs to know how to communicate with actors and directors in their language. It creates respect and a way to go forward as a team.



FOR STUDENTS

For the several thousand students who were lucky enough to personally attend her classes during the 40 years she taught, the course was a life altering influence. The material in these DVDs is dense, and not meant to be watched in one sitting. Watch it in sections so the lessons can sink in.

FOR EDUCATORS

Nina ran a full, thirteen-week course at the University of Southern California and “The Nina Foch Course” can be used as a guide for your teaching curriculum. Please refer to the syllabus in appendix A of the Educator’s Course Guide for a step by step breakdown.

If the full-length course is too much for your lesson plan, an abbreviated syllabus is available. The fundamentals of Nina’s work in script breakdowns can be taught in two or three weeks. The script breakdown is the fundamental building block that allows actors, directors and writers to delve deeper into a script and understand the material. Please refer to the abbreviated syllabus in appendix B of the Educator’s Course Guide.

This coursework can also be used as supplemental material for your own course in acting, directing, or writing. Browse the various chapters for ideas and information to use in your class.



FOR EVERYONE ELSE

If you’re a student of film, or just interested in how things work, if you are interested in classic Hollywood or modern directing techniques, if you are interested in the craft, the art, or simply crave a peek behind the scenes, there is something here for you. The Nina Foch Course is an eclectic mix of craftsmanship, scene work, advice and anecdotes. This class was the most popular course at USC, and most students left with life altering knowledge and experience.

COURSE INTRO by Randal Kleiser



It was the fall of 1965. I'll never forget the first time I saw her, roaring up to the USC campus in a convertible jaguar—her blond hair blowing in the wind. This wasn't Moses' mother from "The Ten Commandments"...It was a movie star.

Even as she continued acting in film and television, Nina's passion for teaching lasted for over forty years. Her course was immensely popular because she developed her own unique style drawing from her experiences studying with Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Uta Hagen, as well as, the directors, Vincente Minnelli, Stanley Kubrick, Cecil B. DeMille and Otto Preminger.



She taught a generation of filmmakers including John McTiernan, Amy Heckerling, Ed Zwick, Ron Underwood, and many others.



Nina went from being my teacher, to my mentor, to my good friend. She often said her greatest accomplishment was her teaching. As she put it, her action was "To share the fascination."

As I began directing, the tremendous value of her teachings became evident. I realized how important it was to preserve them, and I began documenting her classes at regular intervals.

This is the result.



DISC 1: BREAKING DOWN THE SCRIPT



Learn how to use instinct instead of memory to understand the story.

First Read

Learn the correct way to read the script. Nina explains how to best take in the rhythm and flow of the scenes as they build on each other to create tension, character, and plot. Her technique will help you experience the story and understand the flow.

The Story

How to break down the story into its simplest beats. This simple technique helps you find what's important. Find everything that's essential about the story, and you'll discover what is needed and what can be eliminated.

The Moral

Nina explains how to determine the moral of the story. Every story teaches us a lesson, the critical part of the story that allows you to determine what it is about. Once you determine what lesson your story is trying to teach, you are more able to understand each scene as it relates to your story. The moral is your compass for the script, allowing you to keep your scenes on course.

The Spine

In this chapter you find the spine of the story, something that everyone in the story is trying to do. Nina tells how to develop this and give a direction for your actors.



Putting it into Practice: "Casablanca"

As an example of Nina's method, she explores the story of Casablanca," The class breaks down the story using her technique that will work for any project. She explores the moral and the spine. Tracking the character arcs in Casablanca reveals major character changes.

Scene Breakdown

"Casablanca" Scene 8

Nina breaks each line from the scene into intentions and actions.

Intentions

Nina outlines the foundation of every scene... the intention. Learn how to determine to which character the scene belongs. Learn an easy way to keep track of the intention of each scene.

Actions

Nina explains how to understand the subtext through the use of actions.

This key allows directors to know how best to direct a scene, and how to find innumerable possibilities for actions.

"Casablanca" Clip

See the film version of the scene that was analyzed in class.

CASTING

Nina guides her directing students to understand what they need to watch for, how to get the best performance from the actor, and how to make the best decision.



Analyzing the Headshot

What to look for in a headshot. What are the best questions to ask. On the back of the headshot is a summary of the actor's qualifications. Learn what questions to ask to put them at ease.

Meeting the Actor

Learn what to look for when an actor enters the room. How to break bad habits. How to relax the actor. What is the proven subject to bring them out and get their guard down. What are the danger signs to look for that would make you not want to cast them.

Evaluating the Actor

Learn how to handle yourself while evaluating the actor.

What kind of directorial notes get the best results? How to use intentions in your directing of a reading. What to watch for when they follow your direction. What to do immediately after the actor leaves the room. How to analyze the pluses and minuses of each actor.

Example Casting Sessions: Giving Adjustments

In this section, Nina gives criticism and makes suggestions to directing students as they conduct casting sessions.

-Casting Session 1

During a reading of "Fargo" Nina suggests an unusual adjustment for the actor's second read.

-Casting Session 2

During a reading from "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf" Nina analyzes how to spot an actor who is not in touch with themselves.

-Casting Session 3

During a reading from Sex, Lies, and Videotape Nina explains the definition of a scene.

CLASS EXERCISES

In this section, Nina presents exercises to teach partnering. She also covers entrances and exits, and the why it is important for directors to get on their feet and act.

Hot Objects: Partnering Exercise

Learn how the "Hot Object" exercise teaches the power of partnering first-hand. Nina shows how to guide the student as they connect with personal items that mean something to them.

This exercise often casts a spell over the class as the demeanor of the student changes. Years later, many of Nina's students might have forgotten each other's last names, but rarely do they forget their Hot Object.

Examples

In the first example, Nina demonstrates how to push a student to connect and what not to do.

In the second example, the exercise is a success as the student becomes emotional as he connects with his object.

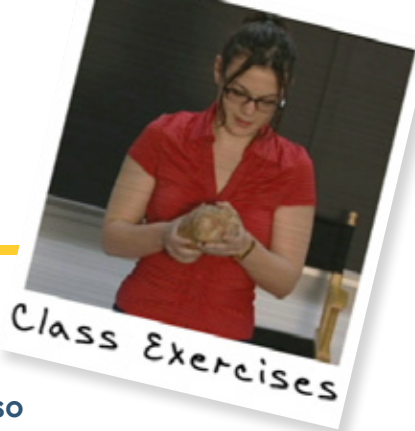
Entrances and Exits

Learn how to create the circumstances and places the characters are coming from and where they are going.

Airport Exercise

Generalities can kill a performance. This exercise teaches how being specific can make an audience believe in the truth of the scene.

Nina boiled down the essence of delivering a line into three specific words. When an actor follows these steps, in order, the line will be delivered more believably than they would if simply memorized and repeated.



Scene Adjustments: "Jerry Maguire"

Here, Nina shows student filmmakers what it is like to act and receive direction. This gives them perspective on the challenges of giving a performance.

VIDEO SCENE ANALYSIS

As the main assignment each directing student chooses a scene from an existing movie and shoots it in one setup. They bring the videos to the class for Nina's analysis.

Introduction

Filming a scene in one setup is challenging and complicated. That is precisely why Nina insisted on it as the fundamental video assignment for the directors in her class.

Learn how to make sure that every part of the scene works with no cuts, no edits, with organic camera movements from start to finish. Nina worked in live television for years, and theatre extensively before that, which made her one of the craft's leading experts in maintaining the seamless scene.

In these scene analyses, watch Nina force her students to examine every frame, every detail, every moment, and every line of their scenes. Some of her words may seem harsh, or unfair. But, Nina always states that when you make a film, you have to live with these details for the rest of your life.



“Eat, Drink, Man, Woman”

Nina teaches how to pace a scene and how to overlap blocking and dialogue.

“Boogie Nights”

Learn blocking and filling each moment. Simulating the effects of cocaine are discussed. Learn the concept “Actions Come from our Partner’s Needs”.

“Notting Hill”

The concept of cheating is outlined. How to deal with an actor’s bad habits. What is sequential linkage?

“The Graduate”

How do you fill each moment? How to use body language, how to discover intentions and best tips for blocking are discussed.

“Almost Famous”

How do you structure and deliver a joke? How do you fake? What is the best way to block?

“Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”

Concepts discussed: Partnering, how to deal with uncomfortable actors, tips on staging , importance of playing one action at a time, finding the action, moving the furniture, and the concept of false exits.

“Sex and the City”

Sex is notoriously hard to direct. Nina points out tricks to making love scenes work. How to make the actors comfortable. How do you direct the way actors touch each other. How do you reveal character through intimacy? Choosing truth or beauty, how much nudity to show. Also discussed: Homosexuality and the class system in America.

DIRECTING LESSONS

More directing lessons can be found on Disc 2 in the "Quick Tips" section.



Two Truths Coming Together

What is a scene? There are many ways to answer this question: conflict, setting, character, and a host of other qualities. Nina Foch had a simple answer to this question.

False Exits

When leaving a scene, often the last thing an actor says is the most important, or leads us into the next scene. How and when do you use this technique? How do you make it real?

What is "sexy"

Over the years, Nina discovered the best action when actors need to be sexy. It's an elegant description of a complicated acting choice.

Share Your Life

Techniques of connecting with your actors so they open up and trust you.

Correcting Bad Habits

What are the top bad habits and how do you deal with them?

When do you bring up the problem? Things to watch out for.

Dialogue Handles

When are these helpful and when do they kill a scene? How do you find the intention of a handle? When do you delete a handle?

Close Your Eyes and Listen

How to use this technique to get closer to the truth of the scene.

Directing Narration

The trick to making narration work. How to break down the beats. Creating an entrance for the narrator. What is the action of the narrator?

Stick to the Script

What to do when an actor says they are uncomfortable with a line. When to use and when not to use improvisation.

Don't Rush the Table Read

How to get the most out of the first read with the cast. Finding tone and meaning of the script.

t h e

Include the Writer

The best way to integrate the writer without giving up control.

How do you get the most from the writer in rehearsal?

Let the Script Guide You

The best way to bring your own viewpoint to the script. How do you integrate the talents of the actors, cinematographer and other crew?

Learn the Actor's Craft

The biggest advantage for directors who try acting. Picking up the language of acting. How to think like an actor so you know how to communicate with them.

Be Prepared

What to watch out for when you start the shooting day. How to instill confidence from your actors and crew. How to be flexible and adaptable.

I Can't Hear You

What not to say when actors mumble. The trick to getting them to speak up in an organic manner.

Furniture is Movable

How to conceive the right blocking for a scene.



DISC 2:

ACTING LESSONS

These lessons work for both directors and actors.

Acting Lessons

Don't Look Down

What causes this habit? How do you break an actor of the bad habit of looking down.

Drunk, Drugged or Insane

How do you avoid cliches and make this kind of behavior believable?

Sources of Power

Raising your voice or clenching your fists if you're angry are not sources of power. Nina explains where an actor's power comes from for a scene and how to generate it.

Getting Turned On

How do you motivate yourself to get excited about a scene? How do you let loose and be wonderful?

Filling Entrances and Exits

What are the techniques to create believable characterizations so the audience knows where the actor has been and where he is going? How to create energy and propel the story forward.

Sequential Linkage

A scene is not just memorizing lines. Learn the fundamental principle behind sequential linkage. Where does the actor find the connections that make this work?

Building Logical Character Beats

Learn how to use the five senses to create specific connections that reveal character.

Tap Dance Therapy

Nina shows when to use this directoral technique and how to loosen up the actor so they can do the best work.

Know the Setups

What every actor should know about a shooting day's breakdown.

Do Your Homework

How to prepare for the unexpected. How to create a situation where changes are easily adapted.

Make it Organic

How to make each moment motivated. How to work backwards to achieve believable beginnings.

Lizards and Tarragon

The trick of using animals and foods as a acting technique.

Going to a Zero

Nina explains this technique that allows an actor or singer to create an emotional moment no matter what the distractions.

Relaxation Exercise

Nina breaks down the best way to relieve tension and how to achieve a complete state of relaxation instantly.

SHOWBIZ TALES

Nina's career spanned over 60 years of acting for the stage, screen, and television. Part of the joy of being one of her students was in the endless anecdotes she summoned, the ones that didn't directly relate to acting, directing, or writing. Often, students would learn as much from these anecdotes as from the more formal parts of the class.

We won't spoil these anecdotes with comments. They are best experienced first-hand.



- "An American in Paris"
- Billy Wilder
- Laurence Olivier on Being Foolish
- John Wayne was right
- Cecil B. DeMille
- William Holden and Lee J Cobb
- Cloris Leachman's Banana
- There are no small parts
- Lillian Gish and the Poorhouse
- Coaching "The Diary of Anne Frank"
- Griselda Werberser Piffle
- Where ever I'm standing, that's center
- The Nina Foch Memorial Light

LIFE LESSONS



Nina's students often commented that they learned more than just directing, acting and writing in her class. She taught many lessons that could be used in everyday life.

Don't be Late

Why you should never be late on the set.

Failure is your Friend

How to use failure to help you move to the next level of accomplishment.

Demand Your Best

How to approach the work so that you challenge yourself at every turn.

Be Brave

What never works on the screen and how to avoid it.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Nina saved her most important words for the last day of class. She had high standards for all of her students, and pushed them to excel in every way. Watch, and you'll start to understand what made her so unforgettable.

BONUS FEATURES

QUICK TIPS: casting

Have a Good Gatekeeper

What instructions to give the receptionist or secretary in the outer office to get the best results in casting sessions.

Setting up the Room

How to avoid common mistakes in the setup of the casting session.

Don't Help

What not to say to actors and when to listen.

What Not to Say

The top tips to avoid.

Sloppy Actors

Clues to watch for on a resume.

Grungy Actors

Evaluating personal habits in regard to casting.

QUICK TIPS: directing

Win this Fight

The fight every director faces on the first day and how to win it.

Actors Who Drink

How to handle them on set and off.

The Ten Minute Nap

The trick to instant relaxation.

Don't Yawn

Why you should never have an actor yawn.

Marking Props and Wardrobe

The best way to indicate these in your script.

Funny Feet

How the feet of an actor can add comedy to a scene.



Filling the Entrance Demo

Nina demonstrates how to improve a student's entrance to a scene.

Book Recommendations

The top three books every filmmaker and actor should read.



"ILLEGAL" COMMENTARY

In these clips, Nina analyzes her own performance from the 1955 film "Illegal". In her commentary, she explains how her performance was influenced by the technical limitations of the time, and she demonstrates how she grew as an actor in the intervening years.

In this section she discusses problems in partnering, limitation of cameras, downstage eye and indirect partnering, and empty entrances.

BASIC TECHNIQUES EXPLAINED

Shot in 1993, Nina gives a quick overview of her class.

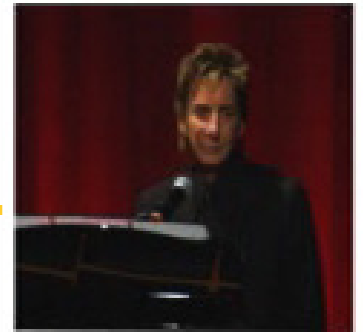
- How to Begin
- Everything is in the Text
- First Read

- Tell the Story in Three Sentences
- The Moral
- Preparation for the Entrance
- Preparation for the Exit
- Character Arc
- Actions
- Partnering
- Props
- The Ideal Situation
- Demand Joy



TRIBUTES

In this section, you can feel Nina's influence on each speaker.



Tributes

Clips from the Tribute to Nina Foch by USC School of Cinematic Arts held April, 2009 at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills featuring Barry Manilow, Julie Andrews, and former students.

-Nina's Teaching Assistants remember her Words of Wisdom.



CREDITS

PRODUCER

Randal Kleiser

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

George Lucas
Marthe and Arent Foch-Fenter
Van Vlissingen
Dirk de Brito
Ted Braun

INSTRUCTOR

Nina Foch

SPECIAL THANKS

Nina Foch II

CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Charlotte Koh
Amotz Zakai

LINE PRODUCER

Dylan Robertson

EDITOR

Ted Levy

CAMERA

Paula Clayton Goodwin
Jay Majer
Dagen Merrill
Jeremy Passmore

CAMERA - 1993 INTERVIEW

Woody Omens

MUSIC

Linus Lau

SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR

Amy Reynolds

ADDITIONAL SOUND EDITOR

Aaron Eberhardt
Gentry Smith

SOUND MIXER

Andy Snavley

POST SOUND FACILITY

Hollywood Global Studios

COLOR Provided by

Eric Babinec
ColorTime Pictures, Inc.

TEACHING ASSISTANT

Katie Wech

STUDENTS

Dan Algierz
Zoe Allen-Pohle
Richard Amberg
Norman Anderson
Karen Barbre
Eugene Beidl
Ridley Bell
Manuel Gerardo Bermudez
Jeremy D. Breslau
Crisanto Briones
Chris Browne
Thomas Bung
George Chumo
Ann-Caryn Cleveland
Christine DeMaio
Thomas Dibble
Andrew Dresher
Steve Drews
Margaret Dunlap
Ingrid Escajeda (or Eskeheda)
Michael (Mike) Frenden
Chad Glaster
Joseph Graceffa
Daheli Hall
Mark Hallihan
Craig Hammill
Robert Heinzman
George D. Huang
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Shaun Jorgensen
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Christina Kim
Miriam Kim
Andrei Koutouza
Shawn Ku
Dan Leve
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John B. Macaulay
Abram Makowka
Darin Mark
Francisco (aka Frankie)

Martinez
Mary Meehan
Marc Merrill
Wendy Milette
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Jason Perlman
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Jeremy Sherlick
Rita Singer
Melissa Stack
George Valdez
Rafael Vega
Lin Lin Wang
Leeza Watstein
Laurel Williams
Alexandra Wong
Olga Zurawska

ACTORS

Josh Allen
Dominique Blocker
Katie Bosckovich
Josh Cienyszynski
Nick Garzilli
Jennifer Halley
Paula Ilabaca
Leslie Karpman
Kenna Knost
Cory O'Donnel
Darcy L. Richardson
Darice Richman
Lewis Stevenson
Katherine Vang

ADDITIONAL EDITING

Temple Brown

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Fawaz Al-Matrouck
Dillon Brown
Michael Costello
Ron Dabach
James Kinnaird
Won Lee
Alex Mitrush
Michael Porter
Adam J Rundgren
Daniel J. Walker
Brian D. Wanke

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

Dessie Markovsky
Diane Lisa Johnson

**POST PRODUCTION
SUPERVISOR**

Nora Donaghy

GRAPHIC DESIGN

James Kinnaird
Peg Baldassari

**POST PRODUCTION
ASSISTANCE**

David Abramson
Matthew Babb
John Baumgaertner
Ken Brady
S. Leo Chiang
Elliot Feld
Alex Garcia
Kyle Hamilton
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Tristan Nyby
Andrea Pallaoro
Josh Sassoon
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Rex Tegelaar
Greg Vannoy
Ron Wandix

POST PRODUCTION INTERNS

Minja Hongisto
Lena Ruziczka
Emmanuelle "Manny" Negrila

MEDIA CONSULTANT

Peter Broderick

LEGAL CONSULTANTS

Michael Donaldson
Chris Perez

COURSE GUIDE

Craig Motlong
Nora Donaghy

SPECIAL THANKS

Larry Auerbach
Julie Andrews
Jim Bontempo
Carol Cook
Cameron Crowe
Dean Elizabeth Daley
Bruce Davis
Lauri DeBrito
Vineet Dewan
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Nancy Peden

Richard Schickel
Steven Sommers
Karen Spiegel
Sophie Stenbeck
Christina Stevens
Tom Troupe
Ron Underwood
Eric Young
Rachel Ward
Ed Zwick

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Diane Baker
Danny Bozarth
Peter Collister
Bruce Davison
Joel Dean
Paul Debevec
William Dunn
Charles Evans, Jr
Jacques Fieschi
Geoffrey Nimmer
Harri Paakonen
William Phelps
Steve Pouliot
Douglas Day Stewart
Joel Thurm
Harry Winer

*And thanks to the many
volunteers who worked on this
project over the past 27 years
whose names we could not
track down.*

Photographs from the
personal collection of Nina
Foch

"I Am Your Child"
Written by Barry Manilow and
Marty Panzer.
Performed by Barry Manilow.
© Universal Music
Careers on behalf of
itself and Swanebravo
MusicSwanebravo Music

"A GIRL'S GUIDE TO CHAOS"

by Cynthia Heimel
© 1988, 1991 by Cynthia Heimel

"ALMOST FAMOUS"

Written and Directed by
Cameron Crowe
© 2000 DreamWorks Films
L.L.C. and Columbia Pictures
Industries, Inc.
All Rights Reserved
Courtesy of Columbia Pictures

"AN AMERICAN IN PARIS"

Written by Alan Jay Lerner
Directed by Vincente Minnelli
© 1951 Turner Entertainment
Company and Warner Bros.
Entertainment Inc.
Courtesy of Warner Home
Video

"BOOGIE NIGHTS"

Written and Directed by Paul
Thomas Anderson
© 1997 New Line Cinema

"CASABLANCA"

written by Julius and Philip
Epstein
Directed by Michael Curtiz
© 2006 Warner Home Video

"CRUEL INTENTIONS"

Written by Choderlos de
Laclos (Novel)
Roger Kumble (Screen play)
Directed by Roger Kumble
© 1999 Columbia Pictures
Corporation and more.

"THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK"

screenplay by Frances
Goodrich and Albert Hackett
Directed by George Stevens
© 1959 Twentieth Century Fox

"EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN"

Written by Ang Lee, James
Schamus, and Hui-Ling Wang.
Directed by Ang Lee
© 1994 MGM

"THE GRADUATE"

Written by Calder Willingham,
Buck Henry, and Charles
Webb
Directed by Mike Nichols
© 1967 Embassy Pictures
Corporation and MGM Home
Entertainment.

"ILLEGAL"

Written by W.R. Burnett, Frank
J. Collins, and James R.
Webb.
Directed by Lewis Allen
© 1955/Renewed ©
1983 Warner Bros. Home
Entertainment Inc.
Courtesy of Warner Home
Video

"JERRY MAGUIRE"

Written and Directed by
Cameron Crowe
© 1996 TriStar Pictures, Inc.
All Rights Reserved.
Courtesy of TriStar Pictures

"THE LOVES OF A BLONDE"

Written by Milos Forman
Directed by Milos Forman
© 1965 CBK, Sebor, Studio
Barrandov

"NOTTING HILL"

Written by Richard Curtis
Directed by Roger Michell
© 1999 Universal Pictures

"THE TEN COMMANDMENTS"

Directed by Cecil B. DeMille
© 1956 Paramount Pictures
TCM Archive footage © Turner
Classic Movies, Inc., A Time
Warner Company. All Rights
Reserved.

**"WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA
WOOLF?"**

Written by Edward Albee and
Ernest Lehman.
Directed by Mike Nichols
© 1966 Warner Bros. Pictures.
Courtesy of Warner Home

Video

"SEX AND THE CITY"

Written by Michael Patrick
King
Candace Bushnell and Darren
Star (book & creator)
Directed by John David Coles
© 1999 HBO

"SEX, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE"

Written and Directed by
Steven Soderbergh
© 1989 Outlaw Productions,
Virgin

"FARGO"

Written by Joel and Ethan
Coen
© 1996 Polygram
Entertainment

USC School of Cinematic
Arts presents The Nina Foch
Course for Filmmakers and
Actors

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