

**CTWR 413 — WRITING THE SHORT SCRIPT — SPRING 2009**

**Section: 19185**

**Time: Thurs, 1 - 3:50PM**

**Location: SCA 342**

**Professor: Tom Abrams  
Tel: (323) 935-5157**

**Office: SCA 412  
Email: tabrams@usc.edu**

**COURSE GOALS:**

- To acquire a personal, professional style of writing in the screenplay format.
- To develop an understanding of character and how character is the basis of compelling drama.
- To learn to write from a visual and aural perspective.
- To understand the *economy* of effective narrative screenwriting.
- To develop a fundamental understanding of the dramatic scene.
- To develop an understanding of the dramatic sequence.
- To begin to understand and use fundamental screenwriting techniques, such as planting and pay-off, dramatic irony, ellipsis, etc.
- To understand the importance of rewriting.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is an intensive introductory course where you will develop your imagination, your ability to observe and your innate desire to put compelling, cinematic narratives on the page.

The class will take place in a workshop setting. Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both dialogue and non-dialogue, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting, concentrating on the major building block of any dramatic work: the scene. You will learn to bring your visual and aural senses to your work, to see and hear your film as you write it, while at the same time you discover the importance of character as it is explored through situations of conflict. In the final weeks of the class you

will apply your skills to a short, fully realized, 10 - 15 page screenplay.

Screenwriting format is not an exact science; within accepted parameters, you should develop a format style that you find both comfortable and expressive. To this end you will read as many professional screenplays as possible, reporting to the class on at least one of them. (Screenwriting software such as Final Draft is, of course, also helpful.) By the third session I expect your assignments to be written in a professional format.

**CLASS SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE) :**

- SESSION 1 - Introduction to character-based screenwriting; first non-dialogue assignment.
- SESSION 2 - Screenplay format, second non-dialogue assignment.
- SESSION 3 - Third and fourth non-dialogue assignment.
- SESSION 4-6 - Dialogue scene assignments.
- SESSION 7-8 - Short script (for production submission).
- SESSION 9 - Introduction to 3-act structure.
- SESSION 10-11 Story from personal experience. (2-3 pages prose)
- SESSION 12-15 "Sequence" structure, writing short films.

**\* Polished draft of final short film due April 30<sup>th</sup> \***

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Students will be graded on fulfillment of the assignments, class participation, and the final polished and rewritten screenplay (for a final exam).

CTWR 413 grades will be based on careful consideration of the following areas of a student's work:

- Demonstrated understanding of the fundamental principles of visualization for the screen.
- The ability to craft compelling characters.
- The ability to write dramatic scenes.
- The ability to write a short compelling dialogue script.
- Class participation. The willingness to help classmates in their struggle with story, character, and structure; this class is a seminar — participation is essential.
- Attendance. Unexcused absences will result in a lower grade. Tardiness will not be tolerated.

Percentages determining final grade:

- Development of ideas and outlines: 15%
- Scene writing: 35%
- Short script writing: 40%
- Classroom Participation: 10%

#### **REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

*The Tools of Screenwriting* by David Howard and Edward Mabley  
(St. Martin's Press)

#### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.—5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

#### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect

for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

Attendance is mandatory. You are expected to be in class on time. The policy of the Writing Division is that two absences will result in a lowering of your grade one full point, a third absence another point. Two late arrivals are treated as one absence.