SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
Writing Division
CTWR 414: The Screenplay
Section: 19191R
Syllabus, Fall 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION

Instructor: Vincent Robert
Class Schedule: Mondays, 10:00 AM – 12:50 PM
Class Location: SCB 207
Office Hours: Mondays from 2:00 pm to 3:45 pm BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

Please call or email to make an appointment at least 2 days ahead. If emailing, please indicate “APPOINTMENT REQUEST” in the subject line. Emails will be answered at earliest possible convenience whenever Instructor is in production.

Contact Info: 310.994.4236 (cell)
scriptsistemaugmail.com (email)

PREREQUISITE

CTWR 413

COURSE OBJECTIVE

The objective of this course is to develop:

• One 10-page script suitable for production in 480. Both a first draft and revision/polish are required. The completed script will count as the midterm for this course.

• A step-outline for a feature screenplay and the first act (25-30 pages) of that screenplay. The completed first act will count as the final for this course.
COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course aims to:

• Help the student find and harness the passion that is at the source of great storytelling. Being authentic means writing from your passion. In short: why are you writing this film? What do you want us to feel? Or learn? What is this story’s reason for being, its epiphany for either the character or the audience?

• Build up the student’s ability to tap into his or her own emotions and knowledge of his/her own personality as a way to develop those of the characters.

  o Writers are encouraged to make their stories unique and personal.
  o Learn to discover the stories only you can tell.

• Help the student explore and develop their Writer’s Voice.

• Visualization: understanding that the screenwriter uses words but writes images.

• Understanding that form is a vehicle for content. The need to communicate emotions and develop congruent and memorable characters is the primary mission of the storyteller; the plot is there to serve this – not the other way around.

• Show the student how to create three-dimensional characters for the screen.

  o Learn the techniques of creating character by writing biographies and monologues.
  o Learn to reveal what characters think and feel through their actions.

• Help the student understand how to turn an idea into a story, and a story into a screenplay that moves the reader. Why is this character interesting? What makes this story dramatic and not simply a slice of life?

• Understanding that the structure grows out of the drive and development of the characters, especially the protagonist. Need for active, goal-oriented characters.

  o Show the student how to use dramatic structure to keep audiences engaged.

• Understand the goal-oriented conflict, dramatic progression and cause-and-effect relationship that are needed to develop and sustain a screenplay.
• Explore the “flirts with change” that make the eventual character change believable

• Presentation of original ideas both as verbal pitches and as written works

• Workshop the ideas in class and participate in feedback by giving intelligent, constructive criticism

• Development of the chosen idea through character profiles, step outlines and scene breakdowns

• Develop and begin to write a feature-length screenplay

COURSE READING

(available at the University Bookstore, Larry Edmunds, Samuel French, Hollywood Stationers, Amazon.com and other specialized bookstores)

David Howard & Edward Mabley, THE TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING (St-Martin’s Press)

Margaret Mehring, THE SCREENPLAY: a blending of film form and film content (Focal Press).

Dara Marks, INSIDE STORY (Three Mountain Press)

Cole/Haag, THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO STANDARD SCRIPT FORMATS -- PART 1: THE SCREENPLAY.

William Goldman, ADVENTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE

And as many professional screenplays as you can! (available at the cinema library)

GRADING CRITERIA

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and growth through the semester, as well as the student’s demonstration of his or her achievement of the course’s objectives, as reflected in the following assignments or ones substituted in their place:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pitch 480:</td>
<td>03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Profile 480</td>
<td>03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 480:</td>
<td>04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Draft 480</td>
<td>04%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Polish 480 (Midterm) 15%
Pitch Feature 03%
Character Profile Feature: 05%
Treatment Feature: 05%
Pages 1-5: 03%
Pages 6-10: 03%
Pages 11-15: 03%
Pages 16-20: 03%
Pages 21-25: 03%
Pages 26-30: 03%
Attendance, participation, critiques: 10%
Final rewritten Act 1: 30%

Assignments must be turned in by the deadline and in the delivery manner indicated in the Class Schedule.

MID TERM GRADES will be available by Mid-October.

There will be no final exam. **If you turn in all your work, if that work is on time, if it is competent, if you read the other students’ works and consistently add to our class discussions, then you will earn no less than a “B-”.** Please refer to the School’s standardized definition of grades. In summary:

- A: 100% to 94% -- **Outstanding** fulfillment of course requirements
- A-: 93% to 90% -- **Excellent** fulfillment of course requirements
- B+: 89% to 87% -- **Above-average** fulfillment of course requirements
- B: 86% to 83% -- **Good** fulfillment of course requirements
- B-: 82%-80% -- **Average** fulfillment of course requirements
- C+: 79% to 77% -- Work of fair quality
- C: 76% to 73% -- Opportunity for improvement in demonstrating “ownership” of concepts, in meeting deadlines, in participation.
- C-: 72% to 70%
- D+: 69% to 67%
- D: 66% to 63%
• D-: 62% to 60%
• F: 59% to 0% -- Failure to meet the minimum course requirements
• Incomplete: assigned only when work is not completed because of documented illness or other “emergency” occurring after the 12th week of the semester.

Please note that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

Grades in CNTV 414 should be viewed as feedback to indicate areas that need greater effort towards understanding and manipulating the objectives. (Hopefully, each student is enrolled in 414 to achieve the above-stated objectives as well as to achieve good grades. However, as the objectives are achieved the grades will reflect that achievement.).

WRITING DIVISION ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class. Regular and punctual attendance is mandatory because of the workshop element of this class. Roll call will be taken at the beginning of each class.

Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by one full point (ex: A to a A-). A third unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered another full point (ex: B to a B-). Your grade will be lowered by one point for every absence after. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

In order for absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session. If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213.740.3303.

Excessive absences, excused or unexcused, will be cause to fail for the semester.
MISSING AN ASSIGNMENT, INCOMPLETES

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

PRESENTATION

As you are hoping to enter the film industry as professional writers, I expect your work to be prepared in a professional manner. Screenplay formatting errors, typos, bad spelling or grammar and overall sloppiness are NOT ACCEPTABLE.

All materials MUST be typed and emailed or printed.

Name every document you email the group as follows:

**YourFirstName_Assignment.Format**

Ex: Vincent_ScBreakdown.doc, or Vincent_ScriptDraft1.pdf

Also:

Save and send all your work generated in Screenwriting softwares as a PDF file.

When emailing a script, **NUMBER YOUR SCENES** before saving it as a PDF.

Put your name, title and page number on the Header of EACH PAGE of your material.

Refer to the SCHEDULE for due dates of assignments.

LAPTOP / TABLET / CELL PHONE POLICY

The use of technology to take notes or read each other’s work is permitted in this class. Any use of a device that detracts from the class (such as surfing the Web for non class-related purposes, messaging or emailing, etc…, or doing work for other classes) will result in the loss of technology privileges for the student.
CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Please note that all dates and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

Unless otherwise modified by the Professor, all assignments are DUE on the day and time indicated here. IF YOU DON’T MEET THE DEADLINE, YOUR ASSIGNMENT MAY NOT GET READ AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A FAILING GRADE FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT. We also may not get to your assignment during the class.

BE AWARE THAT SOME ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE THE SUNDAY MORNING BEFORE CLASS. Those are indicated as such on the following schedule. It is your responsibility to check this schedule regularly to stay on track.

IMPORTANT NOTE: always bring a printed or digital copy of everyone’s scenes to class, as you may be called upon to participate in a cold reading of certain passages. Nothing drives a point home to a writer like hearing his / her words read back aloud!

SESSION #1:

DATE: 8/25

OBJECTIVE: Overview of the class, syllabus & schedule.


ASSIGNMENT: Prepare pitch of 480 short script (3-5 minutes)

DEADLINE: Monday, 9/1 (next class)

TURN IN: Come to class ready to pitch. Keep the pitch under 5 minutes.
Session #2:

Date: 9/1


Review of character concepts

Assignment: Develop Character Profile for 480 script

Deadline: Monday, 9/8 (next class)

Turn In: Bring to class a copy you can read aloud.

Session #3:

Date: 9/8

Content: Character profile feedback. Improv.

Review of structural concepts.

Assignment: Treatment for 480 script (3-5 pages)

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

Deadline: For your own Treatment: Sunday, 9/15, 10:00 am

Turn In: VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

Deadline: For your notes: Monday, 9/15 (next class)

Turn In: Bring written notes to class.
SESSION #4:

DATE: 9/15

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of everyone’s Treatment
           Review of sequence structuring concepts

ASSIGNMENT: Write First Draft of 480 script (10 pages max)

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Script: Sunday, 9/21, 10:00 am

TURN IN: VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 9/22 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #5:

DATE: 9/22

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of everyone’s First Draft of 480 script

ASSIGNMENT: Write Polish Draft of 480 script (10 pages max)

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Polish script: Sunday, 9/28, 10:00 am

TURN IN: VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 9/29 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.
SESSION #6:

DATE: 9/29

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of everyone’s Polish Draft of 480 script

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare pitch of feature script (3-5 minutes)

DEADLINE: Monday, 10/6 (next class)

TURN IN: Come to class ready to pitch. Keep the pitch under 5 minutes.

SESSION #7:

DATE: 10/6


ASSIGNMENT: Character Profile for feature script

DEADLINE: Monday, 10/16 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a copy you can read aloud.

SESSION #8:

DATE: 10/13

CONTENT: Character profile feedback. Improv.

ASSIGNMENT: Treatment for feature script (5-10 pages)

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Treatment: **Sunday, 10/19, 10:00 am**

TURN IN: VIA EMAIL to Instructor ([scriptsystem@gmail.com](mailto:scriptsystem@gmail.com)) and Group

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 10/20 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.
SESSION #9:

DATE: 10/20

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of everyone’s Treatment for feature film.

ASSIGNMENT: Optional: Break down the scene structure of every scene involved in your Act 1. This is for your own use. You don’t turn it in.

Write pp. 1-5 (approx.) of your feature screenplay

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own pp. 1-5: Sunday, 10/26, 10:00 am

TURN IN: VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 10/27 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #10:

DATE: 10/27

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of pp. 1-5

ASSIGNMENT: Write pp. 6-10 (approx.) of your feature screenplay

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own pp. 6-10: Sunday, 11/2, 10:00 am

TURN IN: VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 11/3 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.
**SESSION #11:**

**DATE:** 11/3

**CONTENT:** Feedback and discussion of pp. 6-10

**ASSIGNMENT:** Write pp. 11-15 (approx.) of your feature screenplay

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

**DEADLINE:** For your own pp. 11-15: **Sunday, 11/9, 10:00 am**

**TURN IN:** VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

**DEADLINE:** For your notes: Monday, 11/10 (next class)

**TURN IN:** Bring written notes to class.

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**SESSION #12:**

**DATE:** 11/10

**CONTENT:** Feedback and discussion of pp. 11-15

**ASSIGNMENT:** Write pp. 16-20 (approx.) of your feature screenplay

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

**DEADLINE:** For your own pp. 16-20: **Sunday, 11/16, 10:00 am**

**TURN IN:** VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

**DEADLINE:** For your notes: Monday, 11/17 (next class)

**TURN IN:** Bring written notes to class.
SESSION #13:

DATE: 11/17

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of pp. 16-20

ASSIGNMENT: Write pp. 21-25 (approx.) of your feature screenplay

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own pp. 21-25: **Sunday, 11/23, 10:00 am**

TURN IN: VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 11/24 (last class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #14:

DATE: 11/24

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of rewritten pp. 21-25

ASSIGNMENT: Write pp. 26-30 (approx.) of your feature screenplay

Upon receiving everyone else’s work, read it and prepare feedback notes on each work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own pp. 26-30: **Sunday, 11/30, 10:00 am**

TURN IN: VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 12/1 (last class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.
SESSION #15:

DATE: 12/1

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of rewritten pp. 26-30

ASSIGNMENT: Turn in the entire Act 1 of your screenplay, including any rewrites you choose to execute.

DEADLINE: For your own Act 1: Monday, 12/8, 10:00 am

TURN IN: VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com)

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 this letter is delivered to the Professor 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. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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, (www.usc.edu/scampus or http://scampus.usc.edu) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

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/. Information on intellectual property at USC is available at: http://usc.edu/academe/acsen/issues/ipr/index.html
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS/COURSE CONTINUITY IN A CRISIS

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

Please activate your course in Blackboard with access to the course syllabus. Whether or not you use Blackboard regularly, these preparations will be crucial in an emergency. USC's Blackboard learning management system and support information is available at blackboard.usc.edu.

DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students’ ability to learn and an instructor’s ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.