

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

Course: CTWR 533b
Semester: Fall 2014
Section: 19264D
Time: WED, 4 – 6:50PM
Location: SCB 207

Instructor: Tom Abrams
Email: tabrams@usc.edu
Office: 412 SCA
Office hours: By appointment

CTWR 533b:

REWRITING THE FEATURE SCRIPT

CLASS OVERVIEW:

CTWR 533b is a continuation of 533a. This semester we will revise the draft of the script completed in 533a.

During the first week of class you will be given a strict schedule as to when each of the revised acts should be finished. We will then leave some time at the end of the semester for further revisions.

The goal of this class is for you to complete a professional, rewritten feature script. Structure, scene writing, character, atmosphere and dialogue will be worked on and polished.

As in 533a, the class is a workshop and as such you'll be expected to help your classmates 'build' their scripts. Class participation is a big part of the course. So is the importance of steady work on your script and meeting deadlines. Finally, completion and quality of the revised script will determine your grade.

COURSE GOALS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

1. To complete the second draft of a feature length script.
2. Writers will be encouraged to keep their stories unique and personal.
3. Story structure will be reviewed. Most of these problems should have been solved while writing the step outline in 533a.
4. The subtler aspects of screenwriting such as contrast, subtext, milking the scene and subplot will be stressed and demonstrated.
5. Students will learn to critique a feature script.
6. There is a tendency to rely on plot in the first draft. During the revisions the students will be encouraged to reinvestigate their characters. Did they provide enough obstacles? Did they remain true to the character biographies? Did they rely too much on convention, rather than on their understanding of human nature? Did they write challenging roles for actors?
7. Students will be challenged on the visual quality of their scripts. Did they use location, time of day, props? Does their script invite the cinematographer, the prop person, the sound designer, the set designer, the director, etc. to collaborate? Does it challenge them to do exciting work?
8. Does the script say what you want it to say? Does it have a satisfying resolution? Does it have the emotional, intellectual impact you want it to have? What does it say about the human condition?

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Meetings 1-3 will deal with re-reading the first draft from 533a and devising a list of priorities for revision. Special attention will be given to the first act. Character introduction, opening, point of attack,

and development of conflict will be checked and, if needed, revised. Dialogue and scenes will be rewritten and polished.

Revised First Act is due by Week 4.

2. Meetings 4-10 will deal with revising the second act of the script. Obstacles, sequences, tension and conflict will be checked. Scene and character work will continue.

Second Act is due by Week 10.

3. Meetings 11 - 13 will deal with revising the third act of the script. Resolution, character revelation, twist, and character arc will be discussed. Scene work will continue.

Third Act is due by Week 13.

4. Meetings 14 - 15 will deal with needed revisions. Students will read key re-written scenes and sequences.

Completed script with revisions is due by Week 15.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

CTWR 533b grades will be based on the following areas of the students' work:

1. The creation and presentation of all story material, whether in class or to hand in; this includes all pitching of story ideas, the development of sequencing and outlining and the writing of script pages throughout the semester. This also includes the completed draft.
2. Demonstrated understanding of the fundamental principles of a good story: character, tension, action and obstacles and resolution.
3. Class participation. The willingness to help classmates in their struggles with story, character, and structure; this is crucial both to the student's own learning as well as an aid to their classmates. (The class is a workshop – participation is essential.)
4. Attendance. Absences are not allowed. More than one unexcused absence will result in a lower grade: 1/3 of a letter grade per absence. Tardiness will not be tolerated. More than 3 late arrivals to class will result in 1/3 letter grade reduction of final grade.

CTWR 533b grades percentages:

Quality of writing	60 %
Delivery of 1 st , 2 nd % 3 rd Act material on deadline	30 %
Class participation	10 %

SUGGESTED READING:

How To Build A Great Screenplay by David Howard
The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler
Screenwriting: The Sequence Approach by Paul Gulino

Laptop policy: Laptops may be used in class for purposes of reading assigned material and taking notes only. Students surfing the web or checking email during class time will have laptop privileges revoked.

Cell phone policy: Phones may not be opened during class time. If you need to text or make a call during class, go outside.

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. 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, 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/>.

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.

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.