CLASS OVERVIEW:

The goal of this course is the development and writing of the first draft of a feature screenplay. Toward that goal, there will be weekly assignments and work to present in class for feedback, development and discussion. The course is designed to teach, and reinforce, a number of dramatic principles in screenwriting:

• the art of developing vivid, compelling characters.

• the concept of conflict and conflict as premise for story, with a focus on character, objective, and obstacles to the goal.

• the art of critical, but constructive, evaluation of one’s own work as well as that of others.

• story structure and the outlining of a story.

• issues of contrast, subtext, theme and subplot.

• visual storytelling and how to creatively use location, time of day, and props.

From the initial idea, biographies of the main characters will be created, then a logline and synopsis of the story, followed by a scene-by-scene step outline. The bulk of the semester’s time will be devoted to the week-by-week writing and delivery of a complete first draft with timely advice and feedback from the instructor and students alike.
**COURSE FORMAT:**

This is a workshop course, one in which every student participates weekly both by presenting material developed for his/her story and by analyzing and giving feedback on all other students’ presented material. Positive and helpful feedback is not only useful to classmates, but crucial to each writer’s progress in developing the skill set necessary for an effective and successful career. This ability to contribute to the full class is a hallmark of professionalism and is an expected, minimum requirement of the course.

Other signs of professionalism are equally expected in this course: attendance, punctuality and, particularly, delivery on schedule. The material presented weekly in class is every bit as important as the two hand-in assignments and will be held to the same considerations of punctuality and delivery. Steady and consistent progress on the students’ projects is expected throughout the semester.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Script materials are due via email every Wednesday by 10AM.**

Week 1 - will deal with the story idea each writer is asked to present. With the help of feedback from the group, the writer will fine-tune the concept of the film.

Week 2 - will deal with the creation of biographies of the main characters.

Week 3 & 4 - students will create a two-page synopsis for the story. This will include a 3 Act breakdown, focusing on the goals of the characters (and the author) and the underlying tensions of each Act.

Week 5 - 7 will deal with the writing of the First Act of the feature screenplay with pages emailed and brought in for presentation weekly.

**WEEK 7**

HAND-IN ASSIGNMENT: The FIRST ACT.

Weeks 8 - 15 will deal with the writing of Acts Two & Three, with pages emailed and brought in for presentation weekly.

**WEEK 15**

FINAL PROJECT TO HAND-IN: The COMPLETED FIRST DRAFT.
**EVALUATION CRITERIA:**

This course requires a commitment of two semesters. You will not receive a final grade for CTWR 533a but an “IP” or “In Progress” grade, meaning that students must pass CTWR 533b in order to receive a letter grade and credit for CTWR 533a. At the end of CTWR 533a students will automatically receive a grade of “IP” and 0 units. However, students must still deliver quality work and complete a full screenplay of at least 90 pages in length. Students who do not complete this first draft will not be permitted to proceed to CTWR 533b.

CNTV 533a 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 quality of completed draft.

2. Demonstrated understanding of the fundamental principles of a good story: character, tension, action, obstacles, resolution and theme.

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. Tardiness will not be tolerated. Three late arrivals will result in lowering of final grade.

CNTV 533a grade percentages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of writing</td>
<td>60 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting deadlines</td>
<td>30 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class performance</td>
<td>10 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>of presentations,</td>
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<td>pitching, discussing</td>
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<td>the project, etc.</td>
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SUGGESTED READING:

The Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard
The Writer’s Journey by Christopher Vogler
Screenwriting: The Sequence Approach by Paul Gulino
Story by Robert McKee

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct
Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your
own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is
a serious academic offense with serious
consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the
discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11,
Behavior Violating University Standards
https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-
university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions.
Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally
unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus
and university policies on scientific misconduct,
http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are
don’t tolerated by the university. You are encouraged
to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and
Diversity http://equity.usc.edu or to the Department
of Public Safety
http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-
safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important
for the safety of the whole USC community. Another
member of the university community – such as a
friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can
help initiate the report, or can initiate the report
on behalf of another person. The Center for Women
and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/
provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual
assault resource center webpage http://sarc.usc.edu
describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for
students who need help with scholarly writing. Check
with your advisor or program staff to find out more.
Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

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.