

**School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
CTWR 206b: Writing The Screenplay**

Instructor: Robert Sabin
Class Schedule: Friday/1:00-3:50
Class Location: SCB 101
Office Hours: by appointment
Contact Information: robertcraigsabin@gmail.com

Course Objective:

To complete a high quality, well-structured feature length screenplay, with a compelling Hero, fascinating plot twists, satisfying pay offs, and emotionally impactful transformations. By semester's end, you will have a screenplay we both can be proud of.

Course Description:

We've worked together to create a structured story—you've even broken ground on the screenplay itself. Now we're going even deeper, breaking your script down into ten page bits, each with its own function. We'll focus on managing the audience's expectations, and subverting the expectations in a satisfying and engaging way. We'll use props and behaviors to create a visual mosaic that helps you tell your story. But most of all, we'll explore your main character and her/his relationships to the goal and to other characters in the script. We'll explore how conflict specifically inches the character closer to a vital and moving transformation. We'll rewrite, eliminating the unimportant padding and focussing on dialogue that moves the story forward. Finally, we'll explore why this screenplay was necessary for you to write, and what it says about you and the world.

Course Reading:

Required Reading; Jean Paul Ouellette "The New Elements of Standard Screenplay Format" (Reference)
Recommended Reading; Linda Seger "Making a Good Script Great"
Redcommended Reading; Jack Epps Jr. Screenwriting is Rewriting; The Art and Craft of Professional Revision"

Grading Criteria:

Students will turn in all work in PDF format via Dropbox, unless otherwise specified. Work will be due on the Wednesday following the class in which the work was assigned. Any in-class assignments will be due at the end of class.

Participation:	10%
Assignments:	10% (
Act 1 Rewrite:	10%
Fun and Games :	15%
Bad Guys:	15%
Act 3:	15%
Final Screenplay:	30%

	100%

As per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

A	100% to 94%	C	76% to 73%
A-	93% to 90%	C-	72% to 70%
B+	89% to 87%	D+	69% to 67%
B	86% to 83%	D	66% to 63%
B-	82% to 80%	D-	62% to 60%
C+	79% to 77%	F	59% to 0%

Expectation of Professionalism:

All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for 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.

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.

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.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Respect is the rule. All cell phones should be muted and ignored during class. Laptops can be used for in class notes. No e-mail, social media, or other classwork—we need you present and participatory for the work of your fellow writers, as well as your own.

Class Schedule:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1 1/13: Welcome Back! Quick Review of 8 Part Structure. Part 1; Kick-Ass Opening, Character Set-Up. Managing Expectations. Transformation Set-Up. Relationships. Review of Scene Structure. Review of Description Craft. Review of Dialogue Traps.
In-Class Assignment; Write a quick character sketch of your Hero, including Flaw, Goal, Past Trauma, Future Transformation, and how the Transformation indicates a Theme. (2 pgs. max.)
Assignment; Rewrite Act 1, Part 1, with a Kick-Ass Opening, a Character set up and a Transformation Set-up. (10 pages) Due Wednesday, 1/18.

Week 2 1/20; Brainstorm First Ten. Thematic Discussion. Establishing subliminal expectation of transformation. Hero Defends Flaw. Inciting Incident. Is this the most magical, awesome way to introduce the goal? First steps towards goal defines your Hero. Managing Expectations. We'll watch *Miracle on 34th Street* for illustration. Assignment; Rewrite Act Part 2, up to First Act Twist (approx. 10 pages) Inciting Incident, Thematic Discussion, First Steps Toward Goal. Due Wednesday, 1/25

Week 3 1/27: Brainstorm Second Ten. First Act Twist Review. Things get much harder, much stickier, much more rife with conflict. It's going to be much more difficult than anticipated to achieve the goal. Why? Managing Expectations. Surprising Twists and Turns. Conflict. How it works in Comedy. Action. Drama. How to create a powerful focus on the difficulties inherent in Fun and Games. The Value of Misdirection. Assignment; Rewritten Act 1 (10% of grade), due 2/01. (approx. 25 pgs.)

Week 4 2/03: Brainstorm first act. Fun and Games! What is the Promise of your Premise? The importance of consequences. "So..." "But..." Positive consequences (+) interacting with negative consequences (-). Hero in trouble vs. Hero triumphant, balancing the two. Real world consequences (story) and emotional consequences (flaw). Nightmare scenarios. In-Class Assignment; Write a one page essay on the promise of your premise, as well as how this will translate into story beats. Assignment; Act 2, Part 1, pg. 1-10. Should include first nightmare sequence.

Week 5 2/10: Brainstorm Fun and Games part 1. Supporting characters, how your Hero relates to them, how they challenge the goal or the flaw, and how they arc with your character. Relationships—the most overlooked aspect of telling a story, yet the most emotionally resonant one. We'll discuss the trap of verisimilitude (class, era, idiosyncracies), and brainstorm ways to define character through dialogue and action. In-class assignment; Create a Character Map for your Hero, identifying whether they are allies or opponents, how they interfere with the goal or challenge the flaw (or both) and what they're intensity is. Assignment; Act 2, pgs. 11-20 Should include second nightmare sequence.

Week 6 2/17: Brainstorm Fun and Games Part 2. Conflict. How to raise stakes with multiple sources of conflict. How to avoid repeated beats (unless you're writing a comedy.) The function of the midpoint—false victory or temporary defeat. Fun and Games Goal. Assignment; Fun and Games Complete, including three "nightmare sequences" and the midpoint. (15% of grade.)

Week 7 2/24: Brainstorm Fun and Games. How to Raise Stakes. Comedy (Pride, heart) Drama (goal, heart), Action (life, loved ones) Avoid cliches. Flaw drives Hero to increasingly immoral behavior. Marching towards All is Lost. Keep the problems connected to the flaw. Don't lose your character. Assignment; Act 2 Part 2, pgs. 1-10 Should include one nightmare sequence.

Week 8 3/03: Crushing Defeat. Relate to the Goal. Personal Compromise? Betrayal? Visit to Death? Avoid going too dark—your Hero is still your Hero. Hit the Flaw. Hot the Fire! This is where your belief should really erupt. Why is this flaw a bad thing? Assignment; Act 2, Part 2, pgs. 11-20. Should include at least one nightmare sequence, and culminate in "crushing defeat."

Week 9 3/10: Dark Night of the Soul/Transformation.

Lowest point for your character. Goal should seem impossible. Goal and motivation vital here. Feel the Hero's pain. How to convey the realization that your Hero was wrong in her/his flaw; that your Hero needed to change; the Heroism of change itself! It all goes back to the Olympic Runner. Transformation. Back to the transformation set up in act 1. Pay it off. Realization of how to pursue a goal (often from a clue laid out early in act 2, or late in act 1). We'll see illustrative clips from Silverado.

Assignment; Act 2 Part 2, complete, approx. 25 pages(15% of grade) Due Wednesday, 3/22.

Week 10 3/17: SPRING BREAK! Take it easy on those brain cells. Work on rewriting prior sections.

Week 11 3/24: Act 3—Chickens coming home to roost. Turn the tables; Line up all sources of conflict and knock them down. Attacking the Evil Lair, Abandoning all Lies, Re-acquiring the Allies, a prove it all night situation. Importance of Misdirection and Managing Expectations. Don't get Predictable. We'll watch illustrative scenes from "Rocky" "The Verdict" and "Tootsie".

Assignment; Write Turn the Tables, approx. 10 pgs, due Wednesday 3/29.

Week 12 3/31: Brainstorm "Turn the Tables". Boss Battle. Misdirection less important now. What is important is that you hit the beats and hit them hard, in a satisfying way. Keep your conflict list handy. This final cathartic scene is where the money is.

Assignment; Write your Boss Battle scene, approx. 10 pgs. due Wednesday 4/05.

Week 13 4/07: Brainstorm Boss Battle. Are you happy? Did it pay off the way you wanted? Did it have the impact? Now, wrap it up. Quick scene that shows us the new normal, the new status quo reached. How has your character changed? How has the world changed? How have those around your Hero changed? Sum it up quickly, powerfully, visually.

Assignment; Write your complete Act 3 (15% of grade).

Week 14 4/14: Rewrite! Congratulations on finishing the script! Now let's fine tune. Scenes that stall? Shortening descriptions. Eliminating dialogue that slows down the action. Screenplay should translate to a minute per page. Does your script reflect a movie at that rate?

Assignment; Create a rewrite plan that gets your movie down to 100 pages or less. Identify scenes that are repeated beats, heavy descriptive sections that need to happen faster.

Week 15 4/21: Character pass/Dialogue Pass. Are the character motivations clear in every scene? Is the dialogue as sharp and crisp as it can be? Are all the dialogue traps cut and eliminated. Are the scenes sufficiently sculpted to focus on your character's goal and/or flaw?

In class assignment; Choose a scene from your rewrite plan, and rewrite it.

Week 16 4/28: Celebration! Final questions and discussions, and where do we go from here?

Finals Week: Final Script (30% of grade) **due** Friday, May 5th.

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 not 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/departments/departments-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety 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 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.

<p>PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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