

**School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
CTWR 413: Writing the Short Script
Spring 2017**

Instructor: Craig Sabin
Class Schedule: Wednesdays 10:00 am-12:50 pm
Class Location: SCA 310
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Information: robertcraigsabin@gmail.com

Course Objective:

This is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you will learn and develop your craft as a storyteller. You will learn to draw on your memories, experiences, observation and of course imagination to create compelling characters and stories for the screen.

This is a workshop class. Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both in and outside the class, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting. You will learn to bring your visual and aural senses to your writing, to see and hear your film as you write it, developing and exploring your characters through situations of conflict.

At the end of the class you will apply your skills to writing two short narrative *6 page CTPR 310 scripts*, one for submission to CTPR 310.

Course Description:

This is a writing class. The first half of the semester will involve in-class assignments, as well as homework, that will give you the observational, personal and imaginative building blocks you'll need to craft characters, scenes and stories. You must be prepared to write from Day 1. From there, we will develop two short scripts, all with an eye towards creating viable CTPR 310 projects for the next semester. Focus will be on writing and rewriting, as revisions are an essential part of the writing process.

When you're not writing, you'll be developing the class work with your fellow writers. You must read and be prepared every class to discuss the work of all your other classmates. In a safe and supportive yet rigorous workshop environment, we will discuss how to better shape and convey your ideas so that they play on the page and in your future films. Participation will be essential for creative contributions and the trust that grows from discussing them. Often we learn the most by seeing someone else's work.

Finally, students will be expected to read and discuss assigned screenplays. We are all standing on the shoulders of giants, and it is important to learn how they accomplished such enduring and admired work, so that we can do likewise. We'll also watch examples of the elements and tools discussed in class in already produced shorts and features. You'll see how filmmakers before you dealt with the issues you're dealing with and learn from them what to do, and what to avoid.

Assignments:

In addition to completed assignments, both in class and out of class;

Pitches: Students will prepare three pitches and pitch them to the class.

Short Script #1 (two drafts): Students will create, write and revise a complete short script, 3-6 pages in length.

Short Script #2 (two drafts): Students will create, write and revise a complete short script, 5-7 pages in length.

Course Requirements

Adobe PDF creation capability

Screenwriting Software or script formatting capability (ex. Final Draft)

Course Reading:

Throughout the semester, screenplays will be assigned to familiarize you with format, as well as examples of the craft at its best. Assigned screenplays are **required reading** and will be discussed in class. In addition;

Required; THE NEW ELEMENTS OF STANDARD SCREENPLAY FORMAT by Jean-Paul Ouellette.

Recommended; THE TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING; A WRITERS GUIDE TO THE CRAFT AND ELEMENTS OF A SCREENPLAY by David Howard and Edward Mabley

Recommended; CREATIVE FILMMAKING FROM THE INSIDE OUT; 5 KEYS TO THE ART OF MAKING INSPIRED MOVIES AND TELEVISION by Jed Dannenbaum, Carroll Hodge and Doe Mayer

Grading Criteria:

Students must turn in all assignments in PDF format. All work must be properly formatted, properly punctuated, correctly spelled and grammatically correct. Regular assignments will be due by 3:00 p.m. on the Monday following the class in which they are assigned. In-class assignments must be turned in by the end of class on the day in which they are assigned. Reading assignments must be read by start of the following class.

Participation:	10%
Pitches	10%
Assignments:	40% (10 assignments, 4% each)
Script #1:	20%
Script #2:	20%

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%

A : Work of **excellent** quality. Outstanding application of the dramatic principles and fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines as specified in the syllabus.

B : Work of **good** quality. Above average fulfillments of course requirements and deadlines.

C : Work of **fair** quality. Minimum fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines for passing graduate credit.

C-: FAIL to meet minimum grade for credit. NON PASSING GRADE.

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. Please silence cell phones during class.

Laptops will be allowed, for note taking and in-class assignments only.

Class Schedule:

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

Week 1 1/11: Hello. Review of Syllabus. Dropbox Intro. "The nature of narrative. What are the essential elements of a great short film? Iteration—The importance of experience and specificity. Props, Locations, Time of Day, Time of Year, Sound, Atmosphere, Mood. We'll examine an illustrative short film.

In-Class Assignment; Trip to School; "List the places you went to school, list how you got there. Choose one trip. Describe it to the class.

Reading Assignment; Jean Paul Ouellette "The New Elements of Standard Screenplay Format" Introduction, Chapters 1, 2 (pgs, 1- 12)

Week 2 1/18: Character. What makes for an interesting character? Characters and their world, their props. How to define characters. Differentiation and specificity. Plant/Payoff of Props..

In Class Assignment; "Roommates" Describe a significant space shared by two interesting characters in harmony. Then in conflict, Then in separation. Tell us a story through the space and the objects within it. 1-2 pgs. Due by end of class 2 pgs. Max. Due Monday 1/23

Reading Assignment; Jean Paul Ouellette "The New Elements of Standard Screenplay Format" Chapters 3-6 (pgs. 13-28)

Week 3 1/25: The Mechanics of Cinema; Goal, Flaw, Plant/Pay-Off, Managing Expectations, Twists and Reversals, Repetition Uses (Variation) and Drawbacks (Repeated Beats). The essentials of scene structure. We'll watch illustrative examples from short films and "Love Actually". The importance of Transformation. Brief overview of screenplay format, and screenwriting software.

Assignment: Prep for a Date (or Significant Event). An interesting Character, alone in a significant location, prepares for some character-revealing event. After the character leaves, we cut to after the event, and the character's return. How did it go? How did your Character's preparations pay off? 1 pg, in screenplay format, NO DIALOGUE.. Due Monday 1/30.

Reading Assignment; Jean Paul Ouellette "The New Elements of Standard Screenplay Format" Chapters 7-10 (pgs. 29-56)

Week 4 2/01: Workshop the "Prep for a Date" assignment. Goal and Conflict.

Characters that challenge the goal or the flaw. Scene construction. Plan, expectation of success, Conflict, Deal With It, Positive or Negative Outcome, Consequence. The importance of Observation for inspiration. Keep gathering experience.

Assignment: Observation: Go out to a public place (off campus, if possible) with a range of people, and watch until someone captures your imagination. Observe everything you can about them. (From a distance. Don't write and don't follow—don't be creepy.) Once you've studied them thoroughly, go home and write all the details on an index card. Choose a random name, write it on an envelope, and put the index card in the envelope. Now, repeat that entire process with a second observed person. Then, open the envelopes, and ask "What would Character X do to Character Y to provoke an extreme reaction?" Write a short story built around those two characters and that conflict. 2-3 pgs. max. Due 2/06

Reading Assignment; Jean Paul Ouellette "The New Elements of Standard Screenplay Format" Chapters 12-15 (pgs. 75-95)

Week 5 2/08: Workshop "Observation". Dialogue! Dialogue Plant/Payoff. Dialogue Traps to Avoid. We'll watch clips from "Social Network" as well as illustrative shorts.

Assignment; "The Wrongest Person" Character A prepares a space for the arrival of Character B, but (twist!) Character C shows up instead. Character A must get rid of Character C before Character B shows up. Screenplay format, with dialogue, 3-4 pgs. Due Monday, 2/13.

Reading Assignment; Jean Paul Ouellette "The New Elements of Standard Screenplay Format" Chapter 11 (pgs. 57-74)

Week 6 2/15: Workshop “The Wrongest Person” Visit from CTPR. The importance of relationships. Motivation from the Past. The Flaw and Transformation. Revealing the past through conflict. Conflict and goal tells us all. We’ll watch illustrative clips from “The African Queen”.

Assignment: Seduction/Persuasion Character A wants Character B to do something. Character B is interested, but resistant. Using all the tools you’ve discovered, write a steadily escalating scene of seduction/persuasion, successful or not. 3-4 pgs. max. Due Monday 2/20.

Reading Assignment; Whiplash Screenplay

Warning; Pitches are due next week. Be prepared to pitch

Week 7 2/22: Workshop “Seduction/Persuasion”. Workshop pitches.

Assignment; Refine two pitches. Make sure they have a strong character, world, goal, and transformational opportunity. Be prepared to present to class.

Reading Assignment; Pulp Fiction Screenplay

Week 8 3/01: Beating out your Story. Everyone presents pitch for 310 Script #1..

Assignment: First Draft of 310 Script #1. Due Monday 3/06.

Week 9 3/08: Workshop 310 Script #1. Creating a revision plan.

Assignments: Second draft of Script #1 Due Monday 3/13.

Spring Break March 12th-19th. Don’t kill too many brain cells.

Week 10 3/22: Beating out your Story. Everyone presents pitch for 310 Script #2

Assignment: First draft of 310 Script #2. Due Monday 3/28.

Week 11 3/29: Workshop 310 Script #2.

Assignment: Revise 310 Script #2. Due Monday, 4/03

Week 12 4/05: Workshop 310 Script #2. Choosing your Script

Assignment: Rewrite selected 310 Script Due Monday, 4/10

Week 13 4/12: Workshop 310 Script. Create a Rewrite Plan.

Assignment: Rewrite 310 Script. Due Monday, 4/17

Week 14 4/19: Workshop rewritten 310 Script.

Assignment; Final polish of 310 Script. Due Monday, 4/24

Week 15 4/26: Final Class. Table Reads Congratulations!

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/department/department-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 style="text-align: center;">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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