

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
Writing Division
CTWR 505: Writing the Short Script
FALL 2017 – (Two Units, Required, Section 19281)

Instructor: Sean Hood
Class Schedule: Tuesday 2:00 - 4:50 PM
Class Location: SCB 304
Office Hours: By appointment before or after class.
Contact Information: seanbhodd@gmail.com

"In dreams begins responsibility." – W.B. Yeats

Your point of view, which is your voice, your person, isn't something you have to get. It's something you have to uncover. – Hanif Kureishi

"Directing students should spend a year making films with their typewriters."
– Alfred Hitchcock

GOALS OF THIS COURSE:

- Ideation: To develop your cinematic imagination; you will be honing your skills of **observation** as well as studying how **memory** and **experience** can bring originality and brilliance to your characters and stories (with emphasis on your 507/508 scripts.)
- Character: To strengthen & deepen your ability to conceive characters that will lead to compelling stories.
- Voice: To explore and develop your artistic point of view and original cinematic voice. (*Who are your cinematic heroes and why?*)
- Research: To develop ideas for stories and characters through observation of, research into, and direct experience with real life.
- Visualization: To learn to write from a visual and aural perspective.
- Technique: To understand the structure and *economy* of effective screenwriting.
- Dramatic Scene: To develop a fundamental understanding of the dramatic scene.
- Short Scripts: To learn to write effective and moving short scripts (507 &508.)
- Rewriting: To understand the importance of rewriting.

This is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you will develop your resources as a storyteller: your memory and observation, your responsiveness to stories around you, and of course your imagination, your ability to create and develop compelling dramatic characters and cinematic conflict.

Once you have a notebook full of ideas, 505 will then move on to teaching you how to bring those ideas alive on screen. We will be filling your writer's toolbox, a supply of techniques and tricks of the trade that you will use write effective screenplays.

We will begin with **visualization**, the concept of telling a story with pictures. You will learn to bring the inner life of your characters to the screen without dialogue by using planting and payoff, action and activity, location, props, costume, atmosphere and motivation. We will discover that it is possible (and indeed necessary) to tell your stories visually, to make them compelling and rich with meaning by using these basic techniques.

Later, we will combine these techniques with dialogue in a second stage of exercises designed to teach you the major building block of cinema – the scene. We will expand our work with character and study the ingredients necessary to make any scene work. By exploring our character's goals, intentions, or "wants" we will discover that the lifeblood of any scene is **conflict**.

The class will take place in a workshop setting. Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both non-dialogue and dialogue, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting. You will learn to hear your film as you write it, while at the same time you will discover the importance of character as it is explored through situations of conflict. You will also be learning how to be an active member of a "writer's room."

During the semester you will be required to workshop your *CTPR 507 P1 & P2 scripts* in class. During the last four weeks of the semester you will apply all your skills to writing and rewriting *the 5 page, CTPR 508 screenplay*.

Screenwriting format is not an exact science; within accepted parameters, you should develop a format style that you find both comfortable and expressive. To this end you will read and analyze three screenplays provided by the instructor. By the third session I expect your assignments to be written in a professional format -- assignments not meeting that standard will be returned unread.

READING LIST:

1. Feature screenplays or pilots (**required**, provided by instructor)
2. Handouts/links (**required**, provided by instructor)
3. On Film-making, Alexander Mackendrick (*highly recommended* for every directing student)
4. Your Screenplay Sucks, William M. Akers (*recommended* for professional screenplay format)
5. How To Build a Great Screenplay, David Howard (*recommended* for terminology/story structure)

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

CTWR 505 grades will be based on careful consideration in the following areas of the students' work:

- Student must demonstrate understanding of the fundamental principles of ideation, visualization, creating compelling characters and writing the scene via the weekly assignments.
- The student must demonstrate an understanding of how to write a short script
- The student must demonstrate the understanding of how to rewrite a scene.
- The student must demonstrate the ability to read and respond to other student's work. Class participation includes full involvement in and contribution to all class discussions, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule) the assignments of the other students and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.
- Class attendance is mandatory, and includes being on time to class (otherwise, the students who present their material first are short-changed).
- You are allowed one unexcused absence (documentation required for excused absences). Beyond one, you will receive a reduction of one-third letter grade for each unexcused absence. (e.g., A- down to B+, B down to B-)
- Tardiness is unprofessional, and so will be considered unacceptable. You will be allowed one unexcused tardiness. After that, you will have your grade lowered by one-sixth of a letter grade for each occurrence. For example: Two tardies = A- to B+. BE ON TIME. IT IS HIGHLY INCONSIDERATE OF YOUR CLASSMATES NOT TO BE.

GRADING WEIGHTS:

CTWR 505 grades are based on:

- Weekly Assignments (including P2 Script).....50%
- Reading and Responding to Workshop Assignments.....20%
- Final 508 Script.....30%

LETTER GRADES:

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

PRESENTATION:

As you are hoping to enter the film industry as professionals, 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.

Classroom Decorum

The professor expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a fragile process and while we should ask questions, analyze and even challenge, we want to remain supportive, always keeping in mind that the screenplay is fragile work in progress. A working writer needs to develop *the art of collaboration* while working with their peers. As a working writer you will need to be able to work constructively with directors, producers and studio executives.

Laptop and Texting Policy

Students may use their laptops at the discretion of the professor. Laptops may be used for note taking, but not for surfing the web unless it is part of a class project. Texting is not allowed during class time. Texting is distracting and disruptive. There is nothing that needs to be communicated to anyone except your classmates during class time.

Save your texting and surfing until class break.

*Note: 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 me 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. The telephone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

8/22: WEEK ONE – MEMORY

In class assignment – TRIP TO SCHOOL

- List the places you went to school.
- List how you got to each school. Pick the hottest place/trip emotionally.
- List things, places, activities, people, clothes connected with that trip.
- Now describe one trip to the class, tell us how you got to school. (More “telling”, less “reading”.)

(Students will read the most charged memory for them. We will focus on what's memorable/unforgettable and why. Is it a short film? Are their characters memorable?)

Assignment for next week

1. Read “Moonlight” script – who is the main character, what does he want?
2. 2nd “Memory” Prompt

Describe the following memories:

- My favorite toy as a child.
- A secret place I used to go.
- The most frightening person in my childhood.

1 page each. Describe the specifics of objects, person, place. Feelings and mood they engendered. Upload to Dropbox.

8/29: WEEK TWO – MEMORY

In Class:

1. Discuss student's favorite Memory prompt
2. Discuss In Bruges script (go over script format)
3. Screen short film

Assignments for next week:

1. Write a 2-3 page story on one of the four memories (trip to school, toy, place, person.) Could this be a P1 Project?
2. Atmosphere exercise: same location, three times, horror, romance, comedy

9/5: WEEK THREE – P1 & ATMOSPHERE

In class

1. Discuss P 1 ideas. Read mood exercise, discuss format, description, planting and payoff.

Assignments for next week:

1. *My moment of greatest pride and moment of deepest shame.*
2. *My moment of greatest joy and moment of greatest terror.*
Length: 1 page each.
3. *Read Breaking Bad Pilot.*
4. *Bring rewritten PI non dialogue script (your own or from exercise)*
5. *Screen short film*

9/12: WEEK FOUR – EXPERIENCE

In class:

1. Discuss “greatest” assignments.
2. Discuss PI ideas.
3. Screen short film

Assignment for next week:

1. *“TRUE/FALSE”. Write two small, one or two paragraph stories. One true. One false. Class tries to determine which one is which and why.*
2. *Preparation for a date.*

9/19: WEEK FIVE - OBSERVATION

In class:

1. Discuss ‘True/false’ assignment
2. Discuss Preparation for a date

Assignment for Next Week:

1. *“Steal’ a character.*
 - a. *Go home write about him or her. Give a name. Why did he/she catch your attention?*
2. *Same character, same location, different times and circumstances.*

9/26: WEEK SIX - CHARACTER

In Class:

1. Discuss stolen character.
2. Discuss environment/character assignment.

Assignment for Next Week:

1. *“Steal” a second character. Write about him and her. Give them a name. 1 Page.*
2. *Construct a conflict for these two characters. Is there a short film here? One wants something from the other. Describe their story. 2-3 Pages.*

10/3: WEEK SEVEN: DIALOGUE SCENE

In Class:

1. Discuss character stories. Is there a P2 here?

Assignment for next Week:

1. Write a seduction scene. 3-5 pages.
2. Bring initial documentary (portrait of a place, person or process) ideas for your P2. One paragraph each. Bring your web research or newspaper articles.

10/10: WEEK EIGHT: DIALOGUE SCENE & P2 PROJECT

In Class:

1. Discuss seduction scenes.
2. Discuss one of your P2 documentary ideas (1/2 of the class).

Assignments for Next Week:

1. Write an interrogation scene.
2. Write first draft of P2.

Note: CTPR 508 Teacher will visit in week ten to talk about and answer questions about 508. (I will email Pablo: pfrasconi@gmail.com to set it up.)

10/17: WEEK NINE – P2 AND DIALOGUE SCENE

In Class:

1. Discuss interrogation scene.
2. Discuss P2 Documentary Ideas/scripts.

Assignment for Next Week:

1. Write an intruder scene.
2. Write your P2 idea (either narrative or documentary.).

10/24: WEEK TEN -- P2 & 508 DISCUSSION

In Class:

1. Discuss Intruder scene
2. Discuss (and hand in) P2 Ideas.
3. Visit from 508 Rep.

Assignment for next week:

1. Bring in 3 one-paragraph ideas for your 508 script.

10/31: WEEK ELEVEN - P2 & 508

In Class:

1. Discuss 508 ideas.
2. Screen Short Films

Assignment for Next Week:

1. *Choose two ideas and write them up as a one-page synopsis.*

11/7: WEEK TWELVE: CTPR 508 and THE 5 PAGE SHORT SCRIPT

In Class:

1. Discuss two 508 ideas.

Assignment for Next Week:

1. *Choose one idea and write the 5-page script.*
2. *Email to class.*
3. *Read classmates first draft script.*

11/14: WEEK THIRTEEN -- THE SHORT SCRIPT 2

In Class:

1. Discuss 508 scripts.

Assignment for next week:

1. *Rewrite 508 scripts.*
2. *Email students' rewritten scripts*
3. *Read students' scripts*

11/21: WEEK FOURTEEN: THE SHORT SCRIPT 3

In Class:

1. Discuss rewritten 508 scripts. (GROUP A)

Assignment:

1. *Polish and complete 508 scripts. (GROUP A)*

11/28: WEEK FOURTEEN: THE SHORT SCRIPT 3

In Class:

1. Discuss rewritten 508 scripts. (GROUP B)

Assignment: Polish and complete 508 scripts. (GROUP B)

FINAL DRAFT DUE: Friday December 6th at 10AM

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 Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. 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](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.
<https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website:
<http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response.
<https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [https://diversity.usc.edu/](https://diversity.usc.edu)

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

PLEASE NOTE:

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY
INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**