UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

WRITING DIVISION

CTWR 505: **Creating The Short Film** (2 units)

19284

Instructor: Rick Parks

Location: SCA316

Time: 2-4:50pm WEDNESDAYS (beginning 8/23)

Hours: by appointment

Contact: rpparks@att.net

(818) 262-8091 (cell/text)

Course Objectives:

• CHARACTER WORK: To strengthen & deepen your ability to conceive characters and ideas that will lead to compelling stories.

• IDEATION: To facilitate the development of artistic technique and cinematic imagination.

• OBSERVATION: To develop ideas for stories and characters through observation of, research into, and direct experience with and from real life.

• PERCEPTION: To learn to write from a visual and aural perspective.

• TECHNIQUE: To understand the structure and economy of effective narrative screenwriting.

• CRAFT: To develop a fundamental understanding of the dramatic scene.

• Voice: To explore and develop your artistic point of view and original cinematic voice.

• COHESION: To learn to write the short script.

• DISCIPLINE: To understand the importance of rewriting.

Course Description:

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.

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, concentrating on the major building block of any dramatic work, the scene.

You will learn to bring your visual and aural senses to your writing, to see and hear your film as you write it, while at the same time you discover the importance of character as it is explored through situations of conflict. 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 as many professional (recent) screenplays as possible, reporting to the class on at least one of them.

Course Reading:

Four feature screenplays or pilots (**required**, provided by instructor)

In addition, suggested readings for this class are:

"The Tools of Screenwriting" by David Howard and Edward Mabley.

“Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out,” Dannenbaum, Hodge, Mayer (Fireside, 2003)

Grading Criteria:

CTWR 505 grades are based on:

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

Class participation includes full involvement in and contribution to all class discussions, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule above) the assignments of the other students and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

ASSIGNMENTS ARE TO BE EMAILED TO THE PROFESSOR BY 6:00 PM THE NIGHT BEFORE CLASS.

CTWR 505 is a WORKSHOP. Assignments turned in late will result in lower grade.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected 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 **absences** 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.

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%

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Students may bring laptops to class to take notes and review work. However, internet usage during class is not allowed, except for in-class work. Cellphone use is not allowed except before and after class and during breaks.

Class Schedule:

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

**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.

• **Name every document** you email me or the group as follows:

Your Name - Assignment Name. - Format

Example: **Parks-memory.doc**, or **Parks-memory.pdf** or **Parks-memory.fdx**

Also: Put your name, title and page number on the Header of EACH PAGE of your material. Refer to the SCHEDULE for due dates of specific assignments.

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

**8/23 Week 1: INTRODUCTIONS--**

Ideation - how to think.

What is a short film?

Go BWA--

**In class assignments**–

**Part One**: ATMOSPHERE

**Mood and atmosphere.** Designed to build the writer's sense of a compelling location. The goal is to engage the audience without introducing action, through light, use of sound, and visuals. In three parts. Length: No more than a page total. Make the audience expect something to happen. A. Fear. 2. Romance. 3. Comedy.

*The assignment: Pick a cinematic location. Describe the sights and sounds of that location in order to make the audience think that something:* ***romantic*** *is about to take place. The scene ends when your character enters the location. Repeat with the same location, but use the sights and sounds to make the audience expect that something* ***frightening or violent****is going to take place. As before, the scene ends when the same character enters the scene. Repeat a third time using sights and sounds to make the audience expect something* ***humorous*** *is about to happen.*

*These scenes and/or moments are not connected into a larger story. Time can pass. (A location that is vibrant and full of life can be run-down and old, for example.)*

*Also, the fear or love or laughs should not come from the character's interaction or movement. The goal is to get the audience to expect something will happen. Bad example: Show the banana peel, but not the man slipping....)*

**Part Two**: **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 class, tell us how you got to school. (More “telling”, less “reading”.)

**Assignment for next week:**

**8/30 WEEK TWO: MEMORY**

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.

**PIVOTAL PERSON** - biggest influence - antagonist

***Assignment for next week****:* “Preparation for a Date”.

## **9/6 WEEK THREE: PREPARATION FOR A DATE or SIGNIFICANT EVENT**

Two short scenes. One scene (1/2 to 1/3 page) of “preparation”, one scene (1/4 page) of “aftermath”.

Also designed to build audience engagement and expectation. Introduces the use of props, costume, and character revealing activity -- but not necessarily dramatic action. Helps the writer practice time ellipsis, the technique of planting and payoff, and/or repetition with a variation. And of course preparation and aftermath. In two parts. Length: No more than a page total.

*Pick an interesting character and place him or her in a location significant to that character. (A home, an office, a combat bunker.) Show that character preparing for some character-revealing event, such as a crucial job interview, a murder, a confession, an encounter with aliens. Whatever. The point is to show – through props and movement – not only what the event is, but how the character feels about what's about to happen. This should not be a guessing game. We are not given clues, but glimpses into the character's hopes and fears. It should be crystal clear what the event is when the character leaves the location. Then, ellipse time and show the character's return. We do not see the primary scene of the event. But when the character returns to his home, or aircraft hanger, or office... we should know exactly what happened and how the character feels about it by changes in demeanor, costume, props, etc.*

***Assignments for next week:***1) “Experience” assignment, 2) Write a paragraph about two ideas you would like to present as options for your non-dialogue **Project 1 in 507**.

**PIVOTAL PERSON - POV** that same story from their POV.

**9/13 WEEK FOUR: GROUP “A” P1 Pitches and “EXPERIENCE” exercise.**

**Part 1)** DISCUSS two ideas for **GROUP “A”** 507 PROJECT 1 PITCHES. (5 mins per student)

**Part 2**) “Experience” assignment. Describe:

• My moment of greatest pride and moment of deepest shame.

• My moment of greatest joy and moment of greatest terror.

Length: 1 page each.

***Assignment for next week:*** **Group “B” P1** Pitches and “CHARACTER ENVIRONMENT”.

**9/20 WEEK FIVE: Group “B” P1 Pitches and “CHARACTER ENVIRONMENT”**

**Part 1)**: DISCUSS two ideas for **GROUP “B”** P1 PITCHES. (5 mins per student)

**Part 2)** “Character Environment”. Describe:

**A character visits a location three times.**

This exercise, also non-dialogue, should build on Atmosphere and Preparation For A Date, while also allowing the writer (in a short, simple form) to use surprise, mystery, twist and suspense, and engage the audiences' hopes and fears. The writer also practices manipulating time. In three parts. Length: 1 page, maybe a page and a  half.

*A character discovers, or stumbles upon, an interesting location. It is new to him or her. It evokes a sense of mystery in the audience. Perhaps fear as well. Or hope, depending on the exploration and what the character finds. The character should find something or somebody unexpected. (Some writers will keep this element a surprise to the audience as well; others may show the new element before the character does, building a moment of suspense.)*

*Second part: Time has passed. (How does the audience know? How much time? A day? A month? Several years?) The character now returns to the location, but is motivated to engage the element discovered in the first part. Is this now a romantic encounter? A deadly one? A quest for knowledge? An attempt to help someone or some thing? The goal is either achieved or not, but the action should reveal something about the main character and his or her counterpart.*

*Third part: Time has passed. (Again, visual clues.) The character returns for the third time. The second element or person is now gone. The location may or may not be significantly changed, but the main character should be. He or she should be much different - because of these encounters, the goal reached or lost - than he/she was in the opening.*

*Discussion: What is the “story” of these three scenes? What has happened between these characters and why? Is there a “theme” and how is it conveyed?*

*Length: 1 1/2 pages.*

***Assignment for next week: Group “C” 507 Project 1*** *Pitches and “True/False” assignment.*

## **9/27 WEEK SIX: Group “C” P1 Pitches and “TRUE/FALSE”**

**Part 1)**: DISCUSS two ideas for **GROUP “C”** 507 P1 PITCHES. (5 mins per student)

## **Part 2)** “TRUE/FALSE”.

Write two small, one or two paragraph, stories. One true. One false.

Class tries to determine which one is which and why.

***Assignment for next week****: “WRONGEST PERSON/INTRUDER” Dialogue scene.*

# **10/4 WEEK SEVEN: Dialogue Scene – “WRONGEST” PERSON / INTRUDER**

**The "Wrongest" Person.** A dialogue scene between two characters. Should build and employ many of elements already introduced. Preparation, planting and pay-off, etc. (For some reason, writers tend to forget atmosphere again, like sound and light, to help the audience expect a romantic or violent scene...) Designed to reveal character through conflict, to build suspense through cross-cutting and a ticking clock, and to practice dialogue -- including attitude, vernacular/voice, scene/plot advertising, exposition.

Length: As long as it needs to be, but hopefully not more than 3 or 4 pages.

*Character A prepares some location for character B's arrival, but character C shows up instead! This should be, from what we know of character A and his/her plans, the absolute worst person. Character A must get rid of character C before he/she crosses paths with character B! But, character A cannot come out and say exactly why character C must leave. (“Listen mom, you gotta leave because I was about to smoke crack with my favorite girl…” that cannot happen.) For this to work, the audience must know what is being planned and the stakes involved. Also, character C must be entirely motivated to stay. (Mom is sick and took the day off, for example.)*

*The scene ends immediately when Character B arrives, whether Character A is successful in getting rid of character C, or not.*

***Assignments for next week:*** *Write a paragraph for two ideas for* ***507 Project 2*** *films, and “SIGNIFICANT OBJECT” Dialogue scene.*

## **10/11 WEEK EIGHT: GROUP “A” 507 P2 Pitches and *SIGNIFICANT OBJECT”*** *Dialogue scene*.

**Part 1)** DISCUSS two ideas for **GROUP “A”** 507 PROJECT 2 PITCHES. (5 mins per student)

## **Part 2**) **Dialogue Scene – SIGNIFICANT OBJECT**

The goal of this scene is to build audience’s expectations by using a significant prop. This scene should employ many of the elements practiced so far, including preparation, use of light and sound, manipulating time, motivated opposing characters, suspense and surprise, reversal and character change.

*A character prepares for a significant encounter and plans to use a certain object. Because of the conflict with a second (or more) character(s) the prop ends up being used in an entirely different way. Cheap gift perfume; a failed apology; the perfume is used as poison.*

*3 to 4 pages.*

***Assignments for next week:*** *1)* ***Group “B” 507 Project 2 pitches****, 2) prepare three ideas for* ***short documentaries****: a portrait of a place, a portrait of a person, and a portrait of a process. (Bring in a newspaper article or web download you used to research doc ideas. )*

## **10/18 WEEK NINE: GROUP “B” 507 P2 Pitches and *Documentary ideas.***

**Part 1)** DISCUSS two ideas for **GROUP “B”** 507 P2 PITCHES. (5 mins per student)

**Part 2*)*** DISCUSS one of your documentary ideas (person, place or process).

***Assignment for next week****: 1)* ***Group “C”*** *507 Project 2 pitches, 2) “****Creative Lie****” Dialogue scene (3 – 4 pages).*

# **10/25 WEEK TEN: GROUP “C” 507 P2 Pitches and “CREATIVE LIE*” Dialogue scene.***

**Part 1)** DISCUSS two ideas for **GROUP “C”** 507 PROJECT 2 PITCHES. (5 mins per student)

**Part 2*) Read CREATIVE LIE scene*.**

**Creative lie.** Dialogue scene between two characters. Four to five pages. As with all the others, the writer should employ elements practiced all semester, including suspense, engaging audiences' hopes and fears, surprise, mystery, escalation, distinctive dialogue.

*A* character tells a lie to either pursue some objective or to escape some trouble. The audience must know it is a lie. The lie should escalate. The person being lied to should be entirely motivated to block the character's goal. (Think of the bonded warehouse scene in Beverly Hills Cop.)

Length: 3 to 4 pages.

# [***Assignment for next week****: “SEDUCTION” Dialogue scene.*

# **11/1 WEEK ELEVEN: Dialogue Scene – SEDUCTION / PERSUASION**

The goal of this scene is to explore characters -- their past and present relationships. This is a good scene to introduce the concept of exposition through conflict.

Length: 3 or 4 pages.

*Somebody wants another character to do something. The seducer should know which "buttons" to push. The goal should be appealing to the person being seduced, but that person should have legitimate, character revealing opposition. This need not be sexual or romantic. The seduction/persuasion should escalate. The scene ends when the seducee agrees or doesn’t.*

***Assignment for next week:*** *Prepare 5 one-sentence ideas for* ***508 script****.*

## **11/8 WEEK TWELVE: CTPR 508 and THE 5 PAGE SHORT SCRIPT**

• Pitch 508 project ideas in class for feedback.

***Assignment for next week****: Choose one idea and revise into a one page synopsis.*

## **11/15 WEEK THIRTEEN: THE SHORT SCRIPT 2**

• Pitch revised 508 idea in class for feedback.

***Assignment for next week****: Write the first draft.*

## **11/22 WEEK FOURTEEN: THE SHORT SCRIPT 3**

• First Draft of 508.

Students deliver the first draft for feedback.

***Assignment for next week****: Write the second draft.*

## **11/29 WEEK FIFTEEN: THE SHORT SCRIPT 4**

• Revision of 508 script.

Students deliver second draft of script for feedback.

**FINAL DRAFT OF 508 SCRIPT** **DUE THE NEXT WEEK, DURING EXAM WEEK**.

**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](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/" \t "_blank).

**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](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](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/>

*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](http://dps.usc.edu/)

**PLEASE NOTE:**

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