

## CTWR 413 (19448D) – WRITING THE SHORT SCRIPT COURSE SYLLABUS

INSTRUCTOR: Peter Gamble Robinson

TIME/LOC.: Wednesdays from 10am-12:50pm in SCA 259.

OFFICE HOURS: After class, or by appointment.

PHONE: 213-925-8880 (Between 9:00am and 9pm)

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### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSES

Short films are the medium through which Directors first master their craft. They are also the showpieces that you will use to try to get professional opportunities.

A good short film contains all of the elements of a great feature: plot, character, theme, beginnings-middles-ends, conflict, twists, turns, great dialogue, etc. Learning the short-form will teach you the bulding blocks you need to create great features.

The focus of this class is to teach you the fundamentals of screenwriting, but also to help you create a script for CTPR 310, the Intermediate Production class (which can be produced within a 5 week schedule, with only two weekends of shooting.)

Our goals will be as follows:

- 1) A PRODUCIBLE SHORT FILM THAT SHOWCASES TALENT.
- 2) THE FUNDAMENTALS OF STORYTELLING .
- 3) TO FIND YOUR “VOICE” & CREATE A BRAND.

Our schedule will be as follows:

Weeks 1-8 will focus on basic structure, and exercises.

Weeks 8-15 will focus on creating 2 short scripts.

### HOMEWORK AND NOTES:

Homework is due 48 hours before class.

All assignments should be written in final draft, or another screenwriting software that allows for revisions in red, and with \*’s at the edge of the page. This is a standard of the industry, and (if you’re not already) now is a good a time to become acclimated to it. **Each week the new revisions should be marked with asterisks, and the work from the previous week should no longer be marked**, in this way we can focus only on the most recent changes you have made Please see me with any questions or problems with this.

## **GRADING CRITERIA:**

The work done through the semester will be applied towards your final grade as follows:

10% participation

90% Weekly Assignments (6% each)

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%

In general, you should assume the following general guidelines as a way of thinking about what type of grade you will receive:

- If you show up to class, and do the minimum required work, you will get a C.
- If you show up to class, and demonstrate a significant effort, you will get a B.
- If you show up to class, demonstrate a significant effort and do exceptional work, you will get an A.
- If you do not show up to class, don't complete your assignments, or fail to complete your assignments in a timely manner, you will get a D or an F.

Your performance in class, and your notes will (each) be worth half a letter grade. Two or more unexcused absences or late assignments will lower your grade a half letter grade. Absences can be excused in advance with permission. Unexcused late assignments will receive an automatic F.

Additional notes on how to get an A: From previous experience, people who get A's apply the notes they are given in class, integrating them into their work each week. They do the work each week not because it was assigned, but because they aspire already to be professional writers. As such, they go beyond the bare minimum of each assignment.

## **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 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.

### **SICK POLICY**

If you are sick and still contagious, please do not come to class. If you are unsure whether you are contagious, contact the USC Health Center. Any genuine illness will be accommodated for, and I will make up that class with the student either over the phone, skype, or in person at another time. I would much rather spend an extra couple of hours with a student when they are well than lose several days of creative time to illness, and I'm sure most of your fellow classmates will feel the same way.

### **SCHEDULE:**

Date    Week    Teaching:

8/23    Wk 1    **INTRO/GOAL SETTING**

Introduction to students; setting goals; reading syllabus.

Lecture(s):

- 1) Introduction - who I am.
- 2) Who you are.
- 3) Goal Setting – what do we want from the class? / Read Syllabus.
- 4) Synopsis Exercise – Plot Character & Theme / Read Harry the Dirty Dog / Watch Lin's films & Others.

Assignment(s):

- 1) Go onto the internet, find a short film to show the class that showcases the director, or is the type of film you'd like to create. Research directors and what shorts helped THEM break in. Send a link to the films to me.
- 2) Brainstorm 3 short films. Write one paragraph each.

8/30    Wk 2    **SHORTS THAT WORKED**

Discussions:

- 1) Which short films were compelling and interesting, and why?
- 2) How can we improve the short-ideas you created? What's missing?

Lecture: Character Establishment.

Assignment(s):

- 1) Write 2-3 pages of scenes, with at least three behaviors that allow us to triangulate the character's "inner character".

- 9/6 Wk 3 **ESTABLISHMENT OF CHARACTER**  
 Discussion: Assignments.  
 Lecture: The 4 character arcs and modifiers. / Forced change.  
 Assignments: 1) Write a short film, 3-4 pages tracking the character's arc and each moments of change. Discuss in class.
- 9/13 Wk 4 **CHARACTER ARCS/FORCED CHANGE**  
 Discussion: Homework.  
 Lecture: Modifiers.  
 Assignment: Create another moment of forced change for the charcter you've created, this time focusing on a modifier to enable change. (Under 5 pages)
- 9/20 Wk 5 **MODIFIERS AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE**  
 Discussion: Homework.  
 Lecture: Scene structure – conflict, escalation, high stakes.  
 Assignment: Write a scene or short film where a character and another character oppose each other, and the story escalates and twists and turns.
- 9/27 Wk 6 **SCENE STRUCTURE – CONFLICT, ESCALATION, HIGH STAKES**  
 Discussion: Homework.  
 Lecture: Theme & Third acts. / Silent films.  
 Assignment: Write a compelling silent film.
- 10/4 Wk 7 **SILENT FILMS**  
 Discussions: Homework. Which ones were the most successful, and why?  
 Lecture: Commercials.  
 Assignment: Write a commercial with a story.
- 10/11 Wk 8 **THE 30 SECOND FILM – AKA – THE COMMERCIAL**  
 Discussion: Homework.  
 Lecture: Dialogue  
 Assignment: Write 1-3 pages of scenes, with at least three behaviors that allow
- 10/18 Wk 9 **DIALOGUE**  
 Discussion: Homework.  
 Lecture: More Dialogue. (Non-linear dialogue, subtext, losing empty dialogue.)  
 Assignment: Again, write a scene between two more characters who speak with very different voices.
- 10/25 Wk 10 **SHORT FILM #1**  
 Discussion: Homework.  
 Lecture: Branding and career building.  
 Assignment: Rewrite first short.
- 11/1 Wk 11 **SHORT FILM #1 – REVISED**

Discussion: Homework.  
Assignment: Write second short.

11/8 Wk 12 **SHORT FILM #2**  
Discussion: Homework.  
Assignment: Rewrite second short.

11/15 Wk 13 **SHORT FILM #2 – REVISED**  
Discussion: Homework.  
Assignment: Polish 1 of the 2 films for the cold read next week with actors.

11/22 **THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS**

11/29 Wk 14 **THE COLD READ**  
Bring in actors, and have them read the work aloud.  
Possibly bring in guest writers to give feedback.

## 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 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](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](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](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.