

DIRECTING SYLLABUS
18620 BROWN
CTPR 508 PRODUCTION II
2018: SPRING SEMESTER
USC SCA

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OBJECTIVE

The directing component of 508 will further develop skills learned in 507 with a special emphasis on the director's preparation, working with actors, and designing and executing visuals.

RECOMMENDED READING

- 1.) *Voice & Vision Second Edition: A Creative Approach to Narrative Film and DV Production*, Mick Hurbis-Cherrier This is particularly handy for blank forms (call sheet, script breakdown, etc.)
- 2.) *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film & Television*, Judith Westin. 1996.
- 3.) *Film Directing Fundamentals: See Your Film Before Shooting*, Nicholas T. Proferes.
- 4.) *Film Directing Shot By Shot: Visualizing From Concept to Screen*, Steven D. Katz, 1991
- 5.) *Shooting To Kill*, Christine Vachon & David Edelstein, Quill paperback, 2002
- 6.) *A Challenge For The Actor*, Uta Hagen, 1991
- 7.) *The Intent to Live: Achieving Your True Potential as an Actor*, Larry Moss, Bantam, 2005

DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK

On the Tuesday prior to the first day of shooting each project, at the production meetings, each director will submit and present a Director's Notebook-in-Progress.

NOTE: *Directors are required to upload the current draft of the script including detailed analysis, to the shared drop-box/Google shared folder that Tuesday evening. All members of the class are to read scripts and respective detective work prior to the upcoming directing class on Thursday. This is done to ensure that all members of the class can participate in the critique of the rehearsals conducted in class by the director.*

The master original of your director's notebook should be bound in a three-ring binder, **each section neatly organized and labeled with divider tabs**. All directors' notebooks will be submitted two weeks after completion of all P3 project. They will be returned after grading. (*Digital submission will not be accepted*)

The Director's Notebook is an essential tool for pre-visualization. It is a system that codifies and organizes a director's plan; clarifying one's vision and facilitating effective communication to your team. It is a mandatory requirement of the directing component of 508. While each director must prepare every element of his/her book, *it is imperative to collaborate with your assigned cinematographer on all aspects of visual design and rendition for the project.*

The Director's Notebook must consist of the following:

- a.) Cover page – including project title, project team names, contact info, draft number, and date.
- b.) Log line pitch – In one or two sentences, briefly describe what this film is about.
- c.) Vision pitch – What is the overall look and tone aesthetic of this project?
- d.) Visual and aural references – What are your inspirations for the look and sound? Print out frame-grabs from existing movies or photographs from other sources to visually demonstrate “the look” you want to capture. (During the reference show-and-tell in class, directors may play brief excerpts of audio inspirations if they choose to do so.)
- e.) In-depth Analysis of the script must be completed using the director's script analysis format covered in class. In addition, please complete the check-lists found at the end of this syllabus.
 - 1.) “Realization of a Vision: Directors Answer Questions 1-10” (Addendum check list

#1). Write complete answers for each question.

2.) Scene Analysis – “Scene Breakdown” (Addendum check list #2). Write complete answers for each question.

3.) Character Analysis – “Uta Hagen: The Six Steps” (Addendum check list #3). You must provide answers to these questions For ALL characters in your script, however, details may vary depending on the prominence of each character.

f.) Master Script – This first copy of the script will contain notes on:

1.) Performance expectations and blocking ideas. (This will/may change while collaborating with actors during rehearsals.)

2.) Story beats.

3.) Transitions

These notes should be written on the sides, tops and bottoms of the script. Use a variety of colors, highlighting or underlining to codify your own system. Notate ALL transitions (meaning ins and outs of scenes) indicating visual, emotional, or rhythmic juxtapositions from one scene to another and for the first and last images of the film. This is YOUR master script. All ideas go here! You may re-do this script many times as your drafts change. This is all part of the process.

g.) Lined Script – This second copy of the script is your lined script. You will not be able to create this script before you prepare shot lists and storyboards. They work in tandem. Indicate each shot with a number that will correspond with ALL other shot lists and storyboards. (Use a straightedge! Start left and move right on the page as the scene progresses.) Illustrate how much of a scene is covered in each shot. This process is a visual illustration of your coverage.

h.) Shot List – In script order, this is the breakdown of your camera coverage written in list form.

1.) Number as follows: Scene number, followed by shot numbers. Scene #1 / Shot # 1 or Shot A – abbreviated as 1-1 or 1-A Scene #1 / Shot #2 or Shot B – abbreviated as 1-2 or 1-B Etc. (Scene numbers must correspond to the script. Scene / Shot numbers must correspond to the lined script, storyboards, and overheads.)

2.) Pre-edit the film on paper and know every shot you need to tell your story fluidly.

3.) Design your transitions. Know how each shot will segue into another – and especially how scenes will transition from one to the next.

4.) Describe each shot (PROSE STORYBOARDS). What will it cover? Indicate the shot size (and lens size, if you know it). How wide will the shot be? Is it a master shot? A mini-master? A medium shot? A three-shot? A two-shot? A medium close-up or medium "single"? A close-up or "single"? An extreme close-up? An insert? For close-up "single" shots, indicate if these will be a "clean single" (one actor alone) or a "dirty single" (over-the-shoulder of one actor facing another actor). Will the shot be from a high, low, or neutral angle?

5.) Describe all camera movements. Indicate dolly moves, handheld moves, zooms, tilts, pans, etc.

6.) Describe the movement of actors within the shot. Below is an example of a static shot that is brought to life by the blocking of the actors:

Camera is situated behind the bar, facing out into the room. A waitress named Shirley, seen head-to-knee in the middle of the room, is delivering drinks to two extras seated at a cocktail table. In the deep background, the entrance door opens and in steps Joe – seen head-to-toe. A blast of sunlight reveals that it is still daylight outside. As the door closes behind him, he surveys the room, his eyes still adjusting to the dim lighting of the seedy bar. He walks forward into the room, passes right by the waitress who looks up with recognition and smiles sardonically. Joe continues toward the camera, settles onto a bar stool so that his head and shoulders are now in close-up, facing camera – his massive frame masking Shirley from view. A beat later, however, Shirley suddenly emerges from behind the left side of his head, joining his close-up – which now becomes a tight two-shot. She leans forward and whispers into his left ear, "Did you miss me?" His eyes close and he sighs in exasperation.

7.) You must decide ahead of time if there are moments when an actor "breaks the fourth wall." If so, how will this affect the shots just before and after? For instance, in the last description, what if it was the final shot of the movie and, let's say, you wanted to create a jarring "button" to end the film on an ironic note. After Shirley's line, "You miss me?" Joe's final beat could be to shift his eyeline directly into the lens and shrug. Showtime's *House of Lies* and Netflix's *House of Card* are examples of show that utilize this technique.

8.) Screen direction. You must make sure you do not "cross the line" with your coverage. At all times, you need to be sure the camera is placed on the correct side of the line and that your actors' eye lines are on the proper side of the lens. Looser, handheld styles of shooting often break these rules. There may also be times when a jarring effect is achieved by crossing the line on purpose. Nevertheless, screen direction rules should never be broken out of laziness or ignorance. You should always be aware of when you are breaking these rules and you should be able to clearly articulate cogent reasons for doing so.

9.) Make sure you have enough coverage planned to allow yourself the ability to

shape performances and pacing in the editing process.

10.) Never shortchange yourself on inserts. You should plan to cover important action details and the handling of important props with inserts – even if you think you might not need it in editing. A very common mistake among inexperienced filmmakers is to forget, ignore, or belittle the importance of inserts. Very often, inserts are a critical component in telling the story dynamically. Inserts also come in very handy as cutaways when intercutting, trimming, and shaping coverage for performance and pacing. Better safe than sorry!

11.) On the other hand, you have limited card space, so don't overshoot. Prioritize your coverage. Make sure you have the basics to cover the scenes properly. Then, if you think you have time and card space, add your "icing on the cake" shots. But be realistic. Ask yourself, "Why do I need this shot? What part of the story does it express? What part of the scene needs to be covered from this angle?" "Am I just showing off technique with this fancy dolly move, or does it truly add to the emotional impact of the moment?"

12.) Combine set-ups / simplify blocking. If a character moves around the room to six different positions that all need to be covered, you will waste a lot of time setting up the camera and lights in all these positions. Figure out creative ways to combine and simplify.

13.) Include details of visual or performance elements you want to make sure you will remember on the day.

i.) Storyboard – In script order, illustrate your shot list in a series of frames. These do not have to be elaborate drawings. They need only be rough sketches with stick figures. The quality of your drawings is not important but going through the process of visualizing the shots is. Here is where you carefully consider how you are directing your audience's attention. When is the story calling out for a new angle? Consider framing and composition, angle, direction of action and eyeline. If there is action, pre-think screen direction of entrances and exits. Pay close attention to transitions from one scene to the next. Camera moves should be indicated with arrows and brief notations.

j.) Overhead Blocking / Camera Plan – Draw overhead diagrams of each set (basic geographic components of your location, such as walls, furniture, doors, key set dressing). Then plot out the actors' positions / movements (use initials, such as A for Artie, B for Brenda, to represent your characters). And, finally, plot out the various placements of the camera – using the angle icon (<) to indicate camera direction. Use separate sheets of paper for every scene – even if they take place in the same set – and use the full size of the page. Do not draw miniature cameras or miniature figures. Keep this neat and uncluttered so that you can

clearly see the shooting plan.

k.) Shooting schedule—In shooting order, break down your shot list per day, with specific timings allotted for each shot. This is an extremely important component which will allow you to gauge how you are doing schedule-wise during your very busy day of shooting. At any given moment, you should be able to refer to this schedule and know if you are on schedule, ahead of schedule, or, most importantly, if you are behind schedule and need to begin compromising shots in order to finish your day on time.

This notebook represents your film information, and is a kind of visual / verbal journal. It will keep evolving as you revisit your imagining, thinking and planning. The process of putting it together will help you focus on what you want to say and how best to say it.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Over the course of the semester, there will be eight sessions dedicated solely to directing:

DIRECTING SESSION 1 - Tuesday, January 9; 1:00–4:50pm SCA 209

We will go over the syllabus and discuss the requirements for the Director's Notebook. We will also discuss in details, the principles of script and character analysis including story beats and transitions.

Sessions 2, 5 and 7. These three sessions take place on the Tuesday or Thursday before the first weekend of shooting for each Project cycle.

(P1) DIRECTING SESSION 2 - Tuesday, January 16; 1- 4:50pm SCA 209

(P2) DIRECTING SESSION 5 - Tuesday, February 20; 9 - 11:50am SCA Stage 3

(P3) DIRECTING SESSION 7 - Thursday, March 29; 9 - 11:50am SCA Stage 3

In each of these sessions, approximately 45 minutes will be dedicated to each project.

The director of each project will bring in his/her actors and rehearse at least one important dialogue scene. You should have had a minimum of one rehearsal with your actors prior to this in-class workshop. It is imperative that your actors are completely off-book for this class exercise.

NOTE: It is **MANDATORY** that your actors are available for this class. When casting actors for your projects, you must clear this date with them in addition to your weekend shoot dates. Please be in touch with the SA to schedule which 45-

minute slot you want (especially so that your actors do not have to be present for the entire class – but *the actors must be punctual*).

Reminder: Directors must post their most current drafts of their scripts plus detective work/ text analysis on the Tuesday evening prior to their Thursday presentation. ALL class members are responsible for reading each script and detective work/ text analysis in advance of class.

The producer of each project should bring:

- a.) Key props.
- b.) Water for actors.
- c.) 7 (or more) hard copies of the appointed scene (called “sides”) for each of the actors (estimated 2 but may be more), director, producer, cinematographer, instructor, and SA.

NOTE: Free copies can be generated by the SA. 48 hour deadline getting file / originals to the SA. Otherwise, producer is responsible to make copies, out of pocket.

The cinematographer will operate the camera and shoot the rehearsal in a master shot. One camera and tripod will be used for each of these three classes.

The SA will arrange which of the project teams will bring in the equipment to be shared by all teams in these classes.

For these exercises, we will only use available lighting on the stage and the sound will be in-camera only. Sets will be imaginary – with available tables, desks and chairs used to approximate furnishings you have in mind.

SESSION 3 – Tuesday, January 23; 1 - 4:50pm SCA 209.

Working with a cinematographer. This will be a joint directing and cinematography class. The directing and cinematography instructors will discuss this crucial relationship, culminating with the blocking and shooting of a short scene in class. We will explore the director’s relationship with various members of his team and discuss professional on-set etiquette.

SESSION 4 – Tuesday, February 13; 1 - 4:50pm SCA Stage 2

Working with actors. We will explore the dynamics of the collaborative process between directors and actors from casting, through rehearsals and their working relationship during production. Staging, blocking and mining a scene will be discussed.

SESSION 6 - Tuesday, February 27; 1 - 4:50pm SCA 209

Shot variety, camera angles and shot grammar will be further explored in this class. A larger portion of this class will be dedicated to the moving camera practicum for the purpose of creating a visual design with camera movement. Instructor will guide students through a practical exercise of designing and executing one continuous 'long take' scene.

SESSION 8 - Thursday, April 5; 9 - 11:50am SCA Stage 3

TBA.

PRODUCTION MEETINGS WITH PRODUCING & DIRECTING INSTRUCTORS:

On the Thursday before the first day of shooting for each Project cycle, each trio will have a final production meeting with Producing Instructor Michael Peyser and Directing Instructor Bayo Akinfemi.

P1 Production Meetings: Thursday, January 18; SCA 209 (9 - 11:50am)

P2 Production Meetings: Thursday, February 22; SCA 209 (1 - 4:50pm)

P3 Production Meetings: Thursday, March 29; SCA 209 (1 - 4:50pm)

Within these class periods, the SA will schedule specific meeting times for each project. In these meetings, the director must be prepared to review a number of the elements in the Director's Notebook.

GRADING

The directing component of your overall grade for 508 accounts for 20% (see Master Syllabus for grading policies and breakdown).

That 20% directing portion of your overall grade will be determined by your directing instructor based on the following criteria:

The Director's Notebook: 50%

Collaborative Effort: 20%

Class Participation: 20%

Attendance and Punctuality: 10%

Merits of final film 0%

Please note that grades for making art are totally subjective. Highest grades are awarded for passion and commitment. Did you demonstrate growth? Did you strive to be the strongest director you can be? Did you collaborate well with your cast and crew?

GENERAL INFORMATION

Attendance is mandatory in these eight directing sessions. You may have one *excused* absence. Everyone *must* be on time and turn assignments in on time. If you don't show up in class without contacting the instructor and SA, or do not get a formal extension from the instructor on an assignment ahead of time, it will be reflected in your grade.

ADDENDUMS

Attached at the end of this 508 directing syllabus, you will find three invaluable check lists:

1. Realization of a Vision: Directors Answer Questions 1-10 (for script analysis)
2. Scene Breakdown (for scene analysis)
3. Uta Hagen: The Six Steps (for character analysis)

These basic principles have been approved by the Directing Track division of the USC School of Cinematic Arts – and adopted as standardized guidelines to be taught by all First and Second Semester directing instructors. You will utilize these checklists during this semester – they are mandatory components of your Director's Notebook. It is highly recommended that you keep them handy as you move forward to other classes beyond this semester and as you develop your own careers as filmmakers. They are invaluable foundation tools.

REALIZATION OF A VISION: Director's Answer Questions 1 - 10

The director must have a thorough understanding of the narrative...the way it is structured, the way it opens, unfolds, develops, climaxes and resolves. This understanding may derive from the director's being the creator, the developer, the author, or the analyst/interpreter of the story - or any combination of the above. The director is responsible for conveying to the creative team the vision and trajectory of the narrative. The director is the individual ultimately responsible for the Realization of the Narrative and its reception by an audience.

1. What happened immediately before the scene began?
2. What are the given circumstances?
3. What is the expectation of each character at the beginning of the scene?
4. What is at stake for each character in this scene?
5. What is each characters overall objective in the screenplay and scene?
6. Who or what are their obstacles, internal or external?
7. Beats
8. What is the turning point in the scene?
9. How has each character changed by the end of the scene?
10. What is he event (or function) of this scene in the script?

A DIRECTOR MUST KNOW WHAT HE/SHE WANTS TO HAPPEN TO AN AUDIENCE.

In order to convey a human life-experience, a director must know what needs to be seen and heard and otherwise sensed, and in what order and time-frame.

So as to guide a team and navigate an exploration and realization of a narrative a director must master the skills of:

**REAL TIME COMMUNICATION
LEADERSHIP/MANAGEMENT/DECISION-MAKING
STORY-TELLING
PERFORMANCE
AESTHETICS
A VARIETY OF TECHNOLOGIES**

These skills must be mastered and adapted to function during the periods of:

**Ideation and Development
Scripting
Pre-Visualization
Pre-Production
Production
Post-Production**

Scene Breakdown

Open Scene

To be completed by all actors and directors

1. What happens before the scene begins?
2. What are the GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES – psychological, social, economic, political, time and place?
3. What is the character's overall OBJECTIVE IN THE STORY? What is the character's OBJECTIVE IN THE SCENE?
4. What are the character's WANTS and NEEDS?
5. What are the character's INTERNAL OBSTACLES? EXTERNAL OBSTACLES?
6. What are the BEATS in the scene?
7. What happens after the scene ends?

UTA HAGEN - THE SIX STEPS

1. WHO AM I?

- A). What is my present state of being?
- B). How do I perceive myself?
- C). What am I wearing?

2. WHAT ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES?

- A). *What time is it?* (The year, the season, the day? At what time does my selected life begin?)
- B). *Where am I?* (In what city, neighborhood, building, and room do I find myself? Or in what landscape?)
- C). *What surrounds me?* (The immediate landscape? The weather? The condition of the place and the nature of the objects in it?)
- D). *What are the immediate circumstances?* (What has just happened, is happening? What do I expect or plan to happen next and later on?)

3. WHAT ARE MY RELATIONSHIPS?

How do I stand in relationship to the circumstances, the place, the objects, and the *other people* related to my circumstances?

4. WHAT DO I WANT?

What is my main objective? My immediate need or objective?

5. WHAT IS MY OBSTACLE?

What is in the way of what I want? How do I overcome it?

6. WHAT DO I DO TO GET WHAT I WANT?

How can I achieve my objective? What's my behavior? What are my actions?