

**SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS  
CTPR 506 - VISUAL EXPRESSION  
SYLLABUS**

**Semester:** Fall, Spring

**Professor:** Bruce Block

**TA:** Ryan Frost - email: rfrost@usc.edu

**READING & REFERENCES** (see below)

**PREREQUISITES:** CTPR 507 OR CTAN 547 OR CTIN 534

**INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE**

Just as a writer is concerned with story structure or a musician with musical structure, a picture maker must be concerned with visual structure. Visual structure is the only language available to picture makers yet it is often misused or simply ignored. The key to using visual structure is an understanding of the basic visual components and how visual structure relates to narrative/story structure. The basic visual components are: space, line, shape, color, tone, movement, and rhythm. It is through the control of these basic visual components that the picture maker stirs an audience's emotions, creates a visual style, gives unity to their work and links story structure to visual structure. The principles discussed in this class can be used to create and control pictures for any format including theatrical motion pictures, television shows and commercials, internet sites, and computer games, using live-action, traditional or CG animation. This class relates all of the visual concepts to practical production and bridges the gap between theory and practice.

**The Structure of the Class:**

1. Define each basic visual component.
2. Divide the components into sub-components.
3. Show how to recognize these components.
4. Demonstrate how these components communicate to an audience.
5. Apply the components to a text/script.
6. Discuss how the component is used technically and aesthetically in actual production.
7. Show examples from films.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES**

The class has two assignments that are due at the end of the semester: a notebook of original still photographs (each student works alone on the notebook) and a film/video (students work in groups of four). Each student is required to create a photographic notebook of still photographs illustrating the concepts discussed in class. Working in groups, students create a 3-5 minute film demonstrating the principles of visual structure. Notebook and film grades are based on originality, directorial clarity and realization of each visual concept. Final course grade is based on the notebook grade (60%), film grade (40%). There is no mid-term grade given in this class. Late notebooks or films will not be accepted. The class does not allow make-up exams, extra credit papers or projects, or notebook re-dos.

Attendance is extremely important. Attendance at all film screenings, including the student films, is mandatory. Excessive tardiness will be counted as an absence. Absences will lower a student's final grade.

## **COURSE READING & REFERENCES**

The text for the class is *The Visual Story* by Bruce Block. The book is available at the USC Student bookstore, from online vendors and at local bookstores. The class is divided into topics that coincide with the chapters in the book.

Dozens of films are used as reference. *The Visual Story* lists the films used in class.

## **CLASS LECTURE SCHEDULE**

Listing of material for each lecture is approximate since discussion lengths will vary.

NOTE: This class meets as a double-session per day class.

LECTURE 1: Orientation and overview of the basic visual components. Basic class terms are defined. Space is introduced with an overview followed by the organization of space into four basic categories.

LECTURE 2: Definition of basic types of space continues. Discussion moves to aspect ratio and screen formats.

LECTURE 3: Discussion of surface divisions and open and closed space. The final assignments for the class (individual student notebook and group film) are given.

LECTURE 4: Visual structure. The relationships between visual and narrative structure, structural analysis and visual economy are discussed.

LECTURE 5: Visual structure continues. The Principle of Contrast & Affinity is discussed. Graphing, charting and visual change is discussed.

LECTURE 6: Visual structure completes. Line and shape discussion begins. Linear motif, basic shapes, perception of line, and methods of creating shapes are discussed.

LECTURE 7: Color. Color structure and systems are discussed to clear up and simplify an extremely misunderstood visual component.

LECTURE 8: Color continues with an explanation of color interaction, meaning, and control.

LECTURE 9: Tone & Light. Although tone is an aspect of color, tone also relates to directorial emphasis and exposure control. Tone and light are related to the gray scale.

LECTURE 10: Movement. Movement is defined in relation to the screen, the camera, a single object and then an object and the background. Fragmented and continuous structures of movement are discussed. Continuum of Movement is described.

LECTURE 11: Rhythm. Visual rhythm is discussed in stationary and moving objects, and editing.

LECTURE 12: Additional visual topics are discussed. Class purposes are summarized.

LECTURE 13: Screening & discussion of a feature length film.

LECTURE 14: Screen student's final films and discuss.

LECTURE 15: Screen student's final films and discuss.  
Student photographic notebooks are due.

### **STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

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 the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) 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 phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

### **STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.