

CTPR 566
USC SCA

THE PITCH

2 units

Faculty:

Gail Katz gail@gailkatz.com (310) 344-5727
Howard Rosenman bigzr@mac.com (646) 457-2572

SA:

Ben Monie benmonie@gmail.com (917) 628-3888

Fall 2011 Monday 6:30 pm – 9:30 pm Room SCB 104

Class Overview:

Learning the skill of presenting your ideas to buyers in a compelling and entertaining way is indispensable to success and survival in Hollywood. We will investigate what makes an idea pitchable, how to assess and effectively target the marketplace, and whether or not to wear flip-flops to the meeting (the answer is not as obvious as you think.) This is boot camp: you will be on the griddle pitching as often as time permits. We will bring in guest speakers to share their wisdom and war stories, and to hear your pitches. Some of the visitors will be friendly; some will be intimidating, just like real life. In addition to frequent short pitches, you will prepare two more fully developed pitches to be presented in class, one for a feature, one for a television series, as well as a fifteen minute professional-grade pitch, developed from a pitch worked on earlier in class, to be presented to us as your final. Pitches may be accompanied by one to three page written “leave behind” or whatever “show & tell” you feel is necessary to help sell your pitch. Hopefully all of this will make you better pitchers.

Class Rules:

Timely attendance is mandatory and failure to attend all classes may affect your grade. If you are going to miss class we want our SA to hear about it in advance. It is expected that you will be ready to pitch to the class at your scheduled time and that all written material will be handed in on time. If not, your grade will drop accordingly. Out of respect to your fellow students who are up in front of you pitching, no cell phones, iPhones, BlackBerrys, or iPads are to be in operation during class, and laptops are **only** for taking notes. Class may run late, depending on the number of students pitching. All students will be expected to remain for the duration, as will the instructors.

Outside Viewing:

A few times during the semester, you will be required to see a current feature release and pitch it to the class.

Outside Reading:

For one assignment you will be asked to find written source material on which to base a pitch.

Required Reading:

Adventures in the Screen Trade by William Goldman (Grand Central Publishing 1989)

Additional Suggested Readings:

The Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell (Princeton University Press 1972)

Save the Cat by Blake Snyder (Michael Wiese Productions 2005)

Screenplay by Syd Field (Delta 2005)

Story by Robert McKee (It Books 1997)

You'll Never Eat Lunch in This Town Again by Julia Phillips (Signet 1992)

Office Hours:

Both Gail Katz and Howard Rosenmen are available by appointment only. They can always be reached by email or, when absolutely necessary, cell phone.

Grading:

Your grade will be based on how well you develop the skill of pitching, including idea formulation, character and story development, and your performance. It breaks down roughly like this:

In-Class Cold Pitches & other brief assignments (7-9 of them) – 25%

Prepared Pitch #1 – Feature, along with written material – 20%

Prepared Pitch #2 – Television, along with written material – 20%

Final Pitch Presentation– 25%

Class Participation – 10%

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 us (or to SA) 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/>.

Class Schedule:

Class #1, August 22nd: Intro, overview and pitch openings. We will dive right in with a study of how to open a pitch and grab your audience.

Class #2, August 29th: Elements of the pitch. Preparing for a meeting: research and attire. The pitch itself: theme, characters, plot, and your brilliant evocative closing. Techniques and strategies. The importance of always having ideas that you are working on and that can be pitched on a moment's notice if you happen to get trapped in an elevator with Steven Spielberg.

September 5th—Labor Day—No Class.

Class #3, September 12th: The feature market. Possible guest expert. The role of pitching in the business, what they want, who hears pitches, who doesn't. Assignment will be given for Class #4. We will ask students to start thinking about their feature pitches, and to begin emailing us their ideas for help in direction and selection.

Class #4, September 19th: Public domain abbreviated feature pitch. All students do a four-minute pitch of a feature adaptation of a public domain novel, contemporized or period—preferably contemporized. Think *Emma* adapted as *Clueless*, or *Taming of the Shrew* as *Kiss Me Kate* or *Ten Things I Hate About You*. In the pitch students will identify the specific market for the film.

Class #5, September 26th: Half of students do seven-minute feature pitches, with comments by instructors, students and possibly visiting professional, with “leave behind” or “show & tell” at your discretion.

Class #6, October 3rd: Second half of students do the above.

Class #7, October 10th: TV drama: the architecture of the TV season, cable vs. network, assessing a network's needs. The nature of a TV pitch: story engines, what is a typical episode, what are the characters' long arcs. Tone. How much do you give at a pitch? What is the end of year one? What is the end of year five? How much of the pilot story do you tell? We will ask students to start thinking about their upcoming drama or comedy TV pitches and begin emailing us their ideas.

Class #8, October 17th: TV comedy: all of the above from class #7, plus multi camera vs. single camera. Students will declare whether they are going to present drama or comedy pitches for their next assignment.

Class #9, October 24th: Some students do seven-minute TV drama pitches, with “leave behind” or “show & tell” at your discretion.

October 31st—Halloween—No Class. **See a horror film and be prepared to terrify us with your pitch of the film next week.

Class #10, November 7th: Rest of students do seven-minute TV comedy pitches, with “leave behind” or “show & tell” at your discretion.

Class #11, November 14th: Children's & Family Media. A guest expert will discuss the marketplace's varied outlets and types of pitches.

Class #12, November 21st: Reality TV: How it works and the lay of the land. There will be a guest expert, and students will have an opportunity to give a prepared two-minute pitch. Additionally, **The New Digital Frontier:** Online content, web distribution, handheld mobisodes, etc.

Class #13, November 28th: A panel of agents will talk about pitching, how to pitch to them, and what they are looking for in both pitches and clients.

December 7th– December 14th: Final Pitches. Students will book individual meetings with faculty through SA. This is your fully developed professional pitch (up to fifteen minutes long) based on one of your previous feature or television pitches, along with new accompanying “leave behind” or “show & tell” at your discretion.