

PLAYWRITING 1 (THTR 365) Spring 2012 4 units GFS 216
Thurs 3 - 5:50 p.m. Jan 12 - April 26 2012 No class March 15 (Spring break)

Catalogue description: 365 Playwriting I (4, FaSp) Essential elements of playwriting through weekly assignments, students' initiative, occasional productions of scenes, and extensive classroom analysis.

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Office hours: Thurs 10 am - 1 pm; Wed 6 – 8 pm; Tues 1 - 4 pm
[Note: Office hours are BY APPOINTMENT; I share office space in MCC. To arrange an appointment, please contact me at least 24 hours in advance.]

Mauve takes offense at my having said, "I am an artist"--which I do not take back, because the word of course included the meaning: always seeking without absolutely finding. It is just the converse of saying, "I know it, I have found it." As far as I know that word means: "I am seeking, I am striving, I am in it with all my heart. — Vincent Van Gogh

Course Objectives

As a student in this workshop, you will experience the creative process firsthand at both the intuitive and technical level while being guided through the writing of a one-act play.

Playwriting 1 is designed to explore the art and craft of dramatic writing with a particular focus on process including: creative brainstorming, developing characters, generating stories, intentional use of language, plus analysis and revision. The Final Project of the course is a revised draft of a one-act play for the stage. Emphasis is placed on discovering and evolving your own unique, artistic voice, as well as experimenting with new modes of writing for theatre.

Development of the play is essential—as is development of the imagination. Each week discussion and writing exercises will accompany a workshop session in which each person presents ideas/scenes/pages for exploration and critique as a prelude to rewriting, expanding, and polishing.

An additional focus: We seek to examine current culture and trends in American theatre as part of an attempt to define and redefine American playwriting for this new century.

Required Texts

PLAYWRITING – BRIEF & BRILLIANT. Julie Jensen.
METAMORPHOSES. Mary Zimmerman.
TRESTLE AT POPE LICK CREEK. Naomi Wallace.
TREEFALL. Henry Murray.
CLOUD TECTONICS. Jose Rivera.
BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO. Rajid Joseph.
BECKY SHAW. Gina Gionfriddo.
THE DEATH OF A MINER. Paula Cizmar. (I'll provide scenes.)

Optional Texts

JERUSALEM. Jez Butterworth.

CLYBOURNE PARK. Bruce Norris.

TWO-HEADED. Julie Jensen.

9 PARTS OF DESIRE. Heather Raffo.

TWO SISTERS AND A PIANO. Nilo Cruz.

THE SINS OF SOR JUANA. Karen Zacarias.

STOP KISS. Diana Son.

THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE. Julia Cho.

Additional articles/essays will be provided via Blackboard and/or hard copies.

Additional Plays

The School of Theatre's Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each student in Playwriting 1 to read at least seven plays as part of the course. The plays listed under "Required Texts" fulfill this requirement. You are also encouraged to read additional plays from the "Recommended Reading" section at the end of the syllabus. The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer.

Grading

Components of the Grade

Your grade will be based on multiple components: completion of a writing journal (see below), the ongoing writing and revision of your one-act play, completion of the reading assignments and presentations re: the reading, quizzes, participation in class exercises and discussion, providing feedback for other students' works-in-progress, and completion of your Final Project.

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows:

Writing Journal (See below; used for midterm and final grade)	25 percent
Quizzes	10 percent
Reading & Presentations	10 percent
Ongoing Research, Writing, Revision, Analysis, Participation	25 percent
Final Project (revised draft of play) & Final Exam	30 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

Please bear in mind that you earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline.

Assignments are accepted only within one week of due date. After that, they are considered a missed assignment, which counts as zero.

The Writing Journal is your archive of sketches, research, ideas, and resources for current and future writing. It includes (but is not limited to) the following entries:

Writing exercises and all raw material generated in class (DATE ALL WRITING X's)

Found character play/monologue (please DATE and add to WJ)

Character bank/character recipes and character monologues (Please DATE and add to WJ)

Research related to Final Project play (Please DATE and add to WJ)

Sketches/reactions to reading assignments (DATE and add to WJ)

Impromptu Play Project (Please DATE this and add to WJ)

Plans for initiating (and eventually, revising) Final Project (Please DATE this and add to WJ)

NOTE: All Writing Journal entries must be DATED AND LABELED for portfolio review.

Your Final Project is a REVISED draft of your one-act play. The project will be graded on both artistic merit AND progress, i.e., growth from early exploratory work to final draft. Elements to

be assessed are: character development - 25 percent; language (distinct character voice; rhythm, pace, metaphor) – 25 percent; story/structure/theatricality – 25 percent; overall achievement (includes how well script works as a whole, plus professional appearance of script) – 25 percent.

Guide to Grades

USC defines grades as follows: A = work of excellent quality; B = work of good quality; C = work of fair quality for undergraduate credit and minimum passing for graduate credit; C- = failing grade for graduate credit; D- = work of minimum passing quality for undergraduate credit; F = failure; IN is given for incomplete work and *must be student-initiated after 12th week and is only awarded under exceptional circumstances*. The following scale is used:

96-100%=A 95-91%=A- 88-90%=B+ 85-87%=B 81-84%=B- 78-80%=C+
75-77%=C 71-74%=C- 67-70%=D+ 66-64%=D 61-63%=D- 60 and below=F

Note on Participation

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. This course is modeled along the lines of a professional, artistic workshop; thus, as a member of such a workshop, your participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your colleagues' work as well. Theatre is a highly collaborative, community-oriented medium and play development is a key part of the life of a playwright. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues' work. One unexcused absence is allowed. All other absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare the assigned work that is due and hand it in immediately upon return to the workshop.

PLEASE NOTE: If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from *your classmates*, NOT from me. Please keep in contact with your fellow writers and arrange to get their notes if you are absent. Please also consult Blackboard, where you will find resources and handouts related to the class. If you miss class, it may also be necessary to do independent research to make up for what you have missed. Again: When you miss a workshop, you must find a way to make up what you have missed ON YOUR OWN.

Extra Credit

If you desire extra credit, you may participate in a service learning project. Please let me know as early as possible in the semester, so that I can put you in touch with Brent Blair; he will acquaint you with the opportunities for service learning via his project N-TURN at USC.

Official Statement from School of Theatre on Trojan Integrity and Plagiarism

Dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the School of Theatre. Therefore, USC policies on academic integrity will be enforced in this course. Work suspected of containing plagiarized material (the unacknowledged or inappropriate use of another's ideas, wording, or images) will be verified for authenticity by the School of Theatre through internet services. I expect you to familiarize yourself with the academic integrity guidelines found in the current "Scampus."

(www.usc.edu/dept/publications/scampus; http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/appendix_a.p)

Disability Services

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday – Friday, 8:30 – 5:00. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776. (Please note: If a medical problem or disability arises during the course of the semester and academic accommodations are needed, the same procedure as detailed here must be followed.)

Communications

Each student is required to maintain a working e-mail account (USC accounts are available free of charge). Each student is required to check his/her e-mail on a regular basis, particularly the evening before class for any notices pertaining to class. My e-mail is noted at the top of this contract. Also, please note: This class is Blackboard-enabled; thus the syllabus and other course content can be found online.

Student Responsibilities

1. You are entering into a collaborative relationship with fellow writers and, thus, it is your responsibility to be available to your workshop colleagues for feedback, analysis, and support.
2. All workshop members must be treated with respect.
3. You are required to attend the workshop and to be on time. Tardiness is defined as being 15 minutes late or more. Excessive tardiness will affect your ongoing writing and participation grade. Only one (1) unexcused absence is allowed.
4. Other absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance).
5. All assignments, written and/or otherwise, must be prepared on time and turned in (or presented) on the deadline date. Late assignments will be marked down due to the missed deadline. Assignments not turned in within a week of deadline count as missed assignments (zero credit).
6. It is your responsibility—and SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY—to make up work you have missed; I will not be repeating lectures or class discussion; you will need to make arrangements to do independent research on whatever topics you have missed to keep up with the workshop. You will also need to make arrangements with your classmates to obtain notes and/or information re: what you missed. Do not request notes or information from me. Many materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. If you lose your syllabus or handouts, go to Blackboard.
7. Please check your e-mail regularly to see if there are any changes in class meeting place, etc. On rare occasions, it becomes necessary to schedule a new location for class meeting. If I am unable to provide you with this information in the preceding class, I will send you the information via e-mail.
8. Written work must be typed, and legible copies must be provided for all workshop participants. In an effort to be environmentally friendly, providing a copy to all workshop members may be accomplished by **projecting your document onto the screen in the classroom from your computer**. Instruction on how to do this will be provided and we will create a schedule of volunteer scribes to assist in this area, eliminating the need for paper. The Final Project must be printed, however.
9. Please remember: A grade is not given, it is earned.
10. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail or text message at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee I will receive your message with sufficient time to make arrangements to meet with you. (Contact information is on the first page of the syllabus.)

SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week One 1/12/12

Introduction: What Makes a Play a Play?

Writing X: Interviews/Analysis to Mythmaking.

Assignments for week two:

Write a 2-3 page “found character” monologue.

Read selected scenes from *Metamorphoses* and *Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*. Prepare to discuss. (Discuss also in Writing Journal.) Read *Playwriting – Brief & Brilliant*, 1st half.

Week Two 1/19/12

Sources of Inspiration – Myth, Ephemera, True Life, Brainstorms, and More

Writing X: Assembling/Grafting/Evolving.

Workshop: Present the found character pieces.

Read aloud: Selected scenes from *Metamorphoses*, *Trestle*, *Treefall*, and *Cloud Tectonics*. (BRING YOUR BOOKS TO CLASS!)

Assignments for week three:

Begin creating a character bank containing six or more characters; your character bank should include at least one character derived from **myth**, one character from **current events (research)**; one character from **historical events (research)**, and one character totally from your **imagination** who can humanize a theme; write monologues for each of these designated characters for your Writing Journal (WJ).

Bring in three sources of inspiration (objects, other writing, pictures, research, etc.)

Read the rest of *Playwriting – Brief and Brilliant*, 2nd half. Prepare to discuss.

HEADS UP: Begin a search (and research) for Final Project play. (Research and ideas to be presented week four.)

Week Three 1/26/12

Characters (And Themes) To Die For—Or At Least Remember.

Writing X: Fatal Flaws + Values and Themes.

Workshop: Present character banks and monologues; brainstorm potential conflicts for these characters. Present sources of inspiration.

Discuss *Playwriting –Brief and Brilliant*.

Read aloud: Scenes from *Treefall* and *Cloud Tectonics*.

Assignment for week four:

Using ideas from character bank, continue search/research on potential Final Project play.

Read remainder of *Metamorphoses*, *Trestle*.

Also: Experiment. Write a scene—something exploratory.

Week Four 2/2/12

Rituals of Antiquity – Honoring the Origins of Theatre in Present Day Plays.

Writing X: Ritual monologues + ritual plays.

Workshop: Present the exploratory scenes. Present ideas and research for Final Project play.

Assignment for week five:

Read remainder of *Treefall* and *Cloud Tectonics*.

Prepare for panel discussions on all four plays assigned to date: *Metamorphoses*, *Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Treefall*, and *Cloud Tectonics*. Group will break into two panels: World in Crisis (week 5) and Healing Power of Art (week 6).

Create a presentation that shows your research, sources of inspiration, selected ritual, and ideas for your Final Project play.

Write another exploratory scene: 2 - 4 pages.

Week Five 2/9/12

Page to Stage: Turning Research/Ideas/Rituals into Action, Conflict, Tension.

Writing X: Impromptu Play—6 Items of Information.

Present: Panel discussion by Panel 1 on World in Crisis.

Present: Research, inspirations, ritual, etc. for Final Project play.

Workshop: Exploratory scenes.

Assignment for week six:

Prepare a character-voice-exploration monologue for the main character of your play. Be ready to present orally plus include it as an entry for your WJ.

Continue research.

Reminder: Panel 2, Healing Power of Art, will do discussion week 6.

Prepare for all-workshop story conference.

Week Six 2/16/12

The Sensory World of the Play.

Writing X: Visualization/Combining Research and Meditation.

Present: Panel discussion by Panel 2 on Healing Power of Art.

Workshop: Present impromptu plays from Wrtng X and character-voice exploration monologues.

Story conference: Discuss how to focus your research, resources, characters, and theatrical elements to begin Final Project play.

Assignment for week seven:

Polish “Impromptu Play.”

Read the remainder of *Becky Shaw*, *Bengal Tiger*, and *Death of a Miner*. Write response to plays in your journal.

Write experimental scene (2 – 4 pages). Note: This may be the first scene of your Final Project play—or a later scene. It’s not necessary that you write in order, at this point.

(Hint: Look at writing X and WJ entries for possible raw material.)

Week Seven 2/23/12

Believe What They Say? Or What They Do? An Exploration of Dialogue and Subtext, Behavior and Action.

Writing X: Subtext/Contradictions.

Workshop: Present experimental scenes (2-4 pages) from Final Project plays.

Assignment for week eight:

Write a scene from your Final Project play (2-4) pages.

Reminder: Next week: QUIZ + turn in WRITING JOURNAL for midterm assessment.

Week Eight 3/1/12

The Worst-Case Scenario: Pushing Your Character to the Edge.

Writing X: Empathy/Nightmare.

Workshop: Readings/discussions of Final Project plans/scenes.

QUIZ: Brief essay test involving *Playwriting-Brief and Brilliant* and the plays we've read: *Trestle*, *Metamorphoses*, *Treefall*, *Cloud Tectonics*, *Becky Shaw*, and *Bengal Tiger*.

Compare and contrast. You may use your books to quote from the plays.

TURN – IN: WRITING JOURNALS for midterm evaluation and pages written so far for your Final Project play.

Assignment for week nine:

Write a RAW DRAFT of your Final Project play.

Week Nine 3/8/12

The Playwright's Paint—Language.

Read aloud: Poems to explore language, rhythm, imagery, sound, epiphany.

Workshop: Present scenes, Final Project plans.

TURN IN raw draft of your entire play.

Assignment for week ten:

Keep working on your play.

SPRING BREAK -- NO CLASS 3/15/12

Week Ten 3/22/12

But Is It Theatrical? Exploration of visuals, movement, and other devices so critical to live performance. Plus: Stage directions—techniques and tricks.

Writing X: Scene w/out Dialogue.

Workshop: Present newly written scenes.

Discuss: The feedback on raw draft of your Final Project play. Questions and answers; brainstorming.

Assignment for week eleven:

Assess the raw material in your WJ. Prepare a revised plan for your Final Project; discuss. Keep working on your play; do revisions as needed. Due: Week eleven.

Week Eleven 3/29/12

Exploration of Rewrite Tools: Traditional and Non-, Mechanical and Non-, Left-brain and Right-brain.

Workshop: Present revised scenes and discuss revision plans.

Assignment for remaining weeks: Keep working on your play; revise as needed.

Week Twelve 4/5/12

Getting Ready: Focusing the Work.

Workshop: Present workshop members' scenes.

(Note: In-class presentations of full scripts will be scheduled for the last weeks of class; be ready to sign up for a particular week.)

Assignment: Continue to write and revise FP plays.

Week Thirteen 4/12/12

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts. (Schedule TBA)

Assignment: Keep revising.

Week Fourteen 4/19/12

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts. (Schedule TBA)

Assignment: Keep revising.

Week Fifteen 4/26/12

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts. (Schedule TBA)

End Game: Last Look Q&As. Where to go next—how to submit a script.

Turn in: Your Final Project play.

FINAL EXAM: Feedback & Critique of Scripts TUES MAY 8 2 – 4 pm

REMINDER: Use Blackboard as a resource. Class materials, information, handouts, additional essays, source materials, etc., are posted on the class site on Blackboard.

We all have two heads and two memories. A head of clay, which will turn to dust; and another, forever invulnerable to the gnawings of time and of passion. One memory that death kills, a compass that expires with the journey, and another memory, the collective memory, which will live as long as the human adventure in the world lives. —Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Faces and Masks*

FORMAT

Final Project plays must be properly formatted and must have a cover page plus a character page, which includes: a list of characters, the time and place, a playwright's note (optional—although this is your chance to speak about the style and world of your play).

When formatting your script, the most important point to consider is readability. The Dramatists Guild has a recommended standard professional format (example follows on next page), however you may do slight variations on the professional standard. I don't require any one in particular; however the following format is **prohibited**. Again:

DO NOT use the following:

Max: Did you hear from him yet?

Pat: He'll call. Give him time.

The above format is too cramped, is difficult for actors, directors, literary managers, and producers to read. This format is accepted generally only in PUBLISHED scripts (which are cramped to save space and money; plus they include other anomalies because they are transcriptions of the stage manager's prompt book from the original production).

Though some playwrights play with the formatting when they are writing plays that are more poetic or nontraditional, the following format is considered the industry standard:

Stage directions—are indented, single-spaced, and placed in parentheses.
Double space before character name. Use 12-point Courier.

Character name—is capitalized and centered. Single space between character name and dialogue. 12-point Courier.

Dialogue—single-spaced and typed on a full line, with reasonable margins.
Double space before next character name. 12-point Courier.

Line readings—are discouraged; but if you use them, they should be centered like character name and placed in parentheses.

The typed script, then, using this format style, looks something like this:

(Stage directions here.)

CHARACTER NAME

Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue. In 12-point Courier.

CHARACTER NAME

Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue.

Note how this looks different from a screenplay in that the dialogue extends out to the left margin rather than being clustered under the character name.

A sample from a script follows:

(Len takes another drink, hands Celia the bottle. She drinks and hands it back.)

LEN

Good ole Bobby. Here's to you, B.C. Wherever you are.

(Len finishes off the liquor.)

This place is a pit.

CELIA

It's old. Everyone's old.

LEN

Look at that. Lawns shaved within an inch of their life. Stunted little bushes, one here, one there, no flow to the branches, just regimented rows of ugly little shrubs.

CELIA

Yep. Cracked driveways. Greasy bricks.

LEN

Everything's the color of rust.

CELIA

Rust and motor oil.

LEN

I'm taking you out of here, Celia.

CELIA

Forget it. I'm not leaving.

LEN

Today. Now. Tonight.

(He grabs her; she throws his hand off her arm. He staggers.)

Damn, I'm so drunk.

***(If you insist on line readings, they should look like this:)*

CELIA

(coolly determined)

Forget it. I'm not leaving.

Recommended Reading: A Playwright's Bibliography

(In addition to the required reading, here are some books every writer should read at some point during his/her writing career. For your oral presentation, pick a play from the list below.)

On writing

THE WRITING LIFE, Annie Dillard
AN ANATOMY OF DRAMA, Martin Esslin.
ON BECOMING A NOVELIST and THE ART OF FICTION, John Gardner
WRITING IN RESTAURANTS and THREE USES OF THE KNIFE, David Mamet
ONE WRITER'S BEGINNINGS, Eudora Welty
ON WRITING WELL, William Zinsser.
LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET, Rainer Maria Rilke
ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL, E.M. Forster
MAKING A LITERARY LIFE. Carolyn See
SIX MEMOS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM. Italo Calvino.

On playwriting craft

THE ART OF DRAMATIC WRITING, Lajos Egri (classic text; dated, but a helpful resource)

The submission/competition/grants info bible:

DRAMATISTS SOURCEBOOK, published yearly by TCG

Plays (an eclectic collection)

OEDIPUS EL REY; and BITTER HOMES AND GARDENS, Luis Alfaro
THIN AIR: TALES FROM A REVOLUTION, Lynne Alvarez
CLOUD NINE; and FEN, Caryl Churchill
SEVEN, a theatrical documentary by Paula Cizmar, Carol K. Mack, Ruth Margraff, Anna Deavere Smith et al.
TALES OF THE LOST FORMICANS, Connie Congdon
THE SAINT PLAYS, Erik Ehn
BACK OF THE THROAT. Youssef El Guindi
FEFU AND HER FRIENDS, Maria Irene Fornes
DANCING AT LUGHNASA, Brian Friel
PYRENEES, David Grieg
SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION, John Guare
TEA and KOKORO (TRUE HEART), Velina Hasu Houston
YELLOW FACE, David Henry Hwang.
36 VIEWS, Naomi Iizuka
LAST LISTS OF MY MAD MOTHER and TWO HEADED, Julie Jensen
ANGELS IN AMERICA, Tony Kushner
FLOYD COLLINS (musical), book by Tina Landau; music & lyrics by Adam Guettel
YELLOWMAN, Dael Orlandersmith
MARISOL, Jose Rivera
CLEVELAND RAINING, Sung J. Rno
THE CLEAN HOUSE, Sarah Ruhl
SPRING AWAKENING: A NEW MUSICAL by Steven Sater (based on play by Wedekind)
DOUBT, John Patrick Shanley
CURSE OF THE STARVING CLASS, Sam Shepard
BALTIMORE WALTZ; HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE, Paula Vogel
FEVER CHART, Naomi Wallace
OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD, Timberlake Wertenbakker
JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE; and FENCES, August Wilson
ST. LUCY'S EYES, Bridgette Wimberly
THE MOUNDBUILDERS; BALM IN GILEAD; and BOOK OF DAYS, Lanford Wilson
PORCELAIN; and A LANGUAGE OF THEIR OWN, Chay Yew.