

School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
CTWR 533b: Writing The Feature Script
4.0 Units
Pre-Reqs: CTWR 533a

Instructor: Sean Hood
Class Schedule: 4:00-6:50pm Wednesday
Class Room: SCB 207
Office Hours: By appointment – preferably Wednesday before class.
Email Address: seanhhood@gmail.com

Course Objective:

The objective of this course is to learn the professional craft of rewriting, to practice the craft by generating, discussing and receiving notes for revision, and to apply the craft by completing a rewrite of an original screenplay.

Course Description

From the first draft to the final day of shooting, professional screenwriters face a process of continual reevaluation, ongoing critique and shifting circumstances. They spend most of their time embroiled in rewrites. This course is designed to give students the tools to approach this process in a professional way.

From a purely artistic perspective, rewriting one's own material is the most challenging, painful and ultimately rewarding discipline a writer (or filmmaker) ever faces. Said John Irving, "The most important and essential element of writing is rewriting." This course is also designed help the students face this challenge with confidence and creativity.

The class will lead students step-by-step through the revision of an original feature script, moving from broad discussions of the author's original intent, to a more detailed "game plan" for the rewrite, and finally to the most specific areas of scene and dialogue. Each aspect of the screenplay will be analyzed and reconsidered, with emphasis on story and character fundamentals.

This course will not only help students to improve their scripts, it will allow them to practice skills of analysis, discussion and presentation they will need in future projects throughout their professional careers. With this in mind, students will be expected to participate in all discussions and to help their fellow students develop their outlines and screenplays.

Ultimately, each student is required to complete an extensive rewrite (or rewrites) by the end of the semester. A dialogue polish does **not** constitute an extensive rewrite. Since each screenplay offers unique challenges for each writer, the instructor will take into account the progress of each student on an individual basis.

Course Reading:

Students will be required to read each other's original screenplays as well as each other's ongoing revisions. Because of sheer volume of this material as well as the time and care taken in its analysis, no other course reading will be assigned.

However, I will recommend books, articles, and feature screenplays that pertain to the class or to individual student work. This reading will be entirely optional.

Assignments:

The writing assignments will be due by **midnight Monday** previous to each class. This is a firm deadline and the late delivery of assignments will impact your grade for the course. If you finish the work earlier, please send it in. All written assignments will be uploaded to the Dropbox folder.

You'll be expected to come to class with written notes on your colleagues' pages. These written notes will be then uploaded to the Dropbox folder after class.

Grading Criteria:

Grading will depend on the quality and improvement of student's written work and in-class presentations, as well as the student's involvement in the class discussions.

The course aims to prepare students to be working professionals. With that in mind, grading will reflect the standards and expectations students can expect to encounter in the "real world." So, all assignments must be submitted **on time**. Students must attend all classes, arriving **on time**. Students who cannot make a class or complete an assignment must contact the professor via email **before** they miss a class or fail to complete an assignment.

When judging a screenwriter's work, industry professionals often ask if a writer can "deliver." Professional work is "delivered" on-time, proofread, and carefully thought out. Slipshod or hurried work is rarely tolerated. So in determining a final grade, **hard work and professionalism** will be as important as originality and skill.

Likewise, working as a professional requires the skills of collaboration and communication. So as they would be in any story meeting in the entertainment industry, students are expected to be involved in each and every discussion. Failing to read and engage with other students' material will affect the students' final grades.

Specific areas that will be considered in determining a final grade are:

- Classroom Participation – 5%
- Summary of Notes – 5%
- Written Feedback (Notes) – 10%
- Treatment/Beat Sheet – 10%
- Bi-Weekly Revised Pages – (10% each) 40%
- Final rewritten and polished screenplay – 30%

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%

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.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

As the class is discussion based, cell phones should be turned off. You may use your laptop when giving and receiving notes, but for those reasons only.

Class Schedule

Week 1 – Wednesday, August 26

- Lecture - Overview of Class
- Introductions.
- Review of Syllabus.
- Discussion of class goals.
- Giving and receiving professional feedback.
- Screenplay terminology.
- Splitting the class into two Groups.

Assignment Due – Monday, August 31, Midnight

- Reread your own script from beginning to end.
 - Answer the Rewrite Questionnaire, 1-2 pages.
 - Read GROUP A scripts (for class discussion.)
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Week 2 – Wednesday, September 2

- Lecture: Organizing feedback/notes into a Summary of Feedback.
- Critique and discussion of GROUP A screenplays.
- All deliver 1-2 pages of written notes on screenplays written by GROUP A.

Assignment Due – Monday, September 7, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers a 1-2 page Summary of Feedback
 - Read GROUP B scripts (for class discussion.)
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Week 3 – Wednesday, September 9

- Lecture: How to create a Treatment or Beat Sheet outlining the rewrite.
- Critique and discussion of GROUP B screenplays.
- All deliver 1-2 pages of written notes on screenplays written by GROUP B.
- Each student in GROUP A makes an **Appointment With The Professor** for the next week.

Assignment Due – Monday, September 14, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers a 1-2 page Summary of Feedback
 - GROUP A delivers a 2-3 page Beat Sheet or Treatment detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.
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Week 4 - Wednesday, September 16

- Lecture: Constructing a Game Plan. Using index cards, character trees and other tools to create a map of primary characters, relationships, and arcs.
- Discussion of Group A's Beat Sheets or Treatments.
- Each student in GROUP B makes an Appointment With The Professor for the next week.

Assignment Due – Monday, September 21, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers a 2-3 page Beat Sheet or Treatment detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.
 - GROUP A begins writing.
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Week 5 – Wednesday, September 23

- Lecture: Excavating and Revising Structure.
- Discussion of Group B's Beat Sheets or Treatments.

Assignment Due – Monday, September 28, Midnight

- GROUP B begins writing.
 - GROUP A delivers revised Sequences One and Two (The First Act)
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Week 6 - Wednesday, September 30

- Lecture: Fleshing Out and Revising Character
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Monday, October 5, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences One and Two (The First Act)
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Week 7 - Wednesday, October 7

- Lecture: Subplots and supporting characters.
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Monday, October 12, Midnight

GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Three and Four (up to the Midpoint)

Week 8 - Wednesday, October 14

- Lecture: Revising the Scene
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Monday, October 19, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Three and Four (up to the Midpoint)
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Week 9 - Wednesday, October 21

- Lecture: Theme, audience “satisfaction,” resolution of tensions in The Third Act.
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Monday, October 26, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Five and Six (Complete Second Act)
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Week 10 - Wednesday, October 28

- Lecture: “Punching Up” emotions.
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Monday, November 2, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Five and Six (Complete Second Act)
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Week 11 - Wednesday, November 4

- Lecture: Surgical Revisions. Troubleshooting.
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Monday, November 9, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Seven and Eight (The Third Act)
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Week 12 - Wednesday, November 11

- Lecture: TBD
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Monday, November 16, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Seven and Eight (The Third Act)

Week 13– Wednesday, November 18

- Lecture: Polishing and final touches.
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Thanksgiving – Wednesday , November 25 – 29

Assignment Due – Monday, November 30, Midnight

- If behind, finish Third Act.
- Deliver 1 page game plan for the polish.
- Deliver 2-4 polished sequences with revision marks (*)

Week 14 – Wednesday, December 2

- Lecture: TBD
- Discuss Revised Pages, and game-plans for the polish.

Week 15 – Wednesday, December 9 – Optional Class Lunch

- Final notes and encouragement. Discussions about transitioning from film school to professional life.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE – Monday, December 14, Midnight

Students who are late with their work will get an **entire letter drop** for each day they are late. (For example: A- to B-)

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/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>, 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 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> 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.