

SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

Writing Division

CTWR 529: Intermediate Screenwriting

Section: 19266D

Syllabus, Spring 2016

GENERAL INFORMATION

Instructor: Vincent Robert
Contact Info: 310.994.4236 (cell)
scriptsystem@gmail.com (email)
Class Schedule: Wednesday, 7:00 PM – 10:00 PM
Class Location: SCA 216
Office Hours: Tuesdays from 6:00 pm to 6:45 pm **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.**
Wednesdays from 6:00 pm to 6:45 pm **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.**

Please text, call or email to make an appointment at least 2 days ahead and indicate "APPOINTMENT REQUEST" in the subject line. Requests will be answered at earliest possible convenience whenever Instructor is in production.

I'm also available for email questions or phone conferences.

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

This intermediate screenwriting course will build and expand on your previous classes and sharpen your storytelling craft through practical writing experience in the short-film form, leading to an extensive introduction to shaping a feature film story.

By the end of this class, you will have completed:

- One complete and revised narrative short-film screenplay, 8-10 pages (by team)
- One complete and revised narrative short-film screenplay, 8-10 pages (solo).
- One complete revised Treatment (8-10 pages) for an original narrative feature film. This will be turned the last week of class and **will count as the Final** for this course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course strives to do what all good writing courses do -- help you to see clearly and to find your own voice as writers.

You will be encouraged to use your awareness of your own experiences to make your stories unique and personal. To discover the stories only you can tell, not the stories you think Hollywood wants you to write.

Being authentic means writing from your passion. In short: why are you writing this film? What do you want us to feel? Or learn? What is this story's reason for being, its epiphany for either the character or the audience?

This is a workshop course, where every student participates weekly both by presenting material developed for his/her story and by analyzing and giving constructive feedback on all other students' presented material. Giving and receiving feedback is not only useful to your classmates, but crucial to your own development as professional storytellers. It's uncanny how often a student will recognize in someone else's work the very problems he or she is struggling with in their own scripts. Because feedback and participation are a requirement of this course, they will be graded.

Our time will be divided between lectures, discussions, watching films/clips and in-class table read of the student's written pages. The emphasis will be on learning:

- The best ways to present original ideas both as verbal pitches and as written outlines
- How to communicate emotions and develop congruent and memorable characters
- What makes a story compelling and not simply a slice of life
- How the structure grows out of the drive and development of the characters, especially the protagonist
- How goal-driven conflict, dramatic progression and cause-and-effect relationship are needed to develop and sustain a story
- How "flirts with change" make the eventual character transformation believable
- How to tell a story using the full palette of filmic expression. The screenwriter uses words but writes images

Our ultimate goal is to develop in you the tools of the craft and give voice to your unique imagination and perspective to create compelling characters and stories for the screen.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

(available online or at the University Bookstore, Larry Edmunds, Samuel French, Hollywood Stationers, Amazon.com and other specialized bookstores)

David Howard & Edward Mabley, *THE TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING* (St-Martin's Press)

Dara Marks, *INSIDE STORY* (Three Mountain Press)

Margaret Mehring, *THE SCREENPLAY: a blending of film form and film content* (Focal Press). OUT OF PRINT BUT EXCELLENT IF YOU CAN FIND IT.

Jean-Paul Ouellette, *THE NEW ELEMENTS OF STANDARD SCREENPLAY FORMAT* (Yankee Classic Pictures).

And as many professional screenplays as you can! (available at the cinema library)

GRADING CRITERIA

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and growth through the semester, as well as the student's demonstration of his or her achievement of the course's objectives, as reflected in the following assignments or ones substituted in their place:

Pitch 1 (Project 1)	05%
Pitch 2 (Project 1)	05%
Character Profile (Project 1)	05%
Step Outline (Project 1)	05%
Draft 1 (Project 1)	05%
Draft 2 (Project 1)	10%
Pitch (Project 2)	05%
Character Profile (Project 2)	05%
Step Outline (Project 2)	05%
Draft 1 (Project 2)	05%
Draft 2 (Project 2)	10%
Pitch (Feature)	05%
Character Profile (Feature)	05%
Synopsis (Feature)	05%
Step Outline (Project 2)	10%
Participation in class, critiques, etc...:	10%

Assignments must be turned in by the deadline and in the delivery manner indicated in the Class Schedule.

MID TERM GRADES will be available by Late February / Early March.

There will be no final exam. **If you turn in all your work, if that work is on time, if it is competent, if you read the other students' works and consistently add to our class discussions, then you will earn no less than a "B".** Please refer to the School's standardized definition of grades. In summary:

- A: 100% to 94% -- **Outstanding** fulfillment of course requirements
- A-: 93% to 90% -- **Excellent** fulfillment of course requirements
- B+: 89% to 87% -- **Above-average** fulfillment of course requirements
- B: 86% to 83% -- **Good** fulfillment of course requirements
- B-: 82%-80% -- **Average** fulfillment of course requirements
- C+: 79% to 77% -- Work of fair quality
- C: 76% to 73% -- Opportunity for improvement in demonstrating "ownership" of concepts, in meeting deadlines, in participation.
- C-: 72% to 70%
- D+: 69% to 67%
- D: 66% to 63%
- D-: 62% to 60%
- F: 59% to 0% -- Failure to meet the minimum course requirements
- Incomplete: assigned only when work is not completed because of documented illness or other "emergency" **occurring after the 12th week** of the semester.

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.

Grades in CNTV 529 should be viewed as feedback to indicate areas that need greater effort towards understanding and manipulating the objectives. (Hopefully, each student is enrolled in 529 to achieve the above-stated objectives as well as to achieve good grades. However, as the objectives are achieved the grades will reflect that achievement.).

WRITING DIVISION ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class. Regular and punctual attendance is mandatory because of the workshop element of this class. Roll call will be taken at the beginning of 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. 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.

Excessive absences, excused or unexcused, will be cause to fail for the semester

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late assignments will be graded down each day late. 1 day an A becomes an A- , more than 3 days late is considered a 0 and you will fail the course. Please plan your time accordingly during the semester. You are expected to show the assignments you are working on each week for class feedback. You must turn in the final draft of the screenplay which you wrote during this course.

MISSING AN ASSIGNMENT, INCOMPLETES

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

PRESENTATION

As you are hoping to enter the film industry as professional writers, I expect your work to be prepared in a professional manner. Screenplay formatting errors, typos, bad spelling or grammar and overall sloppiness are NOT ACCEPTABLE.

All materials MUST be typed and emailed or printed.

Name every document you email the group as follows:

YourFirstName_Assignment.Format

Ex: Vincent_ScBreakdown.doc, or Vincent_ScriptDraft1.pdf

Also:

Save and send all your work as PDF files.

When emailing a script. **NUMBER YOUR SCENES** before saving it as a PDF.

Put your **name** and **title** on the **FRONT or FIRST PAGE** of your material.

Refer to the SCHEDULE for due dates of assignments.

LAPTOP / TABLET / CELL PHONE POLICY

The use of technology to take notes or read each other's work is permitted in this class. Any use of a device that detracts from the class (such as surfing the Web for non class-related purposes, messaging or emailing, etc..., or doing work for other classes) will result in the loss of technology privileges for the student.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Please note that all dates and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

Unless otherwise modified by the Professor, all assignments are DUE on the day and time indicated here. IF YOU DON'T MEET THE DEADLINE, YOUR ASSIGNMENT MAY NOT GET READ AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A FAILING GRADE FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT. We also may not get to your assignment during the class.

BE AWARE THAT SOME ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE THE TUESDAY MORNING BEFORE CLASS. Those are indicated as such on the following schedule. It is your responsibility to check this schedule regularly to stay on track.

IMPORTANT NOTE: always bring a printed or digital copy of everyone's scenes to class, as you may be called upon to participate in a cold reading of certain passages. Nothing drives a point home to a writer like hearing his / her words read back aloud!

SESSION #1:

DATE: 1/13

OBJECTIVE: Overview of the class, syllabus & schedule. Divide into teams

CONTENT: Overview of the class, syllabus & schedule
Ideation: How to develop ideas

- The "What If?" game
- Who is this story about? (Protagonist)
- What is this story about? (central conflict/goal)
 - How is this compelling and not just a slice of life?
- Where/when does this story take place? (setting/world)
- What is the tone / genre of the story?

EXERCISE: Watch & discuss excerpts from "Vertigo"

ASSIGNMENT: Each team prepares 2 pitches for potential 1st short film project. Keep each pitch below 5 minutes.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 1/20 (next class)

SESSION #2:

DATE: 1/20

CONTENT: Each member of the team pitches one of the potential storylines for 1st short film project. Keep the pitch under 5 minutes. Feedback.

Lecture: Character, voice, rhythm, POV

EXERCISE: Building a character together from a headline (time permitting)

ASSIGNMENT: Based on feedback, choose the story you want to develop as Project 1. Write a CHARACTER PROFILE of the Protagonist, presented as a monologue in his/her own voice.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 1/27 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud.

SESSION #3:

DATE: 1/27

CONTENT: Character profiles feedback

Lecture: Story structure

EXERCISE: Structuring a story together from a headline (time permitting)

ASSIGNMENT: As a team, write BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE of your story. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Outline: Tuesday, 2/2, 10:00 am

TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**

DEADLINE: For your notes on others' Outline: Wednesday, 2/3 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' Outline to class.

SESSION #4:

- DATE: 2/3
- CONTENT: Feedback on the Outlines
- Lecture: Scene Structure
- EXERCISE: Structuring a scene together from a headline (time permitting)
- ASSIGNMENT: As a team, write the FIRST DRAFT of your Project 1 screenplay (8-10 pages). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.
- DEADLINE: For your own First Draft: Tuesday, 2/9, 10:00 am
- TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**
- DEADLINE: For your notes on others' First Drafts: Wednesday, 2/10 (next class)
- TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' First Drafts to class.

SESSION #5:

- DATE: 2/10
- CONTENT: Feedback on the First Drafts
- Visualization: How to tell a story with pictures
- Planting and Payoff
 - Location, props, costumes, atmosphere
 - Correlative, feelings, motivation
- EXERCISE: Watch & discuss excerpts from "Wall•E"
- ASSIGNMENT: As a team, write the FINAL DRAFT of Project 1 script (8-10 pages). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.
- DEADLINE: For your own Final Draft: Tuesday, 2/16, 10:00 am
- TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**
- DEADLINE: For your notes: Wednesday, 2/17 (next class)
- TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' Final Draft to class.

SESSION #6:

DATE: 2/17

CONTENT: Feedback on the Final Drafts of Project 1

Lecture: Writing dialogue

EXERCISE: Watch & discuss excerpts from “Inglourious Basterds”

ASSIGNMENT: Prepares a pitch for your solo 2nd short film project. Keep each pitch below 5 minutes.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 2/24 (next class)

SESSION #7:

DATE: 2/24

CONTENT: Feedback on pitches for 2nd short film project

EXERCISE: Screening & discussion of 2 short films

ASSIGNMENT: Write a CHARACTER PROFILE of your Protagonist, presented as a monologue in his/her own voice.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 3/2 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud.

SESSION #8:

- DATE: 3/2
- CONTENT: Feedback on Character profiles
- EXERCISE: Watch & discuss excerpts from "Wag The Dog"
- ASSIGNMENT: Write BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE of your story. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work for next class.
- DEADLINE: For your own Outline: Tuesday, 3/8, 10:00 am
- TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**
- DEADLINE: For your notes on others' Outline: Wednesday, 3/9 (next class)
- TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' Outline to class.

SESSION #9:

- DATE: 3/9
- CONTENT: Feedback on Outlines
- ASSIGNMENT: Write the FIRST DRAFT of your Project 2 screenplay (8-10 pages). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.
- DEADLINE: For your own First Draft: Tuesday, 3/22, 10:00 am
- TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**
- DEADLINE: For your notes on others' First Drafts: Wednesday, 3/23 (next class)
- TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' First Drafts to class.
- NOTE: No class next Wednesday 3/16 (Spring Break).
Next class: Wednesday 3/23**

SESSION #10:

DATE: 3/23

CONTENT: Feedback on First Drafts

ASSIGNMENT: Write the FINAL DRAFT of Project 2 script (8-10 pages). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Final Draft: Tuesday, 3/29, 10:00 amTURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**DEADLINE: For your notes: Wednesday, 3/30 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' Final Draft to class.

SESSION #11:

DATE: 3/30

CONTENT: Feedback on Final Drafts of Project 2

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare a PITCH of your feature-length script. Keep the pitch under 5 minutes. Include your take on why the idea is important to you and why it should be compelling to an audience.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 4/6 (next class)

SESSION #12:

DATE: 4/6

CONTENT: Feedback on Feature pitches

ASSIGNMENT: Write a CHARACTER PROFILE of the Protagonist, presented as a monologue in his/her own voice.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 4/13 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud.

SESSION #13:

DATE: 4/13

CONTENT: Feedback on Character profiles

ASSIGNMENT: Write a 3-5 pages SYNOPSIS of your feature screenplay. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Synopsis: Tuesday, 4/19, 10:00 amTURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**DEADLINE: For your notes: Wednesday, 4/20 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #14:

DATE: 4/20

CONTENT: Synopsis feedback.

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare a 3-5 pages BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE for your feature film idea.

Expand in particular the grabber, Inciting Incident, major turning points at the end of acts 1 & 2, the Mid Plot Point and the climax.

Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Outline: Tuesday, 4/26, 10:00 amTURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**DEADLINE: For your notes: Wednesday, 4/27 (last class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #15:

DATE: 4/27

CONTENT: Outline Feedback. Recap of major concepts. Q&A.

ASSIGNMENT: Enjoy the Summer!

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 this letter is delivered to the Professor as early in the semester as possible.

DSP is located at 3601 Watt Way, Grace Ford Salvatori Hall, 120 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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, (www.usc.edu/scampus or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

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/>. Information on intellectual property at USC is available at: <http://usc.edu/academe/acsen/issues/ipr/index.html>

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS/COURSE CONTINUITY IN A CRISIS

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

Please activate your course in Blackboard with access to the course syllabus. Whether or not you use Blackboard regularly, these preparations will be crucial in an emergency. USC's Blackboard learning management system and support information is available at blackboard.usc.edu.

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.