

**School of Cinematic Arts  
Writing Division  
CTWR 206a: Writing the Screenplay 19157D  
Fall 2016      4 Units**

Instructor: Craig Sabin  
Class Schedule: Fridays/1-3:50 pm  
Class Location: SCA 361  
Office Hours: Available by appointment  
Contact Information: e-mail robertcraigsabin@gmail.com

**Course Objective:**

This class will focus on the fundamentals of writing a feature, with emphasis on three-act structure, character development, visual storytelling, world building and theme, giving you all the elements you'll need to create a detailed treatment and an impactful screenplay. At the course's end, you should have a deeper understanding of how story elements work, and how you can use them to more effectively and powerfully communicate your truth, in preparation for 206b, writing the actual screenplay.

**Course Description:**

We'll review the function of three act structure and explore the relationship between screenplay elements such as Main Character, Goal, Inner Flaw, Theme, Conflict, Transformation and Resolution. We'll develop a biographical essay for your feature's Main Character, as well as an 8-part story outline and detailed treatment. Finally, we will break ground on your script, creating the first act, establishing the world, genre and tone. As we develop your feature, we will also hone your writing skills with writing exercises.

In addition to writing, students will be expected to read and note up the work of the rest of the class, so that you develop an eye for good material, and a sense of how to fix material that does not deliver. We'll create a constructive, supportive, yet rigorous workshop environment, to broaden your awareness of structure beyond your own work and apply it to the work of others.

Finally, screenplays will be assigned for reading, and we will watch the elements and tools discussed in class at work in produced movies. You'll see how filmmakers before you dealt with the issues you're dealing with and learn from them what to do, and what to avoid.

**Assignments:**

Assignments (10 @1.5% each, 15%) will be due the Monday following class, by 8:00 pm. All students are expected to read and make notes on all work submitted by the deadline. Notes on work are due by start class. In addition;

Pitches (10%): Students will prepare three feature film ideas for presentation and discussion in class.

Main Character Bio (10%): Students will create a detailed bio of the main character in your feature outline, 3-5 pages in length.

8-Part Outline (15%); Students will map out their feature story beats in a 2-5 page outline.

Treatment (two drafts) (20%): Students will create, write and revise a complete feature treatment 10-15 pages in length.

The first act (20-30 pgs.) (20%) pages of your screenplay, written in standard screenplay format.

**Course Requirements**

- Word processing Software
- Adobe PDF creation capability
- Screenwriting Software or script formatting capability (ex. Final Draft)
- Dropbox Account

**Course Reading:**

Required; THE NEW ELEMENTS OF STANDARD SCREENPLAY FORMAT by Jean-Paul Ouellette.

Selected Screenplays (by selected authors)

Recommended; SAVE THE CAT by Blake Snyder

MAKING A GOOD SCRIPT GREAT by Linda Seger

**Grading Criteria:**

All assignments must be in PDF format and submitted via Dropbox. All work must be properly formatted and punctuated, correctly spelled and grammatically correct. In-class assignments must be turned in by the end of class. E-mailed reading assignments will be sent no later than Mondays at 7:00 PM, and must be read by start of the following class.

Participation:	10%
Assignments:	15%
Pitches:	10%
Character Bio:	10%
8-Part Outline:	15%
Treatment:	20%
First Act:	20%
-----	
	100%

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%

**Expectation of Professionalism:**

All material is expected to be turned in **on time** and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

### **Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

Students are expected to 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 equate 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:**

Respect is the rule. No cell phones, and keep computer use limited to note taking and other class needs. (Specifically, *this* class.) Facebook, Twitter, E-mail and Google Hangouts should all be closed.

### **Class Schedule:**

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1, Aug. 26: Introductions. Class Business, Syllabus, Dropbox, et. al. 3 Act structure review. The function of the acts. Character/Hero. Who the hell is this guy and why do I care? The vital elements of a character. Observation/Judgment. Character Arc over the feature story. What drives a character to action?

Assignment; Write three brief character bios of people you know. (You don't have to reveal your relationship to them.) Include their back stories and inner flaws, as well as their wants and needs. Are they "successful", or "unsuccessful"? Break our hearts—make us care. 3-5 pages total. Assignments due in Dropbox Monday, Aug. 29<sup>th</sup> 8 pm. Reading; THE NEW ELEMENTS OF STANDARD SCREENPLAY FORMAT by Jean-Paul Ouellette.

Reading; "Whiplash" screenplay

Week 2, Sept. 2: Discussion of "Whiplash". Workshop bios. Emotional Core of the Feature Script. Goal! Three types of Goal. Goal and the Character Arc. Inner Flaw, Theme and Transformation. Mini-goals and mini-transformations. Inching your Hero towards transformation. We'll watch clips from the Matrix and the Grinch.

Assignment; Prepare three feature film ideas to present in class. Have fun with genres, world building, and scope.

Reading; "The African Queen" screenplay.

Week 3, Sept. 9: Discussion of "The African Queen". Workshop pitches—help your classmates choose their best idea. Remember, you will have to work on this idea for the entire academic year. Class pitch presentations. Dramatic Question. Eight Part Outline Overview.

Assignment; Write a Character Bio for your feature. Identify the Motivation and the Flaw and how they came to be. Give us a hint as to how the Goal will Transform this Character. Give us a sense of the world of your script 3-5 pgs.  
Reading; "The Hangover" screenplay.

Week 4 Sept. 16: Workshop Character Bios. Discuss "The Hangover". Conflict and its sources. Conflict and Theme. Conflict and Consequence. Consequence and Transformation. Emotional Core of your movie. We'll watch illustrative examples from Mission Impossible; Ghost Protocol.

Assignment; In essay form, write out a list of sources of Conflict for your feature. There should be at least four sources, and many of those sources should include further "minion" sources of conflict. Write how they connect to the theme, how they challenge the main character, and how they inch the main character towards transformation.  
Assignment; Turn in complete character bio (3-5 pgs.)

Reading; "Bridesmaids" screenplay

Week 5 Sept. 23: Discuss "Bridesmaids". The Importance of relationships, as conflict, as motivation, as transformation. Act 1 Outline, in detail. Kick-Ass Opening, Set-Up, World, Character, Flaw, Inciting Incident, Motivation, First Steps Towards Goal, First Act Twist. We'll watch examples from "The Abyss".

In-Class Assignment; Write out your First Act Outline.

Reading; "The Sting" screenplay

Week 6 Sept. 30: Discuss "The Sting". Workshop Act 1 Outline. Consequences, Real World and Emotional IN EVERY SCENE! The Writer's Toolbox—Props and Tools, Dialogue. Misdirection, Twist. Scene Sequences. Stockpiling Conflict. Act 2- Fun and Games; What is the intrinsic and unique "gold" in your concept. Sequence 1; Hero Deals with New Act 1 Twist Reality. Sequence 2; Hero Gets Into Trouble. Consequences, Real World and Emotional. Sequence 3; Hero Triumphant. False Victory or Temporary Defeat Mid-Point

Assignment; Act 2 Part 1 (Fun and Games) Outline. Make sure to throw substantial and, when possible, stock-piled conflict at the Hero. Be clear on how the conflict has consequences, both real world and emotional. Be clear on why this is the "gold" of your story.

Reading; "The World's End" screenplay.

Week 7 Oct. 7: Discuss "The World's End". Workshop Act 2 Part 1 Outline. Act 2 Part 2 The Tyranny of the Audience kicks in. Sequence 1; Bad Guys Close In. Sequence 2; Allies Fall Away. Sequence 3; Dark Night of the Soul. Sequence 4; Revelation, Transformation, Inspiration. The art of Rising Stakes, and desperate motivation. We'll watch scenes from "Tootsie"

Assignment; Write out Act 2 Part 2 (Bad Guys Close In) Outline.

Reading; "Gravity" by the Cuarons

Week 8 Oct. 14: Discuss "Gravity" Workshop Complete Act 2 Outlines. Act Three. The Big Climax. Turn the Tables, Character and Situation Pay Off, Boss Battle, and Resolution. We'll watch examples from "Team America" and "Sleepless in Seattle".

Assignment; Complete 8 Part Outline 3-5 pgs.

Reading; Class Choice #1—Pick a Script.

Week 9 Oct. 21: Discuss “Pick a Script”. Workshop Act 3 Outlines. Scene Construction and the Value of Entertainment. Twists, Surprises, Misdirections, and how they play into building your scenes. Hero-Goal-Conflict-Deals-Consequence. Positive or Negative. Treatment—the short story version of your film. Spacing out the treatment. Attitude in prose.

Assignment; Write the first half of your treatment, using your 8 step outline.

Assignment; Turn in Completed 8-Part Outlines

Reading Assignment; “The African Queen” sample treatment.

Week 10 Oct. 28: Breaking Your Story – Final story notes. Awoooooo! Scary!

Assignment; Complete the first draft of your treatment, using your 8 step outline.

Reading Assignment; Class Choice #2 – Pick A Script

Week 11 Nov. 4: Discuss Class Choice Script. Workshop Treatments. Act 1 Review.

Screenplay format. Dialogue – Tool, not a crutch. Misdirection and Twists in Dialogue.

Dialogue derived from Character. Intention and Motivation. Scene Construction Review.

We’ll watch illustrative clips from “Social Network”, “Nottinghill” and “Pulp Fiction”.

Assignment; Act 1 Part 1 – First 15 pages (max.), should include “kick-ass opening”, world establishment, character establishment, conflict and twists, and take us right up to the inciting incident.

Reading; “Flashdance” screenplay

Week 12 Nov. 11: Discuss Flashdance. Workshop the first 15. Review Act 1 Part 2, the importance of the goal and the plan to accomplish it. Relationships?

Assignment: Act 1 Part 2 Second 15 pages (max.), should include inciting incident, character motivation, plan, first steps towards goal, right up into the first act twist.

Reading; “Basic Instinct” screenplay

Week 13 Nov. 18: Discuss Basic Instinct. Workshop the second 15. What does the First Act Twist do? What are the hallmarks of a great First Act Twist? We’ll brainstorm powerful act twists for your feature, and see illustrative examples from great movies.

Assignment; Complete the first draft of your first act.

Assignment; Turn in your revised and complete treatment.

Reading; No Country For Old Men (Breaking All the Rules)

Week 14 Thanksgiving Weekend! Are you still here?! I’m available for office hours.

Week 15 Dec. 2: Discuss No Country. Workshop First Acts. Prep for Fun and Games. What’s next? Final thoughts.

Finals Week: Your First Act is due Friday, Dec. 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **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/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>.

This is important for the safety 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 [sarc@usc.edu](mailto: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](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.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PLEASE NOTE:</b> <b>FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</b></p>
--