

SYLLABUS

Staff Writing the Single-Camera Drama Series

CTWR 499

Section 19277D

Fall 2016

Pre-Requisites: CTWR 421 or CTWR 521

Thursday 9am—12:50pm

SCI 106/SCA 362

Instructor: Sonja Warfield

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description---In a TV medium where new episodes are required each week, writing and re-writing skills become a most valuable asset. Moreover, the vision and adaptability of the Head Writer and Writing Staff determines the course of any scripted series. Writing students in this course will experience first-hand what it is like to work as Staff Writers on a Single-Camera hour drama pilot and gain Show Running experience participating in the full production experience.

(NOTE: This course requires your full attendance for the two weekends prior to the Thanksgiving Holiday. If you cannot be present for those weekends, you should reconsider participating in this class.)

Course Goal—completion of a 36-minute pilot script, taking a TV pilot concept from the page to the stage/location and into the living room — a full skill set in one course. Students begin and develop greater understanding and skills to pitch, write and re-write a pilot of an SCA created TV series, pitch further episodes, in addition to collaborating with a corresponding Production Division class (CPTR 479) in creating a final product. Students will develop and increase the necessary skills to interact with other writers, producers, directors, actors, editors, and craft/crew -- all working together to produce the dramatic TV series.

The final produced version of the pilot will be mastered to DVD and distributed to each student the end of the course. The finished pilot will also be screened to the class and the public in the Norris Auditorium at the end of the Spring Semester.

Requirements---The course is recommended for students, both graduate and undergraduate who have a serious interest in writing drama for television.

Writing Division Students who apply for this course must have satisfactorily completed **CTWR 421 or CTWR 521**. Production Division Students who wish to join the staff should have written a spec script for a one-hour drama series or feature film and have participated in at least one writing course.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

“Writing the Pilot” by William Rabkin

“Writing the One Hour Dramatic Series” by Pamela Douglas

These textbooks must have been read in their entirety by Week/Class Four (4) for all students selected to participate in the Writers Room.

SUGGESTED READING:

“The TV Writers Workbook” by Ellen Sandler

Attendance—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 an 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.

WRITERS ROOM—The class will create the environment of the “Writers Room” for a one-hour dramatic series. Stories will be broken on the “board” during class hours. Stories and acts will be divided amongst the writing staff, and the physical writing of the episode(s) will involve individual and/or team writing outside of class hours. While attempts will be made to minimize these hours and fairly distribute the assignments amongst the staff, all writers in the Writers Room must be willing to commit to an additional 2 hours per week on average, but not every week. Production meetings, table readings with actors, and rehearsals will take place during regular class hours. All writers will have CREW REQUIREMENTS as follows:

ALL STUDENTS will contribute a minimum of 6-8 hours of production crew assignments outside of class, during week 11, to help build the stage sets on Stage 4, culminating in a Mandatory Test Shoot day on a Saturday TBD. For those students participating in the Writers Room, this is in addition to any time spent outside of class hours performing writing duties towards the pilot script.

During the weekends of Weeks 12 & 13, ALL STUDENTS will be required to work in their assigned set positions during the 12 hr shoot days on DATES TBD --

NOTE: Students who take on Showrunner (Executive Producer) responsibilities are expected to be available for casting, additional re-write sessions as needed and post-production on their episodes.

Students with various Producer assignments (e.g. Casting, Pre-Production) are expected to be available as needed for their individual assignments. Anyone who finds that they are unable to perform their duties should inform the instructor in due time.

Attendance is of paramount importance. This class is all about collaboration. If you are not present, you can't collaborate. If you can't collaborate you deprive your fellow writers of your insights, ideas and support.

(**NOTE:** The Instructor understands that most students have multiple classes and responsibilities during the semester; so every effort is made to allow for real conflicts that arise.)

Grading---Since this class is essentially a weekly writing workshop, students will be graded on their participation in the room writing process, their ability to give and receive constructive criticism, their initiative in bringing new ideas and script fixes to class and the timely completion of all weekly homework assignments. In addition, they must fulfill the production requirements of CTPR 479.

Breakdown of grade will be as follows:

Story & Outline — 20%

Class (Script/Outline) Assignments (Writing) -- 30%

Production Work—30%

Final Exam — 20%

Two unexcused absences automatically lower your grade one full point. Three unexcused absences will lower grade two full points. Tardiness will be noted and two late arrivals will count as one full absence. There is important ground to cover in each session and tardiness will not be tolerated.

Spelling, Grammar, Format are important and writing assignments deemed deficient in these areas will be penalized accordingly.

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.

LAPTOP POLICY: Laptops, a vital writing tool, are encouraged in class. Navigating the Internet and instant messaging for personal reasons are not. A warning will be given for the first such infraction. The next will result in a loss of one grade. Needless to say the same rule applies to cell phones.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note that the current syllabus is subject to revision. Changes will be announced in class or via email. It is the students' responsibility to remain current with changes and revisions and to check with the instructor and/or classmates when uncertainties arise.

All students will report to SCI 106 at the beginning of every class for attendance taking. Be on time. Beginning in Week 3, there will be breakout sessions for those students chosen to be in the Writers Room. Admission in this class does not guarantee participation in the Writers Room, but its an excellent opportunity for CTWR students to gain first-hand experience in television production that duplicates the production process of TV series currently broadcast on Network, Cable and Premium cable channels.

WEEK 1: Entire faculty, class and SAs, will meet together in **SCI 106** to examine the concepts, aesthetics, and craft techniques relevant to the single-camera dramatic episodic TV show PILOT process, department by department, through lectures, TV clips, and in-class discussions; and to screen and discuss the work jointly created and shot by the class.

Writers will choose three alternate disciplines of production, i.e., art direction, camera, sound mixing, etc. for your designated crew assignment after the Writers Room closes at approximately midway through the semester. From that point forward, Writers with the exception of the Showrunner will report to their crew department instructor after attendance at each class, unless further script writing is specifically requested by the Showrunner and/or Instructor.

Class will review, discuss and address any questions concerning the Concept Pitch Guidelines.

Assignment: Develop oral pitches for series ideas, using the Pitch Guide which is posted in the “Syllabus” section of Blackboard Learn for guidance and references.

WEEK 2: Writers will orally pitch their series pilot ideas and concepts before the class and receive comments and notes. Writers will also participate in Q&A session for other students’ pitches. Writers will take notes of prospective pitches and series ideas and be prepared to discuss the merits of each pitch or lack thereof in the following week.

Assignment: Complete reading of one of the two required textbooks by beginning of the next class and be prepared to discuss.

WEEK 3: Showrunner and participants in Writers Room announced. Writers break out to SCA 362. Watch award-winning hour drama. Showrunner and Writers begin process of breaking story. Three teams of writers will be formed to correspond to each act and/or episode of the three 12-minute segments to be produced. Define beginning, middle and end and/or episodes 1, 2 and 3, but adhering to a three-act structure.

Assignment: Complete reading of the second of the two required textbooks by the beginning of the next class and be prepared to discuss.

Based on Showrunner’s initial synopsis, begin to arc out the respective acts of the pilot episode with emphasis on “tent poles” for each.

WEEK 4: Showrunner and Writers will complete the “tentpoles” of the pilot episode as defined in “Writing the Television Drama” and begin working on the “beat sheet” and/or outline for the pilot story.

Assignment: Develop “story beats” consistent with the theme of the pilot concept and be prepared to discuss and share in the next class.

WEEK 5: Showrunner and Writers break story. Writers will present beats to Showrunner, construct the first Act of the pilot, while tracking the story

through Acts 2 and 3.

Assignment: Team “A” will go to script, delivering a “Writers Draft” of the First Act in Final Draft script form by Monday evening, 9pm of the following week.

Teams B and C will continue to beat out Acts Two and Three.

WEEK 6: Writers will review First Act and give notes. Team “B” will then present story beats for Act 2 and receive notes.

Assignment: Team “A” will rewrite Act 1.

Team “B” will write in Final Draft software script form Act 2.

Team “C” will refine beat sheet for Act 3 and make any necessary adjustments caused by edits to Acts 1 and 2.

Because of the time crunch, both Team “B” and Team “C” will be going to script.

All assignments are due by Monday, 9pm the next week.

WEEK 7: Delivery to entire class of FIRST DRAFT of ACT 1. Writers will receive notes from entire class body on First Act in first half of class.

Breakout. Instructor, Showrunner and Writers’ Assistant review ***production draft script formatting and delivery***. Discuss principles and protocol of Tone Meeting.

Discuss Acts 2 and 3. Track story, theme, character arcs, design fixes for problem areas.

Assignment: Showrunner and Team “A” make any necessary last minute edits and then Showrunner and Writers Assistant “Lock” pages, introduce scene numbers, create a “Production Draft” of First Act of pilot script in preparation of following week’s “Tone Meeting.”

Teams “B” and “C” will rewrite their respective acts and deliver by the standard deadline, Monday @ 9pm. All teams need to be on standby to make last minute edits as the full script will be distributed to the full class and professors in the following week. But ONLY Act 1 will be a “Locked Production Draft.”

WEEK 8: Tone meeting. DELIVER LOCKED ACT 1. Deliver FIRST DRAFTS of Acts 2 & 3

Entire class body will give notes in response to their reading of the full script.

Assignment: Showrunner and Writers will rewrite Acts 1, 2 and 3 of the full pilot script, with emphasis on Act 1, as it is the only Act being produced in the Fall Semester.

Teams “B” and “C” will rewrite Acts 2 and 3 based on notes from the class and from Showrunner. All rewrites and edits are due by the standard deadline, Monday 9pm.

Except for the Showrunner and unless there are special circumstances, this is the termination of the “Writers Room” portion of the class for the semester.

It will be the responsibility of the Showrunner to make further edits and rewrites for the remainder of the semester, but be on standby because he/she may need you for emergency rewrites. Check in consistently with Showrunner and/or Instructor.

Assignment: Attend the following, it is mandatory and important to your grade —

SUNDAY – A.D. AND SCENE PREP WORKSHOP 10:00 TO 6:00
(ENTIRE CLASS)

WEEK 9: Writers. Writers work on revisions for Act 1. Address notes for Acts 2 & 3.

SATURDAY/SUNDAY CASTING SESSION (Showrunner)

WEEK 10: Class will screen casting tapes. Participate in discussion and analysis of potential actors and their viability towards the vision of the Showrunner in casting her/his pilot. Writers continue to revise Acts 2&3. Make any final changes to Act 1.

SATURDAY/SUNDAY CASTING SESSION (Showrunner)

WEEK 11: Class will screen additional casting tapes. Participate in discussion and analysis of potential actors and their viability towards the vision of the Showrunner in casting her/his pilot.

Continue re-writing for Acts 2 & 3. Finalize Act 1 if necessary.

SUNDAY TEST SHOOT ON STAGE, ENTIRE CLASS

WEEK 12: Discuss and analyze test shoot dailies and footage from Test Shoot.

Continue re-writing Acts 2 & 3.

SATURDAY/SUNDAY ACT 1 SHOOT DAYS 1&2

WEEK 13: Entire class will screen pilot dailies from the weekend. Check in with Showrunner for possible need of rewrites for Acts 2 and 3.

SATURDAY/SUNDAY ACT 1 SHOOT DAYS 3&4

WEEK 14: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

WEEK 15: Entire class will view, discuss and analyze Editor's Cut screening of Act 1. Participate in discussion with particular focus on whether, at this stage, what's been shot is reflective of the Showrunner's vision and what you contributed in the Writers Room.

Assignment: Polish Acts 2 and 3 and distribute digitally to the entire class and to instructors.

WEEK 16: FINAL EXAM (no class meeting due December 8th)

All students in the CTWR Section of this course will be required to present a Pitch Document and pitch a series concept as their final exam. It can be new or old, but if old it must be a significantly more developed version of their original pilot series concept using the parameters from the Pitch Guideline and incorporating everything you've learned from class participation in writing and production. You will be graded on the quality of your presentation, so please take this seriously. These are due December 8th by 9am.

**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/departments-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 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.

**PLEASE NOTE:
FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT
PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE
CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**