

**INTERMEDIATE SCREENWRITING**

CTWR 529 Spring 2017

Section: 19269D

Time: Tues 7-10 pm

Room: SCA 362

Instructor: Siavash Farahani

Email: karma@karmafilm.com

Office hours: By appointment

**COURSE OBJECTIVE:**

This intermediate screenwriting course will build and expand on your previous classes and sharpen your storytelling craft. Our motto and guiding principle will be Frank Daniel's famous motto, "a good story well told."

To that end we will study and workshop the entire screenwriting process with emphasis on ideation, character, theme, structure, visualization, construction of dramatic scenes, dialog and format.

Our time will be divided between lectures, discussions, watching films/clips and in-class table read of the student's written pages. Our ultimate goal is to empower you the writer with the tools of the craft and give voice to your unique imagination and perspective to create compelling characters and stories for the screen told for maximum dramatic impact and audience participation.

**COURSE WORK:**

Students will complete 3 projects during the semester:

- Two complete and revised narrative short-film screenplays, following the submission guidelines of CTPR 546 for possible production in that class. 8-10 pages each. **THE DEADLINE FOR CTPR 546 SCRIPT SUBMISSIONS THIS SEMESTER WILL BE SUNDAY, MARCH 19th**
- One complete revised Outline for an original narrative feature film. 8-10 pages.

Each project will include supplemental work such as loglines, character bios,

outlines etc.

The class will be divided into two reading groups and alternate weekly. If you miss a class when your work is to be discussed you will forfeit your opportunity for feedback for that week. **You are expected to attend and work on your project even on weeks when your group is not up.**

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 is also a requirement of the course.

### **WORK EVALUATION & GRADES:**

While there are many different and time honored storytelling traditions in the world, this course specifically focuses on the Western narrative tradition and the 3 act structure. As such, stories are expected to include a clear protagonist, a central objective/ conflict, a clear theme, and a plot that has a beginning, a middle, an end, a climax , and a resolution that includes a character arc.

### **GRADING BREAKDOWN**

Short Script #1 (20%) and supplemental work (10%)	30%
Short Script #2 (20%) and supplemental work (10%)	30%
Feature Script Outline	30%
Participation	10%

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%

**A** : Work of **excellent** quality. Outstanding application of the dramatic principles and fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines as specified in the syllabus.

**B** : Work of **good** quality. Above average fulfillments of course requirements and deadlines.

**C** : Work of **fair** quality. Minimum fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines for passing graduate credit.

**C -** : **FAIL to meet minimum grade for credit. NON PASSING GRADE.**

### **REQUIRED READING:**

Students must read these two books on their own time outside of class. We will be referring to these texts regularly:

*The Tools of Screenwriting* Howard/Mabley

*Save the Cat* Blake Snyder

You are urged to read as many screenplays as possible. Many will be made available on the class dropbox account.

### **ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED READING:**

*Save the Cat Goes To the Movies* by Blake Snyder

*Save the Cat Strikes Back* by Blake Snyder

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell

*The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler

*Stealing Fire From the Gods* by James Bonnet

*Cut to the Chase* by Linda Venis

### **HOUSE RULES:**

**Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class.**

#### **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 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.

**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.

**Late Assignments** will be marked down a full letter grade for each late day.

**Missed Assignment:** A missed assignment can only be made up in case of a documented illness or emergency.

**All work must be original and originate in this class** – no revisions of work started in other classes or adaptations of others' work will be accepted without the prior permission of the instructor.

**Unless otherwise noted, all work is due prior to start of class when your reading group is up, delivered to instructor and all classmates via dropbox in PDF.**

**Assignment formats:** Assignments are to be uploaded to the correct assignment folder in the class dropbox and only in PDF format. The filename **MUST** consist of the "student's last name\_ assignment name\_date.pdf "  
(Example:Smith\_CharacterSketch\_1-22-15.pdf)

**Laptop, Cell Phone, iPad Policy:** Cell phones, and similar devices must be turned off during class. Laptops, iPads and similar devices may be used only with permission from the instructor and only in context of class work. Use of any of the above to text, surf the web or social media will result in loss of privilege of using those devices for the duration of the semester.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

### **WEEK 1 - Jan 10**

- Introductions
- Lecture “Good Story Well Told”/STRUCTURE/How to craft LOGLINES
- Ideation

**Written work due Week 2:** All groups prepare 3 potential loglines for 1<sup>st</sup> short film project. Keep each logline between 25-30 words. Keep it simple. The logline must indicate:

- 1) Who this story is about (protagonist/antagonist)
- 2) What the story about (the central conflict/objective)
- 3) Where/when the story takes place (setting/world)
- 4) What the tone /genre of the story is

**NOTE:** If you wish to submit your script to be considered for production in 546, please check with production division regarding deadlines and production guidelines.

### **WEEK 2 - Jan 17**

- Pitch loglines to class (all groups)
- Give and receive feedback
- Lecture on Theme, Character development and the nature of the short film.

**Turn in and pitch:** 3 short-film loglines.

### **Written assignment due Week 3:**

**1)** From your 3 loglines choose the one you most want to develop in this class and WRITE A BRIEF BIO for both its protagonist and its antagonist, describing their life prior, during and after the events of the story in 3<sup>rd</sup> person.

**2)** WRITE A ONE-PAGE CHARACTER SKETCH for your protagonist and antagonist, IN THE FIRST PERSON. Let each character speak in his/her own voice,

revealing as much as possible about some aspect of that character's life. Try to capture each character's unique speaking rhythms and point-of-view. Let the character reveal something conscious and unconscious about themselves through their thoughts, behavior and feelings.

**NOTE:** Start thinking of IDEAS FOR YOUR FEATURE FILM outline, which you'll be working on later in the semester. Allow time for these ideas to develop and mature.

### **WEEK 3 - Jan 24**

- Workshop character sketches/backstories (all groups)
- Outlining / Story Structure

**Turn in:** Character backstories and first-person character sketches to be read in class and receive feedback.

### **Written Assignment due Week 4:**

Write a ONE PARAGRAPH SYNOPSIS of your story and from that synopsis, write an OUTLINE (or "beat sheet"). For the synopsis: Keep it simple at this point. Tell the story as it will unfold on the screen: Include the setting, the major characters, the main story beats, and the resolution. Make us want to see this movie! For the step outline: Write in the present tense only, and limit your description to what we will actually see and hear on the screen, in the order we'll see and hear it. Avoid long sentences and prose. This should be a bullet-pointed outline.

### **WEEK 4 - Jan 31**

- Workshop Synopsis/beat sheets (all groups)
- Lecture: Writing the scene

**Turn In:** Your short-film synopsis and beat sheet to be read and get feedback.

**Written Assignment due Week 5:** All groups start to write the FIRST DRAFT of Project 1 short film screenplay.

### **WEEK 5 - Feb 7**

- Workshop Group A first drafts of Script #1

- Lecture: Visualizing the moment/Writing Scene Description

**Turn in:** Script # 1 first draft.

**Written Assignment due Week 7:** Revise first draft based on feedback. Craft 3 loglines for 2<sup>nd</sup> project. Choose something different from your first project.

## **WEEK 6 - Feb 14**

- Workshop Group B first drafts of Script #1
- Lecture: Writing Dialogue

**Written Assignment for next week:**

- 1) Revised first draft for Script #1
- 2) Develop 3 loglines for Script #2.

## **WEEK 7 - Feb 21**

- Pitch and workshop 3 loglines for Script #2
- Lecture: The Rewrite

**Turn in:** Script #2 Loglines

**Written Assignment due Week 8:**

All groups choose idea for Project 2

1 page character sketch (in the words of the character as before)

1 page character bio as before

1 page outline as before

Revise Project 1 based on feedback.

## **WEEK 8 - March 7**

- Workshop character sketch, backstories and outline for Project 2 for all groups

**Turn In:** Character sketch, backstory and outline for Project 2

**Written Assignment due Week 9:**

Both groups start writing first draft of Script #2 and start revising Script #1.

**SPRING RECESS March 12-19**

**WEEK 9 – March 21**

- Group A workshop first draft of Script #2

**Turn in:** Group A turns in first draft of Script #2

**Written Assignment:** Both groups keep working on revising Script #1 and writing first draft of Script #2

**WEEK 10 – March 28**

- Group B workshop first draft of Script #2

**Turn in:** Group B turns in first draft of Script #2

**Written assignment:**

- 1) Both groups revise both scripts and submit drafts to instructor and class prior to class on Sunday October 25<sup>th</sup> by noon. Read all scripts prior to next class and be ready to give feedback on both.

- 2) Develop 3 loglines for feature.

As before each idea should address who and what the story is about. What the tone genre, and setting are. And lastly why the idea is important to you and deserves to be made into a feature.

**WEEK 11 - April 4**

- Feedback on revised Script #1 and 2 scripts.
- Pitch/workshop feature loglines.



**Turn in:** Feature loglines

**Written assignment:** Develop outline and character sketches for the feature idea you want to pursue.

### **WEEK 12 – April 11**

- Workshop feature outlines and character sketches (all groups)
- Streamlining sequences and scenes for maximum dramatic impact

**Turn in:** feature outlines and character sketches.

**Written assignment:** keep developing feature idea.

### **Week 13 – April 18**

- Workshop feature outlines and character sketches (all groups)

### **WEEK 14 April 25 (Last Class)**

- Workshop feature outline ideas (all groups)
- Final thoughts and reviews.

**Turn in:** Latest version feature outlines.

### **STUDY PERIOD April 29-May2**

**\*\*\*\* Final Feature Outline due May 3, 2017 by 12 pm:** Completed and revised feature outline (5-10 pages)

**\*\*\*\* NOTE:** Assignments, course plan and deadlines are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

## USC 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](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.

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

### **SCRIPT FORMAT**

All scripts must be submitted professionally formatted. Why? Because if you send a script to a producer or agent, bad formatting will get your script a poor reading. It's like showing up for an interview in your pajamas.

There are variations in script formatting, and some television shows have specific requirements, but for this class we'll be using basic script formatting. I recommend you buy a scriptwriting program like Final Draft, which is the industry standard. It will take a little time to learn it, but it formats for you. Final Draft is available to Cinema students at a discount through the writing division.

If you use Word you can set up the margins and space the hard way or create a template. Instructions on how to create a template are available on the web at WikiHow or you can download one from Writing Academy.

A free screenwriting software called CELTX is available for download online. It has a few glitches but it gets the job done.

On the next page is a sample script page.

FADE IN:

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

It's an office building on a hot summer day. The office is one of those glass boxes, the glass tinted opaque.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING WINDOW - DAY

One window is different. It shines iridescent, like a puddle in a parking lot, or a soap bubble.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

A man and a teenager are outside, standing in the shade of a tree.

A car pulls up and two men get out. IAN (late twenties) is a little disheveled, unassuming. JON (mid-twenties) is on, energetic. The man, MATTHEW'S FATHER (early fifties) immediately gravitates towards Jon.

MATTHEW'S FATHER

He's in there.

Ian and Jon both look at the window.

IAN

How long has he been in there?

MATTHEW'S FATHER

Since last night.

(to the teenager with him.)

Right?

(to Jon)

I thought about going in after him. I looked through. But I didn't see him. You find people in those things or over there or whatever you call it ... right?

Moment of confusion.

JON

I'm not the, he's the—

IAN

Sorry. I mean, I'm Ian—

They all sort of re-orient themselves.

MATTHEW'S FATHER  
You're the one that finds people?

FADE OUT.

1.) **Font:** Always use Courier. It can be Courier, Courier New, or Courier Final Draft, but it needs to be Courier.

2.) Every script begins with

FADE IN:

And ends with

FADE OUT.

3.) Slug Lines (also called Scene Headings) are at the top of each new scene. A scene is determined by a change of time or location. Scripts are built this way for production and each scene means that production has to set up cameras and lighting and sound in a particular location with a particular set of actors. They get really unhappy when you screw up Slug Lines because it makes it hard for the production crew to schedule when they are going to shoot scenes and get all the people and equipment scheduled to be there.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

They are always in ALL CAPS. They have three parts. There are two spaces between INT. /EXT. and Location, and then space, hyphen, space between Location and Time.

- 1.) INT. or EXT. means Interior or Exterior and tells production if the shot is inside or outside. (Outside often means they have to go scout for a location. Inside might be a location but it is often a sound stage.) Occasionally people use I/E meaning that the shot moves from one to the other.
- 2.) LOCATION (in this case OFFICE BUILDING). This should always be short. If you have a scene set in, say, Laurie's living room and you have other scenes set in her kitchen and bedroom, you can do this two ways. You can say LAURIE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM or you can say LAURIE'S LIVING ROOM. But once you chose, make sure that you always use the same description every time you put a scene there. An overstressed and tired Director who is doing a break out at one in the morning (because there is NEVER enough time) might break LAURIE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM and LAURIE'S LIVING ROOM as two different places. That's because software like Final Draft will give him a list based on YOUR

SLUGLINE. And Final Draft is stupid as dirt and will read it as two locations. ("But I'm not writing it in Final Draft," you say. That just means that some P.A. had to convert your script to Final Draft for production. She already hates you. Don't make the Director hate you, too.)

- 3.) TIME This can be NIGHT, DAY, AFTERNOON. It can be really specific if, for example, the train is due into Yuma at 4:10 and it's 4:09.

4.) Action

Action is the text that describes the scene and the characters and the actions that are in it.

A man and a teenager are outside, standing in the shade of a tree.

A car pulls up and two men get out. IAN (late twenties) is a little disheveled, unassuming. JON (mid-twenties) is on, energetic. The man, MATTHEW'S FATHER (early fifties) immediately gravitates towards Jon.

The first time a character appears in a script, her name is in all caps, followed by an age and a description. SUE (43) is a large blonde wearing a lot of make-up. After that, don't give the name in all caps. (The description should never be any longer than the one I just gave. So make it pop.) The first appearance is capitalized so it's easy to make a list of all the characters to cast them, track their wardrobe, and schedule them.

Action should be kept pretty short, just enough that someone reading the script gets a sense of what's going on.

If there is a sound that is usually written in all caps. A phone RINGS. That's so sound knows.

Every slugline is followed by at least one line of action.

- 5.) CHARACTER NAME always appears every time there's a line of dialogue. If your character is called Matthew on page one, don't change it to MATT on page three. That will be read as a different character. Again, many people in production will hate you. And you will look stupid. It's always in ALL CAPS.

IAN  
How long has he been in there?

Sometimes you'll have characters you don't want to name. It's okay to call them BLOND COP or WAITRESS.

6) DIALOGUE is under the character name. It's single spaced and follows normal punctuation rules.

7) PARENTHETICALS are explanations about how the dialogue works. Sometimes people write acting directions like (angrily) in a parenthetical. This irritates actors and directors. Mostly use parentheticals when otherwise the dialogue would be confusing.

MATTHEW'S FATHER  
Since last night.  
(to the teenager with him.)  
Right?

There are lots more details about formatting. People argue about formatting. Television scripts are sometimes different (sometimes in a TV script the dialogue is in all caps.) But this will get you started.

For more details, [Scriptfrenzy](#) has a decent guide to more fun things like (V.O.) and (O.S.) and other such things. Script formatting basics are clear, but the details of script formatting are an art form and we'll talk about how a reading script is different from a shooting script and why your scripts may be a little different than the ones you read. (Those are usually shooting scripts.)

But this will get you started and should allow you to format professionally.