

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMA-TELEVISION
Writing Division
CTWR 514a: Basic Dramatic Screenwriting
Fall 2017 – (Two Units, Required, Section 19234)

Instructor: Don Bohlinger
Class Schedule: Friday 10:00-12:50
Class Location: SCA 203
Office Hours: Tuesday 2-4, SCA 354, or by appointment
Contact Information: dfb@usc.edu, (email is best) Cell phone: 323 804 0110

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

This is an intensive screenwriting workshop designed to cultivate your cinematic imagination (the ability to discover and create unforgettable characters and stories) by honing your skills of observation as well as studying how memory and experience can bring originality and brilliance to those characters and stories. Once you have collected a notebook full of character and story ideas you will begin developing your first feature screenplay; the first draft of that screenplay is your final assignment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

514a is designed to spur your imagination through a series of exercises in ideation. Where do you find your characters and your stories? How do you make them personal, rich and full of meaning? What are the stories that captivate you? We will be responding to prompts designed to mine our own experiences, dreams, memories, and to sharpen our skills of observation. We will ask again and again: is there a story here? Is there a compelling character here? And more importantly: **how do I tell my story and reveal my character in a way that is true to me as a writer and thus original?** In assignments designed to inspire compelling characters and film ideas you will begin telling your stories to the class. One of these stories or characters will grow into your first feature screenplay.

The second aspect of the class will deal with writing your first feature script. Although we will touch briefly on story structure and the mechanics of screenwriting (*don't worry, you will get more than your share of this before graduating*), the main focus of this class is how to build a story from character. Who is your character? What is the situation that will compel the audience to watch? And what are the obstacles that block your character's progress, that prevent her from achieving her goal.

Both 513/514a classes are more about process than product; but in the end, if you stay true to who you are as a storyteller you will be surprised how compelling the final script will be.

Members of the class will be graded on attendance (more than one absence will cause your grade to drop by a half-grade,) fulfillment of the weekly assignments, class participation (you must read and respond to your colleagues work) and the final feature script.

WEEKLY PLAN:

The groundwork of this course is a weekly series of assignments that develop specific storytelling resources. They are presented and discussed in class. There will also be several in-class exercises. The work moves towards a 3-5 page prose treatment for your feature script and culminates in the writing of your feature. In addition to other students' work there is some required reading and several recommended texts.

Please note how the work of 513 overlaps with 514a after we complete the short script in 513.

COURSE GOALS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Writers are encouraged to keep their scenes and characters unique and personal, to use their own experience and to strive to find their voice.

Writers will learn how to create compelling characters.

Writers will learn how to tell their stories visually.

Writers will learn how to write a dramatic scene.

Writers will learn how to write a feature script.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Aug. 25	Memory
Sept. 1	Experience
Sept. 8	Experience
Sept. 15	Observation
Sept. 22	Observation
Sept. 29	World
Oct.. 6	Short Outline
Oct 13	Feature Pitches
Oct. 20	Feature Idea
Oct. 27	Feature Idea
Nov. 3	Feature 1 st 30
Nov. 10	Feature 2 nd 30
Nov. 17	Feature 3 rd 30
Nov. 24	<i>Thanksgiving</i>
Dec. 1	Feature Final Pages/Questions
Dec. 10	Feature Due

READING LIST:

- Where I'm Calling From, Raymond Carver, (recommended.) But we will be reading and talking about the first two stories in that collection: *Nobody Said Anything* and *Bicycles, Muscles, Cigarettes*.
- On Writing, Stephen King (recommended)
- Other materials will be distributed in class and via email.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

CTWR 514a grades will be based the student's ability to demonstrate an understanding of the following fundamental principles of screen storytelling:

- Ideation: the "where and how" to find your stories and characters
 - Observation exercises
 - Memory exercises
 - Experience exercises
- How to create feature stories for screen.
- How to develop and write the first draft of a feature screenplay (format counts.)
- How to read and respond to your fellow student's work. (The writers table)

GRADING WEIGHTS:

CTWR 514a grades are based on:

- Weekly Writing Assignments.....40%
- Reading and Responding to Workshop Assignments.....20%
- Final Feature Script.....40%

LETTER GRADES:

100-93....A	82-80....B-	69-67.....D+
93-90.....A-	79-77....C+	66-63.....D
89-87.....B+	76-73....C	62-60.....D-
86-83.....B	72-70....C-	0-59.....F

Presentation:

As you are hoping to enter the film industry as professionals, 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.

Classroom Decorum

The professor expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a fragile process and while we should ask questions, analyze and even challenge, we want to remain supportive, always keeping in mind that the screenplay is fragile work in progress. A working writer needs to develop *the art of collaboration* while working with their peers. As a working writer you will need to be able to work constructively with directors, producers and studio executives.

Laptop and Texting Policy

Students may use their laptops at the discretion of the professor. Laptops may be used for note taking, but not for surfing the web unless it is part of a class project. Texting is not allowed during class time. Texting is distracting and disruptive. There is nothing that needs to be communicated to anyone except your classmates during class time.

Save your texting and surfing until class break.

*Note: 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 me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.- 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The telephone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

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 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/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provide s 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.