

SYLLABUS
Wells Writing Division
CTWR 529 Fall 2017
Intermediate Screenwriting
Wednesdays, 7:00pm – 10:00pm
CSA 362

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Lecturer: Wayne Powers

Phone: 424-666-4443

Email: (awaiting USC email address)

Office Hours: 5-7 and 10-11 Wednesdays BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

***“If you want to speak to the world,” said Tolstoy,
“speak of your own village.”***

GOALS OF THE COURSE:

In this intermediate screenwriting course, I will combine what I learned as a student at USC Film School, my *alma mater*, with what I learned in my professional career in film and television starting when I was twenty-three years old.

There are 293 ways to make change for a dollar, and probably more ways to write a screenplay. I will focus on ways that have worked for me (usually) and that coincide

with USC philosophies like that character is more important than plot, and how to make personal scripts even if you're writing a genre motion picture.

This course aims to sharpen your storytelling and screenwriting skills through practical writing experience in the short-film form, leading to an extensive introduction to shaping a feature film story.

You will further explore your abilities to write screenplays that follow the Western narrative tradition: A strong premise; clear focus on all your characters wants versus their needs; writing through visuals; a three act structure; creating sequences; learning “approaches” and using other tools of the craft in both short films and features.

You will learn through discussions to evaluate scripts and how to give constructive feedback.

I will give lectures, have in-class exercises, give tips on how to pitch, and watch films that highlight our topics, and, in a safe supportive environment we will workshop your assignments.

COURSE WORK

- * Two complete and revised narrative short film screenplays following submission guidelines of CTRP 546 for possible production in that class.
- * An original feature film story in revised synopsis form, ready for development for an original full length screenplay.
- * The idea is to look forward to the realistic possibility of having the short scripts produced, and to create a feature film story that has the potential to become a first-rate screenplay.
- * This completed revised synopsis will count as the final for this course.

STRUCTURE OF THE CLASS

This is a workshop course, where every student participates weekly both by presenting material developed for their story and by analyzing and giving 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.

Note: Some of your work, or your classmates' work, will be based on personal events from their lives or their families/friends' lives. This class is nonjudgmental.

Things that are said in the room stay in the room.
Everyone should feel this is a safe space.

READING

I recommend:

On Writing by Stephen King

Screenwriting is Rewriting by Jack Epps Jr.

Making the Good Script Great by Linda Seger

Adventures in the Screen Trade by William Goldman

You are urged to read as many screenplays as possible, for new films and classic films. Take advantage of the great Cinema library that contains many screenplays that you can't access over the internet. Plus the expanding collection of scripts and DVDs (including some of mine). Often early drafts are more helpful than production drafts.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

On time Short Script #1: 25%

On time Short Script #2: 25%

On time Feature Script Synopsis 40%

Participation 10%

You will receive a mid-term written grade/evaluation.

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 “C”.

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.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Wells 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.

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.

You are hereby warned: "After 3 unexcused absences students will fail the course."

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.

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.

LAPTOP, PHONE, I-PAD POLICY

The use of laptop computers or tablets to take notes or read each other's work is encouraged in this class. Any use of a laptop, tablet or phone that detracts from the class (such as surfing the Web for non class-related purposes, IM-ing other students, or doing work for other classes) will result in the loss of laptop privileges for the student.

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,

abused homonyms (“there, their, they’re”, etc.), bad spelling or grammar or overall sloppiness are NOT ACCEPTABLE and may cause your draft to be returned unread.

All materials MUST be typed, properly formatted and PROOFREAD. It must be either emailed to the group or printed and distributed in class when required.

All scripts are to be typed in standard script format and delivered in PDF format. Only use any of the courier fonts.

SEND TO WAYNE POWERS your pages in Final Draft or Word and not in PDF so that he can make notes directly on the draft. Number your pages and scenes. For everyone else:

- NUMBER YOUR PAGES AND SCENES before saving the script as a PDF.
- Put your name, title and page number on the Header of EACH PAGE of your material.
- I highly suggest using Final Draft software to get the job done properly.

All other assignments must be submitted in Word or pdf format.

Name every document as follows:

YourFirstName_Assignment.Format

Ex: Wayne_Treatment1.doc, or Wayne_ScriptDraft1.pdf
or Wayne_FinalDraft.pdf

All work must be original – no adaptations without the prior permission of the instructor. PLAGIARISM will result in serious consequences per school department and school policy.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The School of Cinema-Television expects the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical performance from USC students. As such, the University seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that only personal and 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, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>.

Should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty, all implicated students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further

CNTV 529, Spring 2012! SYLLABUS review. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Always bring your printed copies 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! In most cases the assignments are to be emailed to the entire class by 10am the Monday before class. Students are expected to have read everyone's assignment before class and to have prepared comments on them.

SYLLUBUS

Week One

- * Introductions
- * Syllabus
- * Where do ideas come from?
- * Ingredients for your Premise
- * PREMISE = GENRE + MAIN CHARACTER + INCITING INCIDENT + PLOT GOAL (what MC wants) + THEME GOAL (what mc needs).
- * In Class work: Write a premise to an American film you like, using above formula. Read to class.

- * “Life’s a Pitch” exercise.

Work Due Week Two

Choose the SHORT FILM IDEA that you most want to develop in class using the above “formula” for one of your projects and a description of your two or three main characters. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present them to the class.

Week Two

- * How to pitch.
- * In class: Pitch your favorite (or two favorite) stories for your first short film.
- * Give and receive feedback.
- * Lecture and Clips: Creating Your Main Character.
- * HANDOUT: Character Crutch List
- * In class exercise: Write a scene where the CAMERA explores a room of the main character when he’s not there.. Don’t write every object but only what’s important to give us an idea of their character. Find something that is surprising.
- * Character Descriptions that sell.

Work Due Week Three

- * *Answer relevant questions on the hand-out Character Crutch List.” (Do not turn in.)*
- * *To further know and understand your character prepare the following:*

Your main character is dead!

Be prepared to read a eulogy at the funeral playing whatever character you want (preferably an antagonist or love interest). Try to reveal things the mourners wouldn't expect to hear, like a deep dark secret. When you read it next class, it should take around five minutes. Bring a prop if you want, to illuminate your character. Feel free to act the part.

Week Three

NOTE: If you haven't yet, start thinking of IDEAS FOR YOUR FEATURE FILM synopsis, which you'll be working on later in the semester. Allow time for these ideas to develop and mature.

- * Presenting The Funeral plus Feedback
- * Structure of the Short Film
- * More on character with clips.

Work Due Week Four

Write a ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS of your story and from that synopsis, write a BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP 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. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday at midnight and prepare to present to the class.

Week Four

- * Turn in your synopsis and beat sheet.
- * Workshop them.
- * Lecture and clips: Creating “Approaches” to Scenes.

WORK DUE WEEK FIVE

Write the FIRST DRAFT of your short film screenplay. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present it to the class.

Also, if you haven’t yet now is a good time to begin thinking of IDEAS FOR YOUR FEATURE FILM STORY, which you’ll be working on later in the semester. Allow time for these ideas to develop and mature. Explore these ideas carefully, and review them each week to see how you can enrich them.

WEEK FIVE

- * Workshop your short-film first draft.
- * In class exercise: Action verbs.
- * In class exercise: That's Good That's Bad

WORK DUE WEEK SIX

Come up with a SHORT FILM IDEA that you want to develop as your 2nd SHORT SCREENPLAY (stretch a little – choose something completely different from your first short film), and write a brief (three sentences or so) DESCRIPTION of it. Who is it about? What's the primary conflict? How, roughly, will it resolve? Then a ONE-PAGE CHARACTER MONOLOGUE for each of these characters, writing IN THE FIRST PERSON: That is, 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. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present it to the class.

WEEK SIX

- * Pitch and workshop your short film ideas and character monologues.
- * Lecture and Clips: Two Antagonists (Theme and Plot)
- * Keeping Backstories Simple

- * TURN IN: Your 2nd short-film idea, character monologues

WORK DUE WEEK SEVEN

WRITE A ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS OF YOUR STORY, AND FROM THAT SYNOPSIS, WRITE A BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE. **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:** Remember to 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. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present it to the class.

WEEK SEVEN

- * Workshop your 2nd short-film synopsis.
- * Lecture and Clips: Sequences
- * TURN IN: your 2nd short-film synopsis and beat sheet.

WORK DUE WEEK EIGHT

Write the FIRST DRAFT of your 2nd short-film screenplay. Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight, and be prepared to present it to the class.

WEEK EIGHT

- * Lecture and Clips: “Write with the door closed, rewrite with the door open.”
- * Workshop your 2nd short-film first draft.
- * Turn in: The 2nd short-film first draft.

WORK DUE WEEK NINE

REVISE AND POLISH both your 1st and 2nd short film screenplays. Email copies to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present one of them to the class.

WEEK NINE

- * Workshop your revised short film drafts.
- * Lecture, Clips: Feature Film Structure
- * Turn in: Your revised drafts of both your 1st and 2nd short-film screenplays.

WORK DUE WEEK TEN

Prepare TWO STORY IDEAS FOR YOUR FEATURE FILM PROJECT, consisting of a few sentences each. Try to use the “Premise Formula” you learned earlier.

As before, each idea should address: 1) The central character or characters, 2) what the character(s) will encounter in the body of the story – i.e. the subject or central "conflict" of the story, 3) an indication of how the story will resolve. ***Include with each idea, in a paragraph***

or two, why the idea is important to you and deserves to be made into a feature. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to pitch these ideas in class.

WEEK TEN

- * Turn in: Feature story ideas and explanations.
- * Pitch and workshop your feature story ideas.
- * Lecture and clips: Sequences that lead to Plot Points.

WORK DUE WEEK ELEVEN

Choose the story idea you plan to develop, and WRITE A BRIEF BACKSTORY of its protagonist and antagonist(s). Then create a ONE-PAGE MONOLOGUE for each of these characters, writing 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. As with your short-film characters, try to capture each of these characters' unique rhythms and point-of-view. Notice how adding specific, identifiable characters to a simple story idea brings that story to life and lets us see its potential. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present it to the class.

WEEK ELEVEN

- * Workshop your character monologues and backstories.

- * Turn in: Your character and backstories.
- * Lecture and Clips: The Set Up.

WORK DUE WEEK TWELVE

Write your opening scene and your introduction of your main character. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present it to the class.

WEEK TWELVE

- * Workshop opening scenes
- * Lecture, Clips: Essential Scenes
- * Turn in: Opening scenes.

WORK DUE WEEK THIRTEEN

Expand your feature story idea into a synopsis of not more than five pages, *breaking it down into acts*. Tell the story as it will unfold on the screen: Include the setting, the major characters, the main story beats, and the resolution. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present it to the class.

WEEK THIRTEEN

- * Workshop your synopsis.
- * Turn in: Your synopsis.

- * Lecture and Clips: Supporting Characters

WORK DUE WEEK FOURTEEN

Revise your feature synopsis, telling the story simply but fully in no more than five pages. Email a copy to all members of the class by Monday night at midnight, and be prepared to present it to the class.

WEEK FOURTEEN

- * Workshop your revised feature synopsis.
- * Lecture: Research and The Truth is No Excuse.
- * Reasons for Diversity

WEEK FIFTEEN

- * Turn in: Your complete and revised Feature Synopsis.

Syllabus and assignments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

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 Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. 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>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

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