

**USC School of Cinematic Arts  
INTERMEDIATE SCREENWRITING**

**CTWR 529**

SECTION 19257

Fall Semester 2017

Tuesdays, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

Room SCA 259

Jeff Hammer, Instructor

email: jthammer77@yahoo.com

Office hours by appointment

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** This class is an intermediate course in writing for the screen. Its goal is to help you write the best scripts possible for CTPR 546 or thesis film production. It also aims to build on the screenwriting skills you have previously developed and to enhance your ability to write, both cinematically and dramatically. Beyond that, the course strives to do what all good writing courses do - help you to your own voice as writers.

**COURSE GOALS:** Students will complete three projects over the course of the semester: two complete short-film screenplays (with revisions) that follow the submission guidelines of CTPR 546 for possible production in that class and one original feature outline, ready for development into a screenplay. The idea is to look forward to the realistic possibility of having the short screenplays produced and to create a feature film outline that has the potential to become a first-rate screenplay.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** This class is a workshop, and you will be expected to read and give constructive feedback to your classmates. The collaborative process is central to writing for film and television and is an integral part of the class experience. Intelligently analyzing and critiquing screenplays is an essential skill for anyone involved in filmmaking. Students will read everyone's assignment **BEFORE** class and will bring **WRITTEN** comments to discuss in class.

Assignments are due by the class dates specified in the syllabus. **All assignments must bear your name, the project title, and an accurate date (see E-mail Formats).** **In most cases (indicated in the syllabus), the assignments are to be emailed to the entire class by midnight the Sunday before class.**

**GRADES:**

Class participation - 10%

Written comments on peers' work - 30%

2 completed and revised short film screenplays - 40% (20% each)

1 completed and revised feature film outline - 20%

### **RECOMMENDED READING:**

You are urged to **READ SCREENPLAYS** (in standard screenplay format) of films that you know well and especially admire. It's the best way to experience how the visuals and dialogue of an influential film first played out on the page. Also recommended:

- *Screenwriting is Rewriting* by Jack Epps, Jr.
- *On Directing Film* by David Mamet
- *Rebel Without A Crew* by Robert Rodriguez

### **CLASS RULES:**

**Participation:** Constructive feedback is a crucial component to this course, and the best way to participate is to be present. As such, students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Unexcused absences or repeated lateness will lower your final grade.

- Students who miss a class, excused or unexcused, will receive a zero for participation for the missed class. You can't participate if you are not here.
  - With 1 absence, the highest participation grade you can earn is an A-.
  - With 2 absences, the highest participation grade you can earn is a B-.
  - With 3 absences, the highest participation grade you can earn is a C-.
  - **More than three absences, excused or unexcused, will be basis for failure for the course.** (An essential component of the course is providing regular feedback to your peers, just as they will be providing regular feedback to you. You can't fulfill your class obligations if you are not here.)
- Two unexcused absences will lower your final grade by half a letter (i.e. the highest final grade you can earn is an A-).
- A third unexcused absence will lower your final grade by a full letter (i.e. the highest final grade you can earn is an B).
- Two late arrivals and/or early departures equates to one full absence.
- In order for an absence to be excused, the student must have written approval from the instructor prior to the absence.

**Written Comments:** Students are expected to read their peers' work **BEFORE** class. Students will prepare concise, written comments for their peers' writing assignments on a weekly basis. These comments will be emailed to the instructor BEFORE class.

- Students who submit all written comments before class will receive full credit for the week.
- Students who submit all written comments within 24 hours after completion of class will receive 85% credit for the week.
- Students who submit all written comments within 2-7 days after completion of class will receive 50% credit for the week.
- Students who do not submit all written comments within 1 week after completion of class will receive zero credit for the week.

**Late Assignments:** Punctual and professional work is an expectation of the course. Late work will negatively impact your final grade.

- Work submitted on time may earn a maximum grade of an A for the assignment.
- Work submitted 0-3 hours past the deadline may earn a maximum grade of an A- for the assignment.
- Work submitted 3-24 hours past the deadline may earn a maximum grade of a B for the assignment.
- Work submitted 1-3 days past the deadline may earn a maximum grade of a C for the assignment.
- Work submitted 3-7 days past the deadline may earn a maximum grade of a D for the assignment.
- Work submitted 1-2 weeks past the deadline may earn a maximum grade of an F (50%) for the assignment.
- Assignments that are 2 weeks late from original due date will not be accepted, thereby resulting in a zero for the grade.
- **In order to respect your peers' time, students will not be required to read assignments that are submitted past the deadline.**

**Assignments must be properly formatted and PROOFREAD.** You will be held to professional standards – typos, abused homonyms (“there, their, they’re”, etc.), grammatical and spelling errors may cause your draft to be returned unread.

- Work submitted with 2-3 grammatical/spelling errors may earn a maximum grade of an A- for the assignment.
- Work submitted with 4-6 grammatical/spelling errors may earn a maximum grade of a B for the assignment.
- Work submitted with 7-10 grammatical/spelling errors may earn a maximum grade of a C for the assignment.
- Work submitted with 10+ grammatical/spelling errors may earn a maximum grade of an F (50%) for the assignment.

**Missed Assignment or 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 need to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before the final assignment is due.

**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 written permission of the instructor.

**E-mail Formats:** Assignments delivered by email should be in **PDF format**. The **filenames** should consist of the “*student's last name\_ assignment name\_date.pdf*” (Example: *Gonzales\_CharacterSketch\_9-19-16.pdf*)

**Laptop, Cell Phone, iPad Policy:** Cell phones must be turned off during class. Laptops, iPads, and similar devices may be used only with permission from the instructor.

**Respect:** Constructive critiques of your peers' work is expected and encouraged. However, personal or needlessly harsh attacks will not be tolerated. Students engaging in such negative activity will be dismissed from class.

## SYLLABUS

**Syllabus and assignments are subject to change at instructor's discretion. If changes to the schedule occur, students will receive an emailed notice.**

### **WEEK 1 (8/22/17)**

- **Focus: Introductions, Rules, Getting Started**
- **Brainstorm/Pitch story ideas for 1<sup>st</sup> Short Film Screenplay**
- **Assign Group A and Group B**

### **Written assignments due Week 2:**

**GROUP A** – Choose the SHORT FILM IDEA that you most want to develop in this class, and WRITE A ONE-PAGE CHARACTER SKETCH for the **protagonist** and its **antagonist**, writing IN THE FIRST PERSON and revealing backstory for each of these characters. That is, let each character speak in his/her own voice, conveying 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. Hint: What the character *thinks* about things won't be as important as how he or she *feels* about things. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

**GROUP B** -- Develop THREE STORY IDEAS for your first short film screenplay. Keep them simple for now, consisting of little more than a few sentences each. Each idea should address: 1) The central character or characters, 2) The subject or central "conflict" of the story, and 3) an indication of how the story will resolve. Do not wait until the last minute to explore these ideas. One of them will be the foundation of your next screenplay, and you'll want to have confidence in it. We will be discussing these ideas in class.

Also, 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. Carefully explore these ideas, and review them each week to see how you can enrich them.

## WEEK 2 (8/29/17)

- **Focus: Character Intros**
- **Group A workshop character sketches**
- **Group B discuss short film ideas**

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

GROUP A – Write a write a BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE (or “beat sheet”) from this synopsis. **For the beat sheet**, 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. This beat sheet should not exceed 1 page. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

GROUP B – Choose the SHORT FILM IDEA that you most want to develop in this class, and WRITE A ONE-PAGE CHARACTER SKETCH for the **protagonist** and its **antagonist**, writing IN THE FIRST PERSON and revealing backstory for each of these characters. That is, let each character speak in his/her own voice, conveying 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. Hint: What the character *thinks* about things won’t be as important as how he or she *feels* about things. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

## WEEK 3 (9/5/17)

- **Focus: Story structure (The Short Film)**
- **Group B workshop character sketches**
- **Group A workshop your short film beat sheet**

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

GROUP A – Begin writing the FIRST DRAFT of your short film screenplay. *This draft will be workshopped in Week 5.*

GROUP B – Write a write a BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE (or “beat sheet”) from this synopsis. **For the beat sheet**, 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. This beat sheet should not exceed 1 page. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

## WEEK 4 (9/12/17)

- **Focus: Writing the scene**
- **Group B workshop short film beat sheet**

### **Written Assignment due Week 5:**

GROUP A – Complete the FIRST DRAFT of your short film screenplay. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

GROUP B – Begin writing the FIRST DRAFT of your short film screenplay. *This draft will be workshopped in Week 6.*

**WEEK 5 (9/19/17)**

- **Focus: Writing Scene Description**
- **Group A workshop short film first draft**

**Written Assignment due Week 6:**

GROUP A – REVISE your first draft, using notes provided by your peers. *Please bring one hard copy of the revised draft to the next class, and please email instructor a PDF. Be sure to pay particular attention to spelling, punctuation, and formatting.*

GROUP B – Complete the FIRST DRAFT of your short film screenplay. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

**WEEK 6 (9/26/17)**

- **Focus: Rewriting**
- **Group B workshop short film first draft**

**Written assignment due Week 7:**

GROUP A – Choose the idea that you want to develop as your 2<sup>nd</sup> SHORT SCREENPLAY. Then, write a BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE (or “beat sheet”) from this synopsis. **For the beat sheet**, 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. This beat sheet should not exceed 1 page. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

GROUP B – REVISE your first draft, using notes provided by your peers. *Please bring one hard copy of the revised draft to the next class, and please email instructor a PDF. Be sure to pay particular attention to spelling, punctuation, and formatting.*

**WEEK 7 (10/3/17)**

- **Focus: Writing Visually**
- **Group A workshop 2nd short film beat sheet**

**Written Assignment due Week 8:**

GROUP A – Begin writing the FIRST DRAFT of your 2nd short-film screenplay. *This draft will be workshopped in Week 9.*

GROUP B – Choose the idea that you want to develop as your 2<sup>nd</sup> SHORT SCREENPLAY. Then, write a BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE (or “beat sheet”) from this synopsis. **For the beat sheet**, 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. This beat sheet should not exceed 1 page. *Email a copy to all*

*members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

ALL - Read *The Crying Game* by Neil Jordan (for Week 10 class on October 24).

### **WEEK 8 (10/10/17)**

- **Focus: Writing Dialogue**
- **Group B workshop 2nd short-film synopsis**

#### **Written Assignment due Week 9:**

GROUP A – Complete the FIRST DRAFT of your 2nd short film screenplay. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

GROUP B – Begin writing the FIRST DRAFT of your 2nd short film screenplay. *This draft will be workshopped in Week 10.*

ALL - Read *The Crying Game* by Neil Jordan (for Week 10 class on October 24).

### **WEEK 9 (10/17/17)**

- **Focus: Writing the feature film**
- **Group A workshop 2nd short-film first draft**

#### **Written Assignment due Week 10:**

GROUP A – REVISE your first draft, using notes provided by your peers. *Please bring one hard copy of the revised draft to the next class, and please email instructor a PDF. Be sure to pay particular attention to spelling, punctuation, and formatting.*

Prepare THREE STORY IDEAS FOR YOUR FEATURE FILM PROJECT, consisting of a few sentences each. 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.

GROUP B – Complete the FIRST DRAFT of your 2nd short-film screenplay. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

ALL - Read *The Crying Game* by Neil Jordan (for next week).

**NOTE: The deadline for submitting screenplays for possible production in CTPR 546 is before midnight on Sunday October 22.** Consult the 546 Submission Guidelines (available on the SCA Community website, in the Writing Division office, and in SPO) for detailed instructions on how to submit.

## **WEEK 10 (10/24/17)**

- **Focus: Case study of *The Crying Game*, break down and analyze structure**
- **Group B workshop 2nd short screenplay first draft**
- **Group A Pitch feature story ideas**

### **Written Assignment due Week 11:**

GROUP A – Choose the story idea you plan to develop, and WRITE A BRIEF BACKSTORY of its protagonist and antagonist. 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. *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

GROUP B – REVISE your first draft, using notes provided by your peers. *Please bring one hard copy of the revised draft to the next class, and please email instructor a PDF. Be sure to pay particular attention to spelling, punctuation, and formatting.*

## **WEEK 11 (10/31/17)**

- **Focus: Reviewing your characters**
- **Group A workshop character monologues**

### **Written Assignment due Week 12:**

GROUP A – Describe your feature story three ways: once in ONE SENTENCE, once in THREE SENTENCES, and once in THREE PARAGRAPHS. Keep it simple at this point. Make us want to see this movie! *Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

GROUP B – Choose the story idea you plan to develop, and WRITE A BRIEF BACKSTORY of its protagonist and antagonist. 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 Sunday night at midnight.*

## **WEEK 12 (11/7/17)**

- **Focus: Opening scene, first ten pages**
- **Group B workshop character monologues**

### **Written Assignment due Week 13:**

GROUP A – Expand your feature story idea into a synopsis of not more than five pages, *breaking it down into 3 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 Sunday night at midnight.*

GROUP B – Describe your feature story three ways: once in ONE SENTENCE, once in THREE SENTENCES, and once in THREE PARAGRAPHS. Keep it simple at this point.  
*Email a copy to all members of the class by Sunday night at midnight.*

### **WEEK 13 (11/14/17)**

- **Focus: Revising your synopsis**
- **Group A workshop your synopses.**

#### **Written Assignment due week 14:**

GROUP A – Revise your feature synopsis, telling the story in no more than five pages.

GROUP B – Expand your feature story idea into a synopsis of not more than five pages, *breaking it down into 3 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 Sunday night at midnight.*

### **WEEK 14 (11/21/16)**

- **Focus: Shaping your feature, working with scenes and sequences**
- **Group B workshop your synopses.**

#### **Written Assignment due week 15:**

GROUP B – Revise your feature synopsis, telling the story in no more than five pages.

### **WEEK 15 (11/28/17)**

#### **Final Thoughts/Remaining Workshopping**

#### **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.