

CTWR 553 – ADVANCED REWRITING (4.0 units):
Revision of a Feature-Length Screenplay
Prerequisite: CTWR 514b or 533b
Section: 19266D

FALL 2017

Instructor: Rick Parks
Class Schedule: 10:am to 12:50pm - Tuesdays
Class Room: SCA 345
Office Hours: By appointment only.
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Phone/text: (818) 262-8091

Calendar/Session

Every Tuesday for 16 weeks, from August 22nd through the 5th of December, with the final draft of the new work to be delivered no later than the 2nd week of December.

Course Description:

The purpose of this class is to take an already-completed screenplay through the next step in the development process, and learn more about embracing an objective, analytical approach to the process.

FALL Semester:

During the semester, students are required to complete **at least one set** of revisions on a previously written first draft of a completed screenplay, though additional revisions are encouraged. In addition to each others work, students may be assigned exemplary, produced scripts to read and discuss in class.

Lectures and analysis of the student's screenplay will result in pages and homework to be submitted on a regular basis throughout the semester. Required reading will be discussed. (see below)

Remember, the goal isn't simply to *complete* the assignment but to refine your *craft*; never to assume, or expect perfection.

As we read your work in class, gathering feedback from both the professor and other students, *keep a notebook*. Write down everything useful we tell you (I expect this) and keep pushing forward. I expect the student to keep track of assignments and progress.

The fundamentals of screenwriting will be stressed, reviewed, and analyzed as we dissect and re-build the better version of your film.

Deadlines:

The course will approach assignments and deadlines in a professional manner. Assignments and pages must be completed by deadlines. Part of learning to be a professional screenwriter is to write under pressure and produce-- under a deadline. Tardy or missing assignments will be subtracted from one's grade.

Required reading:

SCREENWRITING IS REWRITING by Jack Epps, Jr. / Bloomsbury 2016 (Amazon)

Highly Suggested reading:

The Writer's Journey (any edition) by Christopher Vogler. see AMAZON

Save The Cat by Blake Snyder - Michael Wiese Productions, Studio City, CA

Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley.

Subject matters of the course:

- NOTES
- PLAN
- CHARACTER
- ACT ONE ISSUES
- THE OTHER QUADRANTS
- STORY/THEME
- STRUCTURE
- PLOT
- CONFLICT
- ALLIES
- THREADS
- DIALOGUE

Topics and methodology:

The course is designed to use analysis, notes and individual readings of the student's work, class discussion and critique to illuminate the successes and weaknesses in the current draft and to craft credible answers to these issues.

Students will be expected to participate in all discussions and to help their fellow students discover holes in the narrative/structure/ dialogue, etc... and to encourage answers to these deficiencies. In The Industry, writers are often called upon to work on their feet and this classroom will be used as a training ground to hone this important skill.

HOMEWORK:

Is due *no later* than 24 hours before class. This deadline will give the professor and your peers ample time to review your work and to help you with your journey. After that, it's late and will not only reflect on your grade (not my rules) but on your dedication. The student is expected to give as much help in this as he or she would expect/desire in return. As in life, the more you give the more you get.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. **The professor feels strongly about prompt attendance at all classes and conferences.** Students who cannot make a class must contact the professor by email or through the front office **before** they miss the class. The policy of the Writing Division is that *two absences will result in a lowering of your grade one full point, a third absence another point. Two late arrivals are treated as one absence.*

Grading Criteria:

Grading will be dependent on depth and breadth of thought in assignment preparation as well as serious and constructive class participation. All assignments must be submitted on time. "A"'s are for outstanding work.

There may be **only one A grade** in this class, make it yours.

The professor expects students to conduct themselves in a **professional** manner as they prepare to work in The Industry. Professional means all work delivered on time, neat, printed, well thought out. Hurried or slip shod work will not be appreciated. Effort is of critical importance in determining final grade.

Areas that will be considered in determining the student's final grade are:

ASSIGNMENTS

notes - 10%
Plan-5%
Character - 5%
Act 1 changes - 2%
Presentation - 2%
Presentation pt2 2%

MID TERM (beat sheet) - 10%

First 15 pages 2%
15-45 - 2%
45-60 - 2%
60-75 -2%
75-90 - 2%
90-105 - 2%
105-120 - 2%

FINAL DRAFT - 40%

PARTICIPATION - 10%

This course is demanding and success depends on a student's commitment to hard work and originality. Working as a professional writer involves collaboration and this professor expects the students to be involved in each and every discussion. Lack of involvement or lack of working on other student's ideas *will* adversely affect the student's grade.

Individual Meetings:

Students are encouraged to take advantage of office hours. Each student is expected to meet with the professor at least twice during the semester. **The professor will answer questions by email, but would rather answer them, in depth, during class**, so that the other students may benefit from discussing individual story/character/structure problems.

Classroom Decorum

The professor expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a fragile evolving process and we can only expect success if we are supportive and positive in our feedback and criticisms of our fellow students. Any negative attacks will reflect poorly on the student making the attacks and will affect their final grade. We are here to help each other become better writers. Rather than trying

to tell a student what is *wrong*, this professor is more interested in revealing how to make it better. We should strive at all times for constructive criticism.

Issues:

If any issues or concerns arise with any member of the classroom, which might affect a supportive learning environment, the professor would highly encourage the student to contact him privately to seek a resolution.

Laptop Policy and Texting Policy

Laptops may only be used in class for note taking or quick reference. Instant messaging, twittering, texting, checking email or surfing the web is both distracting to the instructor and your fellow students. You should be able to survive two hours and fifty minutes without checking your email or tweeting some random thought. Texting should be saved for break time. The professor reserves the right to ban laptops from the classroom.

Course Schedule and Syllabus:

(-subject to change as needed)

1. YOUR SCRIPT: Why did you write this? What were you trying to say? What's good about it? What's bad? We will examine the process of rewriting a script paying particular attention to the role of premise, structure and character.

EACH OTHER'S SCRIPTS:

We will give and receive notes in class on each other's scripts.

Homework: **NOTES.**

2. DISCUSS YOUR NOTES: PITCH YOUR TAKE - we want to have a game plan and we will talk about a PLAN of attack

HOMEWORK: **YOUR PLAN**

3. CHARACTER ISSUES: in class discussion of your lead/ his or her allies and enemies Things you could do to elevate illuminate your plan/theme/desire, through CHARACTER.

HOMEWORK: revisit your character's traits/strengths/weaknesses and how you can better illuminate/challenge them

4. Discuss: **ACT ONE ISSUES:** it's all in the set-up -- Whose story is it? Who is the character, how's their introduction? What do they want, and why is it import to the plot and the audience? Examine internal and external character story. (Want and Need) the six things - is it enough to take us to page 110?

HOMEWORK - how would you increase the stakes, how can you elevate your main character's wants and needs? How best to develop the "force" propelling your main character through their story.

5. THEME: Discuss sequencing the screenplay into event/theme/character scene groupings. Discuss structure as relations to both plot and character.

HOMEWORK: Prepare to tell the class your revised story as a verbal presentation. This is not a pitch, but a discussion of your idea. Look for threads to hold it together and run throughout the story. Look for plot and character story lines.

Work on understanding what you are writing about such as: Redemption, honor, regret, healing, self- discovery, etc.

6. Discuss the set-up and develop into the main body of the story. Discuss how the set-up will be resolved in the third act.

HOMEWORK: Work on your in class story presentation. Tell the story; scene by scene. Each scene should have a "scene point" (what the scene is about) and an "action description" (what happens in the scene).

Begin to develop the story into 8 major sequences. Each sequence must have a question. Identify the structure, the first and second culminations.

7. In-class presentations of story outlines. Discuss revisions. The living beat sheets will be continually revised during the semester and it is acceptable if the beat sheet at the end of the semester is considerably different than the one delivered early in the term. Constant revision is an important part of writing.

HOMEWORK: Using your in class notes, revise your beat-sheet.

MID-TERM -- Beat-Sheets should be complete and turned in

8. Finish story presentations. Read and discuss pages looking to clarifying and simplifying the character story and plot problems.

HOMEWORK: Deliver 15 pages (the first sequence) focusing on establishing character problem, and on establishing the world of the story.

9. Discuss these First Acts. (sequences) Compare them to your notes.

HOMEWORK: Deliver pages 15 to 45 (the second and third sequence).

10. Discuss pages 30 to 45 (the third sequence) -- Follow the initial story problem and character problem. Discuss the various relationships that are being examined. Discuss sub-plot. How can the various relationships help to propel us through the second act?

HOMEWORK: Deliver pages 45-60.

11. Read and discuss pages 45-60 (the fourth sequence). Discuss first half of Act Two and continue to discuss ways to develop more sub-plot and complication. Discuss the mid-point plot turn.

HOMEWORK: Deliver pages 60-75.

12. Discuss the importance of **changes** in plot, and in characters as we turn to the back half of the screenplay. Read and discuss pages 60-75 (the fifth sequence).

HOMEWORK: Deliver pages 75-90.

13. Focus on looking to increase complications through intensifying relationships and subplot. Complete the Second Act, sixth sequence Read and discuss pages 75-90 (the sixth sequence).

HOMEWORK: Deliver pages 90-105.

14. Discuss the Third Act as it relates to both resolving the character story and resolving the main plot problem. Read and discuss pages 90-106 (the seventh sequence).

HOMEWORK: Deliver pages 105-120.

15. Read and discuss pages 105-120 (the eighth sequence).

HOMEWORK: Students will take notes and execute a short revision of their screenplay paying attention to character development, motivation, and consistency.

Finals Week: Deliver complete First Draft for Final Exam. The class will extend into exam week and discuss completed drafts.

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 of the 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 <http://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.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

Please activate your course in Blackboard with access to the course syllabus. Whether or not you use Blackboard regularly, these preparations will be crucial in an emergency. USC's Blackboard learning management system and support information is available at blackboard.usc.edu.