
USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

The John Wells Division of Writing For Screen and TV CTWR 529 INTERMEDIATE SCREENWRITING SPRING 2018 (4 units)

Instructor: Siavash Farahani
Email: karma@karmafilm.com
Section: 19265D
Time: Wed 7-10 pm
Location: SCA 362
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.

CLASS DESCRIPTION:

Students will complete 3 projects during the semester:

- Two completed and revised narrative short-film screenplays, following the submission guidelines of CTPR 546 for possible production in that class. 8-10 pages each. **PLEASE CHECK WITH PRODUCTION OFFICE FOR 546 SCRIPT SUBMISSION DEADLINE**
- 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.

*****UNLESS OTHERWISE INSTRUCTED ALL WORK IS DUE IN PDF FORMAT BY NOON ON THE DAY OF CLASS UPLOADED TO CLASS DROPBOX*****

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/Viewing:

***The Tools of Screenwriting* by Howard/Mabley**
***Save the Cat* by Blake Snyder**

We will be referring to these texts regularly so please read both ASAP. Additionally we will also read and discuss at least one screenplay from a recent major motion picture (to be determined). You will also be assigned to watch movies and scenes outside of class and pending our progress.

Suggested Additional 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
Stealing Fire From the Gods by James Bonnet
The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler
Story by Robert McKee
How To Build A Great Screenplay by David Howard
Cut to the Chase by Linda Venis

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.

Internet Policy:

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

Laptop, Cell Phone, iPad Policy: The use of laptops, cell phones, iPad's and similar

devices is strictly limited to use for v 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.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

CTWR 529 is a WORKSHOP and relies on your timely attendance and delivery of work. Assignments turned in late will not be accepted. If you miss a class you will forfeit table read and feedback for that week.

Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class. Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by 5%. Your grade will be lowered by 5% 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.

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

Missed Assignments: 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_OUTLINE_1-22-15.pdf)

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (01/10/18)

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

Written work due Week 2: All groups prepare 3 potential loglines for 1st 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 (01/17/18)

- 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 3rd 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 (01/24/18)

- 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 (01/31/18)

- 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 (02/07/18)

- 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 2nd project. Choose something different from your first project.

WEEK 6 (02/14/18)

- 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 (02/21/18)

- 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 (02/28/18)

- 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.

WEEK 9 (03/07/18)

- 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

*******SPRING BREAK MARCH 11-18 ***** NO CLASS**

WEEK 10 (03/21/18)

- 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 03/21/18 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 (03/28/18)

- 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 (04/04/18)

- 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 (04/11/18)

- Workshop feature outlines and character sketches (all groups)

WEEK 14 (04/18/18)

- Workshop feature outline ideas (all groups)
- **Turn in:** Latest version feature outlines.

WEEK 15 (04/25/18) Last Class

- Workshop feature outline ideas (all groups)

*****STUDY PERIOD April 28 - May 1**

****** Final Feature Outline due 12/12/17 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.

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**

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.