

**School of Cinematic Arts**  
**Writing Division**  
**CTWR 533b: Writing The Feature Script**  
**4.0 Units**  
**Pre-Reqs: CTWR 533a**

Instructor: Sean Hood  
Class Schedule: 7:00-10:00pm Thursday  
Class Room: SCA 362  
Office Hours: By appointment.  
Email Address: [seanhood@gmail.com](mailto:seanhood@gmail.com)

**Course Objective:**

The objective of this course is to learn the professional craft of rewriting, to practice the craft by generating, discussing and receiving notes for revision, and to apply the craft by completing a rewrite of an original screenplay.

**Course Description**

From the first draft to the final day of shooting, professional screenwriters face a process of continual reevaluation, ongoing critique and shifting circumstances. They spend most of their time embroiled in rewrites. This course is designed to give students the tools to approach this process in a professional way.

From a purely artistic perspective, rewriting one's own material is the most challenging, painful and ultimately rewarding discipline a writer (or filmmaker) ever faces. Said John Irving, "The most important and essential element of writing is rewriting." This course is also designed help the students face this challenge with confidence and creativity.

The class will lead students step-by-step through the revision of an original feature script, moving from broad discussions of the author's original intent, to a more detailed "game plan" for the rewrite, and finally to the most specific areas of scene and dialogue. Each aspect of the screenplay will be analyzed and reconsidered, with emphasis on story and character fundamentals.

This course will not only help students to improve their scripts, it will allow them to practice skills of analysis, discussion and presentation they will need in future projects throughout their professional careers. With this in mind, students will be expected to participate in all discussions and to help their fellow students develop their outlines and screenplays.

Ultimately, each student is required to complete an extensive rewrite (or rewrites) by the end of the semester. A dialogue polish does **not** constitute an extensive rewrite. Since each screenplay offers unique challenges for each writer, the instructor will take into account the progress of each student on an individual basis.

### **Course Reading:**

Students will be required to read each other's original screenplays as well as each other's ongoing revisions. Because of sheer volume of this material as well as the time and care taken in its analysis, reading from the textbook will be mostly optional:

*Screenwriting is Rewriting* by Jack Epps (Head of USC's Writing Division, School of Cinematic Arts,) Jr. Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2016, ISBN: 9781628927405

### **Assignments:**

The writing assignments will be due by **midnight Tuesday** previous to each class. This is a firm deadline and the late delivery of assignments will impact your grade for the course. If you finish the work earlier, please send it in. All written assignments will be uploaded to the Dropbox folder.

You'll be expected to come to class with typed notes on your colleagues' pages for the class discussion. These written notes will be then uploaded to the Dropbox folder after class, sometime on **Thursday**.

### **Grading Criteria:**

Grading will depend on the quality and improvement of student's written work and in-class presentations, as well as the student's involvement in the class discussions.

The course aims to prepare students to be working professionals. With that in mind, grading will reflect the standards and expectations students will encounter in the "real world." So, all assignments must be submitted **on time**. Students must attend all classes, arriving **on time**. Students who cannot make a class or complete an assignment must contact the professor via email **before** they miss a class or fail to complete an assignment.

### **Expectation of Professionalism**

When judging a screenwriter's work, industry professionals often ask if a writer can "deliver." Professional work is "delivered" on-time, proofread, and carefully thought out. Slipshod or hurried work is rarely tolerated. Assignments may be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, screenplay format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission. So in determining a final grade, **hard work and professionalism** will be as important as originality and skill.

Likewise, working as a professional requires the skills of collaboration and communication. So as they would be in any story meeting in the entertainment industry, students are expected to be involved in each and every discussion. Failing to read and engage with other students' material will affect the students' final grades.

Specific areas that will be considered in determining a final grade are:

- Classroom Participation – 5%
- Written Feedback (Notes) – 5%
- Summary of Notes – 5%
- Gameplan and Outline – 5%
- Bi-Weekly Revised Pages – (10% each) 40%
- Final rewritten and polished screenplay – 40%

As per Writing Division policy the breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade is...

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%

### **Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

Students are expected to 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.

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.

### **Internet Policy:**

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

### **Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:**

As the class is discussion based, cell phones should be turned off. You may use your laptop when giving and receiving notes, but for those reasons only.

## Class Schedule

### Week 1 – Thursday, January 11

- Lecture: **The Rewrite Process**
- Introductions.
- Review of Syllabus.
- Discussion of class goals.
- Splitting the class into two Groups.

### Assignment Due – Tuesday, January 16 Midnight

- Reread your own script from beginning to end.
  - Annotate draft as you read.
  - Using Rewrite Questionnaire, summarize the scripts's strengths and weaknesses.
  - Read GROUP A scripts (for class discussion.)
  - Using Rewrite Questionnaire, prepare written notes on GROUP A scripts.
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### Week 2 – Thursday, January 18

- Lecture: **Rewriting The Story**
- Organizing feedback/notes into a Summary of Feedback.
- Critique and discussion of GROUP A screenplays.
- All deliver 1-2 pages of written notes on screenplays written by GROUP A.

### Assignment Due – Tuesday, January 23 Midnight (after Labor Day)

- GROUP A delivers a 1-2 page Summary of Feedback
  - Read GROUP B scripts (for class discussion.)
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### Week 3 – Thursday, January 25

- Lecture: **Rewriting Character**
- How to create a Gameplan and Outline for the rewrite.
- Critique and discussion of GROUP B screenplays.
- All deliver 1-2 pages of written notes on screenplays written by GROUP B.
- Each student in GROUP A makes an **Appointment With The Professor** for the next week.

### Assignment Due – Tuesday, January 30 Midnight

- GROUP B delivers a 1-2 page Summary of Feedback
- GROUP A delivers a 2-3 page Gameplan and Outline detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.

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**Week 4 – Thursday February 1**

- Lecture: **Rewriting Structure**
- Constructing a Game Plan.
- Discussion of Group A's Gameplan and Outline.
- Each student in GROUP B makes an **Appointment With The Professor** for the Make Up Class February 15

**Assignment Due – Tuesday, February 6, Midnight**

- GROUP B delivers a 2-3 page Gameplan and Outline detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.
  - GROUP A begins writing.
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**Week 5 – Thursday, February 8**

- Lecture: **The Set Up and First Act**
- Discussion of Group B's Gameplan and Outline.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday, February 13, Midnight**

- GROUP B begins writing.
  - GROUP A delivers revised Sequences One and Two (The First Act)
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**Week 6 – Thursday, February 15**

- Lecture: **Subplots and Relationships**
- Discussion of Group A's work.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday, February 20, Midnight**

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences One and Two (The First Act)
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**Week 7 – Thursday, February 22**

- Lecture: **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Act, Building to The Midpoint**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday, February 27, Midnight**

- GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Three and Four (up to the Midpoint)

**Week 8 - Thursday, March 1**

- Lecture: **Building Sequences: structure, tension, mini-movie**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday, March 6, Midnight**

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Three and Four (up to the Midpoint)
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**Week 9 – Thursday, March 8**

- Lecture: **End of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Act**
  - Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.
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Spring Break – March 11-18

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**Assignment Due – Tuesday, March 20, Midnight**

- GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Five and Six (Complete Second Act)
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**Week 10 – Thursday, March 22**

- Lecture: **Rewriting Scenes**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday, March 27 Midnight**

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Five and Six (Complete Second Act)
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**Week 11 - Thursday, March 29**

- Lecture: **The Third Act**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday, April 3, Midnight**

- GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Seven and Eight (The Third Act)
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**Week 12 – Thursday April 5**

- Lecture: **Rewriting**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday April 10, Midnight**

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Seven and Eight (The Third Act)
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**Week 13– Thursday April 12**

- Lecture: **Polishing**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday April 17, Midnight**

If you are behind, submit missing sequences. You may submit Optional Polish Pages

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**Week 14 – Thursday April 19**

Lecture: **Hero's Journey's, Saved Cats, and other templates.**  
Discussions of the submitted catch-up sequences and Polish Pages.

**Assignment Due – Tuesday April 24, Midnight**

Anyone who wants to can deliver Optional Polish pages or missing sequences.

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**Week 15 – Thursday April 26**

Final notes on submitted pages and encouragement.  
Discussions about transitioning from film school to professional life.

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**FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE – Thursday May 5, Midnight**

Students who are late with their work will get an **entire letter drop** for each day they are late. (For example: A- to B-)

## 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**