
USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

The John Wells Division of Writing for Screen and TV CTWR 533A – WRITING THE FEATURE SCREENPLAY SPRING 2018 (4 Units)

Instructor: Siavash Farahani
Email: karma@karmafilm.com
Section: 19424D
Time: MONDAY 4–7pm
Location: SCB 101
Office hours: By appointment

Course Objective:

To craft a professional grade first draft of a feature length screenplay.

Class Description:

In 533A the student will ideate, develop, outline and write the first draft of a feature length screenplay. The foundation of the class will be Frank Daniel's precepts of a "good story well told."

The goal here is to craft compelling, character-driven stories, well structured and told for maximum dramatic impact and audience participation. Students will be encouraged to use the dramatic storytelling to find and amplify their unique voice and imagination to create memorable characters and storylines. They will also be trained to identify the genre and themes of their stories, while learning techniques for writing effective prose, dramatic dialogue and cinematic scenes.

As such we will follow an aggressive and intense writing schedule. **Students should anticipate 10-12 pages of writing PER WEEK. The final screenplay must be no less than 105 and no more than 110 pages when formatted according to industry standards (Final Draft, WB, COLE&HAAG format or equivalent).**

This is a workshop class where you will be expected to contribute. **As such, your attendance and participation is mandatory for the process and your final grade.**

Our class time will be divided between lecture, discussion and in-class table readings of your pages, with emphasis on the latter. Students will be broken up into reading groups, with an alternating weekly rotation. Depending on progress, we may also have a guest speakers and in class screenings towards the end of the semester.

The ultimate goal here is to lay a strong foundation for the writing of the first draft of a dramatic, cinematic screenplay.

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

Grading Criteria/Evaluation:

While there are many great and varied storytelling traditions in the world, this class focuses exclusively on the Western tradition, in particular as it is practiced in Hollywood studio system today.

This includes a three act narrative with all its structural components as taught during the semester including - but not limited to – Prologue, Status Quo, Catalyst, Main Tension, Midpoint, Climax, Resolution, Epilogue etc. All with an eye towards maximum dramatic impact and audience participation.

Great emphasis will be placed on creating compelling/multidimensional characters with clear goals, needs, obstacles, conflicts and transformations. This includes believable and well rounded protagonists and antagonist who display a range of human of emotions and behaviors, whose wants, needs, choices and action drive the story.

Your work will be evaluated based on your attention to character development and arc, plot structure, themes, visuals, cinematic appeal and, last but not least, proper format and grammar.

You will also be graded you on your ability to receive and give feedback and make the necessary improvements while encouraging you to tell a unique story using your personal voice and imagination.

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

Assignment/Grade Breakdown:

Loglines/Bios:	5%
Outline:	10%
Act I:	25%
Act II:	25%
Act III:	25%
Participation:	10%

Total	100%

Per theWriting 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.**

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, typos and late delivery. 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.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

CTWR 533A 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 to 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 Assignment: 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)

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Laptops and Ipads are only allowed for class work and assignments. Use of cellphones is limited to reading scripts in class. The use of any of the above is a privilege and maybe suspended if used for anything unrelated to class (i.e. Facebook, Snapchat, texting etc).

Class Schedule:

**NOTE: all deadlines are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.*

Week 1 (01/08/18)

Introductions.

LECTURE: A good story well told. Loglines. Structure.

Discussion. Clips.

Divide class into writing groups.

Assignment : Develop 3 loglines to pitch to class next week based on class discussion. Logline must include

- 1)Who the story is about (protagonist& antagonist)
- 2)What the story is about in terms of character's goal and conflict
- 3)Setting (where and where the story is taking place)
- 4) What the tone and genre of the story is.
- 5) Hook (the unexpected element that piques the curiosity of the audience)

Loglines will be pitched to class on the next class.

(01/15/17) MARTIN LUTHER KING HOLIDAY **NO CLASS**

Week 2 (01/22/18)

Bios & Outlines.. Structure lecture. Discussion.

Assignment: Based on class feedback, select one of your three loglines to develop into a feature screenplay this semester. Then create:

#1) A one page bio for your protagonist and antagonist each. Each bio should devote one paragraph to the character's life prior to, during and after the events of the story.

#2) Based on class lecture and the beat sheet template, identify the genre of your story and develop a step outline for all three acts of your screenplay. The outline should be written in short bullet pointed story beats, not in prose or treatment style.

Send both assignments in one PDF please.

Week 3 (01/29/18)

Feedback on outlines/bios for both groups.

Assignment: Start writing Act I.

Week 4 (02/05/18)

Table read ACT I for Group A

Assignment: Keep working on Act I.

Week 5 (02/12/18)

Table read ACT I for Group B

Assignment: Keep working on Act I.

(02/19/18) PRESIDENT'S DAY ** NO CLASS**

Week 6 (02/26/18)

Table read ACT I for Group A

Assignment: Keep working on Act I.

Week 7 (03/05/18)

ACT I due before class for both groups . 25% of final grade.

Table read ACT I for Group B

Assignment : Start writing Act II.

(03/12/18) SPRING RECESS ** NO CLASS**

Week 8 (03/19/18)

Table read ACT II for group A

Assignment: Keep working on ACT II

Week 9 (03/26/18)

Table read ACT II for group B

Assignment: Keep working on ACT II

Week 10 (04/02/18)

Table read ACT II for group A

Assignment: Keep working on ACT II

Week 11 (04/09/18)

ACT II due before class for both groups . 25% of final grade.

Table read ACT II for group B

Assignment: Start working on ACT III

Week 12 (04/16/18)

Table read ACT III for Group A

Assignment: Both groups keep working on ACT III

Week 13 (04/23/18) ** FINAL CLASS******

Table read ACT III for Group B

Assignment: Keep working on Act III

*****COMPLETED FINAL SCRIPT DUE BY NOON MAY 7, 2018 in DROPBOX.
Combined 75% of final grade.**

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**