

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 500 63223 Dramaturgical Perspectives and Approaches

Spring 2018 Monday 5 – 7:50 pm

Location: GFS 204

Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Office: JEF 201, 950 W. Jefferson, Los Angeles 90089

Office Hours: Available: Tues 2:30 - 5 pm ; Wed 11 am – 1 pm;
Wed 5 – 6:30 pm; Thurs 10 - 11 am; please note that office hours
are by appointment only; contact me via email or phone, at least 24
hours in advance. For appointments outside these hours, I am
available via videoconference.

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<http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts – Mr. Prakash
Shirke, Contact Info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288. MCC

Course Description

Catalogue description: *THTR 500* An advanced writing workshop that investigates the art and craft of dramatic writing initiated/completed in other MFA in Dramatic Writing courses or that was submitted as a sample for program entry.

When you write, you lay out a line of words...The line of words is a hammer. You hammer against the walls of your house. You tap the walls, lightly, everywhere. After giving many years' attention to these things, you know what to listen for. Some of the walls are bearing walls; they have to stay or everything will fall down. Other walls can go with impunity; you can hear the difference. Unfortunately, it is often a bearing wall that has to go. It cannot be helped. There is only one solution, which appalls you, but there it is. Knock it out. Duck. —Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*

Course Overview

Dramaturgical Perspectives and Approaches is a writing workshop for graduate student writers in which the various strategies, tools, and principles of analyzing, absorbing, and revising text will be explored at both the intuitive and the technical levels. In short, the workshop is devoted to mastering the art and craft of revision. As writers, we come to realize: Writing is rewriting. Whether revising to improve a first draft to ready it for submissions, or whether retooling a later draft to prepare it for production, the process can be a challenge—but it shouldn't be a mystery. In this workshop, we'll investigate all aspects of the rewrite—meditation, preparation, the rewrite plan, the writing process itself, and the practice of maintaining focus throughout. Various dramaturgical theories will be explored—and challenged. Attention will be paid to the various situations a writer may face in the revision process: The need to re-imagine or re-tool story and structure; the need to concentrate on dialogue; the need to compress events or compress characters or maintain a consistent tone. The rewrite phase is where analytical skills work hand in hand with instinct and original vision, where creativity takes the form of new solutions for old problems, where difficult decisions are made, where risks are taken—none of which are limitations, by the way. They are assets.

The aim of THTR 500 is to determine what a script needs to achieve its greatest potential and to proceed toward that goal.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- apply various dramaturgical principles to analysis of a script;
- assess their own work and the work of other writers for the purposes of providing constructive feedback for rewriting;
- establish a working knowledge of various concrete rewrite tools and strategies;
- understand both intuitive and technical components of the rewrite process;
- use the right tool for the right job, i.e., establish a method or methods of working on the range of elements found in a script, including character, dialogue, story, structure, atmosphere/tono, theatricality, theme, pacing/rhythm, meaningfulness;
- employ meditation, deep investigation, research, and preparation when revising;
- devise a rewrite plan;
- revise a script.

And Beyond...

We're also adopting key elements of USC's 21st-century vision as our own by:

- GOING GREEN
- CONNECTING
- TRANSFORMING

What does this mean?

GOING GREEN means that we will save on time, energy, and paper. You will no longer print your work; instead, we will project your scenes, brainstorming materials, revision plans, etc. onto a giant screen via laptop computer. You won't print your Final Project; instead, you'll turn in a PDF of the script electronically and I will give you feedback directly on your manuscript via electronic Sticky Notes. All handouts and course materials will be paperless, sent via email and available online via Blackboard.

CONNECTING means that we will make contact in several ways—with each other, with the creative community, with the world at large. We'll connect with each other to form a support network so that everyone feels secure taking artistic risks; plus we'll connect via text message and online to keep up to the minute on what's going on in class; you may even want to try connecting via the free teleconferencing tools available (Google Hangout, Skype). We'll also stay attuned to what's going on in American theatre, and we'll look at what's going on in the world—and explore how we can use art for growth and healing. Let's also take a look at where we are—the American West—and consider how the stories of this region have gone untold and the people have gone unrecognized and determine what we can do to change that.

TRANSFORMING means that we will be looking at theatre writing as a way to effect transformation in our lives, and in the lives of others; we'll look at creating theatre from a

place of empathy, from a place of heart-driven concern for humanity; we'll look at culture and trends and attempt to define and redefine playwriting for the 21st century.

Prerequisite(s): None

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

THE EMPTY SPACE. Peter Brook.

UNPUBLISHED PLAYS (to be supplied as PDFs by instructor; determined after discussion with writers)

SELECTED TEXTS ON DRAMATURGICAL THEORIES (to be supplied by instructor on Blackboard)

In addition, be sure you have read:

WATER BY THE SPOONFUL. Quiara Alegria Hudes.

THE BROTHER/SISTER PLAYS. Tarrell Alvin McCraney.

TREEFALL. Henry Murray.

SWEAT. Lynn Nottage.

INDECENT. Paula Vogel.

MR. BURNS – A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY. Anne Washburn.

PLAYWRITING BRIEF AND BRILLIANT. Julie Jensen.

Published texts available via the USC Bookstore or online at Amazon. They may also be found via the USC library. Unpublished plays and various articles, essays supplied as PDFs.

The School of Dramatic Arts' Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each student in playwriting courses to read at least seven plays as part of the course and to investigate them critically. You are encouraged, in particular, to read contemporary work. Plays will be suggested in class; you may also turn to "Recommended Reading" (see Blackboard). The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer.

Special Note

All students enrolled in MFADW are required to attend program events. This includes all of the New Works Festival events (NWF I, II, and III), all Western Edge Playwrights' Salon events, and the student orientation held in late August. While some of these dates are not yet solidified, please put the times/dates in your calendar as soon as you can. Because we are monitoring professional development in every course that you take, and in the MFADW overall, your participation in these program events will have a direct impact on your annual review.

Please make any and all travel plans for after the New Works Festival III.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Grading criteria: The quality of work for all components (see Grading Breakdown) is determined by the thoroughness of the effort, the continuing process, and the imagination displayed.

Grading Scale for SDA: **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of acceptable quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

Excellent: A (4) = 100-94; A- (3.7) = 93-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80

Acceptable: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: D+ (1.3) = 69 – 66; D = 65-64 (1); D = 63 - 60 (0.7) = 60s; F (0) = 59 and below

Note: A minimum passing grade for graduate students is C.

- “Excellent” indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight, as demonstrated by their work; “Good” means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material and has done the work well; “Acceptable” indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps; “Poor” indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student’s understanding of the class material; “Failure” is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material.
- When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been good, and will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

Grading Breakdown

Your grade will be based on multiple components: the inquiry into various dramaturgical theories; inspiration/research presentation; preparation for revision; critical analysis (which includes reading and discussion of assigned texts as well as other participants’ work); the development of a revision plan, including presentation of the tools/strategies employed and check-ins on your continuing process; ongoing writing and revision; completion of your Final Project.

Please bear in mind that you earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline. Assignments are accepted only within one week of due date. After that, they are considered a missed assignment, which counts as zero. (Note: A late assignment is marked down one grade notch, approximately 5 points; i.e., an assignment that would have earned an A receives an A- for missing the deadline; an assignment that would have earned a B+ receives a B for missing the deadline, etc.)

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows:

Inquiry into Dramaturgical Methods	15 percent
Inspiration Board/Research Presentation	10 percent
Critical Analysis (reading and discussion)	10 percent
Preparation for Revision – Presentation	10 percent
Personalized Revision Plan	15 percent
Check-Ins	5 percent
Ongoing writing and revision	20 percent
Final Project + Final Exam	15 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

Dramaturgical Methods will be explored via essays and excerpts from longer texts, which will be provided; the usefulness and relevance of the various theories and perspectives will be discussed, and the historical and social context of the various perspectives will be noted. Traditional dramaturgy may be challenged, and new ideas brought forth in meaningful discussion.

The Inspiration Board/Research Presentation is a creative project in which each writer presents the various sources that provide the background for the characters, concept, issues, and world of the play. In addition to being a way to refresh the research component of writing—this project is also a way to get in touch with your unconscious motivators. These presentations will be

supported by video projection and may include visual art, musical inspirations, charts, graphics, articles/news stories/essays, photographs, podcasts, archival documents—any kind of source material. You may want to include the original inspirations/visions for this project as well as the new inspirations/visions you discovered in the process of writing; you may also include the beginnings for the new research and intuitive work you will need to arm yourself with for the revision. The presentations may be done in the specific format of your choice, such as Powerpoint, Prezi, Keynote, Glogster, etc. Be prepared to discuss your vision board/research both in a creative/metaphoric language, as well as pragmatically. This is a tool that can not only help you tap into your imagination, it also provides the rest of us with an active, multimedia form of brainstorming with you; it's a way to start to explore ideas, frame your thoughts, and promote discussion about how to prioritize components of the rewrite.

Critical Analysis is vital to every writer because it provides a process for assessing artistic work. In the analysis of already published/produced plays, you gain experience in taking a deeper look at character, language, and structure—which can then be applied to evaluating your own work, to assist you in revision. In the analysis of the work of other writers in the workshop, you gain experience in providing useful guidance to text that is still in-progress and that may be at a more ephemeral stage of development. Both these skills are important in your ongoing life as a writer.

What is the rewrite plan (AKA Personal Revision Plan)?

Each of you will devise some sort of strategy or process-oriented plan for your rewrite, identifying the areas you intend to tackle, and prioritizing where the work needs to be done. Your plan should include a story and structure component as well as a dialogue and character portion, checking for authenticity, voice, and integrity. These rewrite plans will be tailored to the specific needs of the particular script you are working on at this time.

What does participation entail?

Participation includes: presentations; in-class exercises; discussion of assigned reading; and, most important, constructive, guided feedback provided for the other writers' work. The participation grade is determined as follows: For each class session, you get a check mark for showing up (which constitutes a B); you get a check mark with a plus sign (+) if you participate diligently (which constitutes an A); you get a check mark with a negative sign (-) if your participation is less than adequate (which constitutes a C). Please respect your community of writers and be on time. Chronic lateness will constitute a lowering of the participation grade

Your Final Project is a revised draft of the script you designated for rewriting at the beginning of the semester. This should be a revision of an already existing work, rather than a new play. The project will be graded on artistic merit, comprehension of rewrite principles, and progress, i.e., your growth from beginning draft work to revised draft.

HINT: Keep a Creative Journal! This is an archive of your explorations for writing; it may include jottings off the top of your head, stuff from your Inspiration Board, research, ideas, resources for current and future writing, and exercises and raw material from class. NOTE: It's no longer necessary to keep an actual journal, on paper. Due to the proliferation of smart phone and tablet apps for storing notes, etc., the Creative Journal may now be electronic. But do keep one. It will make your writing so much easier!

Note: The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING state that:

- *There shall be no unexcused absences.*
- *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur. Under such exceptional circumstances, no late penalties will accrue.*

Additional Policies

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. This course is modeled along the lines of a professional, artistic workshop; thus, as a member of such a workshop, your participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your colleagues' work as well. Theatre is a highly collaborative, community-oriented medium and play development is a key part of the life of a playwright. Indeed, in this class, one of our projects depends upon collaboration. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues' work and contribute to the discussion. Absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare the assigned work that is due and turn it in immediately upon return to the workshop.

1. You are entering into a collaborative relationship with fellow writers and, thus, it is your responsibility to be available to your workshop colleagues for feedback, analysis, and support.
2. All workshop members must be treated with respect.
3. You are required to attend the workshop and to be on time. Tardiness is defined as being 15 minutes late or more. Excessive tardiness will affect your ongoing writing and participation grade.
4. Though SDA's policy states that there are no unexcused absences, please note that I will excuse absences for certain specific reasons, such as a valid professional development opportunity, provided you make arrangements with me in advance. For other absences to be excused, the absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance). For the most part, if you are doing your work diligently and if you communicate with me, I will excuse a legitimate absence.
5. All assignments, written and/or otherwise, must be prepared on time and turned in (or presented) on the deadline date. Late assignments will be marked down due to the missed deadline. Assignments not turned in within a week of deadline count as missed assignments (zero credit).
6. IF YOU MISS CLASS: It is your responsibility—and SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY—to make up work you have missed and to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from your classmates or Blackboard, **not from me**. I will not be repeating lectures or class discussion; you will need to make arrangements to do independent research on whatever topics you have missed to keep up with the workshop. You will also need to keep in contact with your classmates to obtain notes and/or information re: what you missed. Again: Do not request notes or information from me. Course materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. For your syllabus, handouts, etc., go to Blackboard.
7. Please check your e-mail regularly to see if there are any changes in class meeting place, etc. On rare occasions, it becomes necessary to schedule a new location for class meeting. If I am unable to provide you with this information in the preceding class, I will send you the information via e-mail and/or text message.

8. We're going green in this classroom, so you will be providing all workshop members with copies of your work by **projecting your documents onto the screen in the classroom from your computer**, thus eliminating the need for paper. Instructions on how to do this will be provided. For collaborations, you may work on Google documents that may be team-edited via Google Drive.
9. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail or text message at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee I will receive your message with sufficient time to make arrangements to meet with you. Please note that I have included multiple ways to contact me on the front page of this syllabus.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Weeks 1 – 3 Jan 8 to Jan 26	Preparation & Gathering Introduction: Where Are We and Where Are We Going? Consider: Surprising yourself; writing the best play you <i>can't</i> write; writing beyond your comfort zone; uncovering the people whose stories haven't been told.	Discussion: The Elements of Dramatic Writing. Discuss: <i>Playwriting Brief & Brilliant</i> . Introduction to Various Dramaturgical Approaches. What's Working—and What Isn't? What Is Satisfying to You in the Script—and What Isn't? <i>TBD: The "assessment-challenge" plays, i.e., who should read what?</i>	Week 1: Identify which play each writer will work on and do preliminary discussion of the script. Week 2: Present Inspiration Board/Research presentation. Plus: Start evaluation, discussion, etc on first writer's script. Weeks 2 – 3: Read and prepare to discuss essays/excerpts on dramaturgical theories. Week 2: Do evaluation, discussion, etc. of second writer's script. Week 3: Continue evaluation, discussion of scripts as necessary.
Weeks 4 - 6 Jan 29 to Feb 16	Tools of the Trade Using Charts, Meditation, Analysis, Creative Mapping, etc.	Discussion Introduction to Revision Plan. Exploration of Rewrite Tools--Traditional and Non-, Mechanical and Non. Combining Concrete Tools with the Intuitive. Enhancing Empathy. Using Metaphor. Further Discussion of Dramaturgical Approaches.	Weeks 4 - 6: Present preparation materials. Present revision plan. Write exploratory revised scenes. Read the assessment-challenge plays. Brainstorm with group.

<p>Weeks 7 - 8</p> <p>Feb 19 to Mar 2</p>	<p>Investigation of Story Structure The Physical Mission Versus the Personal/Psychic Mission; The Flip from Want to Need.</p>	<p>Discussion The Search for Meaningfulness.</p>	<p>Weeks 7 and 8: Workshop new scenes for your FPP.</p> <p>Midterm work, due week 8: Turn in 20 pages for midterm assessment.</p>
<p>Week 9</p> <p>Mar 5- 9</p>	<p>The Magic of Language Putting Language to Work</p>	<p>Discussion Rhythm, Pace, Sounds. Imagery and Mystery. Miscommunication, Misdirection, Misinterpretation.</p>	<p>Week 9: Present new scenes and project plans.</p> <p>Keep working.</p>
<p>Mar 12 - 16</p>	<p>NO CLASS</p>	<p>SPRING BREAK</p>	<p>Keep working on your play.</p>
<p>Weeks 10 - 11</p> <p>Mar 19 To Mar 30</p>	<p>Insight & Evaluation What Did You Intend— and Where Are You Now? (For good or for bad.)</p> <p>-.</p>	<p>Discussion Epiphanies and Revelations.</p> <p>Consider: What changes everything? What is missing? What does the play need? How to go deeper?</p> <p>How do you motivate yourself to do YOUR work?</p>	<p>Week 10: Present scenes.</p> <p>Week 11: Present scenes.</p> <p>Week 11: Self-help. Assess the raw material you've created, along with the pages you've generated. Assess risk-taking and construct a challenge. Look to your sources of inspiration. Discuss. Then: Do further revisions as needed.</p>
<p>Week 12</p> <p>Apr 2 - 6</p>	<p>Brainstorming/Problem Solving Upping the Game – What More Can We Ask?</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>Next-Phase Assessment: What does the project NEED?</p> <p>Schedule: In this session we will create a timetable of whose work will be presented in the final weeks.</p>	<p>Week 12: Present new and/or revised scenes.</p> <p>Prepare for presentations.</p> <p>Note: It is my hope to read entire plays/projects as much as possible. But: Depending on the length of the plays and the number of writers in the workshop, we may not be able to read entire plays during the final weeks. If that is the case, please select the material you would most like to present.</p>
<p>Weeks 13 - 15</p> <p>Apr 9 to</p>	<p>Works in Progress Continue Work.</p>	<p>Workshop In-class presentations of full scripts or large segments of scripts from each writer.</p>	<p>Weeks 13, 14, 15: Present your script or script segment according to the schedule as created in class.</p>

Apr 27		Schedule TBA. Plus: End Game. Last Look Q&As. Where to go next—how to submit a script.	PROVIDE FEEDBACK to the other writers as their work is presented. Continue to refine, revise, rework your script. TURN IN: Your Final Project. Due April 23, 2017.
FINAL Monday May 7	FINAL EXAM 4:30 – 6:30 pm (Note: May change)	Artistic Review: Group Feedback & Critique of Scripts.	Date: For confirmation of the date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC <i>Schedule of Classes</i> at www.usc.edu/soc .

REMINDER: Use Blackboard as a resource. Class materials, information, handouts, additional essays, source materials, etc., are posted on the class site on Blackboard.

Some poets actually say they don't revise, don't believe in revising. They say their originality suffers. I don't see that at all. The words that come first are anybody's, a froth of phrases, like the first words from a medium's mouth. You have to make them your own. — James Merrill

Blot out, correct, insert, refine
Enlarge, diminish, interline;
Be mindful, when invention fails,
To scratch your head, and bite your nails.
— Jonathan Swift

The pleasure is the rewriting: The first sentence can't be written until the final sentence is written. This is a koan-like statement, and I don't mean to sound needlessly obscure or mysterious, but it's simply true. The completion of any work automatically necessitates its revisioning. — Joyce Carol Oates

Writing and rewriting are a constant search for what it is one is saying.
— John Updike

Revision is just as important as any other part of writing and must be done *con amore*. — Evelyn Waugh

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 & 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/>

Student Support & 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 – <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

Tab for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students

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.