

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Playwriting 1, THTR-365 62964
Spring Term – Tuesday 3-5:50pm
Location: VKC 109

Instructor: Oliver Mayer
Office: PIRC #1007: MCC #101C
Office Hours : by appointment or walk-in (call first).
Contact Info: omayer@usc.edu, 310 867 9192

Course Description and Overview:

Essential elements of playwriting through weekly assignments, students' initiative, occasional productions of scenes, and extensive classroom analysis.

Learning Objectives:

This course will explore what a play can do. This is a writing course. As well, by reading and discussing ten separate dynamic play texts, we will analyze dramatic writing. Using weekly writing exercises, we will build dramatic writing muscles, which we will eventually use in a Final Scene for each student, performed by professional actors. This Final Scene will either be a free-standing ten-minute one act play, or a scene from a larger work.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Williams, Tennessee, *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*, Penguin.
Wilson, August, *JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE*, NAL Trade.
Guare, John, *SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION*, Random House.
Valdez, Luis, *ZOOT SUIT*, Arte Publico.
Mayer, Oliver, *THE HURT BUSINESS*, Hyperbole.
Fornes, Maria Irene, *PLAYS*, PAJ.
Fugard, Athol, *MASTER HAROLD...AND THE BOYS*, Penguin.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Remember that professors do not "give" grades: students earn grades. Your final grade is up to you. Meeting course requirements does not equal excellence; I am looking for uncommon effort and commitment in each assignment. Dramatic writing demands bravery, chance-taking, and an active sense of play. The writing exercises will be your opportunity to be brave on the page. Students will be evaluated based on individual progress, receiving extended feedback for each assignment. Late assignments (weekly exercises) can be emailed to me at omayer@usc.edu; the midterm and final exams are mandatory and cannot be missed or made up at a later date.

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

Grading Breakdown

Your final grade consists of:

Overall Weekly Grade: 30% **Final Scene Presentation: 30%**
Midterm Exam: 15% **Final Exam 25%**

School of Dramatic Arts classes use the University's grading scale:

96-100%=A	95-91%=A-	88-90%=B+	85-87%=B
81-84%=B-	78-80%=C+	75-77%= C	66-64%=D
71-74%= C-	67-70%=D+	61-63%=D-	

WEEKLY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: These are given both in-class or as homework. Students must be prepared to read aloud their work, for both peer review and my feedback. Absent students should email me or their fellow students about assignments given in-class and/or as homework. These should be turned in on time at the next class.

FINAL SCENE PRESENTATION: The Final Scene will allow you the chance to utilize the sum of knowledge acquired over the course. It will either be an entirely new scene, or a revised and expanded scene from one of the writing assignments. Once chosen, you will turn in a rough draft of the scene, which I will comment upon. At the penultimate class, you will turn in your completed and revised scene. It will be performed by professional actors at the final class. I will secure the actors and provide them your final scenes one week before the presentations. Each student will have the chance to discuss intentions, explain confusions, and answer questions from the actors in the ten or so minutes immediately before the performance begins. The scene will receive a grade based upon your use of dramatic methods and strategies determined over the course of the semester, as well as by your ability to be brave and take chances. **It is imperative that you attend the presentations, as it connects directly to your final exam.**

ATTENDANCE: While you are not graded on attendance, you will be graded on participation which requires your being in class. After two absences, excused or not, the third absence will affect your grade. Three tardy tallies will count as an unexcused absence. Be on time.

MIDTERM EXAM: Midterm occurs in class on **Tuesday, February 26 at 3pm**. Be on time and be prepared to define specific terms used in class **IN YOUR OWN WORDS**.

FINAL EXAM: Students will judge each other's Final Scenes based on essential dramatic questions provided by me. The exam will consist of oral presentation of written responses, and discussion of each student piece, and will occur on **Tuesday, May 7 from 2-4pm**. Attendance **MANDATORY** – no exceptions.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown:

- January 8** Introductions. What is a Play? Break early for All-School Meeting at Bing Theatre, 5pm. Writing assignment: CREDO.
- January 15** Desires. Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the Attack, close reading of Scene One, introductions of Stanley and Blanche. Reversing off expectations. Writing assignment: introducing characters. Read CREDOS, in class writing.
- January 22** Fears. Fornes' *Sarita*. Mystery, love, danger, and violence. Read student scenes in class. First Writing Assignment in-class: a scene that makes you blush.
- January 29** Secrets. Fugard's *Master Harold and the Boys*, memory and regret. Read student scenes.
- February 5** Duende, Filin, Myth, Taboo, and a sense of Play. Mayer's *Young Valiant*. Writing assignment: Valentines.
- February 12** Arias and Jubas. Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, elevated writing, superpowers, visions, shared rituals, prophecy. Read student scenes. Writing assignment: write your own personal Juba.
- February 19** History. Alienation Effects. Valdez's *Zoot Suit*, Brecht, History of Chicano Movement, Dramatizing events and epochs. Vernaculars and Private Languages. Read student scenes. Writing assignment: activate a private or second language or vernacular.
- February 26** Putting it all together. MIDTERM EXAM given in class. Retelling, revamping and recycling of the past IN THE IMMEDIATE MOMENT.
- March 5** MIDTERMS RETURNED. Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation*, anecdote versus experience. Writing assignment: fictionalize a found story.
- March 12** SPRING BREAK, no class. Sleep and write!
- March 19** Blood Offerings. Mayer's *Blade to the Heat*, Physical and musical exploits onstage, Spectacle versus Intimacy, the counter intuitive power of truth telling onstage. Writing assignment: Telling Inconvenient Truths.
- March 26** One on one discussions about individual scenes, trajectories, goals.

- April 2** DISCUSSION OF STUDENT SCENES. Which take the most chances? Which reveal the most? Which have the most joy? Which have the largest questions? **FIRST DRAFT OF STUDENT FINAL SCENES DUE.**
- April 9** SCENES RETURNED WITH EDITS AND QUESTIONS. One on one meetings to discuss edits and rewrites. Writing assignment: starting anew.
- April 16** FINAL SCENES DUE, discussion of Final Class Presentations. Promises Fulfilled and Otherwise.
- April 23** LAST CLASS, FINAL SCENES, Six actors -- Three Male, Three Female – will read your plays in succession. Attendance is mandatory. Refreshments will be provided. Be prompt, attentive and receptive. I will be watching.
- May 7** Tuesday, 2-4pm FINAL EXAM, PIRC #1016. Be there. No exceptions.

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” 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>.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

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. 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. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. 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: 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu