

**School of Cinematic Arts
The John Wells Division of
Writing for Screen and Television**

**CTWR 206a : WRITING THE SCREENPLAY
Section 19156D
Fall 2019**

Instructor: BOB TZUDIKER
Class Schedule: THURSDAY/ 1pm - 3:50pm
Class Location: SCA 363
Office Hours: By appointment at USC or by phone
Contact Information: Email: tzudiker@usc.edu; Phone: 323-969-1981

Course Objective:

Our objective is to develop a feature film story that you will be enthused about writing in the second semester.

Course Description:

This is a workshop in which we will learn as much from each other as from individual work. Discussion of each other's work is a vital part of class, so an essential part of your homework each week will be reading each other's work. Preparation is essential to productive class time. Whether we read outside or read work aloud in class, all are expected to pay attention and share responses with classmates.

Our primary focus first semester will be on learning to outline a feature film story. We will study ideas, character, story structures, outlines, treatments and different ways of creating them. Learning how to communicate a story to others prior to writing is an important skill, as is constructive commentary on the work of others. We will also pay attention to our internal processes as we create stories.

Course Reading:

Read this syllabus.

"Screenplay: Building story through Character" by Jule Selbo (selected chapters)

"Philoctetes" by Sophocles (any translation EXCEPT Seamus Heaney's).

Article from The Guardian 3/4/17 by George Saunders:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/04/what-writers-really-do-when-they-write>

Grading Criteria:

We will be using the web app <https://zoodiker.com/> to submit and view each others work, which will be explained in the first class. All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Outlines and treatments should be submitted as PDFs via email and on <https://zoodiker.com>. Script pages will be submitted on <https://zoodiker.com> in PDF or FDX (Final Draft) format. A backup submission should be made via email in case of technical problems.

Students will present their work in class or electronically submit written work **no later than 6pm on each Tuesday**. This allows time for professor and classmates to read the work before the classes on Thursdays. Late work will be penalized in grading, dropping the maximum grade by one full point (i.e.: A to A-) for each day the assignment is late.

Participation:	10%
Ideas:	10%
Scenes/Bios:	15%
Outlines:	55%
Act 1:	10%

	100%

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%

Expectation of Professionalism:

Assignments may be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. We have an expectation of professionalism, and such errors are distracting to the reader. Please proofread your assignment prior to submission. Spell check is the first step, but will not catch all errors. The best proofreading is to read your work aloud, even to yourself.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected 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.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Students should bring a laptop (if available) to class for work on in-class exercises. No web surfing, checking email or texts during class unless specifically asked to do so. Legible printing on a lined pad is acceptable for in-class work. Laptops will be opened only for specific in-class purposes. Cell phones should be off or silenced and kept out of sight during class time unless specifically cleared by the professor prior to class.

Class Schedule:

Please note that all dates, assignments and subjects are subject to change at the discretion of the professor. It may be necessary to split the class into two groups in order to have time for full discussion of all stories on alternating weeks. The content of each class will vary with the needs of the participants.

Week 1 - 8/29:

ASSIGNMENTS: During the summer:

Read this Syllabus.

Be ready to orally present at least **two** feature film ideas in our first class. What IS a story? And what is an outline?

[Ideas Presentation will be 5% of grade. "Presentation" is an overstatement. It will actually be a conversation about the basics of your ideas, as much as you know at this time, with a focus on what excites you about them rather than having worked-out stories. The excitement may come from a relationship, conflict, setting or image - something that has caught your attention that you might want to explore.]

And get a jump on your readings: get acquainted with the back story of Philoctetes and the Trojan War.

NOTE: Overall class Participation through the semester counts for 10% of the grade.

Week 2 – 9/5: Re-examine your story ideas. Examine Margaritaville to see how storylines are woven together.

How does Theme (or, as I would put it, conflicting energy streams) affect every choice? ASSIGNMENT for next class: make a decision on what idea you'll develop and write a brief description of that idea.

READ "What Writers Really Do..." article from The Guardian 3/4/17 by George Saunders.

[GRADE: Ideas Presentation is 5% of grade.]

Week 3 - 9/12: Structure: what are they talking about? What are the 3 Acts? We will discuss the structural bones of a story, which is the transition between idea and story. We will learn the uses of what I call a 5-Word outline, and see how this is a manifestation of Theme.

ASSIGNMENT: Turn idea(s) into 5-Word outline(s).

[This Outline is 5% of grade]

Writing Division: Curriculum: Syllabus: Syllabus Template.doc

Week 4 - 9/19: "Who?" How character becomes story. Capturing a character with brevity. We will look at song lyrics and other examples to show how concisely this can be done.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Chapter 4 of Selbo book, if you haven't already. If you have read it, read it again. Do a Selbo-style 11-step outline for your main character(s). Overlay the 5-Word on the 11-Step. (This does not make 16 Steps, but the combination of the two types of outline serves as the basis for a story outline.)

[These outlines are 5% of grade]

Week 5 - 9/26: The questions we ask ourselves create the world. Control the questions the audience is asking themselves from scene to scene. Present 11-step outlines, matched up with your 5-Word outline.

ASSIGNMENT: Write a scene that reveals one of your lead characters in less than two pages.

READ Sophocles' Philoctetes (again). Outline Neoptolemus' arc through the play.

[Scene and character outline are 5% of grade]

Week 6 – 10/3: The presence of the past: back story for plot and character. Seminar on Philoctetes - be prepared to discuss, admire, rail against Sophocles, as you see fit, but try to understand what he is doing.

ASSIGNMENT: Write Character bios for your leads.

[Bios are 5% of grade]

Week 7 - 10/10: Plot outlines and beat sheets. Imagery and repetition. Watch selected scenes from Disney's "Tarzan."

ASSIGNMENT: Outline your story through the midpoint that describes the sequence of events, with special attention to your protagonist(s). Include a character list before the outline and a reminder of time and place. Each story beat should be described very briefly, not even in complete sentences - just enough to be comprehensible to the class when we read it.

[Outline to midpoint is 5% of grade]

Week 10/17– FALL BREAK

Week 8 - 10/24: Creating a world. Watch opening of "Guardians of the Galaxy." Story discussions.

ASSIGNMENT: Revise your outline.

[Revised outline is 5% of grade]

Week 9 - 10/31: Dreaming your story: harnessing your unconscious. Blocks to creativity.

ASSIGNMENT: More outline

[Outlines are 5% of grade]

Week 10 – 11/7: Discuss our experiences in doing this classwork, what flows easily and what has been difficult.

ASSIGNMENT: Experiment with writing a scene from your outline.

[Experimental scene is 5% of grade]

Week 11 - 11/14: TBD

ASSIGNMENT: Rewrite experimental scene, write another scene from a different act of the outline.

[Rewrite and 2nd Experimental Scene is 5% of grade]

Week 12 - 11/21: How, when and why to write a treatment.

ASSIGNMENT: Continue or complete plot outline and write beginning of 1st Act through at least the opening and setting main characters in motion.

[Outline is 5%, start First Act start 5% of grade]

Week - NO CLASS ON 11/28

Week 13 – 12/5: Final story discussions and review.

ASSIGNMENT: Continue 1st Act writing, discuss revisions to outline based on discoveries made in the writing process.

[5% of grade]

Finals Week 12/6-18: Deliver final 5-Word, 11-Step and Plot outlines and complete 1st Act by 12/12/18.

[Final outlines are 15% of grade, completed 1st Act is 10%]

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” 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, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710

Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed.

<https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

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

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self-expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, <http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm>; e-mail diversity@cinema.usc.edu. You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

Disruptive Student Behavior:

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

<p style="text-align: center;">PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
