

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

**CTWR 206A: Writing the Screenplay
Fall 2019
Section (#191579)**

Instructor: Toni Ann Johnson
Class Schedule: Fridays 1:00pm—3:50pm
Class Location: SCA room 342
Office Hours: After class, or by appointment
Contact Information: johnson.toniann@gmail.com

Course Objective:

- Learn three-act story structure.
- Learn to develop fully dimensional characters.
- Gain an understanding of all aspects of screenwriting.
- Cultivate your unique voice.
- Write a feature length screenplay treatment.

Course Description:

A screenplay has a limited number of pages in which to tell a complete story. As screenwriters we have to make each scene count. Everything a screenwriter chooses to include is ideally revealing character and moving the story forward.

Creating a treatment allows the writer to plan the story and get a sense of what works and what doesn't before executing a full draft. A well thought out, detailed treatment will conquer the bulk of the work so the writer can flesh out the draft more easily and with confidence.

In this course, through brief lectures, viewing films & clips, video essays, reading scripts like a writer, and by writing and critiquing, you'll deepen your understanding of the elements that make a screenplay work. You'll also develop a detailed three-act treatment for a feature script..

Homework and Notes:

You'll be developing your material over the course of the class and homework will include writing assignments that build toward your treatment.

We'll be workshoping pages in class. You'll email your assignments to your classmates and to the instructor at least **48 hours prior to class, no later than Wednesdays by 1pm**. Send the work in MSWord or PDF **with your last name at the beginning of the file name**. For example: Johnson_title of script

Notes/Critiques—you'll be reading and critiquing classmates work. You may make comments on specific lines within the document using the "notes" function if it's PDF, or track changes if it's an MSWord file.

At the end of the document provide feedback via these guidelines:

1. What's working in the piece? 2. What could work better? 3. Suggestions for revision. Focus on areas you identified as needing improvement. These notes don't have to be extensive. "I don't like this," is not an acceptable critique. If you don't think something works, explain why and offer suggestions for revision. When you write a critique, consider the substantive elements in the script. For example, is the character arc working? Is the theme coming across? Is the tone appropriate?

Everyone will comment on all scripts in workshop, so you will need to read them.

Please give constructive feedback and please be considerate. This is a learning environment. Work can be re-written. We're here to learn and improve. And we can cultivate an atmosphere of support.

NOTES are due via email by the start of class. Please send a single email with your notes for all students attached (also send to your instructor), rather than individual emails for each. Put your first initial, last name, and NOTES in the subject line like this: TJohnsonNOTES

Course Reading:

The Lost Art of Story, by Adam Skelter (Available on Amazon in paperback)

This book contains transcripts of video lectures we'll watch and discuss in class.

Handouts--provided

Devil in a Blue Dress, screenplay (first 30 pages) by Carl Franklin, based on the novel by Walter Mosely. **I'll email this to you.** It's available as a PDF online.

Screenplay – *Bridesmaids* by Annie Mumalo & Kristen Wiig. PDF available online. (short assignment.)

In addition to these, you'll read two feature length screenplays of your choice from films that have been produced. *Pick scripts from films you're interested in and that are the genre or genres you want to write in. PLEASE RUN YOUR CHOICES BY ME FIRST—Thank you!*

You'll be reading the two scripts and answering a set of questions designed to help you read scripts like a writer and to understand the way they're put together. Instructions for this assignment will be provided.

1. Due: Friday, October 11th.

2. Due: Friday, November 22th

RECOMMENDED READING: *The Anatomy of Story* by John Truby

Grading Criteria:

Participation:	10%
Homework:	30%
Written critiques	10%
Two Reading assignments	10%
Final Treatment/ pages:	40%

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:

All material is expected to be turned in on time. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, and typos. 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.

Recording Devices:

You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

No texting or talking on cell phones, please.

Laptops may be used for taking notes, for workshop, and when approved for specific assignments. No internet surfing or texting during class, please. Points may be deducted from your final grade if you violate this policy.

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 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.

Class Schedule:

Week 1 8/30: --Introduction—who I am. Who you are, and the kind

of story you'd like to develop. Collect student info.
 --Go over syllabus; Discuss goals of class.
 --Hand out instructions for reading assignments.
 1st due: October 11th; 2nd due: November 22
 --Discuss beginning, middle and end of films.
 -- Ideas. What makes an idea work for a screenplay? Generating ideas. Want/Need
 --Introduction to three-act structure.
 --Discuss beats of Act I in more depth. Handout provided.

Homework: Develop two ideas for screenplays. The ideas should be about characters that truly interest you. Create characters that no one else would create in the same way, because no other writer has your unique perspective. Consider what the character wants (overall goal) and what he/she needs (the thing that must change in order for the character to grow).

Write a paragraph synopsis for each idea. Be concise. Each paragraph can be half a page or less. Give the ideas a beginning, middle and end. Tell us who the main character is, and what he or she wants and/or needs. What's opposing him/her? Briefly describe what the character goes through to get what they want and/or need. And describe what change the character has undergone by the end. If the character does *not* change, then we (the audience) must understand something in a deeper or new way as a result. What does the audience learn in this case? We'll discuss these in class.

Remember: **Email your story ideas to the class and instructor by 1pm Wednesday, September 4th. Make notes on your classmates' ideas. (What's working? What could work better? What suggestions do you have to strengthen your colleagues' ideas.)**

Notes are due at the beginning of class.

Week 2 9/6: --Discuss students story ideas. Pick one to develop.
 --Discuss CREATING A CHARACTER; Questions for the writer to ask when developing a character. Handout provided.
 --Review act structure, review beats of Act I and discuss beats of Act II up to Midpoint. Handout provided.
 --View portion of Act II of a film. TBA

Homework Part I: Revise and expand your chosen idea. Give it a character arc in three acts. Send to me and to your classmates.

Homework part II. Watch Bend It Like Beckham. (Available to stream on Amazon.)
 Answer: Who is the main character? What does the main character want? What does the main character *need*? What are the act breaks?

Email Part I to me and to the class by Wednesday, 9.11.19 @ 1PM. If you're able to send it earlier that will be appreciated!

Part II (Bend it like Beckham assignment) is due by the start of class 9/13 and you do not have to send this to your classmates.

Week 3 9/13

- Workshop story ideas.
- Discuss Bend It Like Beckham
- Review act structure, and beats of Act II midpoint to end of Act II.
Handout provided.

Homework Part 1: Read Chapters 1&2 in *The Lost Art of Story*

Homework Part II:

Simple Beat Sheet.

For your screenplay idea answer the following:

1. How do you introduce your main character? (Describe the scene.)
2. What is the inciting incident?
3. What is the first act break?
4. What is the mid-point of your second act?
5. What is the end of your second act?
6. What is your climax?
7. What is your resolution?

Email this by Wednesday, 9.18.19 by 1:00 PM

- Week 4** 9/20:
- Workshop student beat sheets.
 - Discuss TREATMENTS. What's in them? What's the format?
 - Look at article on treatments/example
 - Brief review of Act structure. What happens in Acts I & II
 - Discuss beats of Act III. Handout provided.
 - View Video lecture on Story Structure (Anatomy of Chaos)

Homework: **Write Act I** of your treatment. Include all the scenes and write any dialogue you wish to include in prose form, using quotation marks, as in a short story or novel. Write the story in the PRESENT tense—as it would unfold on screen. Don't explain the story, show it. Everything should be visual. Your treatment should show us your movie, (bring it to life on the page). It's not an explanation of the movie. Make sure we understand what takes place in each scene and how it builds to the next. Be mindful of what the characters want within the scenes. Characters should have an objective in each scene.

Email to the whole class and your instructor 2 days prior to next class (by Wednesday at 1pm). Everyone read ACT 1 submissions. NOTES are due by the start of class.

Week 5 9/27:

- Workshop students' Act I.
- Divide into Groups A & B
- Review act structure Act 2
- Discuss Beginnings and Endings/View opening and closing shots

Homework: **Group A revise Act 1 as needed and write the first half of Act 2 to midpoint** of your outline (Mark changes either in bold or highlight) Deliver by

Wednesday at 1pm. Everyone read Group A's pages and make notes. Notes are due by the start of class.

Homework part II: Read the first thirty pages of *Devil in a Blue Dress* (available online as free PDF) Pay attention to the description—the action lines and paragraphs—and notice the voice they're written in. **Copy two action lines or paragraphs that work well, or are interesting in some way and bring to share in class.**

Think about the voice you write your own action/description in. Your action lines can be plain and simply describe what happens. They can also have a perspective and even a personality if you want them to. Having fun with writing your screen description isn't mandatory, but it can make your script a more entertaining read.

Week 6: 10/4 --Discuss *Devil in a Blue Dress* description
 --Workshop treatments up to Act II midpoint (Group A)
 --Discuss reversal of expectation and cinematic tension.
 --View film clip illustrating reversal of expectation.

***Reminder: Your first reading assignment is due next week, 10/11. Email to your instructor by the beginning of class.**

Homework: Finish 1st reading assignment.

Group B, revise Act I of your treatment (mark changes either in bold or using track changes) and write first half of Act II of your treatment up to the midpoint.

Deliver by Wednesday at 1pm.

Everyone make notes on Group B's pages. Deliver notes by start of class on 10/11.

Please bring *The Lost Art of Story* to class next week.

Week 7 10/11: --Halfway point/Midterm evals
 --Reading assignments delivered (late assignments lose points)
 --Workshop treatment, up to Act II midpoint (Groups, B)
 --Discuss theme. What are some ways a writer expresses the theme of a story?
 --Read Chapter 4 of *The Lost Art of Story*, essay on Character and Theme

Homework Part I: Watch the short 10-min film *The Lunch Date*, by Adam Davidson. It's available on youtube. Note the visual storytelling. Use of location. Think about the theme. Write a line or two explaining what you think the theme is. Did the *protagonist* change by the end? Or is this a story where we (the audience) are to experience a change, or new understanding of some sort? Don't worry about getting this "right." Focus on how YOU felt at the end and what meaning *you* took from it. Your response does not have to be the same as another's. **Email to your instructor by the start of our next class (10/25) and be prepared to discuss in class.**

Homework Part II: **Group A, revise Act I and the first half of Act II of your treatment as needed, mark changes (in bold or highlight) and continue writing your**

treatment to the end of ACT II. Deliver by Wednesday 10/23 at 1pm. Everyone read Group A's pages and make notes. Notes are due by the start of class 10/25.

WEEK 8 10/18 FALL RECESS NO CLASS

Week 9 10/25

- Workshop treatments to the end of Act II (Group A)
- Talk about The Lunch Date in terms of the visual writing and thematic ideas. How did you feel at the end of the film?
- What are setups and payoffs? What were they in *The Lunchdate*?

Homework Part I: Watch the film *The Visitor*, written by Tom McCarthy. It's available to stream on Amazon. 1. Write what you think the main character's arc is. 2. How is the protagonist different by the end? 3. Note any subplots, setups and payoffs. 4. What do you think the theme is? Email to your instructor by the start of next class.

Homework Part II: **Group B revise treatment up to midpoint as needed, mark changes in bold and continue your outline up to the end of Act II.** Deliver by Wednesday at 1pm.

Everyone read group B's pages and make notes. Notes are due by the start of class.

Week 10 11/1:

- Workshop treatments to the end of Act II (Group B)
- Tips on writing effective dialogue (Handout provided)
- Discuss *The Visitor*.
- Time permitting, view short film, *Shooter*. Note variation on structure.
- Review beats of Act III

Homework: Group A, revise Act I and Act II of your treatment as needed and continue on to the end of Act III. Mark changes. Deliver by Wednesday at 1pm. Everyone read Group A's pages and make notes. Notes are due by the start of class 11/8.

Week 11 11/8:

- Workshop revised Acts I & II and draft of Act III treatment (Group A)
- Discuss Climax and resolution

Homework: Group B, make any revisions necessary on Act I and Act II of your treatment. Mark changes. And write Act III. Deliver by Wednesday @ 1 PM
Everyone read Group B's submissions and make notes, deliver notes by the start of class.

Homework Part II: Read Chapter six in *The Lost Art of Story*, chapter on Dialogue.

Week 12 11/15: --* **Reading assignments reminder**, due next week
late assignments lose points.
--Workshop revised acts I & II and new pages Act III of treatment
(Group B)
--. View Anatomy of Chaos Subtext in Dialogue

Homework: Group A revise and or polish Act I, II & III.

Deliver by Wednesday at 1pm.

Everyone read Group A's submissions and make notes. Notes are due by the start of class.

***Reminder: Your second reading assignment is due next week, 11/22. Email it to your instructor by the start of class.**

Week 13 11/22:

- Students Deliver reading assignment # 2
- Workshop revised treatment (Group A).
- View film clips for subtext

Homework Part I: Read *Bridesmaids* by Annie Mumalo and Kristen Wiig. Pay attention to dialogue and subtext. Copy one scene of dialogue that you think works well and write down what you think works about it. Email this to your instructor and be prepared to share and discuss in class.

Homework Part II: Group B, revise Act I & II & III as needed, mark changes.

Deliver by Wednesday, Dec. 4th. @1pm

Everyone make notes on Group B's pages. Notes are due by the start of class on Dec. 6th.

Week 14 11/29 THANKSGIVING BREAK NO CLASS

Week 15 12/6:

- Workshop revised treatment (Group B)
- Discuss Bridesmaids
- Final class – Send off

FINALS WEEK – All work due

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>
