

SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
The John Wells Division of
Writing for Screen and Television

CTWR 413: Writing the Short Script I
Fall 2019 ~ Section 19179D
Syllabus

GENERAL INFORMATION

Instructor: Vincent Robert
Contact Info: 310.994.4236 (cell)
scriptsystem@gmail.com (email)
Class Schedule: Wednesdays, 10:00 AM - 12:50 PM
Class Location: SCB 101
Office Hours: Wednesdays from 2:00 PM to 5:30 PM **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.**

THE BEST WAY TO REACH ME IS TO TEXT ME! When texting, please identify yourself (name, 413 class). Texts will be answered at the earliest possible convenience whenever I'm in production.

To make an office appointment, please text me at least 2 days ahead.

I live far out of town and I regret that I can't be there any other day. I am, however, available for phone conferences. Text me in advance to set a time and we'll make it happen.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

The objective of this course is to develop:

- A CTPR 290-type screenplay (5 pgs.), focusing on telling a compelling story **WITHOUT ANY DIALOGUE**, establishing your mastery over visual storytelling. This completed script will count as the Midterm for this course.
- A CTPR 310-type screenplay (5 pgs.) **WITH DIALOGUE**. This completed short script will be turned in during the last week of class and will count as the Final for this course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you will learn and master the basic mechanics of screenwriting, for the purposes of better script assessment, development, and creation. It aims to give you a deeper confidence in your own creative abilities and to help you develop:

- Your resources as a storyteller
- Your observational powers
- Your responsiveness to stories around you
- Your imagination
- Your ability to create and develop compelling characters and conflict

The class will take place in a workshop setting. Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both non-dialogue and dialogue, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting, concentrating on the major building block of any dramatic work, the scene.

You will learn to bring your visual and aural senses to your writing, to see and hear your film as you write it, while at the same time you discover the importance of character as it is explored through situations of conflict.

We will explore the mechanics of cinematic storytelling, including a deeper examination of specific story essentials such as character, goal, theme, conflict, structure, etc... Our primary emphasis will be on character, how to explore and create a compelling presence that resonates off the page.

While in the class, each student is to consider him/herself a member of everyone else's development team. We will share projects with one another, discuss how to improve them in a supportive and safe environment. Your feedback and participation will be graded.

Screenwriting format is not an exact science; within accepted parameters, you should develop a format style that you find both comfortable and expressive.

To this end you will read as many professional screenplays as possible.

By the time you turn in screenplays, I expect them to be written in a professional format -- assignments not meeting that standard will be returned unread.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

You are urged to READ SCREENPLAYS (in standard screenplay format) of films that you know well and especially admire. It's the best way to truly experience how the visuals and dialogue of an influential film first played out on the page. You will learn a lot. Many are available at the Cinema Library.

Also:

David Howard & Edward Mabley, THE TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING (St-Martin's Press)

Jack Epps, Jr., SCREENWRITING IS REWRITING: THE ART AND CRAFT OF PROFESSIONAL REVISION, annotated edition (Bloomsbury Academic)

Paul Lucey, STORY SENSE: WRITING STORY AND SCRIPT FOR FEATURE FILMS AND TELEVISION (McGraw-Hill Companies)

Dara Marks, INSIDE STORY (Three Mountain Press)

Margaret Mehring, THE SCREENPLAY: a blending of film form and film content (Focal Press). OUT OF PRINT BUT EXCELLENT IF YOU CAN FIND IT.

Jean-Paul Ouellette, THE NEW ELEMENTS OF STANDARD SCREENPLAY FORMAT (Yankee Classic Pictures).

William Goldman, ADVENTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE (Grand Central Publishing)

And as many professional screenplays as you can! (available at the cinema library)

GRADING CRITERIA

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and growth through the semester, as well as the student's demonstration of his or her achievement of the course's objectives, as reflected in the following assignments or ones substituted in their place:

Roommates assignment	05%
Date assignment	05%
Pitch 290-style story	05%
Character profile for 290	05%
First Draft, 290	10%
Final Draft, 290	10%
Atmosphere assignment	05%
Two People Wake Up scene	05%
Pitch 310-style story	05%
Character profile	05%
Breakdown, 310	05%
First Draft, 310	10%
Final Draft, 310	15%
Participation in class, critiques, etc...:	10%

Assignments must be turned in by the deadline and in the delivery manner indicated in the Class Schedule.

MID TERM GRADES will be available by Mid-October.

There will be no final exam. **If you turn in all your work, if that work is on time, if it is competent, if you read the other students' works and consistently add to our class discussions, then you will earn no less than a "B".** As per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

- A: 100% to 94% -- **Outstanding** fulfillment of course requirements
- A-: 93% to 90% -- **Excellent** fulfillment of course requirements
- B+: 89% to 87% -- **Above-average** fulfillment of course requirements
- B: 86% to 83% -- **Good** fulfillment of course requirements
- B-: 82%-80% -- **Average** fulfillment of course requirements
- C+: 79% to 77% -- Work of fair quality
- C: 76% to 73% -- Opportunity for improvement in demonstrating "ownership" of concepts, in meeting deadlines, in participation.
- C-: 72% to 70%
- D+: 69% to 67%
- D: 66% to 63%

- D-: 62% to 60%
- F: 59% to 0% -- Failure to meet the minimum course requirements

Grades in CTWR 413 should be viewed as feedback to indicate areas that need greater effort towards understanding and manipulating the objectives.

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, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Name every document you email the group as follows:

YourFirstName_Assignment.Format.

Ex: Vincent_ScriptDraft1.pdf

Also:

Save and send all your work as PDF files.

When emailing a script. **NUMBER YOUR SCENES** before saving it as a PDF.

Put your **name** and **title** on the **FRONT or FIRST PAGE** of your material.

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 / TABLET / CELL PHONE POLICY

The use of technology to take notes or read each other's work is permitted in this class. Any use of a device that detracts from the class (such as surfing the Web for non class-related purposes, messaging or emailing, etc..., or doing work for other classes) will result in the loss of technology privileges for the student.

WRITING DIVISION ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Regular and punctual attendance is mandatory because of the workshop element of this class. Roll call will be taken at the beginning of 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 equate to one full absence.

Excessive absences, excused or unexcused, will be cause to fail for the semester.

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.

INCOMPLETE / MISSING AN ASSIGNMENT

Incompletes are assigned only when work is not completed because of **documented** illness or other "emergency" occurring **after the 12th week** of the semester. Students who wish to get an incomplete must present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment are either personal/family illnesses or emergencies. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled.

Late assignments will be graded down each day late. 1 day an A becomes an A- , more than 3 days late is considered a 0 and you will fail the assignment. Please plan your time accordingly during the semester. You are expected to show the assignments you are working on each week for class feedback. Failure to turn in the final draft of the screenplay which you wrote during this semester leads to failing the course.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Please note that all dates and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

Unless otherwise modified by the Professor, all assignments are DUE on the day and time indicated here. IF YOU DON'T MEET THE DEADLINE, YOUR ASSIGNMENT MAY NOT GET READ AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A FAILING GRADE FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT. We also may not get to your assignment during the class.

BE AWARE THAT SOME ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE THE TUESDAY MORNING BEFORE CLASS. Those are indicated as such on the following schedule. It is your responsibility to check this schedule regularly to stay on track.

IMPORTANT NOTE: always bring a printed or digital copy of everyone's scenes to class, as you may be called upon to participate in a cold reading of certain passages. Nothing drives a point home to a writer like hearing his / her words read back aloud!

SESSION #1:

DATE:	8/28
OBJECTIVE:	Overview of the class, syllabus & schedule
CONTENT:	Group intro. What is a story? Inner Need
EXERCISE:	Roots of Inner Need
VIEWING:	Start with why
EXERCISE:	Premise analysis of a clip, time permitting (per team)
ASSIGNMENT:	Roommates Assignment — before and after. Reveal inner need thru decor & changes
DEADLINE:	Wednesday, 9/4 (next class)
TURN IN:	Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud

SESSION #2:

DATE: 9/4

CONTENT: Roommates feedback
Discussion of main character roles and goals

EXERCISE: Using a news story, assign main character roles and goals

ASSIGNMENT: Preparation for a date – except it happens in an unusual location

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 9/11 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud

SESSION #3:

DATE: 9/11

CONTENT: Date feedback. Conciseness of screenwriting style
Character
Pitching
Discussion of main character roles and goals

EXERCISE: Discovering a character from a headline

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare a pitch for your 290-style story

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 9/18 (next class)

TURN IN: Come to class ready to pitch

SESSION #4:

DATE: 9/18

CONTENT: 290 pitch, then feedback
Correlative

VIEWING: The Abyss

EXERCISE: Invent a correlative for the Protagonist of your 290 pitch. How did it come about? What does it mean to him or her?

ASSIGNMENT: Write a CHARACTER MONOLOGUE for the Protagonist of your 290 script, presented in his/her own voice, "accidentally" laying out the salient events of that person's life. See if you can let each character reveal something to us that he/she/they doesn't yet know or understand about him/her/themselves. Hint: What happened to the character won't be as important as how he or she was affected by those events.

We should be able to tell from the monologue what the person's inner need is, its roots and how it was reinforced over time by subsequent significant events.

Try to capture this character's unique speaking rhythms and point-of-view. Notice how adding specific, identifiable moments to the backstory brings that character to life and lets us understand how they were shaped.

Also: character voice, greatest hits (see handout) and correlative if you can.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 9/25 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud

SESSION #5:

- DATE: 9/25
- CONTENT: Character profile feedback
Structure
- EXERCISE: Going back to our character from a headline, we structure that story
- ASSIGNMENT: First Draft of your 290-style script. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.
- DEADLINE: For your own short script: Tuesday, 10/1, 10:00 am
- TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**
- DEADLINE: For your notes on others' scripts: Wednesday, 10/2 (next class)
- TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' scripts to class.

SESSION #6:

- DATE: 10/2
- CONTENT: 290 script First Draft feedback

VISIT FROM 310 PROFESSOR
- ASSIGNMENT: 290 script Final Draft (MIDTERM). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.
- DEADLINE: For your own Final draft: Tuesday, 10/8, 10:00 am
- TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**
- DEADLINE: For your notes on others' scripts: Wednesday, 10/9 (next class)
- TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' scripts to class.

SESSION #7:

DATE: 10/9

CONTENT: 290 script Final Draft feedback

EXERCISE: Atmosphere exercise

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 10/16 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud

SESSION #8:

DATE: 10/16

CONTENT: Atmosphere feedback
Scene and sequence structural concepts

EXERCISE: Breaking down the structure of a scene from news item

ASSIGNMENT: "Two people wake up" scene

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 10/23 (next class)

TURN IN: **Bring a digital copy of everyone's scenes to class, as you may be called upon to participate in a cold reading.**

SESSION #9:

DATE: 10/23

CONTENT: Feedback on "Two people wake up" scene
Dialogue, Jargon & Subtext

EXERCISE: Jargon exercise

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare a pitch for your 310-style story. Keep the pitch under 5 minutes

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 10/30 (next class)

TURN IN: Come to class ready to pitch.

SESSION #10:

DATE: 10/30

CONTENT: Feedback on your 310 pitch

ASSIGNMENT: Write a CHARACTER MONOLOGUE for the Protagonist of your 310 script, presented in his/her own voice, "accidentally" laying out the salient events of that person's life. See if you can let each character reveal something to us that he/she/they doesn't yet know or understand about him/her/themselves. Hint: What happened to the character won't be as important as how he or she was affected by those events.

We should be able to tell from the monologue what the person's inner need is, its roots and how it was reinforced over time by subsequent significant events.

Try to capture this character's unique speaking rhythms and point-of-view. Notice how adding specific, identifiable moments to the backstory brings that character to life and lets us understand how they were shaped.

Also: character voice, greatest hits (see handout) and correlative if you can.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 11/6 (next class)

SESSION #11:

DATE: 11/6

CONTENT: Character profile feedback

ASSIGNMENT: Breakdown of your idea for the 310-style script, focusing on the main structural elements previously discussed.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 11/13 (next class)

TURN IN: Present Breakdown to group

SESSION #12:

DATE: 11/13

CONTENT: 310 Breakdown feedback

ASSIGNMENT: First Draft of your 310-style script. 5 pages or less. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own First Draft: Tuesday, 11/19, 10:00 amTURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**DEADLINE: For your notes: Wednesday, 11/20 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #13:

DATE: 11/20

CONTENT: First Draft feedback

ASSIGNMENT: Final Draft of 310-style script. 5 pages or less. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Final Draft: Tuesday, 12/3, 10:00 amTURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**DEADLINE: For your notes: Wednesday, 12/4 (last class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

NOTE: **No class next Wednesday 11/27 (Thanksgiving)**
Next class: Wednesday 12/4

SESSION #14:

DATE: 12/4

CONTENT: Final Draft Feedback

ASSIGNMENT: Enjoy the Holidays!

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 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/sssa

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY
INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**