

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
JOHN WELLS DIVISION
WRITING FOR SCREEN & TELEVISION

CTWR 529

Section 19254D - Intermediate Screenwriting (2 units)
Fall 2019

Instructor: Rick Parks

Location: SCA 362

Time: 7 - 10 PM WEDNESDAYS (beginning 8/28)

Office Hours: by appointment

Contact Info: rpparks@att.net

(818) 262-8091 (cell/text)

THE BEST WAY TO REACH ME IS TO TEXT ME!

When texting, please identify yourself (name, 529 class). Texts will be answered at the earliest possible convenience.

For a face-to-face appointment, please text me in advance to set a time and we'll make it happen.

(prerequisite: CTWR 516)

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

This course aims to sharpen your storytelling and screenwriting skills through practical writing experience in the **short-film** form, leading to an extensive introduction to shaping a **feature film** story.

In a supportive workshop environment, we will examine the basics of the craft, encourage productive writing habits, and test unexplored territory of your imagination. Starting with a few simple ideas, each student will mold characters and spin stories from those characters, with an emphasis on learning techniques for character development, visualization, and structuring and reshaping the story until it best embodies the writer's vision.

COURSE GOALS:

Students will complete three projects over the course of the semester:

- **Two complete, revised, short-film screenplays**, following the submission guidelines of CTPR 546 for possible production in that class
- **An original feature film story** in revised synopsis form (8-10 pages), ready for development into a screenplay., which will be turned in the last week of class and will count as the Final for this course.

The idea is to look forward to the realistic possibility of having the short screenplays produced, and to create a feature film story that has the potential to become a first-rate screenplay.

Decorum:

The professor expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a fragile, evolving process and we can only expect success if we are *supportive and positive* in our feedback and criticisms of our fellow students. Any negative

attacks will reflect poorly on the student making the attacks and will affect their final grade. We are here to help each other become better writers. Rather than trying to tell a student what is wrong, this professor is more interested in revealing how to *make it better*. We should strive at all times for constructive criticism. Participation is graded.

Issues:

If any issues or concerns arise with any member of the classroom, which might affect a supportive learning environment, the professor would highly encourage the student to contact him privately to seek a resolution.

Individual Meetings:

Students are encouraged to take advantage of the professor's availability. The professor will answer questions by email, skype or face time, but would rather answer them in depth during class, so that the other students may benefit from discussing individual story/character/structure problems.

HOMEWORK AND NOTES:

Homework is due, via **email**, 24/48 hours before class, in order to give your classmates (and the professor) time to read/analyze your work, and to be prepared to give coherent, well thought out and intelligent notes.

Notes on work are due (via email) at least 20 minutes before the class. They need not be extensive, but what I'm looking for is *critical faculty*.

Pretend you are a development executive and it's your job to shepherd this project, and to present the draft to your boss.

While line notes are important, what I'm really looking for is your ability to tell if the deeper things in the script, such as plot, character, and theme are working.

While it's natural to focus on what is *not* working, it can be *more important to identify where writing is successful*. A writer may be unaware of what is working, and by "do more of this" it helps establish a benchmark and direction to which the writer may aspire.

Imperative reading:

(In addition to select screenplays)

Save The Cat by Blake Snyder - Michael Wiese Productions, -try AMAZON

The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler 3rd ed. Michael Wiese Productions

The Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley

PRESENTATION:

As this is a writing class, formatting errors, typos, bad spelling, grammar and overall sloppiness are NOT ACCEPTABLE.

Exceptions will be made for students whose primary language is not English.

FINAL DRAFT: As the professor (and his working peers) prefers Final Draft and the school provides it in at least a discounted or temporary format, he would prefer that *unless noted*, all

screenwriting assignments be completed in the Final Draft program, so that if and when you are writing any scene work, both you and he can benefit from his NOTES on your work.

Assignments must be properly formatted and PROOFREAD. You will be held to professional standards – typos, abused homonyms (“there, their, they’re”, etc.), grammatical and spelling errors may cause your draft to be returned unread.

All work must be original and originate in this class – no revisions of work started in other classes or adaptations of others’ work will be accepted without the prior permission of the instructor.

Assignments are due no later than 24 hours BEFORE each class, unless requested by the instructor. Remember, YOU are responsible for the instructor receiving your work.

Name every document you email me (or the group) as follows:

YOUR NAME assignment name.whatever

For Example: **RICK memory.doc**, or: **RICK memory.pdf** or: **RICK memory.fdx**

UNEXCUSED, LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE DOCKED 50%.

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 LATE ASSIGNMENT GRADE FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT. The professor discusses on-time projects first, so if your work is late, we may not get to it during class.

It is your responsibility to check the schedule regularly to stay on track.

Be prepared to talk about the work. You will be called upon to do so.

ATTENDANCE:

Class attendance is mandatory, and includes being on time (otherwise, the students who present their material first are short-changed).

You will be allowed **one**, unexcused tardiness. After that, you will have your grade lowered by one-third letter grade for each occurrence.

BE ON TIME. IT IS HIGHLY INCONSIDERATE TO YOUR PEERS IF YOU ARE NOT.

Two late arrivals equate to one full absence, and 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.

In order for an absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session.

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.

SICK POLICY

If you are sick and contagious, please do not come to class. If you are unsure whether you are contagious, contact the USC Health Center. Any genuine illness will be accommodated for, and I will make up that class with the student either over the phone, face-time, skype, or in person at another time. I would much rather spend an extra couple of hours with a student when they are well, than to lose several days of creative time to illness, and I'm sure most of your fellow classmates will feel the same way.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Students may bring laptops to class to take notes and review work. However, **internet usage during class is allowed only for class discussion.** Cellphone use is not allowed, except before and after class and during breaks.

Recording Devices:

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

GRADING

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".

Please refer to the School's standardized definition of grades.

Incompletes are assigned only when work is not completed because of documented illness or other emergency occurring after the 12th week of the semester.

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and 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:

Pitch 1 & 2 (Project 1) 05%
Character Profile (Project 1) 05%
Step Outline (Project 1) 05%
Draft 1 (Project 1) 05%
Draft 2 (Project 1) 10%
Pitch (Project 2) 05%
Character Profile (Project 2) 05%
Pitch (Feature) 05%
Character Profile (Feature) 05%
Step Outline (Project 2) 05%
Draft 1 (Project 2) 05%
Draft 2 (Project 2) 10%
Step Outline FINAL (Feature) 20%
Participation in class, critiques, etc... 10%

THE DAY TO DAY OF IT ALL:

SESSION #1:

DATE: 8/28

CONTENT: Overview of the class, syllabus & schedule. (Split into groups if necessary)

Ideation – how to do all this

- Who is this story about? (Protagonist)
- What is this story about? (central conflict/goal).
- How is this compelling and not just a slice of life?
- Where/when does this story take place? (setting/world)
- What is the tone /genre of the story?

HW: Prepare 2 pitches for potential 1st short film project. Keep each pitch below 5 minutes.

Each idea should address: 1) The central character or characters, 2) What the character(s) will encounter in the body of the story – i.e. the subject or central "conflict" of the story, 3) an indication of how the story will resolve.

HW: PIVOTAL PERSON - (PROSE--not to be shared with the class) biggest influence - *antagonist*
Describe in detail an event in your life where someone "pushed your buttons" and made you react to their intent in a completely unexpected way; someone who changed you in a moment and made you see yourself or the world differently. Writing characters from an emotional place. (2-6 pages max)

Also, now is a good time to begin thinking of **IDEAS FOR YOUR FEATURE FILM STORY**, which you'll be working on later in the semester. Allow time for these ideas to develop and mature. Explore these ideas carefully, and review them each week to see how you can enrich them.

SESSION #2:

DATE: 9/04

CONTENT: Pitch one of the potential storylines for 1st short film project.

Keep the pitch under 5 minutes. Feedback.

Lecture: Character, voice, rhythm, POV

EXERCISE: Building a character together from a headline (time permitting)

CHARACTER WORK SHEET (e-distributed by prof)

HW: Based on feedback, **choose the story** you want to develop as Project 1.

ALSO: PIVOTAL PERSON - POV that same pivotal moment from their POV. Walk a mile in their shoes. Writing and understanding the complete 'antagonist'.

ALSO: Write a **CHARACTER PROFILE** of your first short's PROTAGONIST.

Let the character speak in his/her own voice, revealing as much as possible about some aspect of that character's life. Try to capture their unique speaking rhythms and point-of-view. (1/2 page PROSE)

DO THE SAME FOR THE CATALYST (antagonist)

See if you can let each character reveal something to us that the character doesn't yet know or understand about himself/herself. Hint: What the character thinks about things won't be as important as how he or she *feels* about things.

SESSION #3:

DATE: 9/11

CONTENT: Character profiles feedback

Lecture: FEATURE Story structure – SNYDER/VOGLER

EXERCISE: Structuring a story together from a headline (time permitting)

HW: Write a BEAT-BY-BEAT **STEP OUTLINE** of your (short) story. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work for next class. Tell the story as it will unfold on the screen: Include the setting, the major characters, the main story beats, and the resolution. Make us want to see this movie! Write in the present tense only, and limit your description to what we will actually see and hear on the screen, in the order we'll see and hear it.

SESSION #4:

DATE: 9/18

CONTENT: Feedback on the Outlines

Lecture: Scene Structure SNYDER/VOGLER part two (time permitting)

EXERCISE: Structuring a scene together from a headline (also time permitting)

HW: Write the FIRST DRAFT of your Project 1 screenplay (8-10 pages). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' First Drafts to class.

SESSION #5:

DATE: 9/25

CONTENT: Feedback on the First Drafts

LECTURE/ASSIGNMENT: Visualization: Tell a story with pictures - ACTIONS not WORDS

- Planting and Payoff
- Location, props, costumes, atmosphere
- Correlative, feelings, motivation
- Writing scene description

HW: Write the **FINAL DRAFT** of your Project 1 script (8-10 pages). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

ALSO: Come up with a SHORT FILM IDEA that you want to develop as your 2nd SHORT SCREENPLAY (stretch a little – choose something completely different from your first short film), and write a brief (three sentences or so) DESCRIPTION of it. Who is it about? What's the primary conflict? How, roughly, will it resolve?

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' Final Draft to class.

SESSION #6:

DATE: 10/02

CONTENT: Feedback on the Final Drafts of Project 1

Pitch 2nd short film project ideas

Lecture: Writing dialogue

HW: Choose a 2nd film idea and write a CHARACTER PROFILE of its Protagonist/Catalysts, presented as a monologue in his/her own voice(s).

SESSION #7:

DATE: 10/09

CONTENT: Feedback on second shorts' Character profiles

EXERCISE: **DISCUSS FEATURES vs SHORTS**

Screening & discussion of 2 short films

HW: Write BEAT-BY-BEAT STEP OUTLINE of your second story. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work for next class.

Again, tell the story as it will unfold on the screen: Include the setting, the major characters, the main story beats, and the resolution. Make us want to see this movie! Remember to write in the present tense only, and limit your description to what we will actually see and hear.

SESSION #8:

DATE: 10/16

CONTENT: Feedback on Outline

LECTURE: **CARDING and CHARACTER**

HW: Write the FIRST DRAFT of your Project 2 screenplay (8-10 pages).

Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' Outline to class.

SESSION #9:

DATE: 10/23

CONTENT:

Feedback on First Drafts of project 2

HW: Write the FINAL DRAFT of Project 2 script (8-10 pages). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

ALSO: SEND IN A SHORT LIST OF FEATURE IDEAS

Prepare at least **two** of your *favorites*. For each, answer the following questions: 1) What is the story in 3 sentences? 2) Who is the protagonist? 3) Who/what is the antagonist? 4) What are 2-3 obstacles that the protagonist will overcome? 5) What is the protagonist's arc? 6) What is/are the central theme/s? 7) How will the story resolve? 8) What is your personal connection to the story?

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' First Drafts to class.

SESSION #10:

DATE: 10/30

CONTENT: Discuss final drafts of Project 2 Script

NOTE: The deadline for submitting screenplays for possible production in CTPR 546 is NOV. 3rd. Consult the 546 Submission Guidelines (available on the SCA Community website, in the Writing Division office, and in SPO) for detailed instructions on how to submit.

Discuss Feature ideas

EXERCISE: Describe your feature story three ways: Once in ONE SENTENCE, once in THREE SENTENCES, and once in THREE PARAGRAPHS.

Keep it simple at this point. Make us want to see this movie!

HW: Begin a CHARACTER STUDY of your FEATURE'S lead (use the worksheet and begin a list of traits. Do the same for your Catalyst character.

ALSO: CARD WHAT YOU KNOW FOR YOUR FEATURE (be prepared to discuss)
FIND THE PIVOT POINTS AND NAME THEM (Snyder/Vogler)

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' Final Draft to class.

ALSO: BRING IN THE CARDS YOU KNOW FOR SESSION 11

SESSION #11:

DATE: 11/06

CONTENT: Feedback on Final Drafts of Project 2

Discuss the cards you have

HW: Card first act of your feature

SESSION #12:

DATE: 11/13

CONTENT: Discuss first act cards

HW: Card act two/ pt. one

SESSION #13:

DATE: 11/20

CONTENT: Discuss act two/ pt. one cards

HW: Write the opening scene, first ten pages

ALSO: Card act two/ pt. two

If you can -- FINISH CARDING - GIVE US ALL THE BEATS YOU CAN

(compile your cards into a document and share with professor and class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' **first pages** to class.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

SESSION #14:

DATE: 12/04

CONTENT: discuss opening scene and act two pt. two cards

HW: ALL CARDS SHOULD BE FINISHED AFTER THIS CLASS AND COMPILED INTO A SYNOPSIS/BEAT SHEET TO BE REVIEWED BY INSTRUCTOR AND PEERS

FINALS WEEK:

HW/ FINAL: Revise the SYNOPSIS/BEAT SHEET for your feature film idea.

Focus especially on the conflict, obstacles and twists that will sustain

your plot and give it the breadth of a feature film. **Turn in your completed beat sheets by DEC 11th**

NOTE: Syllabus and assignments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

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/ssq

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**