

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS – WRITING DIVISION
Course: CTWR 305, The Relationship Screenplay
Semester: Fall 2019

INSTRUCTOR: Lindsay Stidham

CLASS SCHEDULE: Tuesdays, 2:00 to 4:50 PM

CLASS LOCATION: SCB 101

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment, Mondays and Tuesdays

CONTACT: lstidham@usc.edu 323-251-7185

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

Students will outline and write a relationship based screenplay through class guidance on the study of character-driven story. Each student will be expected to complete a first draft of the relationship-based screenplay by the completion of this class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Every script is on some level a relationship script, and if it's a great script it's likely a relationship you remember for the rest of your life. I also like to say every screenplay is a love story (of some kind). It might be a best friendship (*Dumb and Dumber*), a familial relationship (*Big Fish*), a romance (*Eternal Sunshine*) or even an antagonist relationship so strong you could call it anti-love/ obsession at its best (*There Will Be Blood/ Black Swan*).

The challenge of a relationship script is to note when these relationships take a turn and to deftly guide them to a conclusion that fits your story. To help achieve this, we will be studying and breaking down various relationship stories for the next 14 weeks, along with learning how to craft your own voice through the art form of the relationship screenplay:

1) RELATIONSHIPS ARCS & MODIFIERS - To explore how to create characters who naturally create conflict and change for each other. Also, how to build, and track the relationship between these characters over the course of the film.

2) STRUCTURE - To learn story structure with a thesis and theme, and that a well crafted script comes from the synergy of plot, character, and exploration of that theme.

The goal will be for you to have the skills necessary to break any story in your future work, not just the specific idea we're working on in class.

3) BRAND - To explore what makes a good story for you, as a writer, creating a cohesive brand – and how to pick films that help you break into the industry.

4) PROCESS - To explore the creative process, idea generation, and how to maintain a vision in the face of studio development.

5) VOICE - Part of your success as a writer will not be your emulation of another person's voice, but rather, the unique ability that comes from your own individual voice. People will hire you because of what you, and only you can do. We will emphasize making your writing as original as possible.

Weeks 1-6 will focus exclusively on outlining a script, character-creation, flaws, strengths, voice, conflict, strong goals, and setting waypoints to write towards. Weeks 7-14 will focus on a first draft, writing (approximately 15 pages) each week to have a first draft ready by the end of the course.

READING:

Students will be required to read and annotate (per instructions) one relationship script that they select, ideally within the same genre they are writing.

Online resource for script by genre:

<https://www.scriptreaderpro.com/best-screenplays-to-read/>

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) Completion of a rough draft of a relationship based screenplay by the end of the class. Completion of one annotated script within the genre you are working half way through the class.

2) Your outlines and scripts will be discussed in class so you will need to email the assignment to the instructor and your classmates **48 hours before class** as a PDF. (Points will be deducted for late delivery.)

3) Group Interaction: Students will be required to read each other's work, make notes on the PDFs of the outlines/scripts, and provide constructive feedback to their

classmates. Being prepared, meeting deadlines and participating with enthusiasm is expected at all times

4) Assignments are to be completed in proper format, and submitted by specified due dates and times as discussed in class. Consistently late work will cost you a grade.

Your annotated script assignment is due by **October 29th**. Your final rough draft is due by **Finals Week**.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Reading assignments:	10%
Participation:	10%
Revised Outline:	20%
Screenplay:	50%
Final Polish:	10%

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 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.

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.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Laptops will be used in class for note taking only. Cell phones should be turned off except during breaks.

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 equate to one full absence.

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. Religious holiday absences are permitted per school policy.

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.

OFFICE HOURS & CONFERENCES

Individual conferences will be available by appointment. Upon the end of this class I do encourage students to stay in touch, and you are always welcome to reach out to visit me again during the office hours I keep each semester.

CLASS SCHEDULE:**WEEK 1, August 27th:**

Introduction to the course and what will be covered. Intro to the **memorable protagonist** and how to create one.

ASSIGNMENT: Identifying dramatic moments in both your own life, and for the protagonist you are creating. Complete in-class writing exercise and your protagonist playbook.

WEEK 2, September 3rd

Discussion of assignments. Identifying character arcs and relationship arcs through the study of classic and contemporary films. Outlining of your own character and relationships arcs and how to achieve a satisfying arc. Identifying relationship genres and supporting of the arc.

ASSIGNMENT: Complete your loose character arc and relationship arc outlines

WEEK 3, September 10th

Discussion of assignments. How your character arc supports the full structure of your script. Outlining by genre, and working from a Chapter Outline.

ASSIGNMENT: Chapter outline your script through the midpoint of the film, focusing on your key relationships and how each character is supporting or not supporting your protagonist.

WEEK 4, September 17th:

Discussion of assignments. Review of films where a protagonist changes and where a protagonist does not change. What is most satisfying? What do we glean from these lessons. Going into all is lost and all is gained territory.

ASSIGNMENT: Write second half of Chapter outlines making special note of character attitude and relationship changes.

WEEK 5, September 24th:

Review of complete outlines and tracking of each character in the story. Possible class guest on learning character through improv and performance.

ASSIGNMENT: Revise outlines based on feedback.

WEEK 6, October 1st:

Establishment of character through dialogue and silence. Review of films that establish character brilliantly through opening scenes.

ASSIGNMENT: Write page 1 through 15 of your script.

WEEK 7, October 8th:

Review of pages 1 through 15. Analysis of inciting incident and hero's/ heroine's journey.

ASSIGNMENT: Write pages 15 through 30 of your script, your protagonist should be beginning to be immersed in their journey and their relationships should be influencing this journey

WEEK 8, October 15th:

Review of pages 1 through 30 of your script. Creating a clear style and voice. Who is known for their style in the business and why-- have they created characters we remember forever, and why? Going back to your assignment from the first day-- are major cinematic moments from your own life inspiring this script? Could they?

ASSIGNMENT: Take a moment to revise the 1st act of your script. Is it memorable? Do we clearly know who your protagonist is and how relationships are driving him/ her/ them?

FALL RECESS: GRADES SENT TO SEE WHERE YOU STAND

WEEK 9, October 22nd:

Notes on Act I. Scene structure. What makes a great scene. What scenes could you go back in your outline and cut. How should relationship drive a scene?

ASSIGNMENT: Write 30 through 45. We should be nearing Act II. All is going well or not so well for your protagonist and your relationships should be bolstering or causing obstacles in their overarching desires and wants.

WEEK 10, October 29th:

Review of pages. How well does the audience know your protagonist check in? What are we learning from him or her or them? Where are they on their journey? What is the inner workings of their mind and how is it being visually expressed?

ASSIGNMENT: Write page 45 to 60... what causes the protagonist to recommit to their journey?

WEEK 11, November 5th:

Review of pages. Re-examination of the hero's journey through a female gaze... is it any different? Reexamination of a hero's journey through a character that doesn't change... how do their relationships drive the story even more? Great low moments in movie history.

ASSIGNMENT: Write pages 60 to 75... you are about to enter the third act. Where do you want your protagonist to be in this moment, and where do you want their relationships to be?

WEEK 12, November 12th:

Review pages. Bringing your protagonist home from their quest. What can you thematically take away?

ASSIGNMENT: Write through the end of your third act (it may go past 90 pages).

WEEK 13, November 19th

Review final acts. Check in on relationships of all characters. Does everyone have an arc? Does each arc support the protagonist? Is there a satisfying conclusion? Analysis of various satisfying vs cliffhanger endings and how they support or do not support character relationships.

ASSIGNMENT: Take notes and work on a revision.

WEEK 14, December 3rd

Staged reading of excerpts from screenplays with guest actors.

Study days: Dec 7 through 10

FINALS WEEK: All work due. Any final meetings schedule with Professor in advance. Open to scheduling one additional class to allot more time for staged readings per class preference.

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/ssu

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>PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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