

**School of Cinematic Arts**  
**Writing Division**  
**CTWR 419A: Senior Thesis in Dramatic Television**  
**Section 19440D**

Instructor: Kate Powers  
Class Schedule: Mondays, 7-10 p.m.  
Class Location: SCB 101  
Office Hours: Mondays, 3-5 p.m. in SCA 223 and by appointment  
Contact Information: kapowers@usc.edu

**Two-Semester Objective**

To develop an original hour-long dramatic television series, including characters, world and season one storylines. Along the way, you will draft, revise and polish a pilot episode and draft a mid-season episode.

**First Semester Objective**

Develop an outline, then draft and revise an hour-long pilot script.

**Required Course Materials**

Writing the Pilot by William Rabkin (2011)  
Writing the Pilot: Creating the Series by William Rabkin (2017)

**Recommended -- But Not Required -- Course Materials**

Deep Work by Cal Newport (2016)  
A Notebook with at least 240 pages/120 sheets, lined or not, as you prefer.

**Course Description**

"If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." – Toni Morrison

“Make yourself happy.” – Vince Gilligan

Over the next two semesters, you will develop an original dramatic series. The initial seed may be a fictional character or your lived experience, a fascinating world or a horrifying problem, but week by week, you will be growing that seed into a compelling story that will blossom into a five or six season narrative that hooks your audience and never lets them go.

As writers and viewers, you already know the value of believable characters, intriguing conflicts and rich worlds. This course will encourage you to deepen that understanding and to develop your creative skill set, even if that means sometimes trying things that don't quite work.

Most of the time, this course will function as a weekly writers' room, where we will discuss and improve each other's ideas. Like any professional writer, you will be expected to read your colleagues' work ahead of time and to arrive with constructive notes. Whenever the class shifts into brainstorming, whether wide ranging or structured around character or story issues, your enthusiastic participation will be an invaluable addition to the process.

This syllabus -- and additional material, as appropriate -- will be available on Blackboard.

### **Names and Pronouns Policy**

I use the pronouns she/her/hers and I invite you to share your pronouns, either verbally during or after classtime or privately via email, as you prefer. In the spirit of a supportive and safe writers' room, I ask that we endeavor to refer to each other by the name and pronouns we've shared, while understanding that pronouns are not necessarily indicative of an individual's gender identity.

### **Laptop and Cell Phone Policy**

The most effective writers' rooms restrict laptop and cellphone access to the writers' assistant -- and to a lesser degree, the showrunner -- in order to keep the staff focused on the work at hand. As much as possible, this class will mimic the structure and ethos of a productive writers' room, the better to prepare you for eventual employment in television or other collaborative environments. Therefore, we will be adopting the same policy and relying on paper notebooks, the classroom projector and, as needed, physical documents.

Consequently, laptops and cellphones are forbidden during classtime. They should be silenced and stored out of sight. The only exception will be during discussion of your work, when you may take notes and/or use your phone's voice memo feature to record the conversation. At no other time may you record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor, per department policy.

As in professional writers' rooms, material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

### **Grading Criteria**

ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS should be delivered, attached to an email to kapowers@usc.edu and, if required, to the entire class on the announced deadline. Late assignments will result in the grade being lowered 5%. The subject line should read:

**419A Last Name Assignment name (Pitch, Act One, etc) Draft #**

ALSO: The file's name AND the header of your assignment should MATCH THIS EXACTLY.

ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS should be proofread prior to delivery. Mistakes happen, but if an assignment contains more than two typos per five pages, the resulting grade will be lowered by 5%. A semester-long pattern of sloppy proofing will result in a final grade being lowered by

10%. ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS are to be delivered as PDFs. SCRIPTS should be written in Final Draft or Movie Magic Screenwriter -- we will be using Revision Mode.

Your grade is based primarily on written assignments. Your outline will serve as your mid-term exam, and your final script is your final.

You are expected to complete all reading -- from the assigned texts AND your classmates' submitted pages -- in advance of class, and to have prepared feedback. Your participation during class -- what I call "staff ethic" -- is also important. This means not just giving and receiving notes, but listening to your classmates, contributing to the discussion and above all, helping create a safe space for this class to do its best work.

Staff Ethic:	10%
Class preparation (assigned reading, viewing and classmates' pages):	10%
Pilot Pitches	10%
Pilot Worksheet	5%
Character Bios:	5%
Outline:	20%
Final script (Due by 9 p.m on Sunday, December 10th):	40%
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TOTAL	100%

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%

**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 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:**

Please note that topics and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. In particular, additional worksheets and/or revised outlines may be assigned to ensure students produce a compelling final draft. Screenings will be incorporated as needed.

**Week 1: Monday, August 26, 2019**

Class and instructor introduction; review syllabus

What are you watching? What would you most like to write?

Elements of pilot: Concept, characters, conflict, theme and franchise

The emotional core of compelling stories

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT CLASS – IN TWO WEEKS:

1. Brainstorm 1 to 2 pilot pitches, complete with characters, conflict, theme and world.
2. Draft a 1 page PITCH DOCUMENT for each premise, incorporating all the above pitch elements.
3. Select and watch an existing pilot that shares one or more elements with your favorite premise.
4. Complete the Pilot Analysis Worksheet for your selected pilot.
5. Email your worksheet and a PDF of your PITCH DOCUMENT(S) to kapowers@usc.edu by 12 p.m. on Wednesday, September 4.
6. Be prepared to discuss your worksheet and to verbally pitch your pilot premises in class.

**Week 2: LABOR DAY – No Class****Week 3: Monday, Sept. 9, 2019**

Character and conflict as story-building tools

Discussion of pilot worksheets

Pitching of pilot premises

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Choose a pilot premise for this course.
2. Develop your characters (no more than 5), conflict, theme, world and possible storylines into a 2 PAGE TREATMENT.
3. Email a PDF of the TREATMENT to kapowers@usc.edu by 6 p.m. on Saturday, September 14.
4. Be prepared to discuss your pilot and storylines in class.

**Week 4: Monday, Sept. 16, 2019**

Story beats, scene structure, act breaks.

Discussion of story premises and storylines

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Choose an A & B storyline for your pilot and write a beatment; email as a PDF to instructor AND CLASSMATES by 6 p.m. on Saturday, September 21.
2. Read beatments and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 5: Monday, Sept. 23, 2019**

The world of your pilot. Establishing setting and supporting cast via opening scenes, introductions of character arcs. Discuss “carding.” Break room up into two groups for pitching purposes.

Discussion of Beatments

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Write an outline and email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 6 p.m. on Saturday, September 28.
2. Group A: Prepare cards for in-class story pitches
3. Read outlines and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 6: Monday, Sept. 30, 2019**

First group pitches their show with cards.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Group A: Revise outlines and email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 6 p.m. on Saturday, October 5.
2. Group B: Prepare cards for in-class story pitches
3. Read outlines and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 7: Monday, October 7, 2019**

Second group pitches their show with cards.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Revise outlines and email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 6 p.m. on Saturday, October 12.
2. Read pages and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 8: Monday, October 14, 2019**

Workshopping revised outlines

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Begin writing Teaser and Act One (aim for 5-8 pages) and email to instructor and classmates by 12 p.m., Sunday, October 19.
2. Read pages and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 9: Monday, October 21, 2019**

Workshopping teasers and first acts

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Finish drafting Act One (8-10 pages) and email scripts through Act One (~ 15 pages total) to instructor and classmates by 6 p.m. on Saturday, October 26.
2. Read pages and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 10: Monday, October 28, 2019**

Workshopping first acts

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Begin writing Act Two -- TURN ON REVISIONS! -- and email scripts (~ 20 script pages) to instructor and classmates WITH REVISIONS MARKED to instructor and classmates by 6 p.m. on Saturday, November 2.
2. Read pages and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 11: Monday, November 4, 2019**

Workshopping second acts

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Finish drafting Act Two -- RESET REVISIONS! -- and email scripts through the end of Act Two (~ 25-30 script pages) to instructor and classmates by 6 p.m. on Saturday, November 9, WITH REVISIONS MARKED.
2. Read pages and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 12: Monday, November 11, 2019**

Workshopping second acts

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Begin work on Act Three -- RESET REVISIONS! -- and email scripts (~ 30-35 script pages) by 6 p.m. on Saturday, November 16, WITH REVISIONS MARKED.
2. Read pages and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 13: Monday, November 18, 2019**

Workshopping third acts

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Finish drafting Act Three -- RESET REVISIONS! -- and email scripts through the end of Act Three (~ 40-45 pages) to instructor and classmates by 6 p.m. on Saturday, November 23, WITH REVISIONS MARKED.
2. Read pages and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 14: Monday, November 25, 2019**

Workshopping third acts

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Begin work on Act Four -- RESET REVISIONS! -- and email scripts (~ 50-55 pages) to instructor and classmates by 12 p.m. on Sunday, December 1, WITH REVISIONS MARKED.
2. Read pages and prepare feedback for next class.

**Week 15: Monday, December 2, 2019**

Workshopping fourth acts and discussion of draft goals

Discussion of series bibles and holiday break assignments

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Read your current drafts and email a list of 3-8 goals for the first draft to kapowers@usc.edu by 6 p.m. Thursday, December 5.
2. Complete a full draft of your pilot.
3. PROOFREAD the finished draft.
4. Leave hard copy of your FULL DRAFT in instructor's mailbox by 12 p.m., Thursday, December 12, 2019.

**Classes end: Friday, December 6, 2019**

**Finals Week: Wednesday, December 11-Wednesday, December 18, 2019**

**FINAL DRAFT SCRIPT DUE: 12 P.M. on THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2019**

## 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](http://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](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### **Support Systems:**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://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](mailto: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**