

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

**CTWR 414: The Screenplay
Spring 2020**

Instructor: Craig Sabin
Class Schedule: Monday/10:00 AM-12:50 PM
Class Location: SCB 101
Office Hours: by appointment only
Contact Information: rsabin@usc.edu

Course Objective:

To deepen your understanding of and familiarity with the craft of screenwriting, including visual writing, compelling characters and narrative structure, by developing your ideas, and writing, reading, and workshopping scripts.

Course Description:

In CTWR 414, we will build on the lessons taught in 413, to strengthen your abilities to tell a good story well. We'll focus on refining your ideas and your work so that it conveys your truth powerfully and effectively, and we'll gain expertise with the tools for doing so, such as visual writing, compelling characters, and narrative structure, for both long form and short form films.

There will be two fronts to our approach. The primary focus will be on writing new material for this class. All students will be required to write and polish a short script, a format the class should be familiar with. The scripts will align with the submission guidelines for CTPR 480 scripts, 7-10 pgs in length.

Once completed, we will develop feature scripts, from the initial idea, to a detailed 10 pg. outline, to fully written first act.

The second front, no less important, will be in workshopping the material of the rest of the class. Each student will be expected to read and "note up" the work of fellow classmates, as well as be prepared to discuss the work in class. This will help you more easily identify the effects of good craft and poor craft, and apply lessons learned to your own work. We'll also read produced screenplays, to see what lessons can be learned.

In addition to writing, we'll be watching examples of the elements and tools discussed in already produced short films, some successful, some not. You'll see how filmmakers before you dealt with the issues you're dealing with and learn from them what to do, and what to avoid.

Course Reading:

You should read as many screenplays as possible to familiarize yourself with the styles and form of other professional writers. You will be assigned some scripts to read on your own time and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Additionally the following books are highly suggested:

"The Tools of Screenwriting" by Howard & Mabley

"Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out" by Dannenbaum, Hodge, Mayer

Grading Criteria:

All assignments are due by the Friday following class, no later than 5:00 pm. Students must turn in all assignments in PDF format, via Dropbox. Late assignments will be recorded as such, and will negatively impact their grades, each late day increasing the penalty.

All work must be properly formatted, properly punctuated, correctly spelled and grammatically correct. Assignments should be read and notes prepared by start of the following class.

THE TOPICS LISTED BELOW ARE MERELY AN EXAMPLE. **(PARTICIPATION CANNOT EXCEED 10%)**

Participation:	10%
Assignments:	30% (15 assignments at 2% each)
Script 1:	15%
Outline:	15%
First Pages:	30%

	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%

Missed Assignment or Incompletes:

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who need to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before the final assignment is due.

All work must 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.

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.

Recording Devices:

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

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Respect is the rule. Please silence cell phones during class. Laptops are allowed for note-taking only. Please show the class and your fellow students the respect they deserve.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class.

On the third absence, students will have their final grade lowered by 10% and an additional 10% for each absence thereafter. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

Note: This is a change in policy. Instructors will no longer distinguish between an excused or unexcused absence. An absence will be an absence.

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/or know you will miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

If a student has an emergency and additional accommodations are needed, those accommodations will need to come through the USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) office. The Writing Division recommends the student and/or advocate contact CSI at 213-821-4710 and their home department adviser for additional support.

Class Schedule:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1 1/13: Hello. Syllabus Review, Schedule Review. DropBox Intro. What are your favorite types of films? Introduction to Short Film Structure. Character, Goal, Inner Flaw, Conflict, Transformation. Short scripts vs. Feature Scripts. Three Act Structure. We'll examine two illustrative short films.

Assignment; Write a one page synopsis for a 10 minute short dealing with a Supernatural Theme. Due Friday, 1/17

Reading Assignment; “The Social Network”

Week 2 1/20: Happy Martin Luther King Day! Keep the dream alive!

Week 3 1/27: Discuss “The Social Network” Workshop the Supernatural Synopses. Goal and Theme Intensive. How do you translate your theme into a visual story? Why does what you’re writing about matter to you? How do you convey that meaning and vitality to an audience? How does your character’s Inner Flaw relate to Theme? Planning and Preparation Meets Conflict! Plant/Payoff. Assignment; Write a 1-pg synopsis for a 10 minute short dealing with your choice of Practical Joke, Escape, or Caper/Heist Theme. Due Friday, 1/31

Week 4 2/03: Workshop the Synopses. Conflict! Scene Structure Overview. Sequence Overview. What is the best way to tell the story you want to tell? What genre is your film? How do you construct compelling sequences? What is an Antagonist? Why can’t we all just get along? How does Conflict impact on your Protagonist? Where does Conflict come from? How does Conflict relate to Theme? Plus, a visit from 480 faculty. Assignment; Write a 1-pg. synopsis for a 10 minute short dealing with the Love Story or Trip w/ Destination Themes. Due Friday 2/2. Assignment; Prepare three pitches for 480 scripts. You may use ideas developed in class, or come up with new ideas. Due Monday, 2/10, in class.

Week 5 2/10: Workshop the Pitches. Overview of the Writer’s Toolbox; Props, Dialogue, Plant/Payoff, Misdirect, P.O.V., Twist, Props, Mood, Genre, Lantern. Scene Descriptions. How do you write scripts that leap off the page? What are passive verbs, and how do you avoid them? How large should my text blocks be? How can I punch up important details? Dialogue Traps to Avoid. Assignment: Write a 1 pg. synopsis and scene by scene outline (3 pg. max) of your 480 idea. Due 2/21

Week 6 2/17: Happy President’s Day!

Week 7 2/24: Workshop the Synopses and Outlines. The Importance of Relationships. Scene Structure. Character Transformations. How are scenes constructed in a screenplay? How do I keep my audience surprised and engaged? What, exactly, is a “Twist” and how do you accomplish it? How does misdirection work? How does P.O.V. help manage expectations? Assignment; Write a first draft of your 480 script. Due Friday, 2/23

Week 8 3/02: Workshop 480 Scripts. Create Rewrite Plan. Assignment; Rewrite 480 Scripts. Due Friday, 3/7.

Week 9 3/09: Workshop Second Draft. Polish Plan. Features! Review/Overview of Visual Storytelling. What’s working? What’s not clear? Feedback. Review of the toolbox. Difference between short and feature. Feature structure overview. 8 Part structure Breakdown. We’ll create a feature film idea in class, mapping out the crucial moments. Assignment; Turn in Final 480 Drafts. Due Friday, 3/13

Assignment; Develop Two Feature Pitches, 1 pg. each, with emphasis on Character, Goal/Problem, and the World of the Story. Due Monday, 3/23, in class

Week 10 3/16: What are you doing here? It's Spring Break! Stay hydrated!

Week 11 3/23: Workshop both pitches. Decide which idea to pursue the rest of the semester.

Assignment; Write Chapter outline of your selected feature idea. Due Friday, 3/27

Week 12 3/30: Workshop Outlines, with emphasis on Chapter Tensions. Character Motivations, Flaws, etc.

Assignment; Write Character Bios for Primary Characters Due Friday, 4/03

Assignment; Revise Outline. Due Friday, 4/03

Week 13 4/06: Workshop Revised Outlines, with Character Bios.

Assignment: Write your feature's Kick-Ass Opening. Due Friday, 4/10

Week 14 4/13: Workshop Kick-Ass Opening.

Assignment; Intro World.Character w/ Revised Kick-Ass Opening. Due Friday, 4/17

Week 15 4/20: Workshop Pages.

Assignment; First Sequence, w/ Revised Pages, Due Friday, 4/24

Week 16 4/27: Table Reads! Where the rubber meets the road. Final workshop of pages and outlines.

Finals Week:

Final Draft of your Feature Outline due Friday, 5/07

Final Draft of your Script Pages due Friday, 5/07

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/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**