

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS – WRITING DIVISION

Course: **CTWR 415A: ADVANCED WRITING (2 units)**
Semester: **Spring 2020**
Section: **19201D**
Time: **Fridays, 1p-3:50p**
Classroom: **SCA 342**
Instructor: **Anne McIntyre Postman**
Email: apmcinty@usc.edu
Telephone: **213.740.3303**
Office Hrs: *by appointment*

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

The objective of CTWR 415A is to learn a professional approach to screenwriting from conception of the idea through the outlining process; to develop a detailed outline for a feature-length screenplay; and to write the first 15 screenplay pages.

- Learn to identify feature-worthy story ideas
- Understand the elements of dramatic structure
- Create dimensional, compelling and unique characters
- Gain an understanding of all aspects of screenwriting
- Develop your unique voice
- Write, and rewrite, a professional outline for a feature-length screenplay
- Write the first 15 pages of your screenplay

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Writing a feature-length screenplay is a highly demanding undertaking that will challenge and reward you. It is an opportunity for you to explore the world, experience, and your own perspective on that experience. It is also a chance to develop an effective writing process you can duplicate for almost any story.

In a workshop setting, you will learn a logical yet flexible approach to writing a feature script. Because a screenplay has a limited number of pages in which to tell a complete story, writers have to make each scene count. Every beat must reveal character and/or move the story forward. The outline is what allows the writer to develop and solidify the story in the most efficient manner before executing a full draft. Most of the heavy lifting is in the outline.

Screenwriters for hire are typically required to turn in an outline. The outline is written into the contract and the writer must deliver the outline prior to going to

script. Studio executives, producers and directors read and sign off on the outline so they're in agreement about the direction the story is going.

In this course, through brief lectures, viewing films, reading scripts, and by writing and workshopping each other's material, you will deepen your understanding of the elements that make a screenplay work. You will develop a detailed three-act outline for a feature script as well as a set of concise character biographies. Finally, you will write the first 15 pages of your screenplay.

Because this class is a workshop, students must contribute to all class discussions and invest time and energy in their classmates' stories. Arriving to class a few minutes early, being prepared, meeting deadlines, participating with energy and enthusiasm, and turning in work that is proofread and correctly formatted are expected at all times.

All class work must be based on new, original ideas and completed on your own. No previously written scripts or treatments may be used. Your final grade will be based on your written and in-class performance as well as your consistent attendance, punctuality, and ability to meet deadlines and contribute to a productive workshop environment for all.

REQUIRED READING:

1 FEATURE SCREENPLAY, your choice. Pick a script from a film that really speaks to you, in a genre you wish to write in. Free scripts are available online (simplyscripts.com, or just google them) or you can borrow them from the script library on SCA's 3rd floor. You can also read scripts at the WGA Library on West Third Street in LA. You don't have to be a member to read scripts, but you'll have to read them there. To make real strides in learning the art of screenwriting, I recommend reading one script per week.

For your chosen script, you'll be answering a set of questions designed to help you learn how to read scripts like a writer and to understand the way stories are put together. Instructions for this assignment will be provided.

RECOMMENDED READING:

The Screenwriter's Roadmap: 21 Ways to Jumpstart Your Story,
Neil Landau

Your Screenplay Sucks!: 100 Ways to Make It Great, William Akers

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK:

Each week, you will submit your work two ways:

1. To the Discussion Forum (on Blackboard)
2. To the Assignments site (on Blackboard)

Use professional screenwriting software. I recommend Final Draft. Let me know if you need help getting set up with screenwriting software.

***Please do not email me your assignments.** If your assignment is late, submit it to Blackboard as instructed above and email me a note when it is posted.*

GRADING BREAKDOWN:

Final grades for CTWR 415A will be determined as follows:

Participation (Oral):	10 pts.
Weekly Assignments:	42 pts.
1 Script Reading Assignment	8 pts.
Final Portfolio: Outline (30 pts.)/ Script Pgs. 1-15 (10 pts.):	<u>40 pts.</u>
	100 pts.

***Very Important:** It is possible to get full points for all your Assignments but if you are not addressing the weekly story notes you get AND making regular changes to solve story problems and improve your screenplay, you will not get an A in the class.*

Class participation includes full involvement in and contribution to all class discussions, as well as reading the assignments of the other students (often in advance) and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

Class attendance is mandatory and requires that you be punctual to ensure that all students get an equal amount of time for feedback and discussion of their work.

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 proofread your assignment prior to submission. *Scripts not conforming to these guidelines cannot receive a grade in the A range.*

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:

No open laptops allowed on the table. Bring a pad of paper and a pen to take notes. Assignments will be projected on the screen via Blackboard for all discussions and read-alouds. Cell phones must be off (or silent) and out of view in backpacks.

***Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

"Students are expected 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 equate 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 email 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."

COURSE SCHEDULE - Dates and assignments are subject to change

WEEK 1 (JAN 17TH)

- Introduction to Course (overview, requirements, reading, Blackboard, the Syllabus)
- Good writing practices. Deliver the goods. Be a collaborator. Leave your ego at the door. Take the long view and be willing to weather the ups and downs. Always address the notes!
- Ideas. What makes an idea work for a screenplay? Generating ideas.
- 3-Act Structure. Beginning, middle and end. Think not in terms of beginnings, but endings. Know where you want to end up, then work backwards.

Homework: Develop 2 script ideas around characters who deeply interest you. Write a concise half-page synopsis for each idea. Each must have a beginning, middle and end. Describe the protagonist and what they want and need. Who/what opposes them? What harrowing of hell must they go through in pursuit of their goal? How are they changed by their journey? Why does this story move you? Begin reading your chosen screenplay.

WEEK 2 (JAN 24TH)

- Workshop Script Ideas.
- ALL ABOUT CHARACTER. Ibsen's "leading points" and "little peculiarities;" want (motivation) vs. need; Egri's "Unity of Opposites" and opposing world views; active vs. passive characters
- LOGLINE & THEME: what do you want to write and why? Distilling your ideas down to a controlling premise.

Homework: Choose one of your script ideas and revise the half-page synopsis. Also, craft a concise Logline, and write Character Biographies of your 2 principal characters (1 page each).

WEEK 3 (JAN 31ST)

- Workshop Loglines and Character Bios.
- THREE ACT STRUCTURE / Act I. Great beginnings and the first 10 pages. Inciting incident, character introduction, stakes and main conflict, exposition, planting / payoff, Plot Point 1.
- The Beat Sheet – Handout

Homework: Write your Beat Sheet. Write 5 pages' worth of random scenes (to be explained).

WEEK 4 (FEB 7TH)

- Workshop Beat Sheets.
- THREE ACT STRUCTURE / ACT II. First half vs. second half. Rising action and maintaining tension; the midpoint; deepening character; Plot Point #2. How to avoid “dying in the middle.”

Homework: Revise your Beat Sheets.

WEEK 5 (FEB 14TH)

- Workshop Revised Beat Sheets.
- *Screenplay (your choice) Assignment Due.*
- Discuss: THREE ACT STRUCTURE – ACT 3. Climax, resolution, planting / payoff, character revelation and transformation, the journey taken (and why), looking back at Act I.
- OUTLINES. What’s in them? What’s the format?

Homework: Write Act I of your Outline (up to Plot Point 1). Beat out all the scenes and write the story point for each. Use screenwriting software and include scene headings. (Doing this enables you to use the same document to write your script.) Describe briefly what takes place in each scene and how the scene propels the story forward (story point). Be mindful of what the characters want within the scene and if it’s not clear from the description, make a note of it. (Though you’ll delete these notes later, it helps when you go to write the dialogue and action, because you’ll already be aware of what each character is trying to accomplish.)

WEEK 6 (FEB 21ST)

- Workshop all Act 1 Outlines
- Discuss: Scene writing, action and description writing, dialogue.
- Discuss: midpoint Reversal. Escalation and rising tension.

Homework: Revise all Act I Outlines.

****WEEK 7 (FEB 28TH) - NO CLASS MEETING****

- ***SUBMIT Revised Act I’s to Blackboard. I will post written notes. Please note: From here on out we will divide into Groups A & B and workshop on alternating weeks. Please check the schedule below to see what is due and when.***

WEEK 8 (MAR 6TH):

- GROUP A - Workshop first half Act 2 Outlines
- MIDTERM reexamination of class goals & midterm grades given.

WEEK 9 (MAR 13TH)

- GROUP B - Workshop first half Act 2 Outlines
- Character “lowest point.”
- The art of screenwriting: point of view, prose style, dialogue, momentum, format rules revisited.

MAR 14TH – MAR 22ND - SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

WEEK 10 (MAR 27TH)

- GROUP A - Workshop second half Act 2 Outlines
- Discuss Theme. How is your theme expressed?

WEEK 11 (APR 3RD):

- GROUP B - Workshop second half Act 2 Outlines
- Discuss climax and resolution, dialogue and subtext.

WEEK 12 (APR 10TH):

- GROUP A - Workshop Act 3 Outlines

WEEK 13 (APR 17TH):

- GROUP B - Workshop Act 3 Outlines

WEEK 14 (APR 24TH):

- GROUP A – Workshop Script pages 1-15

WEEK 15 (MAY 1ST):

- GROUP B – Workshop Script pages 1-15
- Course evaluations completed.

WEEK 16 (MAY 8TH): *NO CLASS MEETING*

- **FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE ON BLACKBOARD:**
 - **Complete Script Outlines (action and story point)**
 - **First 15 Script Pages**

Congratulations, and have a nice summer!

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/ssa

A. POSTMAN /USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS / CTWR 415A / SPRING 2020

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