

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

**CTWR 439 “Writing the Original Dramatic Series Pilot”
Spring 2020**

Instructor: ALEXA ALEMANNI
Class Schedule: Wednesday 7-10pm
Class Location: SCI 209
Office Hours: By appointment only
Contact Information: alemanni@usc.edu

Hour-Long Drama Series Pilot -- CTWR 439

COURSE GOALS:

Overview: Students are challenged to make the leap from a finite screenplay or episode to create the pilot for an original series involving dramatic elements that could propel storylines and characters for years. Coming up with a premise that introduces the main cast and incites the action in the pilot is similar to beginning any screenplay. But discovering “springboards” for future episodes, and enlarging relationships and issues so that stories will have “legs” requires a new layer of creativity and craft.

Specific Goals:

- Exposure to the process of writing a TV drama pilot
- Appreciation of high quality series concepts and pilots
- How to choose and shape your pilot world and characters
- How to outline the pilot
- How to complete the pilot script
- How to revise and polish the pilot script
- How to write a series bible

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this course is to write a professional-quality pilot script for an original one-hour drama series and a bible for the entire first season. The completed script and bible will be turned in during finals week and will count as the final for this course.

Course Reading:

Pilot scripts and readings will be provided throughout the class.

Required Text:

1. WRITING THE TV DRAMA SERIES — 4th Edition (2018) by Pamela Douglas

Grading Criteria:

All written assignments must be turned in on Blackboard as a PDF and emailed to your classmates as a PDF no later than 11:59pm on Mondays.

Because this is a workshop students must provide constructive feedback to one another, and participate in class discussions.

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 work as well as your attendance, and contribution to the workshop environment.

Attendance policy: Attendance is mandatory because of the workshop element of this class. The only way an absence can be excused is with medical documentation. Three absences will be cause to fail for the semester.

10% Participation in discussion of other students' work
30% Outline incorporating class notes
50% Final draft of pilot
10% Series bible

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%

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.

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:

Laptops are permissible for taking notes. No cell phones.

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 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 AND ASSIGNMENTS:

1. JANUARY 15th

Introduction to principles of creating an original series. Clips from prototype pilots are shown and analyzed. How does a series get “legs?” How are “springboards” used? To what extent are “franchises” helpful? How are new series affected by the changing TV landscape? What qualities contribute to an effective pilot?

Assignment:

- * Read the Preface, Introduction and John Wells comments in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4th Edition.
- * Read the pilot script of *New Amsterdam & The Crown*, both available on Blackboard.

2. JANUARY 22nd

In-class screening of *New Amsterdam & The Crown* made from the script. Analysis of elements that make it successful as a pilot.
Discussion of components necessary for pilot pitch.

Assignments:

- * Prepare to pitch your pilot concept and world next class.
- * Read Chapter One in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4th Edition.

3. JANUARY 29th

Workshop student pitches on concept & world.

Assignments:

- * Revise and develop your concept and world.
- * Prepare character portion of your pitch.
- * Read Chapter Three in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4th Edition.

4. FEBRUARY 5th

Workshop student pitches on characters

Assignments:

- * Revise pitch
- * Read Chapter Four in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4th Edition.

5. FEBRUARY 12th

Workshop student pitches on pilot story arc
How to write a pilot outline.

Assignments:

- * Outline your pilot.
- * Email the first page of the outline only to everyone by February 17th no later than midnight & upload to Blackboard.
- * Review pages 105 to 107 “How to Write Your Outline” in Writing the TV Drama Series.

6. FEBRUARY 19th

In-class feedback on outline beginnings.

Assignment:

- * Revise and complete your outline. Email to all by February 24th no later than midnight and upload to blackboard.

7. FEBRUARY 26th

In-class discussion of outlines.
Effective openings.

Assignment: Revise and complete all remaining outlines.

8. MARCH 4th

Discussion of outlines concludes.

Assignment:

- * As soon as you have revised your outlines, start the script. First five pages are due March 9th no later than midnight, emailed to all by March 2nd.

9. MARCH 11th

In-class feedback on script openings and character introductions.

Assignment:

- * Complete Act One. Email all of Act One to the entire class in time to read before our next meeting.

10. MARCH 25th, APRIL 1, APRIL 8, APRIL 15th

Intensive workshop on scripts in progress.

Assignment:

- * Each week, email pages to everyone by the Monday before class no later than midnight.

* Read the pages and be prepared to give notes. Re-write.

14. APRIL 22nd

How to write a series bible.
Examples are shown in class.

Assignment:

* Write the bible for your series.

15. APRIL 29th

Workshop on series bibles.

Assignments:

- * Revise the bible per class notes and continue re-writing.
- * Complete and deliver the re-written pilot script and bible by May 8th no later than midnight to Blackboard.

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” <https://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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.
<https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

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