

**CTWR 515B  
M.F.A. Thesis Class  
Spring 2020**

Classroom: SCA 362  
Hours: Thursday 4:00PM to 6:50pm

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SCA 352  
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**The task of 515b:**

This semester's theme is simple: **re-write, re-write, re-write**. During the first few weeks of the new semester, we will focus on strategies for rewriting, and, in finer grain, on the act of giving and receiving detailed, constructive notes. You will then proceed to re-write your First Draft with an eye toward adding dimension to characters, story structure, and sub-plots.

Character and story will be rigorously examined and put to the test. Students will be expected to **work extremely hard to bring their First Drafts up to a professional level**, and to work consistently on their revisions. **Pages will be expected to be delivered to the class on a weekly basis without exception.** In 515a, you were at times encouraged to work in your own manner to allow the creative process to percolate. In this second semester, we will work in a more industrial (if not industrious) atmosphere, with a faster pace and more intense revisions.

The class will be treated as a collaborative workshop where it is the responsibility of each student to help his or her fellow students find answers to their story and character problems. Each student in the class will read each draft from each student and will be expected to participate vigorously in the class discussions. Collaboration is an important part of the creative process. Students will be required to give notes to their fellow students after each successive draft.

While it is easy to point out problems, we want to use this time to train our writing minds to solve problems and come up with workable solutions. Working on your feet is an essential talent that every working writer must develop. To quote Jack Epps, Jr., "If you are not involved in solving your script's problems, then you will be forced to use other people's ideas – which may or may not be in your screenplay's best interest." It is important for each writer to participate in the discussion of his/her screenplay. Do not simply sit there and take notes; do not be defensive; but also do not agree with every criticism and then go home and ignore them.

Students are also expected to do a Polish during the course of this term. A Polish is defined as "a two or three week pass" over a screenplay, which may or may not require deep revisions.

One focus of this class is to raise the level of writing to where the student will have a professional screenplay that can be used as a calling card to allow him/her to make the transition from student to professional. Another is the development of awareness of the elements of the art and craft, so that the student can go on to a lifetime of continually improving writing.

### **Course Schedule:**

**Weeks 1-4** Delivery of a Finished Draft will have occurred prior to the first class. Each week we will be critiquing three students' work. Each member of the class is expected, in addition to his/her verbal notes, to deliver written notes to the writer. We will be examining character clarity and development, structure, story and scene construction. We will be looking to intensify and deepen character storied, relationships and character and story arcs. We will be looking at whether the conclusion is satisfying and unpredictable. During this period each writer will begin his/her revisions. Writers are expected to deliver beat sheets by week 4 that detail their changes especially with reference to

character growth and development. Pages to be handed in weekly.

**Weeks 5-7** Examining dialogue for uniqueness and voice. Examination of set-up and follow-through in the second and third acts. Clarifying premise and making sure the premise and questions posed at the end of the first act have been answered in a satisfying manner. Students are expected to make a card presentation to the class showing the changes they will be making to both the characters and the plot. Incorporate Thesis Committee notes (if any).

**Weeks 8-12** Second Draft screenplay due. We will continue to refine the screenplays and focus on scene construction. Generally, we will be looking to focus and tighten.

**Weeks 12-15** The Final Polish. Isolating specific areas that need to be revised such as character story, sequences, suspense, weak or overextended second acts, confused structure, predictability, and tightening.

### **Methodology:**

We will rely on class discussion (see below) and individual meetings (see below). There will, from time to time, be reading and viewing assignments. We will use our theoretical understanding of the screenplay form to encourage fine writing; and we will use the discoveries we make in the writing to contribute to our better understanding of the art and craft of the screenplay.

### **Format:**

All submissions must fully conform to professional standards, which is to say, on 8 1/2 x 11 white paper, 12 point courier, with proper margins and formatting if on paper; or the equivalent on PDF. If you do not have a dedicated screenwriting program, get one: the Write

Brothers software is available for free, and Final Draft at a reduced rate. (See the Division office.)

Proper spelling and punctuation are not optional. A lack of respect for this guideline will result in non-acceptance of the work. Spellcheck is not a substitute for correct spelling; neither is built-in grammar checking a substitute for proper grammar.

Characters can speak as ungrammatically as they wish. You, in your prose and descriptions, may not.

**Timeliness:**

Work is due on the date it is due. This is of the essence. If you are going to miss an assignment, you must discuss this with me in advance, not contemporaneously with the date of the blown assignment. Excuses only by written permission from me, on paper or via e-mail.

**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.

### **Conferences:**

Although I will be available within limits via e-mail, questions concerning work should be saved for class, when all can profit from the discussion. That notwithstanding, each student should meet with me in my office no less than two times during the semester. Appointments can be made via email. Responsibility for making these appointments is yours, not mine.

### **Grading Criteria:**

Classroom participation – 10%. This includes professional conduct, real contribution, and your ability fully and genuinely to help your fellow students. Unexcused absences will reduce your grade.

Outline – 20%. This encompasses the effective and well-written presentation of character and story.

Dramatization – 30%. This encompasses how well you have taken your characters, ideas, conflicts, and transformed them into drama.

Reach and originality – 30%. You are encouraged to take real chances in the writing and to demonstrate your own voice. Doing so will have a significant, positive effect on your grade. Failure to do so will have the opposite effect.

Work ethic – 10%.

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An "A" is for truly exceptional work; a "B" is for good work; and a "C" is for average work. Simply completing the assigned work is, in and of itself, no guarantee of a high grade.

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%

Please note that you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. (This is separate from the question of passing Thesis.)

### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:  
[http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html), (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### **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](https://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](https://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](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://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](https://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/sssa](http://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](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*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.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*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.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.

### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

Please activate your course in Blackboard with access to the course syllabus. Whether or not you use Blackboard regularly, these preparations will be crucial in an emergency. USC's Blackboard learning management system and support information is available at [blackboard.usc.edu](https://blackboard.usc.edu).

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX.