

CTWR 520

Advanced Scene Writing

Spring 2020

Classroom: SCB 101
Hours: Wednesday 10am to 12:50pm

Professor Howard A. Rodman
SCA 352
Office hours: Wednesday 11am to 2:30pm
and by appointment
E-mail: hrodman@cinema.usc.edu
Phone: 213-740-3303

This class has two basic purposes:

- To hone the scene writing skills that you initially developed in CTWR 413, 513, or 528; and
- To explore together the structural, practical and emotional elements of the scene: what it is, how it works.

The course assumes that you are engaged in writing feature screenplays, television scripts, or shorts, on your own or for other courses. You may, *if and only if you ask for and receive my permission*, submit as course assignments scenes from your ongoing work. In this sense, the course can be used as a laboratory in which you can test and refine specific scenes from works-in-progress to a depth and with a detail at times not available in other courses.

That having been said, 520 isn't a 'dumping ground' for previously written material. You will get far less from this course if you don't engage with it, if you don't produce new material purpose-built for it. Can you get by with recycled material? Perhaps. But it's like texting at stoplights – just because you can do it doesn't mean you should.

The work of the course will consist of weekly writing assignments, as well as weekly rewriting assignments. You will be asked to write a number of different kinds of scenes and utilize different writerly techniques. In addition to the weekly assignments you will be asked to present, at midterm, a pair of revised scenes; and, at the end of the course, an original short script or a sequence from a full-length film or television script.

Examples from well-written feature films will be used to help you understand some of the choices, possibilities, joys, and concerns of the scene writing process.

Grading will be based on classroom participation; the fulfillment and quality of weekly assignments; the quality of the midterm and final submissions; and your personal growth as a screenwriter. An "A" is for truly exceptional work; a "B" is for good work; and a "C" is for average work. Simply doing all the assigned work is, in and of itself, no guarantee of a high grade.

Class participation will represent 30% of your grade; your weekly assignments will represent 30% of your grade; your mid-term assignment will represent 15% of your grade; and your final assignment will represent 25% of your grade.

You cannot participate in class if you are not in class. Discuss absences with me in person or via email in advance of those absences.

Weekly assignments are due via email to me at hrodman@cinema.usc.edu in PDF no later than one hour before class, and, additionally, as hard copy brought to class itself. It is your responsibility to leave sufficient time and leeway for internet outages, printer failure, traffic jams, asteroid collision. The work must be professionally presented – properly formatted and free of typos, misspellings, errors of grammar or syntax. More than one misspelling in any given assignment will result in a failing grade for that assignment. Late assignments are not accepted and will also receive a failing grade.

•••

Schedule of Writing Assignments:

Week 1	Introductions; What is a scene?
Week 2	External, direct, overt conflict.
Week 3	Internal, indirect, covert conflict
Week 4	Entrances.
Week 5	Exposition and baggage.
Week 6	Irony; suspense; surprise.
Week 7	Indirection; misdirection. REVISED SCENES DUE.
Week 8	Gags, physical humor, props, sound...
Week 9	Dialogue.
Week 10	Action.
Week 11	Set-ups (advertising); pay-offs.
Week 12	Exits.
Week 13	Transitions.
Week 14	Preparation and aftermath.
Week 15	FINAL SEQUENCE or SHORT DUE.

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, or the PDF equivalent. 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 at least once and preferably twice 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%.

•••

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/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) 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. 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

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.

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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