School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
CTWR 533b: Writing The Feature Script
4.0 Units
Pre-Reqs: CTWR 533a

Instructor: Sean Hood
Class Schedule: 10:00-12:50pm Monday
Class Room: SCA 345
Office Hours: 1:30 – 3:30 PM, Mondays. Room 360 (Professor's Boxes/Lounge)
Email Address: shood@usc.edu

Course Objective:

The objective of this course is to learn the professional craft and process of rewriting, to practice the craft by generating, discussing and receiving notes for revision, and to apply the craft by completing a rewrite of an original screenplay.

Course Description

From the first draft to the final day of shooting, professional screenwriters face a process of continual reevaluation, ongoing critique and shifting circumstances. They spend most of their time embroiled in rewrites. This course is designed to give students the tools to approach this process in a professional way.

From a purely artistic perspective, rewriting one's own material is the most challenging, painful and ultimately rewarding discipline a writer (or filmmaker) ever faces. Said John Irving, "The most important and essential element of writing is rewriting." This course is also designed help the students face this challenge with confidence and creativity.

The class will lead students step-by-step through the revision of an original feature script, moving from broad discussions of the author's original intent, to a more detailed "game plan" for the rewrite, and finally to the most specific areas of scene and dialogue. Each aspect of the screenplay will be analyzed and reconsidered, with emphasis on story and character fundamentals.

This course will not only help students to improve their scripts, it will allow them to practice skills of analysis, discussion and presentation they will need in future projects throughout their professional careers. With this in mind, students will be expected to participate in all discussions and to help their fellow students develop their outlines and screenplays.

Ultimately, each student is required to complete an extensive rewrite (or rewrites) by the end of the semester. A dialogue polish does not constitute an extensive rewrite. And likewise, a complete page-one rewrite will only result a new-but-not-better first draft.

Since each screenplay offers unique challenges for each writer, the instructor will take into account the progress of each student on an individual basis.

Course Reading:

The SCA Writing Division Chair, Jack Epps, has written a book about rewriting that summarizes everything you could hope to learn in this class. If you hope to make the transition from student writer to professional, his book is a MUST READ.

Screenwriting is Rewriting by Jack Epps (Head of USC's Writing Division, School of Cinematic Arts,) Jr. Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2016, ISBN: 9781628927405

Assignments:

The writing assignments will be due by midnight Saturday previous to each class. This is a firm deadline and the late delivery of assignments will impact your grade for the course. Since we have only one day, Sunday, to read your material, late assignments may or may not receive feedback in Monday's class. If you finish the work earlier, please send it in. All written assignments will be uploaded to the Dropbox folder.

You'll be expected to come to class with written notes on your colleagues' pages for the class discussion. These written notes will be then uploaded to the Dropbox folder after class, sometime on Monday afternoon. I'd prefer that you not upload notes before the discussion, so that those receiving notes have open minds.

Grading Criteria:

Grading will depend on the quality and improvement of student's written work and in-class presentations, as well as the student's involvement in the class discussions.

The course aims to prepare students to be working professionals. With that in mind, grading will reflect the standards and expectations students will encounter in the "real world." So, all assignments must be submitted on time. Students must attend all classes, arriving on time. Students who cannot make a class or complete an assignment must contact the professor via email before they miss a class or fail to complete an assignment.

Expectation of Professionalism

When judging a screenwriter's work, industry professionals often ask if a writer can "deliver." Professional work is "delivered" on-time, proofread, and carefully thought out. Slip-shod or hurried work is rarely tolerated. Assignments may be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, screenplay format mistakes, and typos. Please proofread your assignment prior to submission. So in determining a final grade, hard work and professionalism will be as important as originality and skill.

Likewise, working as a professional requires the skills of collaboration and communication. So as they would be in any story meeting in the entertainment industry, students are expected to be involved in each and every discussion. Failing to read and engage with other students' material will affect the students' final grades.

Specific areas that will be considered in determining a final grade are:

- Classroom Participation – 5%
- Written Feedback (Notes) – 5%
- Summary of Notes and Game Plan – 5%
- Outline and Pitch – 5%
- Bi-Weekly Revised Pages – (10% each) 40%
- Final rewritten and polished screenplay – 40%

As per Writing Division policy the breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade is…

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%

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.

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.

Internet Policy:

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snap-chatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

As the class is discussion based, cell phones should be turned off. You may use your laptop when receiving notes or taking lecture notes, but for those reasons only.

Class Schedule

Week 1 – Monday, January 13

- Introductions.
- Lecture: The Rewrite Process.
- Review of Syllabus, Textbook and first assignments.
- How to give and receive "professional" notes.

Assignment Due – Saturday, January 18 Midnight

- Print your own script on paper. Reread from beginning to end in one sitting.
- Annotate draft as you read. Send me a Picture of an Annotated Page.
- Read Introduction and Chapters 1–3, Epps.

Monday, January 20 – No Class – President's Day

Assignment Due – Monday, January 18, 5 PM

- Read all of you peers scrips.
- Answer Rewrite Questionnaire for your own script.
- Do a set of WRITTEN NOTES for each script, as per the Notes Template.

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Week 2 – Monday, January 27

- Lecture: Epps 1–3 and Definitions.
- Organizing feedback/notes into a Summary of Feedback.
- Critique and discussion of screenplays as per the Rewrite Questionnaire.

Assignment Due – Saturday, February 1 Midnight

- Deliver a 1–2 page Summary of Feedback
- Read Chapters 4–7, Epps.

Week 3 – Monday, February 3

- Lecture: Epps 4–7 and Definitions.
- How to create a Gameplan for the rewrite.
- Critique and discussion of Summary of Feedback.
- All deliver 1 paragraph of notes on Summary of Feedback. Let each of your peers know if they are missing something and/or what is most important.

Assignment Due – Saturday, February 8, Midnight

- Deliver a 2–3 page Gameplan detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.
- Read Chapters 8–11, Epps.

Week 4 – Monday, February 10

- Lecture: Chapters 8–11, Epps and Definitions.
- Writing a professional "Treatment" or "Outline."
- Discussion of Gameplans.
- Each student delivers 1 paragraph of notes on Gameplan.
- Each student makes an Appointment With The Professor for Monday 2/17, (10 AM – 1 PM) or Tuesday 2/18, (1 PM – 4 PM)

Monday, February – 17, No class – President's Day

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Assignment Due – Saturday, February 22, Midnight

- Deliver Treatment or Outline.
- Prepare a 10–15 minute Pitch for your revised story.
- Read Chapters 12–14, Epps.

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Week 5 – Monday, February 24

- Lecture: Chapters 12–14, Epps and Definitions
- Each student Pitches their revised story.
- Each student delivers 1 paragraph of notes on Outline.

Assignment Due – Saturday, February 29, Midnight

- Deliver revised Sequence One
- Read Chapter 15, Epps

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Week 6 – Monday, March 2

- Lecture: Chapter 15, Epps and Definitions
- Discussion and analysis of delivered pages. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Saturday, March 7, Midnight

- Deliver revised Sequence Two (or to the end of The First Act)
- Read Chapter 16, Epps

Week 7 – Monday, March 9

- Lecture: Chapter 16, Epps and Definitions
- Discussion and analysis of delivered pages. Deliver written notes.

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Monday, March 16 – No Class – Spring Break

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Assignment Due – Saturday, February 27, Midnight

- Deliver revised Sequence Three
- Read Chapter 17, Epps

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Week 8 – Monday, March 23

- Lecture: Chapter 17, Epps and Definitions
- Discussion and analysis of delivered pages. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Saturday, March 28, Midnight

- Deliver revised Sequence Four (or up to the Midpoint)
- Read Chapter 18, Epps

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Week 9 – Monday, March 31

- Lecture: Chapter 18, Epps and Definitions
- Discussion and analysis of delivered pages. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Saturday, April 4, Midnight

- Deliver revised Sequence Five
- Read chapter 19, Epps

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Week 10 – Monday, April 6

- Lecture: Chapter 19, Epps and Definitions
- Discussion and analysis of delivered pages. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Saturday, March 11 Midnight

- Deliver revised Sequence Six (or a Complete Second Act)
- Read Chapter 20, Epps

Week 11 – Monday, April 13

- Lecture: Chapter 20, Epps and Definitions
- Discussion and analysis of delivered pages. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Saturday, April 18, Midnight

- Deliver revised Sequence Seven
- Read Chapter 21, Epps

Week 12 – Monday April 20

- Lecture: Chapter 21, Epps and Definitions
- Discussion and analysis of delivered pages. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Saturday April 25, Midnight

- Deliver revised Sequence Eight (or to the END of the draft)
- Read: Chapter 22 and 23 Epps

Week 13 – Monday April 27

- Lecture: Polishing, Epps and Definitions
- Discussion and analysis of delivered pages. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Saturday April 17, Midnight

Submit a batch of Polished Pages with * REVISION MARKS.

Week 14 – TBD

Discussions of Polish Pages.

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Week 15 – Monday May 11

Final Optional Class, Beer/Coffee and Discussion of professional life after USC.

FINAL SCRIPT: it is a draft suitable for submission to an agent, producer, or studio. It should be a clean (no revision marks), proofread (no typos,) professional (good styling and formatting) and self-consistent draft.

FINAL DRAFT DUE – Monday Night, Midnight of May 11 . Students who are late with their work will get an entire letter drop for each day they are late. (For example: A- to B-). I dread having to enforce this rule, but I always do.

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.

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

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!