

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

**CTWR 324
Spring 2020**

Instructor: Christopher J. Moore
Class Schedule: Friday, 1:00 — 3:50pm
Class Location: Room SCB — 304
Office Hours: After class or by appointment (contact me in class, or by email.)
Contact Information: CMoore71@usc.edu; or Department Offices
213-740-3303

Course Statement:

This class is designed for students who have an interest in delving into the art and craft of writing for the half-hour, character-driven, scripted television comedy. It will explore the rules of TV writing as well as the nature of sitcom and its evolution over the years. Television production is a collaborative experience and so is the writing process. That too will be explored and examined over the semester.

Please Note: Students in this course will be asked to collaborate as a group on writing projects, including a completed 'spec' episode of an existing series.

For students who desire to end the course with a writing sample they can show as their own, this may NOT be the class for you. Look into CTWR 434 (Episodic Writing for Existing 1/2 Hour Shows) or CTWR 437 (Writing the Original 1/2 Hour Pilot).

Course Goals:

- Exposure to the process of writing episodic TV Comedy in a collaborative atmosphere; i.e. the "Writing Room".
- Appreciation of outstanding comedy series writing, and the development of the 1/2 hour scripted comedy form.
- What to look for in choosing a series to write a 'spec' script for, and in developing a strong story for that spec script.
- Overall development of comedy writing skills through comic scene construction and story development.

Course Objective: To write scenes for various existing TV Comedy series that demonstrate professional skill in several current comic platforms (i.e: multi-camera, single camera), and comic sub-genres of the form (i.e. 'romantic', 'family', 'workplace', 'buddy comedies', etc.)

To work on scenes with writing partner(s) to understand the collaborative nature of comedy writing. Taking part in the process of a Writers Room which mirrors the real world of TV Comedy.

As a class, break a story and collaborate on the writing of a COMPLETE EPISODE for a current comedy. This will serve as the final course project.

Course Theme: Comedy is Character. Each genre of TV comedy requires an understanding of character, which leads to creating conflict, which in turn leads to story, structure, theme, and ultimately what the Pros refer to as “the funny.”

Course Reading:

Assigned scripts, articles, and excerpts from books (TBA).

Grading Criteria:

As per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

Attendance and participation are vital to our room. Your fellow writers depend on your showing up and sharing your thoughts on their work, not to mention the note that can turn a scene or story around. Handling in assignments in a timely, complete manner is a routine every writer needs to get used to. In an ever-changing creative landscape your professionalism is one thing you can always depend on.

Grading on collaborative writing assignments is only a portion of the final grade. Your individual grade for this course will also depend upon your on-time attendance, participation, and understanding of the basic concepts covered in class demonstrated by answers to exam questions.

THE TOPICS LISTED BELOW ARE MERELY AN EXAMPLE. **(PARTICIPATION CANNOT EXCEED 10%)**

- Participation: 10%
- First Scene Writing Assignment: 5%
- Beat Sheet and Story Outline: 10%
- Mid-Term exam: 15%
- First Draft Part 1 — 10%
- First Draft Part 2 — 10%
- Final Exam: 20%
- Final Draft and Polish — 20%
- Totaling 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%

The final draft (and all written assignments) will be assessed for the following qualities:

Does it realize the promise of the story outline? Are the voices of the characters true to the original series? Is the script correct in structure and format? Were notes addressed appropriately?

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 proof your assignment prior to submission.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to 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 advisor for additional support.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

Lively discussion and participation are encouraged, but please be courteous and respectful. No food or drink will be allowed in the class, with the exception of water in a clear plastic container.

LAPTOP POLICY:

Laptops, a vital writing tool, are encouraged in class. Cruising the Internet and instant messaging are not. This writer's room is an "all for one and one for all" atmosphere. To turn your attention to anything but the work at hand is disrespectful, not to mention unprofessional. A warning will be given for the first infraction. The next will result in a loss of one grade. The same rule applies to cell phones.

INTERNET POLICY:

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

Recording Devices:

You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

Class Schedule:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS:

1/17/2020

WEEK 1— Introduction to the principles of writing for an episodic TV comedy series and how sitcom writing differs from other forms of screenwriting in conception, intention, characterization and structure.

Brief overview of the history and development of the 1/2 hour situation comedy form, and the current state of the business of TV writing and the changing marketplace.

Watch an episode of a 1/2 hour comedy to discuss and deconstruct, examining elements of the form.

ASSIGNMENT: Read assigned script. Break down characters and story elements.

1/24/2020

WEEK 2— Review and discuss the characters and tone of the assigned script. Discuss the episode and story beats.

Watch episode to be announced. Discuss core character relationships and story structure.

Break into Writing Teams (two students per team).

ASSIGNMENT— Using scripts provided as a guide, each team will write an original 2-3 minute scene for the show, capturing as closely as possible voice and tone.

1/31/2020

WEEK 3— Cast, table read, and discuss the chosen sitcom scenes. Discuss comedic conflict and basic scene structure.

Discuss how personal stories can become scripted episodes.

Watch episode of another current series. Discuss character relationships and basic story structure, including “A” and “B” stories.

Discuss criteria for choosing which shows to consider when writing a ‘spec’ episode.

ASSIGNMENT: Each writing team of two will select a series and come up with two (2) ‘spec’ episode ideas for a current show (following the criteria discussed in class).

2/7/2020

WEEK 4— Writing teams will pitch episode ideas. Examine the scope and types of stories that work best in the 1/2 hour form. Examine how story ideas can be fresh and engaging, yet still draw upon the core character relationships and conflict of the series premise.

Discussion of how show writing staffs function. Overview of writing room dynamics and the process of collaboration. Discuss the giving, and taking, of notes from classmates.

Split into two writing “staffs” (Show A and Show B) - consisting of three writing teams (six students) each - which will work together for the remainder of the semester on the Final Project; a full spec episode of a current series.

Each “staff” will select a series for which to write a spec, and then collaborate on every phase: Story idea, beat sheet, outline, first and second drafts.

ASSIGNMENT: Each writing staff will come up with three episode ideas for their chosen show (Can be based on stories pitched in class, or can be totally new ideas).

2/14/2020

WEEK 5—Both writing staffs will pitch and discuss story ideas for their respective shows: Break down overall story arcs. Discuss possible ‘B’ stories for each episode.

ASSIGNMENT: Break down episode ideas into ‘beat sheets’ (Both groups).

Everyone is to watch at least two episodes of **BOTH** shows. You not only must be familiar with the show you are writing, but also the show you will be giving notes on.

2/21/2020

WEEK 6—Mid-Term - Short answer questions about all facets of comedy television writing covered to date in class.

Screen: Episodes of series chosen for each project. Examine tone and feel (pacing etc.) of each show.

Go over beat sheets for both shows. Break into specific scenes to a form a ‘rough outline’.

ASSIGNMENT: Both groups to begin expanding and refining, adding detail and dialogue.

Due next class: Outline for show A.

2/28/2020

WEEK 7— Workshop: Show A Story notes on full outline.

Full class will discuss, enhance, and help revise as needed. The goal: To have a solid outline at the end of class from which to begin writing the draft.

Discuss the history and development of the 1/2 hour comedy show on television.

Watch an episode of a 'classic' 1/2 hour comedy to discuss and deconstruct'.

**ASSIGNMENT: Show A: Begin writing first draft- (first 15 pages).
Show B: Outline due next class.**

3/6/2020

WEEK 8— Workshop: Show B Story notes on full outline.

Full class will discuss, enhance, and help revise as needed. The goal: to have a solid outline at the end of class from which to begin writing the draft.

Watch an episode of a classic 1/2 hour comedy to discuss and 'deconstruct'.

ASSIGNMENT: Show B: Rewrite part 1, and complete writing first draft - (first 15 pages).

Show A: First 15 pages of first draft due next class.

3/13/2020

WEEK 9— Show A Table read and notes on first draft, part 1.

Discuss in terms of clarity and progression of story. Look for inconsistencies and repetition of information. Do the voices of the main characters ring true?

Watch an episode of a 'classic' 1/2 hour comedy to discuss and 'deconstruct'.

**ASSIGNMENT: Show A: Re-write part 1, and complete writing first draft.
Show B: Part 1 (first 15 pages) of first draft due next class.**

SPRING BREAK!!!!

3/27/2020

WEEK 10— Workshop: Show B table read and notes on first draft, part 1. Discuss as above.

Continue to discuss the principles applied to writing an episode and making it appear that it has one vision and point of view even though multiple writers have had a hand in the creation.

Watch an episode of a 'classic' 1/2 hour comedy to discuss and 'deconstruct'.

**ASSIGNMENT: Show B: Re-write part 1, and complete writing first draft.
Show A: Full version of first draft due next class.**

4/3/2020

WEEKS 11— Show A Table read and notes on first draft, part 2.

Watch an episode of a ‘classic’ 1/2 comedy to discuss and ‘deconstruct’.

**ASSIGNMENT: Show A: Begin re-write (second draft) of full script.
Show B: Full version of first draft due next class.**

4/10/2020

WEEK 12 Final Exam — Short essay questions on concepts covered in class.

Workshop: Show B table read and notes on first draft, part 2.

Watch an episode of a ‘classic 1/2 hour comedy to discuss and ‘deconstruct’.

**ASSIGNMENT: Show B: Begin re-write (Second Draft) of full script.
Show A: Second draft of full script due next class.**

4/17/2020

WEEK 13 — Punch up with the pros, pt. 1: Begin “Writing Room” re-write process, with guest professional writers.

Workshop: Show A table read and room re-write selected scenes.

**ASSIGNMENT: Show B: Second draft of full script due next class.
Show A: Final polish of script.**

4/24/2020

WEEK 14— Punch up with with the pros, pt. 2: Continue writing Room re-write process, with guest professional writers.

Workshop: Show B Table read and room re-write selected scenes.

ASSIGNMENT: Both teams A & B to finish ‘polish’ of representative scripts.

5/1/2020

WEEK 15— Review concepts covered over the course of the semester. Final questions and closing remarks. Possible guest speaker(s).

FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE: Completed Script (DATE TBA)

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

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.

<p style="text-align: center;">PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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