

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

CTWR 415B – Advanced Writing Spring 2020

Instructor:	Toni Ann Johnson
Class Schedule:	Mondays 4–6:50 PM
Class Location:	SCA 342
Office hours:	By appointment
Contact Information:	toniannj@usc.edu

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

Students refine their existing outline and write a feature screenplay in a constructive, workshop environment. Each student will be expected complete a first draft of the screenplay.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Students will review and analyze their outlines, focusing on creating original, complex characters while developing a strong story and scene structure. After revising and where needed expanding their outlines, students will write their screenplays with a focus on visual storytelling, act breaks, character needs and wants, set ups and payoffs, subplots, original dialogue and subtext. Throughout, from outline to script, pages will be discussed via workshop in class.

Students will read essays and chapters from books on screenwriting. As a group we'll review handouts and watch film clips and videos that reinforce an understanding of the elements of screenwriting. We may also read and discuss excerpts of scripts and articles on screenwriting during class.

COURSE READING:

Students will be required to read and analyze (per instructions) **two** feature scripts from produced films that they select.

Required reading:

The Lost Art of Story by Adam Skelter (this can be purchased on Amazon)

The Anatomy of Story by John Truby (can be purchased new or used on Amazon)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) Completion of a revised outline, and a feature screenplay. Proper grammar, spelling and format are expected.

2) Your outlines and scripts will be discussed in class so you will need to email the assignment to the instructor and your classmates before class (**Saturdays by 12noon**), as a PDF. You may feel free to submit early. Early submissions will be appreciated. (Points will be deducted for late delivery.)

3) Group Interaction: Students will be required to read each other's work, make notes on the PDFs of the outlines/scripts, and provide constructive feedback to their classmates. Because this class is a workshop students must contribute to all class discussions, read their classmates' work, and email notes by the start of class. (Points will be deducted for failure to deliver notes.) Being prepared, meeting deadlines, and participating with enthusiasm will be expected at all times.

4) Students will be required to read from *The Lost Art of Story*, by Adam Skelter and *The Anatomy of Story*, by John Truby. After you read the pages, write down one to three things you learned from what you read, or something you found useful for your own writing, or something you agree or disagree with and why. Be prepared to share in class. When time doesn't permit us to share these impressions we may post them in an online thread either via email or on Blackboard. You might want to keep these paragraphs in one document as a learning journal.

5) Assignments are to be completed in proper format, and submitted by specified due dates and times as discussed in class. Consistently late work will lower your grade. **DON'T MISS DEADLINES IN THIS CLASS. If you miss the deadline more than twice, the third time you will not receive feedback and your homework score will be significantly reduced, which will lower your final grade.**

6) Read two published screenplays and analyze per instructions. The goal is for students to learn to read like a writer. Ideally, you should be reading scripts and watching films as often as possible.

The first reading assignment is due **February 10th**. Second is Due **April 6th**.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Assigned Books study	10%
Reading Assignments:	10%
Participation:	10%
Homework and Notes:	20%
Screenplay:	50%

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%
B+ 89% to 87%
B 86% to 83%
B- 82% to 80%
C+ 79% to 77%

C- 72% to 70%
D+ 69% to 67%
D 66% to 63%
D- 62% to 60%
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 proof your assignment prior to submission.

Script Format: You will be required to write in standard script format. There are numerous software programs available. FINAL DRAFT typically offers a student discount. Celtx is a free software program. Amazon has a free screenwriting software program as well.

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.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Laptops will be used in class for note taking only. **Cellphones should be turned off except during breaks.** I know it's tempting, but please don't surf, chat, or send emails (except for script notes) during workshop. If you do, and I see you, points will be deducted from your final grade.

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 adviser for additional support.

OFFICE HOURS & CONFERENCES

Individual conferences will be available by appointment via phone or Mondays before class.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1, January 13th:

Introduction to the course and the collaborative workshop process. Students will introduce their outlines and what inspired them, and discuss their goals for the screenplay and the class. Class will divide into Groups A and B.

-Reading assignment instructions will be covered- first one due February 10th.

Discussion on TIME MANAGEMENT: how to meet your deadlines.

Review Act structure.

Handouts provided via email

ASSIGNMENT: 1. Group A makes any necessary revisions/expansions and submits outlines by Saturday Jan. 18th at 12 Noon. If your outline is fewer than 20 pages you'll be required to flesh it out. You might be required to do this even if it *is* 20 pages or more. Scene headings and what takes place in the scenes should be included. Nothing vague should be included. All screen directions should be written visually. (No explanations, or things that cannot be executed either visually or via dialogue.) Your outline should reflect three-act structure, you should have subplots, and the writing should include only what we SEE on screen and what we hear. I should be able to tell what your protagonist wants and needs and whether they achieve their what they want or not. I should be able to get a sense of your voice on the page.

2. Both groups read Group A's outlines. Prepare notes on each one and be ready to discuss in class, focusing on: 1) Is each scene moving the story forward as well as setting up character development? 2) Are the wants/needs/and character weaknesses clear? 3) Does the protagonist drive the story? 4) Are the characters active enough? 5) Are there enough subplots? 6) Is there a clear three act structure leading to a strong finish?

3. Read chapters 1 and 2 (story structure) in Adam Skelter's *The Lost Art of Story*. The book is available on Amazon. (There's no class next week so you should receive the book in time. The chapters are short.) Write down one to three things you learned or found useful for your writing and be prepared to share in class.

*** Reading Assignment*** (DUE in 4 weeks.) Read a script of a produced film that interests you. You might choose one that relates to what you're working on. Answer the questions per reading assignment instructions given out in class. Email to your instructor by February 10th.

Group A's outlines to be emailed by Saturday Jan. 25th at noon.

WEEK 2, January 20th – MLK DAY – no class

WEEK 3, January 27th

Discuss Chapter's 1 & 2 of *The Lost Art of Story*.
View Story Structure videos

Workshop Group A's outlines.

Discuss character development, lead character's conflict, and the difference between internal and external conflict. Do you know your characters well enough? Discuss ways to explore character and how theme is expressed via character.

ASSIGNMENT: Group A revise outline and Write the First Act. (due NEXT Sat. Feb. 8th)

Group B's outlines to be emailed this Saturday, February 1st by noon. (Feel free to submit early.)

Both groups read Group B's outlines. Prepare notes and be ready to discuss in class.

Part 2: In John Truby's *The Anatomy of Story*, read CHAPTER 3: 7 Key Steps of Story Structure. Write down one to three things you learned or found useful and be prepared to share in class. This will be the process with the reading going forward.

WEEK 4, February 3rd

REMINDER, 1st reading assignment due NEXT week. Feb. 10th.

Discuss “7 key steps of Story Structure” (John Truby).
Does YOUR script have them?

Workshop Group B’s outlines.

ASSIGNMENT: Group B revise outline as needed and write the First Act.
(due Sat. Feb. 15th)

Group A’s revised outlines and Act 1 pages to be emailed this Saturday,
February 8th at noon.

Both groups read Group A’s revised outline and first acts. Prepare notes
and be ready to discuss in class.

Part 2: In John Truby’s *The Anatomy of Story*, read Chapter 4:
Character—pages 56—75 Up to: Creating Your Hero

WEEK 5, February 10th:

Deliver 1st reading assignment. (Worth 5 points.)

Discuss John Truby’s *The Anatomy of Story*, Chapter 4 (to page 75):
Character.

View Lessons from the Screenplay American Beauty video: The Art of
Character

Workshop Group A’s First Acts.

At this point in the script is the first act working? Are the protagonist’s
goals set up? What are the obstacles for the protagonist in the second
act?

ASSIGNMENT:

Group B’s revisions and first acts to be emailed by Saturday February
22nd at noon.

Both groups read Group B’s revised outlines and first acts. Prepare notes
and be ready to discuss in class.

Part 2: In John Truby’s *Anatomy of Story*, read chapter 4 pages 75—102
Be prepared to do the exercise on page 102 (first 3 bullet points) in class
You’ll list the characters from your screenplay—state their function/state
“moral problem”/ compare characters, etc.

WEEK 6, February 17th – PRESIDENTS DAY – No class

Week 7 February 24th

Discuss John Truby's *Anatomy of Story* chapter 4 (pages 75–102)
In class exercise from first half of page 102

Workshop Group B's First Acts.

What's working and what's not? Does the opening hook the reader? Is the story effectively set up? Is the dialogue effective?

ASSIGNMENT:

Group A revises first act and drafts Second Acts to midpoint.
Group A's Pages delivered by Saturday February 29th at noon.
Both groups prepare notes and be ready to discuss in class.

Homework part 2: In Adam Skelter's *The Lost Art of Story* read chapter 4 on Character and Theme.

WEEK 8, March 2nd:

Discuss Adam Skelter's chapter on Character and Theme.
View video on Character and Theme.

Workshop Group A's Second Acts to midpoint.
Is the protagonist developing/learning/changing? Where is the plot? What are the subplots?

ASSIGNMENT: Group B revises act one and drafts Second Acts to midpoint. Due Saturday March 7th by 12 noon.

Read Group B's screenplay pages. Prepare notes and be ready to discuss in class. Pages to be emailed by Saturday at noon.

Part 2: In Adam Skelter's *The Lost Art of Story* read chapter 6 on Dialogue: Part 1 -- SUBTEXT

MIDTERM GRADES SENT VIA EMAIL

WEEK 9, March 9th:

Discuss Adam Skelter's *The Lost Art of Story* chapter on Dialogue: Part 1
– SUBTEXT

View Video on Subtext

Workshop Group B's Second Acts to midpoint.

Are you tracking the set ups? Is the character facing obstacles?

ASSIGNMENT: Group A drafts Second Act from midpoint to End of Act 2.
Read Group A's screenplay pages. Prepare notes and be ready to discuss
in class. Pages to be emailed by Saturday, March 14th at noon. (I can't
assign homework on the 21st because you're on break. Notes are not due
until March 23rd)

Part 2: In Adam Skelter's *The Lost Art of Story*, read chapter 5 on SCENE
DYNAMICS

MARCH 15—22 SPRING BREAK ~ NO CLASS

WEEK 10, MARCH 23th:

Discuss Scene Dynamics from chapter 5 in Adam Skelter's book

View accompanying video on scene dynamics

Workshop Group A's Second Acts from midpoint to End of Act 2.

How is the pacing? Is the end of Act 2 strong with a low point or high
point depending upon your Act 3?

ASSIGNMENT: Group B drafts Second Act from Midpoint to End of Act 2.
Read Group B's screenplay pages. Prepare notes and be ready to
discuss them in class. Pages to be emailed by Saturday, March 28th by
noon.

Part 2: In Adam Skelter's *The Lost Art of Story* read Chapter 8: "Mining
for Meaning."

Reminder reading assignment#2 is due APRIL 6th.

WEEK 11, MARCH 30th:

Discuss Adam Skelter's "Mining for Meaning"

View accompanying video

Workshop Group B's pages from Midpoint to End of Act 2.

Discuss beginnings and endings; View video on Opening and Closing shots

ASSIGNMENT: Group A to draft Act Three. Prepare notes on group A's pages and be ready to discuss in class. Pages to be emailed by Saturday, April 3rd at noon.

Part 2: View Video: Michael Hague Act 3 in screenplay structure: Climax and resolution.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHgaxy0fmx4&t=19s>

Finish reading assignment #2. Deliver April 6th.

WEEK 12, APRIL 6th:

Deliver Reading assignment #2.

Workshop Group A's Third Acts.

Is the conflict resolved in a satisfying way? How has the protagonist changed/ grown since first encountering the obstacles? What is the new tension building to the third act climax? What is the resolution?

ASSIGNMENT: Group B drafts Act Three. Prepare notes on Group B's pages and be ready to discuss in class. Pages to be emailed by Saturday, April 11th by noon.

Part 2: In Adam Skelter's *The Lost Art of Story* read chapter 9 "Aristotle Was Wrong: Story and the Mind."

WEEK 13, APRIL 13th:

Discuss "Aristotle Was Wrong." (Chapter 9 in *The Lost Art of Story*)
View accompanying video

Workshop Group B's Third Acts.

ASSIGNMENT: Group A revise script and email it by Saturday, April 18th, by noon.
Prepare notes on group A's revised script.

Part 2: In John Truby's *The Anatomy of Story*, chapter 5: Moral Argument read pages 108–139.

WEEK 14, APRIL 20th:

View video on Story and Religion

Workshop Group A's revised script.

ASSIGNMENT: Group B revise script and email it by Saturday the 25th by noon.

Prepare notes on group B's revised script.

Part 2: In John Truby's *The Anatomy of Story* chapter 6 Story World read pages 145--190

WEEK 15 , APRIL 27th:

Workshop Group B's revised script.

Discuss story world as well as any topics students have further questions about.

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>

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