School of Cinematic Arts

The John Wells Division of

Writing for Screen and Television

INTRODUCTION TO SCREENWRITING

CTWR 412 SECTION 19351

Instructor: Bonnie Garvin

Wednesday, 4-7 PM

SCA 259

Email: bgarvin@usc.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment Only

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Understanding elements of feature film writing

Learn difference between short films and feature length films.

Find your own voice

Writing what’s personal and stories you’re passionate about

Writing visually

Develop storytelling skills

COURSE GOALS

Create and develop believable, multi-dimensional characters

Write smart, realistic dialogue

Learn to outline

Learn to format a screenplay

MIDTERN: 3-4 page non-dialogue short

FINAL 10-15 page short script with dialogue

GRADING:

*First Script: 35%*

*Second Script: 35%*

*In Class Assignments: 20%*

*Participation 10%*

Class participation includes full involvement in and contribution to all class discussions, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule above) the assignments of the other students and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

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 unexecused 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 accomodations are needed, those accomodations 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.​

BE ON TIME. Tardiness is unprofessional, and unacceptable. You will be allowed no more than one unexcused tardiness. Further tardiness will result in one-sixth letter grade for each occurrence. (e.g., A- down to B+, B down to B-)

Late assignments will result in a lower grade.

All work must be delivered in proper format.

Per the 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%

**A :** Work of **excellent** quality. Outstanding application of the dramatic principles and fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines as specified in the syllabus.

**B :** Work of **good** quality. Above average fulfillments of course requirements and deadlines.

**C :** Work of **fair** quality. Minimum fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines for passing graduate credit.

**C-: FAIL to meet minimum grade for credit. NON PASSING GRADE.**

**COMPUTER USE**:

Laptops and tablets may be used in class for class related matters. Their use

beyond class related matters can result in loss of the privilege to use them.

Cell phone use is not permitted during class time, barring a life or death emergency.

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| WEEK 1 | INTRODUCTIONS. Discuss differences between writing for film and prose writing. Talk about favorite films. Goals for the course. Discuss formatting. The art of storytelling. Where do ideas come from? View a short film.  **ASSIGNMENT: Find a short film 10 minutes or less.** |
| WEEK 2  WEEK 3 | View and discuss your film. Writing non-dialogue scenes. Building atmosphere. Writing visually. What makes a scene?  **ASSIGNMENT: Write a non-dialogue scene, due next week.**  Read scene aloud. Discuss.  **ASSIGNMENT:** Pitch two short story ideas. Pitch from character (i.e. This is a story about \_\_\_\_\_\_ who wants \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is in the way of getting it). |
| WEEK 4  WEEK 5 | Pitch story ideas. How to take your story a break it into an outline.  **ASSIGNMENT:** Write your outline for your visual short.  Workshop outlines.  **ASSIGNMENT: Write your short film.** |
| WEEK 6 | Read shorts and critique.  **ASSIGNMENT**: Rewrite based on notes. REDLINE all changes. |
| WEEK 7 | Short due. Discuss plot vs. character.  **ASSIGNMENT**: Two ideas for your next (longer) short. |
| WEEK 8 | Pitch ideas. Feedback. Workshop how to outline.  **ASSIGNMENT**: Outline your short. |
| WEEK 9 | Workshop outlines.  **ASSIGNMENT**: Rewrite your outlines. Bring in scene with extraordinary dialogue. What is subtext of dialogue? |
| WEEK 10 | WORKSHOP OUTLINES. Writing Dialogue.  **ASSIGNMENT**: Chose character’s theme song. Write the first half of your script. |
| WEEK 11  WEEK 12 | Workshop first half of script. Discuss theme song.  **ASSIGNMENT**: Rewrite based on feedback. Read assigned screenplay  Discuss and analyze assigned screenplay.  **ASSIGNMENT**: Write second half of script. |
| WEEK 13 | Read pages. Discuss work in progress  **ASSIGNMENT**: Script Revisions. |
| WEEK 14 | Read Scripts.  **ASSIGNMENT**: Finish your script. All changes highlighted! |

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| WEEK 15 | Completion/discussion of work and growth throughout semester. Turn in revisions on second script. |

**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](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, [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](https://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](http://www.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](http://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/ssa](https://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](https://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](http://dps.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*

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

**PLEASE NOTE:**

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