

**School of Cinematic Arts**  
**Writing Division**  
**CTWR 523: Introduction to the Screenplay**  
**Section 19378**  
**SCA 362**  
**SPRING 2020**  
**Professor: Siavash Farahani**  
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**COURSE OVERVIEW:**

This is an introductory course to writing the first draft of a full length screenplay. Students will be guided through ideation, outlining and writing of a first draft. They will be instructed in dramatic structure to effectively use characterization and plot to tell well crafted, dramatically compelling stories. The motto of the class will be a good story well told.

**COURSE OBJECTIVE:**

Developing a feature-length idea, both orally (class pitch) and in written form. Students will write a step outline, then write a feature screenplay to be completed by semester's end. Besides story elements, students are encouraged to understand why they are choosing to write their particular story. How does it speak to them, their interests or experience?

**COURSE GOALS:**

- Developing an idea into a feature screenplay outline, and a first draft.
- Creating unique characters with strong inner lives and complex relationships.
- Establishing a clear personal connection to drive and enliven the story.
- Deepening understanding of narrative cinematic technique and structure.
- Acquiring complete command of format, visual writing style, and dialogue.
- Removing the preciousness while learning to make decisions and work fast.

**Students should anticipate 10-12 pages of writing PER WEEK. The final screenplay must be no less than 95 pages and no more than 110 pages when formatted according to industry standards (Final Draft).**

This is a workshop class where you will be expected to contribute. As such, your attendance and participation is mandatory for the process and your final grade.

Our class time will be divided between lecture, discussion and in-class table readings of your pages, with emphasis on the latter. Students will be broken up into reading groups, with an

alternating weekly rotation. Depending on progress, we may also have a guest speakers and in class screenings towards the end of the semester.

### **Required Reading/Viewing:**

*The Tools of Screenwriting* by Howard/Mabley

*Save the Cat* by Blake Snyder

We will be referring to these texts regularly so please read both ASAP. Additionally we will also read and discuss at least one screenplay from a recent major motion picture (to be determined). You will also be expected to watch movies and scenes outside of class.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **Week 1 01/13**

Introductions and discussion of expectations for the semester.

Lecture: A Good Story Well told.

The first step in feature development: how to develop and manage ideas, and address broad questions regarding potential stories: genre, tone, audience and the writer's connection to the material. "Is this a movie?" How to write a logline.

Assignment:

Write 3 loglines for potential development into a feature script for the semester. Due by 01/17.

### **Week 2 01/20 NO CLASS / HOLIDAY**

Since there is no class, I will provide feedback to you on your loglines via email or a scheduled phone call and help you determine which idea to select as your screenplay for the semester.

Assignment:

1)Based on the feedback you receive, select one of the loglines to pursue as your project for the semester. Identify protagonist, antagonist, central goal and conflict.

2) Write a one page synopsis of the story as envisioned thus far.

3) Write a one paragraph monologues for both the protagonist and antagonist in their own voice as they recount a significant event in their life.

**Week 3 01/27**

Read and discuss synopsis. Break into writing sections. Transforming synopsis into 3 act breaks and sequence for outline.

Assignment: Create the outline.

**Week 4 02/03**

Discuss and trouble shoot outlines. Find comparable film to study for structure, character introductions and other elements.

Assignment: Both groups start writing Act I, Seq1. (12-15 pages)

**Week 5 02/10**

GROUP A table read Act I, Seq 1. Feedback and discussion.

Assignment: Keep writing Act I.

**Week 6 02/17 NO CLASS/HOLIDAY**

Since there is no class on this day group B will receive feedback pm ACT I, Seq 1 directly from me either via email or a scheduled call.

Assignment: Keep writing Act I. Group A be ready to read Act I, Seq 2 in class next week. (12-15 pages)

**Week 7 02/24**

GROUP A table read ACT I, Seq 2. Feedback and discussion.

Assignment:

Start working on Act II, Seq 1& 2 up to midpoint (12-15 pages for each sequence)

**Week 8      03/02**

GROUP B table read ACT I, Seq 2. Feedback and discussion.

Assignment : keep working on Act II, Seq 1&2

**Week 9      03/09**

GROUP A table read ACT II, Seq 1&2

Assignment : keep working on Act II, Seq 1&2

### **SPRING BREAK**

March 15-22, 2020

Assignment: start working on Act II, Seq 3&4 until end of Act II. (12-15 pages for each sequence)

**Week 10      03/23**

GROUP B table read Act II, Seq 1&2. Feedback and discussion.

Assignment: Keep working on Act II, Seq 3&4

**Week 11      03/30**

GROUP A table read Act II, Seq 3&4. Feedback and discussion.

Assignment: Start working on Act III,Seq 1&2

**Week 12      04/06**

GROUP B table read Act II, Seq 3&4. Feedback and discussion.

Assignment: Keep working on ACT III, Seq 1&2

**Week 13      04/13**

GROUP A table read Act III, Seq 1&2. Feedback and discussion.

Assignment: Keep working on Act III, Seq 1&2

**Week 14      04/20**

GROUP B table read Act III, Seq 1&2. Feedback and discussion.

Assignment: Keep working on Act III, Seq 1&2

**Week 15      04/27**

Last class. “You’ve completed a feature script. Now what?”

This will include a discussion of the next step in the feature writing and development process, from re-writing to submission to contests, to possible representatives, and production companies.

**\*\*\*\*COMPLETED SCREENPLAY (no less than 95 and no more than 10 pages) is DUE by 1pm MAY 11, 2020**

**Grading Criteria/Evaluation:**

While there are many great and varied storytelling traditions in the world, this class focuses exclusively on the Western tradition, in particular as it is practiced in Hollywood studio system today.

This includes a three act narrative with all its structural components as taught during the semester including - but not limited to – Prologue, Status Quo, Catalyst, Main Tension, Midpoint, Climax, Resolution, Epilogue etc. All with an eye towards maximum dramatic impact and audience participation.

Great emphasis will be placed on creating compelling/multidimensional characters with clear goals, needs, obstacles, conflicts and transformations. This includes believable and well-rounded protagonists and antagonist who display a range of human of emotions and behaviors, whose wants, needs, choices and action drive the story.

Your work will be evaluated based on your attention to character development and arc, plot structure, themes, visuals, cinematic appeal and, last but not least, proper format and grammar.

You will also be graded you on your ability to receive and give feedback and make the necessary improvements while encouraging you to tell a unique story using your personal voice and imagination.

**\*\*\*UNLESS OTHERWISE INSTRUCTED ALL WORK IS DUE IN PDF FORMAT BY NOON ON THE DAY OF CLASS UPLOADED TO CLASS DROPBOX\*\*\***

### **Grading Breakdown:**

<b>Logline, Monologues and Outline</b>	<b>15% (5% each)</b>
<b>Act I</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Act II</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Act III</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Participation</b>	<b>10%</b>

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%

**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.**

**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 adviser for additional support.

**Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:**

LAPTOPS AND CELL PHONES will **only** be used in class for current class work. There are no exceptions.

**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](http://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](http://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://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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**