



CTWR 212 - Beginning Screenwriting

Units: 4

Term—Day—Time:

Location: TBD

Instructor: Peter Gamble Robinson

Office: Online, or after class.

Office Hours: After class, or by appointment.

Contact Info: pgrobins@usc.edu, Cell: (213) 925-8880

Course Description

Every culture and peoples around the world have evolved to tell stories. Storytelling and the stories we have crafted define, not just the world around us, but who we are as individuals. Stories, the right stories, are some of the most powerful forces in the Universe. Which brings us to this class.

Movies & screenwriting are one of our predominant forms of storytelling. And while the fundamentals remain the same regardless of medium, the craft of screenwriting is a demanding and exacting one, something we can see by how many bad movies there are out there written by professional screenwriters.

In this class, we're going to think about *why* we tell stories, and unravel some of the mysteries of the screenwriting format, but we're also going to focus on *why you* tell stories. We want to understand what drives you to create, and what your voice is.

Learning Objectives

Our goals will be as follows:

- 1) TO UNDERSTAND WHY WE TELL STORIES
- 2) TO UNDERSTAND THE FORMAT OF SCREENWRITING
- 3) TO BREAK APART & UNDERSTAND THE STRUCTURES HIDDEN IN STORIES, AND SEE HOW TO MAKE THEM "DANCE" TOGETHER.
- 4) TO FIND YOUR "VOICE" – AND UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WRITE

Prerequisite(s): N/A

Co-Requisite(s): N/A

Concurrent Enrollment: N/A

Recommended Preparation: Read screenplays online.

Course Notes

Include grading type (e.g., Letter, Credit No/Credit, Numeric). Note any unique characteristics of the course of operating procedure. Is the course Web-Enhanced (i.e. Blackboard), Blended or Online? If copies of lecture slides and other class information will be posted on Blackboard, note that here. If multimedia or technology-enhanced learning strategies will be used, please describe them here.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Final Draft or WriterDuet screenwriting software.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

N/A.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Assignments will be short 2-3 page assignments focused on teaching a particular skill.

Grading Breakdown

Including the above detailed assignments, how will students be graded overall? Participation should not exceed 15% of the total grade. Where it does, the syllabus must provide an added explanation. No portion of the grade may be awarded for class attendance but non-attendance can be the basis for lowering the grade, when clearly stated on the syllabus. The sum of percentages must total 100%.

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
Class Participation		10
Weekly Assignments (6.5% each)		80
Written critique of classmates assignments		10
TOTAL		

Grading Scale

(Optional – the following is only an example of what one might look like if included)

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are due via email to the whole class.

Grading Timeline

Assignments are due the night before at 7pm to give your classmates and teacher a chance to read them. You are expected to read your classmate's assignments and provide written notes, which should be turned in by the time of class.

Additional Policies

In general, you should assume the following general guidelines as a way of thinking about what type of grade you will receive:

- If you show up to class, and do the minimum required work, you will get a C.
- If you show up to class, and demonstrate a significant effort, you will get a B.
- If you show up to class, demonstrate a significant effort and do exceptional work, you will get an A.
- If you do not show up to class, don't complete your assignments, or fail to complete your assignments in a timely manner, you will get a D or an F.

Your performance in class, and your notes will (each) be worth half a letter grade. Two or more unexcused absences or late assignments will lower your grade a half letter grade. Absences can be excused in advance with permission. Unexcused late assignments will receive an automatic F.

Additional notes on how to get an A: From previous experience, people who get A's apply the notes they are given in class, integrating them into their work each week. They do the work each week not because it was assigned, but because they aspire already to be professional writers. As such, they go beyond the bare minimum of each assignment.

WRITING DIVISION ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class. Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by one full point (ex: A to a (A-)). A third unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered another full point (ex: B to a (B-)). Your grade will be lowered by one point for every absence after. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

In order for absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session.

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 must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

SICK POLICY

If you are sick and still contagious, please do not come to class. If you are unsure whether you are contagious, contact the USC Health Center. Any genuine illness will be accommodated for, and I will make up that class with the student either over the phone, skype, or in person at another time. I would much rather spend an extra couple of hours with a student when they are well than lose several days of creative time to illness, and I'm sure most of your fellow classmates will feel the same way.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week	Teaching Topics and Assignments:
Wk 1	<p>INTRO/GOAL SETTING/WHY WE TELL STORIES Introduction to students; setting goals; reading syllabus. Lecture(s):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Intro: Who am I? / Who are you? 2) Goal Setting – what do we want from the class? / Read Syllabus. 3) DISCUSSION: Why do we tell stories? 4) LECTURE: The format of screenwriting / Screenwriting is “condensed truth”. 5) LECTURE: The basic building blocks of stories – PLOT, CHARACTER & THEME. Synergy theory: how we get these three elements to “dance” together. Watch short movies, read “Harry the Dirty Dog.” FOCUS: even short stories have 3 acts. (Basic plot structure.)
	<p>Assignment(s):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Familiarize yourself with the format of screenwriting. Go onto the internet, find several scripts and read some of each. Notice the different ways that people write, and how their voices are individual, even inside a demanding format. 2) ASSIGNMENT: Write a short movie up to 5 pages long, exploring the format. Try to find your own voice. Write about an emotional event in your life. (That you feel safe to share.) Make us feel it.
Wk 2	<p>MASTERING THE FORMAT & EMOTION Discussions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Which “beginner-mistakes” can we see in their writing? How can we avoid those to look professional on the page? How are the writer’s voices beginning to appear, even now? 2) How can we improve the short-ideas you created? What’s missing and what fundamental principles can fix those issues? 3) What 3 act structures do we see in these short films? <p>Lecture: Character Establishment. Assignment: Write up to 5 pages of scenes, with at least three behaviors that allow us to triangulate the character’s “inner character”. (You may do a paragraph to synopsise some of these issues, and then just write a single scene expressing one of the traits. Or you may do multiple scenes.)</p>

Wk 3	<p>ESTABLISHMENT OF CHARACTER</p> <p>Discussion: Assignments.</p> <p>Lecture: The 4 character arcs and modifiers. / Forced change.</p> <p>Assignment: Write a short film, up to 5 pages long, tracking the character's arc and each moments of change. Discuss in class.</p>
Wk 4	<p>CHARACTER ARCS/FORCED CHANGE</p> <p>Discussion: Homework.</p> <p>Lecture: Modifiers.</p> <p>Assignment: Create another moment of forced change for the charcter you've created, this time focusing on a modifier to enable change. (Under 5 pages)</p>
Wk 5	<p>MODIFIERS AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE</p> <p>Discussion: Homework.</p> <p>Lecture: Scene structure – conflict, escalation, high stakes. / Sequence structure.</p> <p>Assignment: Write a scene or short film where a character and another character oppose each other, and the story escalates and twists and turns.</p>
Wk 6	<p>SCENE STRUCTURE – CONFLICT, ESCALATION, HIGH STAKES</p> <p>Discussion: Homework.</p> <p>Lecture: Theme & Third acts / Dialogue & Subtext. Vocabulary, Non Linear Dialogue, etc.</p> <p>Assignment: Write a scene or short film between two people with very different, but distinct voices. (Up to 5 pages.)</p>
Wk 7	<p>DIALOGUE & SUBTEXT (Part 1)</p> <p>Discussion: Homework.</p> <p>Lecture: More Dialogue. (Non-linear dialogue, subtext, losing empty dialogue.)</p> <p>Assignment: Again, write a scene between two more characters who speak with very different voices.</p>
Wk 8	<p>DIALOGUE & SUBTEXT (Part 2)</p> <p>Discussion: Homework.</p> <p>Lecture: Plot Structure.</p> <p>Assignment: Write a chapter outline.</p>

Wk 9	CHAPTER OUTLINE (Part 1) Discussion: Homework. Lecture: How to take notes, the Business of screenwriting. Assignment: Rewrite Chapter Outline.
Wk 10	CHAPTER OUTLINE (Part 2) Discussion: Homework. Lecture: How to take notes, the Business of screenwriting. Assignment: Write short.
Wk 11	SHORT FILM Discussion: Homework. Lecture: The Creative Process – Hair Brain, Tortoise Mind Assignment: Rewrite short.
Wk 12	SHORT FILM – REVISED AND READ ALOUD BY ACTORS Discussion: Actors will read your final projects aloud. Discussion. Lecture: Sendoff lecture – how to teach yourself.

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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