

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

**CTWR 523: Introduction to the Screenplay
Section 19239R
Fall 2020**

Instructor: Robert Ramsey
Class Schedule: Monday 1-3:50 p.m.
Class Location: Via Zoom
Office Hours: By Appointment
Contact Information: Email: robertra@usc.edu
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Course Objective:

Students will develop and write the first draft of a screenplay with an emphasis on character as story engine.

Course Description:

A well-told screen story contains three acts and is distinguished by a singular protagonist whose strong intentions determine the plot of the film. This course will embrace the eight sequence approach to plotting and drafting a feature screenplay. With the intention of defining terms and establishing reference points, we will begin with a character and structural analysis of "The Descendants" (2011). In subsequent classes, students will develop and present feature ideas, expand them into detailed outlines, and then draft and present screenplays sequence by sequence in a collaborative and supportive workshop environment. The final assignment will be a strategic polish based on specific notes and feedback.

Course Reading:

T.B.D.

Grading Criteria:

Participation:	10%
Pitch:	10%
Outline:	20%
Draft:	40%
Polish:	20%

	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%

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.

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 class-related purposes only. Cell phones should be turned off and stowed away except during breaks.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is important. Participation includes full involvement in, and contribution to, class discussion, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule) the assignments of your colleagues and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

Class attendance is mandatory and students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Tardiness is unprofessional and disrespectful to the class. Two late arrivals equals one full absence. Two unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered by a half grade point (Ex. A to A-) Any further unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered another two thirds of a point (ex: B to a C+) for each absence.

Excused absences can include, but are not limited to: illness, both physical and mental; death of a loved one; personal emergency; sporting events (for Student-Athletes) or other university-sponsored activities; religious holidays, and so on.

If you find you must miss class due to personal emergency or personal crisis, please contact your professor as soon as possible so they can assist you in finding the appropriate University care and guidance. Your health and well-being are of utmost importance to the Wells Writing Division and to your Faculty.

The On-line Classroom:

Class dynamics are substantially compromised without the ability to see the people in class; therefore, the default is that students have their cameras on during synchronous online sessions. Those facing challenging situations, such as internet connectivity, illness, or home environments that make this difficult or impossible shall contact me to work out accommodations. I encourage you to use virtual backgrounds, and earphones or headsets, should your home environment benefit from these privacies.

Keep yourself muted unless called on. When your camera is on, please dress as you would in the classroom, and behave as you would in a professional environment.

Students are not permitted to create their own class recordings without the instructor's permission. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

Presentation:

Name each document you submit as follows: YourName_Assignment.pdf. Example: Ramsey_MemoryAssignment.pdf

Class Schedule

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

Week 1 (Aug. 17): Discussion of "The Descendants," by Alexander Payne, Nate Faxon & Jim Rash, based on the novel by Kuai Hemmings Hart. Please watch the movie before first class.

Assignment: Prepare a pitch for your feature, with an emphasis on your protagonist's wants and needs.

Week 2 (Aug. 24): Each student pitches their story, followed by class discussion. Split into Groups A and B.

Assignment: Write 3-5 page outline with sequence and act breaks. Three acts, eight sequences.

Week 3 (Aug. 31): Group A presents outlines.

Week 4 (Sept. 7): Labor Day

Week 5 (Sept. 14): Group B presents outlines.

Week 6 (Sept. 21): Group A presents First and Second Sequences.

Week 7 (Sept. 28): Group B presents First and Second Sequences.

Week 8 (Oct. 5): Group A presents Third and Fourth Sequences (to midpoint).

Week 9 (Oct. 12): Group B presents Third and Fourth Sequences (to midpoint).

Week 10 (Oct. 19): Group A presents Fifth and Sixth Sequences (to the second act curtain).

Week 11 (Oct. 26): Group B presents Fifth and Sixth Sequences (to the second act curtain).

Week 12 (Nov. 2): Group A presents Seventh and Eighth Sequences. Discuss polish strategy.

Week 13 (Nov. 9): Group B presents Seventh and Eighth Sequences. Discuss polish strategy.

Finals Week: Final Polishes due Monday, Nov. 16.

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 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>
