

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

**CTWR 523: The Screenplay
Fall 2020**

Instructor: Craig Sabin
Class Schedule: Thursday/10:00 AM-12:50 PM
Class Location: Zoom Room
Office Hours: by appointment only
Contact Information: rsabin@usc.edu

Course Objective:

Developing a feature-length idea, from pitch to full first draft. Students will write a chapter outline, focusing on chapter tensions and sequences, 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? What are they trying to share with the world?

Course Description:

There is so much that is out of our hands, and it is easy to feel powerless in the face of the global pandemic. But one thing we can do is *write*. In fact, these dismal times are great for writers-- so much material, so much time to think and write. And you'll do a lot of that this semester.

In CTWR 523, we will muscle our way through the screenwriting process, from pitch to completed feature script. We'll do it right, we'll do it well, and we'll do it in thirteen weeks!

In addition to the writing, one of the greatest learning opportunities in this class is reading and noting up the work of your peers. You'll learn how to give notes, how to take them, and how to work constructively through the creative process as part of a development team. Very often, the notes you should take are the ones you're trying to give to others.

Course Reading:

You should read as many screenplays as possible to familiarize yourself with the styles and form of other professional writers. You will be assigned some scripts to read on your own time at the professor's discretion and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Additionally the following books are highly suggested:

"The Tools of Screenwriting" by Howard & Mabley

"The New Elements of Standard Screenplay Format" by Jean-Paul Ouellette

Deadlines

Deadlines are an intrinsic part of writing professionally. When you write a screenplay, you make a series of demands; demands for money, time, favors, and the expertise of hundreds of film professionals. If all of these pieces are in place, but your pages are not ready, it is an unconscionable breach of trust. Also, you're fired.

We take deadlines very seriously in this course. We must, in order to get you to "Fade Out." by the end of the process. The worst thing you can do to your grade, your script, or your reputation, is to consistently miss deadlines.

Grading Criteria:

All assignments are due by the Tuesday following class, no later than 5:00 pm. Students must turn in all assignments in PDF format, via Dropbox. Late assignments will be recorded as such, and will negatively impact their grades, each late day increasing the penalty.

All work must be properly formatted, properly punctuated, correctly spelled and grammatically correct. Assignments should be read and notes prepared by start of the following class.

Participation:	10%
Assignments:	30% (13 assignments at around 2.5% each)
Chapter Outline:	15%
First Draft (Rough):	15%
Final Script Polish:	30%

	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%

Missed Assignment or Incompletes:

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who need to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before the final assignment is due.

All work must originate in this class – no revisions of work started in other classes or adaptations of others' work will be accepted without the prior permission of the instructor.

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.

Recording Devices:

You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Respect is the rule, especially in the Zoom era. Please silence cell phones during class. Keep your camera on to assure your fellow students that you are there and listening. Use the chat function to give real time responses. Keep yourself muted unless you have a note. Please show the class and your fellow students the respect they deserve.

NETIQUETTE

During Zoom Workshop Classes

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

In Larger Lecture classes

- If you have a question for the DAs during the lecture, use the Chat function. (The DA will direct my attention to the question if they can't answer it.)
- If you want to ask a question out loud, use the "raise your hand" function on Zoom. A little blue hand will appear so that the DA knows you want to speak. The DA will get my attention. Don't unmute until called on. • I answer questions in the fifteen minutes before and after the live lecture.

Posting in Forums

- Write as if you were speaking in a class discussion: relaxed in tone but respectful, polite, and professional in your choice of words.
- Post thoughtful and meaningful responses to questions and answers. The point is to have an ongoing discussion with your Blackboard Group of ten students and one DA. Your professor will be joining discussions as well.

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 emotional; 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.

Class Schedule:

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

Week 1 8/20: Hello. Syllabus Review, Schedule Review. DropBox Intro. 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?"

Assignment: Develop your feature pitch. Due in class, 8/27

Week 2 8/27: Shaping the story. Discuss pitches and expand story beats.

Assignment: Create a "Fun and Games" sequence for your feature. Due 9/01

Assignment: Write a scene with conflict introducing your main character and the world of the story. Due 9/01

Week 3 9/03: Read and discuss scenes. Review "Writer's Toolbox"

Assignment: Write a one page synopsis of the story as envisioned thus far. Use the assignment to clarify and refine your idea. Due 9/08

Assignment: Find comparable film to study for structure, character introductions, sequences and other elements. Study it.

Week 4 9/10: Discuss synopsis and comparable films, and what makes a workable, effective outline. Brainstorm possible sequences. Break down Chapter Outline structure.

Assignment: Begin writing Chapter Outline. Due 9/15

Week 5 9/17: Discuss outline draft. Work through remaining story and character issues, with a focus on relationship arcs.

Assignment: Complete Chapter Outline, with significant scenes fleshed out, 5 to 7 pages in length. Due 9/22 (Outline is 15% of your grade.)

Week 6 9/24: Discuss issues with Chapter Outline. These may range from specific story, scene or character beats unique to each writer, or broad screenwriting craft elements such as time management and research.

Assignment: Begin to write first draft. Chapter 1, 10-15 pgs. Due 9/29

Week 7 10/01: Workshop pages. Have we set up the character and world? Flaw? Are we (already) building towards a powerful last act? What is your First Act Twist?

Assignment: Write Chapter 2, 10-15 pgs., completing Act 1, 20-30 pgs. Due 10/06

Week 8 10/08: Workshop Pages. Did the First Act Twist work? Have we set up our “Fun and Games”? Are we building towards a powerful last act? Brainstorm sequences.

Assignment: Write Chapter 3, 10-15 pgs. Due 10/13

Week 9 10/15: Workshop Pages. Discuss sequences. Brainstorm next step sequences. Are we delivering on “the promise of the premise”?

Assignment: Write Chapter 4, 10-15 pgs, up to your script’s midpoint (40-50 pgs.) Due 10/20.

You’re Halfway There...

Week 10 10/22: Workshop Pages. Check in; Are we where we want to be? What new threads are we discovering? What can be cut? Brainstorm “Bad Guys” sequences.

Assignment: Write Chapter 5, 10-15 pgs. Due 10/27

Week 11 10/29: Workshop Pages. Launch into “Dark Night” sequence.

Assignment; Write Chapter 6, 10-15 pgs., completing up to Act 2, 60-90 pgs. Due 11/03

Week 12 11/05: Workshop Pages. Did we successfully transform the character? Are the stakes high for Act 3?

Assignment: Write Chapter 7, 10-15 pgs. Due 11/10

Week 13 11/12: Workshop Pages. Hero Triumph/Destruction/Reveal? Resolution?

Assignment: Write Chapter 8, 10-15 pgs. and finish your rough draft. Due 11/17. (Rough Draft is 15% of your grade.)

Finals Week: **Final Draft of your Feature Script due Friday, 11/22**

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.