

**School of Cinematic Arts  
The John Wells Division of  
Writing for Screen and Television  
CTWR 549: Advanced Rewriting Workshop in Hour-Long Drama  
Fall 2020  
Section #19355**

Instructor: Kate Powers  
Class Schedule: Tuesdays, 7-10 p.m.  
Class Location: Online  
Office Hours: Open Zoom meeting Weds 12 to 2 p.m. and by appointment  
Contact Information: kapowers@usc.edu

**Course Objective:**

Rewrite a pilot script for an original one-hour drama series. All students must have a completed dramatic pilot script (written while attending USC) at the start of the semester.

**Course Overview:**

- Introduction to the art of re-writing
- Participation in “TV Writers’ Room” workshop process
- How to rework a first draft pilot and create a strong second draft script

**Optional Course Reading:**

Screenwriting is Rewriting: The Art and Craft of Professional Revision by Jack Epps, Jr. - Many elements of this class are influenced or drawn from this book, so you may find having a copy useful, but it is not a required text.

**Course Description:**

Congratulations -- you’ve finished an original pilot!

Now what?

Now you begin one of the most demanding -- and most rewarding -- challenges a writer can face: Rewriting.

Over the next 13 weeks, we will use this course as a weekly writers’ room, a creatively safe environment where students will re-discover what drew them to their pilots, take risks and find smart, effective -- and sometimes surprising -- ways to pull the reader in on the first page and never let them go. Along the way, students will learn how to manage the evolution of a script through the rewriting and notes process, while keeping true to their vision for the series.

The course will start by exploring each writer’s original intent, what they still connect with and where they want to focus their attention, then begin to analyze and develop changes to story, scenes and dialogue. Characters and their relationships will deepen. Structure will be tightened for suspense, impact and engagement. Springboards for multiple stories will be analyzed for potential, including possible season and series finales.

Revising existing material is not easy, but it is a skill set every writer needs. Students are encouraged to come to class with an open mind, a willingness to grow and a desire to move their story in new directions.

As in an actual writers' room, students are expected to provide notes, thoughts, critiques -- and yes, pitches -- on your fellow writers' material. We will hone our skills at taking and sorting out feedback -- a vital part of the pilot development process. Students are encouraged to give feedback that reflects their experience with the piece -- invaluable data for any writer -- and tailor their pitches to the goals of the writer, much as a professional writing staff always seeks to make the best version of the show they're on.

This syllabus -- and additional material, as appropriate -- will be available on Blackboard.

**LAPTOP AND CELL PHONE POLICY:**

The most effective writers' rooms restrict laptop and cellphone access to the writers' assistant -- and to a lesser degree, the showrunner -- in order to keep the staff focused on the work at hand.

Alas, Covid-19 has thrown a wrench in my usual request that you rely entirely on paper notebooks and physical documents, as I obviously cannot forbid the use of laptops in class.

That said, I do still require cellphones to be silenced and stored out of sight and all notifications (email, chat, Twitter, etc.) turned off for the duration of the class. I ask that you have a full set of the week's pages downloaded and opened in the PDF viewer of your choice, and that you close any inessential programs before class begins. I find putting Zoom on Full Screen also minimizes distractions, whenever feasible.

As with physical classes, there will always be a 5 minute break in the second hour for checking email and refilling water bottles.

After some discussion, the division has concluded that online workshops function best with as much virtual "face-to-face" communication as possible. To that end, they've asked that we leave our cameras on during synchronous online classes. Those facing situations, such as internet connectivity, illness, or challenging home environments should contact me to work out accommodations. I encourage you to use virtual backgrounds, earphones or headsets as needed.

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

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

Zoom does have a recording feature, which is automatically on at the start of the class. When the conversation shifts to individual projects, I will be turning it off to protect your privacy as artists.

**Grading Criteria:**

You are expected to read ALL your classmates' submitted pages in advance of class, and to have prepared feedback. Your participation during class -- what I call "staff ethic" -- is also

important. This means not just giving and receiving notes, but listening to your classmates, contributing to the discussion and taking any necessary steps to ensure you are able to focus during our Zoom classes, in order to create a safe space for this class to do its best work.

For this class, weekly written assignments are to be delivered as PDFs, attached to an email to kapowers@usc.edu and, if required, to the entire class by 6 p.m. on the announced deadline, with three exceptions: The submission via email of your proposed rewrite project is due by 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 18 or 25, depending on your group, and the final is due via email by 1 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 24.

Late assignments will result in the grade being lowered half a point.

The file name, header and email's subject line should read:

**Last Name Assignment name (Revised Outline, Revised Act One, etc.) Date**

For example, this document is named: Powers 549 Syllabus 081820

Scripts should be written in Highland, Final Draft or Movie Magic Screenwriter.

Your grade is based primarily on written assignments. Your beatment will serve as your mid-term exam, and your fully revised script is your semester final.

Staff Ethic:	10%
Class preparation (reading classmates' pages, preparing notes):	10%
Statements of intent (5% each):	10%
Goals/Solutions charts (5% each):	10%
Beatment:	20%
Final script (Due at 1 p.m on Tuesday, November 24):	40%
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TOTAL	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.

Please proof your assignment prior to submission. If an assignment contains more than three grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes or typos per five pages, the resulting grade will be lowered by half a point. A semester-long pattern of sloppy proofing or an obviously unproofed final script will result in a final grade being lowered by a full point.

**Internet Policy:**

Material discussed during class is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

**Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

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.

**Names and Pronouns Policy:**

My pronouns are she/her. As an instructor, I always want to refer to my students by their preferred name and pronouns; please feel free to share your chosen name and pronouns, either verbally during classtime or privately via email. In the spirit of a supportive and safe writers' room, I ask that we endeavor to refer to each other by our chosen names and pronouns, while understanding that pronouns are not necessarily indicative of an individual's gender identity.

**Class Schedule:**

Please note that dates and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. In particular, as we get deep into the semester and the messiest phase of the rewrites, additional notes/solutions charts, and/or revised outlines may be assigned to ensure students produce a compelling final draft.

**Week 1: Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2020**

Class and instructor introduction; review syllabus. The art and craft of the re-writing process for television. What qualities contribute to a richer, deeper, fuller second draft?

Students pitch their shows and discuss their current goals. (Note: These goals will ALMOST CERTAINLY change and evolve over coming weeks.)

As you know, this class will be divided into Group A and Group B. As of this writing, I believe we have four volunteers for Group A, each of whom will be emailing a PDF of their pilot drafts to the entire class by 1 p.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, August 19.

Please read these drafts, and come to next week's class with prepared notes. Try to identify -- as a reader -- what each pilot is about, in terms of plot and theme. What is the protagonist's inner story? Does the inner story echo the theme? Does the protagonist have a clear, consistent character arc?

Pay particular attention to any elements that held your attention and/or engaged your emotions. Additionally, if you find yourself becoming distracted or confused, try to identify the exact moment when you began to struggle to stay connected with the story.

You are always welcome to analyze the pilot's structure, arcs and pacing as a fellow writer, but in these early weeks, as each writer is still planning their next steps, your initial reactions as a thoughtful, engaged audience will be especially valuable.

#### ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Group A will email their pilots to the entire class by 1 p.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, August 19.
2. Group A should read and annotate their own scripts, compose a statement of intent and 1-2 page notes & solution chart. Please email a PDF of the statement and chart to the entire class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, August 22.
3. Read the Group A pilots and prepare feedback, following the above guidelines.
4. Familiarize yourself with Group A's statements of intent and notes/solution charts.
5. Group B should be prepared to share their pilots via email by 1 p.m. on Wednesday, August 26.

#### **Week 2: Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2020**

Preparing for the Foundation Pass, Part I: In-depth discussion of Group A's drafts, as described above.

#### ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Group B will email their pilots to the entire class by 1 p.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, August 26.
2. Group B should read and annotate their own scripts, compose a statement of intent and 1-2 page notes & solution chart. Please email a PDF of the statement and chart to the entire class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, August 29.
3. Read the Group B's pilots and prepare feedback, following the guidelines described in Week 1.
4. Familiarize yourself with Group B's statements of intent and notes/solution charts.
5. Group A will consider the class feedback, revise their statements of intent (**5% of final grade**) and compose a notes/solution chart (**5% of final grade**) focused on the 4 to 5 goals you're focusing on in your foundation pass, to be emailed to the entire class by 6 p.m., Saturday, August 29.
6. Between now and Week 4, Group A will develop 3-5 specific ideas to address planned solutions and come to Sept. 8 class prepared to pitch and discuss them
7. Review the Group A statements and charts for the next class.

#### **Week 3: Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020**

Preparing for the Foundation Pass, Part II: In-depth discussion of Group B's drafts, as described above.

1. Group B will consider the class feedback, revise their statements of intent (**5% of final grade**) and compose a notes/solution chart (**5% of final grade**) focused on the 4 to 5 goals you're focusing on in your foundation pass, to be emailed to the entire class by 6 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 5.

2. Between now and Week 5, Group B will develop 3-5 specific ideas to address planned solutions and come to the Sept. 15 class prepared to pitch and discuss them.
3. Group A will continue to prepare for next week's discussion of their plans for the Foundation Pass.

#### **Week 4: Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2020**

Character & Relationships - Exploring protagonist's essential wants/needs and examining emotional turning points. Is your protagonist's story revealed through behavior and dramatic action? Are you giving your protagonist challenges and moments that target their flaws? Is your protagonist active and propelling the story, as appropriately?

Discussion of Group A's statements and planned changes for the Foundation Pass.

#### ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Group B will continue to prepare for next week's discussion of their plans for the Foundation Pass.
2. As needed, Group A will email to the INSTRUCTOR ONLY a revised notes/solution chart by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 12.
3. Group A will draft a new beatment (**20% of final grade**) for your pilot, addressing the 4 to 5 goals of your Foundation Pass (10-20 pages) and email your beatment to the entire class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 19.

#### **Week 5: Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020**

Story and Theme - How do story and theme work together? How does your protagonist's emotional arc express your chosen theme? Are there opportunities for the other characters' choices to contrast with or complicate the protagonist's?

Discussion of Group B's statements and planned changes for the Foundation Pass.

#### ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Group A will email beatments to the entire class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 19.
2. Read Group A beatments and prepare feedback.
3. As needed, Group B will email to the INSTRUCTOR ONLY a revised notes/solution chart by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 19.
4. Group B will draft a new beatment (**20% of final grade**) for your pilot, addressing the 4 to 5 goals of your Foundation Pass (10-20 pages) and email your beatment to the entire class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26.

#### **Week 6: Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2020**

Structure and Plot - It's not just a question of what stays and what goes. Where does your story begin? Where does it end -- both in the short term (this script) and the long term (the season and the series)? Are there ways to use the elements of mystery, suspense or surprise to heighten the story's impact?

Workshopping of Group A beatments, discussion of goals for the Character Pass, as well as pacing/progress over the next 7 weeks.

**ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:**

1. Group B will email beatments to the entire class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26.
2. Read Group B beatments and prepare feedback.
3. As needed, Group A may email the instructor a revised statement of intent and notes/solutions chart for the character pass.
4. Group A will begin work on their Character Pass; new pages to be emailed to the class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 3.

**Week 7: Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2020**

Complications, Obstacles, Reveals and Reversals.

Workshopping of Group B beatments, discussion of goals for the Character Pass, as well as pacing/progress over the next 6 weeks.

**ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:**

1. Group A will email a PDF of their current draft by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 3 -- PLEASE TURN ON REVISIONS.
2. Read Group A's pages and come prepared with notes.
3. As needed, Group B will email the instructor a revised statement of intent and notes/solutions chart for the character pass.
4. Group B will begin work on their Character Pass; new pages to be emailed to the class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 10.

**Week 8: Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020**

Scenes & Dialogue - Is your dialogue believable? Organic? Is it what the characters would say? At the same time, are you playing it too safe? We'll explore some techniques for finding and expressing your characters in unexpected ways.

Workshopping of Group A drafts, discussion of goals for the Structure/Plot pass.

**ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:**

1. Group B will email a PDF of their current draft by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 10 -- PLEASE TURN ON REVISIONS.
2. Read Group B's pages and come prepared with notes.
3. Group A will continue work on their Character Pass, and/or begin work on their Structure/Plot Pass; new pages to be emailed to the class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 17.

**Week 9: Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020**

On the Page - The physical elements of a screenplay -- action, dialogue, transitions, scene headers, titles and especially WHITE SPACE -- are part of a writer's tool box. We'll explore techniques for using these elements to maximize reader engagement.

Workshopping of Group B drafts, discussion of goals for the Structure/Plot pass.

**ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:**

1. Group A will email a PDF of their current draft by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 17 -- CLEAR ALL REVISION MARKS and CONTINUE TO TRACK CHANGES.
2. Read Group A's pages and come prepared with notes.
3. Group B will continue work on their Character Pass, and/or begin work on their Structure/Plot Pass; new pages to be emailed to the class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 24.

**Week 10: Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020**

Workshopping of Group A drafts, discussion of goals for the Relationship pass.

**ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:**

1. Group B will email a PDF of their current draft by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 24 -- CLEAR ALL REVISION MARKS and CONTINUE TO TRACK CHANGES.
2. Read Group B's pages and come prepared with notes.
3. Group A will continue work on their Structure/Plot Pass, and/or begin work on their Relationship Pass; new pages to be emailed to the class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 31.

**Week 11: Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2020**

Workshopping of Group B drafts, discussion of goals for the Relationship pass.

**ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:**

1. Group A will email a PDF of their current draft by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 31 -- CLEAR ALL REVISION MARKS and CONTINUE TO TRACK CHANGES.
2. Read Group A's pages and come prepared with notes.
3. Group B will continue work on their Structure/Plot Pass, and/or begin work on their Relationship Pass; new pages to be emailed to the class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 7.

**Week 12: Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2020**

Workshopping of Group A drafts, discussion of goals for the next pass, approaches to the Dialogue, Scene, Consistency and Polish passes.

**ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:**

1. Group B will email a PDF of their current draft by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 31 -- CLEAR ALL REVISION MARKS and CONTINUE TO TRACK CHANGES.
2. Read Group A's pages and come prepared with notes.
3. Group A will continue work on their Relationship pass, and/or begin work on the next pass, to be determined by each writer's goals for the next draft. New pages to be emailed to the class by 6 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 7.



**Week 13: Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2020**

Workshopping of Group B drafts, discussion of goals for the next pass, approaches to the Dialogue, Scene, Consistency and Polish passes.

If needed, new pages may be emailed to the INSTRUCTOR ONLY by Friday, Nov. 13 for notes/feedback, as needed.

Note: In addition to this week's usual Wednesday office hours from 12 to 2 p.m., I will also be hosting open Zoom meetings on Thursday, Nov. 12 and Tuesday, Nov 17 from 3 to 5 p.m.

**FINAL DRAFT SCRIPT DUE: 1 p.m. Tuesday, November 24, 2020**

**Classes end: Friday, November 13, 2020**

### **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**Incompletes:**

This option is applicable strictly after the twelfth week of classes. The only acceptable reasons for taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or family emergency. Students must inform the professor before the final assignment and present verifiable evidence in order for an alternative make-up plan to be constructed.

**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 removed from the Zoom meeting pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

**EVEN THOUGH IT MAY BE A WHILE BEFORE ANY OF US SET FOOT ON CAMPUS,  
FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE STILL NOT PERMITTED IN ANY  
INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX.**

**(Feel free to drink non-water beverages and discreetly eat snack of your choice during our Zoom class, but please mute your microphone if it's particularly crunchy or slurpy.)**