

**SYLLABUS FOR**  
**CTPR 335 INTRO TO EDITING**  
USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

**SPRING 2021**

**SECTION** 335-18500  
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*"The notion of directing a film is the invention of critics - the whole eloquence of cinema is achieved in the editing room." – Walter Murch*

**FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Yes, this entire semester will be taught online, but I'm choosing to see this as an opportunity rather than a limitation. You will hear me say this a bunch this semester, but let's get it started now,

***THE OBSTACLE IS THE WAY***

What this means is that whatever impediment, unexpected twist, or unforeseen circumstance befalls you, you can use to your advantage and find a path that is unique and suited to the moment. That is exactly what we will be doing this semester. The goal of this class remains the same (see below) but how we get there will be different from past semesters.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Editing is much more than putting images together. At its best, it is the conscious action of bringing out a film's text and subtext, to fulfill a larger vision. In this class you will learn how to read a script **for story**, analyze the shot footage **for story**, and put it all together to **fulfill that story** (whether that comes from you or someone else).

We will discuss techniques, tools and approaches and work to recognize, understand and begin to intuit what makes for a good cut, what builds a strong sequence and how to shape both a performance and a story.

The course will cover both the theory and the technique of editing and students will put the ideas into practice nearly every week through a series of scenes that are designed to gradually expand the types of editing experiences that you have. The accumulation of these editing experiences should give you an overview of the complete process -- aesthetic and the practical -- teaching you to how to make *informed* editing choices and to begin to develop your own personal taste and style.

In addition, you will be given a working knowledge of how to organize an editing room and operate the various tools that you need to make your editing decisions. As the semester continues you will begin to learn skills that may take you beyond what you do in this class, but are essential if you are to work in any capacity in an editing room today.

Projects will be edited using the Avid Media Composer. You will also get an overview of the entire filmmaking process from the point of view of the editing room. But more importantly than learning the nuts and bolts techniques of how to prepare your footage for editing, you will learn how to prepare *mentally* for editing: how to look at a scene for optimum editing in order to best bring out your artistic ideas. You will discover editing principles and aesthetics that you can use no matter which format you edit with and what

format your project is intended for (television, feature, documentary, etc.).

During your time in this class you will be learning as many techniques as possible in order to prepare you to undertake the editing process in other USC courses and in your post-school careers, on films edited either by you or by others. You will be expected to edit your projects outside of class time and bring them into the class to present and discuss with others.

Because of the amount of material we need to cover, the 15 weeks (note that our last class happens during finals week on so don't make plans for that night) time period for our classes will get pretty intense. **Be prepared for some classes to go past the official finish time.**

#### **CLASS FORMAT:**

The class is structured to give you an overview of how a film is made from the point of view of the editing process (and, recently, more and more things are being made the responsibility of the editing staff). Along the way, therefore, you will get a sense of the entire flow of film editing – including its thought processes, technical needs, scheduling, and politics.

The first week will be an introductory week in which we'll discuss a variety of topics including how the class will work, the process of editing, the nuts and bolts of the editorial process. I'll then present a series of pieces of film to look at and begin building our common language so that we understand what we are talking about when we are talking about editing and post-production. We will also discuss variations on the syllabus that we may want to make.

After that, our weekly meetings will generally include a presentation by one student who will examine a scene from a favorite film of theirs, emphasizing the editorial choices made in the creation of that scene. I will also discuss different aspects of editing, using film clips to illustrate the topics. Over the course of the semester, these talks will provide a more or less complete discussion of the thought processes and techniques of the editing process, from picture editing to sound and music across a wide spectrum of projects.

At least half of each class will be devoted to the screening and critiquing of the scenes that you will have edited, in pairs, during the preceding week. At times, we will give you re-editing notes and you will return to the editing room during the next week for a second cut. During parts of the semester, partners will take on alternating roles as editor and director in order to provide each student with the varied experience that exists in the "real world". If necessary, we will meet once or twice in the editing rooms where you and I will get some hands-on experience together.

A final component of our classes will be a discussion of the politics of editing — from working closely with directors, producers and writers, to getting jobs, getting notes and developing a distinct style.

Along the way, you're going to learn how to make sense of a lot of footage, how to use Avid in a professional way, how to work better in Adobe Premiere, how to think about music, sound and effects to tell your story, and a whole slew of skills that will better prepare you for the more advanced work here at USC.

**A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND ADULT SUBJECTS**

Filmmaking is an art and art often involves the depiction of unsettling or disturbing imagery and language. In the films we screen and in class discussions at times you will be exposed to vulgar language, violent imagery, and/or scenes of a sexual nature. If this bothers you please do not take the class.

**NOTE: CLASS EXERCISES**

This semester we have a broad batch of new material to cut for our classroom exercises. During our first class we will discuss the types of material students are most interested in editing and we will revise some of the below assignments to reflect your interests.

**WEEKLY COURSE BREAKDOWN**

*Please note, that this breakdown is liable to change several times during the course of the semester, depending on the availability of guest speakers or the progress of your own work.*

<p>Week 1 (Jan 20)</p>	<p><b>INTRO TO EDITING / CLASS</b> <i>The And</i> <b>Working Virtually</b></p>	<p>The 4 Steps of Mastery What are we really talking about when we're talking about editing. Platforms Class plan  <b>Creativity Exercise #1</b></p>
<p>Week 2 (Jan 27th)</p>	<p><b>APPROACHING A SCENE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coming up with a game plan.</li> <li>• Making sure you're on the same page as the director</li> <li>• First cut.</li> <li>• Revisions</li> <li>• <b>2nd half of class on AVID</b></li> </ul>	<p>How scenes can be constructed. Trusting an audience.  <b>Frame by Frame assignment</b>  <b>Scene Presentation:</b>  <b>Creativity Exercise #2</b></p>
<p>Week 3 (Feb 3rd)</p>	<p><b>BUILDING A PERFORMANCE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of reaction shots.</li> <li>• How to 'land' a line.</li> <li>• Editing styles and their functions in various films.</li> </ul> <p><b>2nd half of class on AVID</b></p>	<p><b>Scene Presentation:</b>  <b>Creativity Exercise #3</b></p>

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<p>Week 4 (Feb 10th)</p>	<p><b>SCRIPT TO SCREEN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The symbiotic relationship between screenwriting and editing.</li> <li>• Where the rules are the same</li> <li>• Where the rules are different.</li> <li>• Understanding editing to make you a better writer.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Cut Due</b></p> <p><b>Scene Presentation:</b></p>
<p>Week 5 (Feb 17th)</p>	<p><b>WORKING WITH SOUND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with sound</li> <li>• Ambiences backgrounds and tones.</li> <li>• Using sound effects to enhance a scene and build moments.</li> <li>• <i>Apocalypse Now</i></li> </ul> <p><b>2nd half of class in EDITING LAB</b></p>	<p><b>2nd Cut Due</b></p> <p><b>Scene Presentation:</b></p>
<p>Week 6 (Feb 24th)</p>	<p><b>SCENE ANALYSIS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking a scene on paper and working through the beats and how to approach it.</li> </ul> <p>Watch a couple examples of each.</p>	<p><b>3<sup>rd</sup> Cut Due</b></p>
<p>Week 7 (Mar 3rd)</p>	<p><b>ACTION SEQUENCES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 types of Action sequences.</li> <li>• How to approach them, tools to use</li> </ul> <p><i>Bad Boys 2, Skyfall, The Raid.</i></p>	<p><b>Bowling scene robbery cut due</b></p>
<p>Week 8 (Mar 10th)</p>	<p><b>CUTTING FOR COMEDY</b></p>	<p><b>Bowling scene robbery cut #2 due</b></p> <p><b>One page paper – single spaced – on ‘What I’ve Learned So Far.’</b></p>
<p>Week 9 (Mar 17th)</p>	<p><b>DOCUMENTARY FILM EDITING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to approach documentary editing, why you should learn to cut documentary and where to start watching docs.</li> </ul>	
<p>Week 10 (Mar 24th)</p>	<p><b>SCENE ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENTS PART 2</b></p> <p><b>Breaking down a scene and establishing an approach.</b></p>	<p><b>Scene Presentation:</b></p>

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NO CLASS APRIL 7 <sup>TH</sup>	WELLNESS DAY	NO CLASS
Week 11 (Apr 14th)	<b>SCENE ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENTS PART 2</b>  Breaking down a scene and establishing an approach.	Scene Presentation:
Week 12 (Apr 21st)	<b>BUILDING MONTAGES + SEQUENCES</b>	Scene Presentation:
Week 13 (Apr 28th)	<b>THE ART OF GETTING BY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How to get a job, what to do when you get a job, what to do when you can't get a job, how to be, how to live, why you shouldn't get a dog.</li></ul>	
Week 14 (May 5th)	<b>FINAL CUTS of FINAL PROJECTS</b>	FINAL DUE w/ a one page – single-spaced – description of your approach to the scene.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Beginning with the first week, you and your partner will be required to edit and/or re-edit a scene every week. You will present it at the next class, and accept criticism from your classmates and me so you can re-edit the scenes for a screening during the following week. My comments will be given **verbally** during the class. You won't get a written critique.

Once during the semester, you will be required to choose a short scene from a project you admire, and analyze it from the point of view of its editing — its style and content and anything else that we have learned up until that point. The scene can be from a film of any kind, a television show, a commercial or a music video — whatever. In short, you can choose anything where editing is involved. You will screen the scene in class and present that analysis following the screening, **both written and orally**. You will be expected to bring a copy of the film to class **along with your typed report** on the date it is due. We will have the availability to screen from a DVD or a QuickTime file of *most codecs*. Once again, my comments will be given verbally during the class. You won't get a written critique.

Students will be required to attend and participate in all classes. **ATTENDANCE WILL BE TAKEN AT EVERY CLASS and LAB**. Written explanations will be necessary *in advance* for all excused absences. **Unexcused absences will be reflected in the course grade**. In addition, students will be expected to be at class on time; *lateness will also be reflected in your grade*. Please make use of my e-mail address or phone number above if you have an unavoidable problem. If you cannot make the class or will be late, let me know by the evening before the class. [Sorry for all of the bold facing, underlining and italics, but this section cannot be emphasized enough. Responsibility is an important skill for an editor.]

Since film editors are judged on their ability to complete their work in a timely manner, you will likewise be responsible for completing each stage of every project on time and in a professional manner.

**GRADES:**

To make it as clear as possible, your grade will be based on a total of 600 points. The point breakdown is as follows:

- **In Class Participation & Engagement – 50 points**
- **Successful completion of Scene Presentation – 50 points**
- **Scene Analysis presentation – 100 points**
- ***EDIT 1* assignment – 100 points**
- ***EDIT 2* assignment – 100 points**
- ***EDIT 3* 100 points**
- ***EDIT 4* assignment – 100 points**
- **Final Assignment – 200 points**

Each week that you complete one of the above assignments you will receive your score via email during the following week. This does not include the Young Indy assignment. The score for that will be emailed after the semester has concluded.

**PRESENTATION OF EDITED MATERIAL:**

**Just like in the real world, all material must be properly prepared for screening.** It will be your responsibility to make sure that your outputs are complete, with sound, and in viewable condition. You should check your materials *before leaving the editing station* and on another machine if possible. We will discuss proper leadering and slating at various points during the semester. You will then be expected to leader/slate your tapes every week after that.

**OFFICE HOURS**

Via Zoom or phone by appointment.

**Asynchronous Learning**

All class sessions will be Zoom recorded and made available for asynchronous viewing until end of the grading period in early December. Students enrolled in this course from outside the U.S. Pacific Time Zone will still be expected to participate in real time assuming that the official class time falls between 7am and 10pm in their time zones. Wherever possible faculty will be understanding and make accommodations to ease the inconvenience of asynchronous learning.

Students from outside the U.S. Pacific Time Zone for whom the class falls between the hours of 10pm and 7am may still be required to complete certain components of the course synchronously. These components will be announced at the beginning of the semester and students with concerns about meeting these requirements should discuss them with their faculty at that time.

**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).

**Safety:**

All students are expected to abide by USC School of Cinematic Arts Safety Guidelines. Violations of any of the safety guidelines may result in disciplinary action ranging from confiscation of footage to expulsion from the University.

**Stressful Times:**

These are stressful times in our country, and Graduate School in and of itself is stressful. I encourage you to take care of yourself and your fellow students. USC provides opportunities for Mindful Meditation <http://mindful.usc.edu> and Mental health counseling is available at the Engemann Student Health Center, 1031 W. 34<sup>th</sup> Street, 213-740-9355.

**Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*

[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, 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 Campus Support & Intervention - (213) 821-4710*

[campussupport.usc.edu](http://campussupport.usc.edu)

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*

[ombuds.usc.edu](http://ombuds.usc.edu)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.