

WRITING THE SHORT SCRIPT
SPRING 2021
CTWR 413 SECTION 19182D
Instructor: Bonnie Garvin
Wednesdays 10 AM – 12:50 PM
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CTWR 413 is a course in screenwriting fundamentals preparing students to write short films that can be used in their CTPR 310 production course the following semester. The first 4 weeks will focus on teaching fundamentals through the use of scene exercises. The remaining 10 weeks of the semester will be spent on writing and rewriting shorts. Students should write and revise two scripts for possible 310 production, then choose one and rewrite it in preparation for 310 production.

GOALS OF THIS COURSE:

- Introduction to the craft of screenwriting.
- To learn and practice the elements of a “Good story well told.”
- To strengthen & deepen your ability to conceive compelling ideas, characters and stories through experience and observation
- To learn to write from a visual and aural perspective.
- To learn narrative structure
- To learn the building blocks of the dramatic scene.
- To write a write two five-minute short film scripts.

This is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you will learn and develop your craft as a storyteller. You will learn to draw on your memories, experiences, observation and of course imagination to create compelling characters and stories for the screen.

This is a workshop class. Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both in and outside the class, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting. You will learn to bring your visual and aural senses to your writing, to see and hear your film as you write it, developing and exploring your characters through situations of conflict.

At the end of the class you have completed two short narratives *5 page CTPR 310 script in keeping with Covid -19 rules and regulations.*

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 and be prepared to discuss them in class. Additionally the following books are highly suggested:

"The Tools of Screenwriting" by Howard & Mabley

"Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out" by Dannenbaum, Hodge, Mayer

GRADING:

In-class exercises 30%

Assignments 60%

Participation 10%

Class participation includes full involvement in and contribution to all class discussions, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule above) the assignments of the other students and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

Class attendance is mandatory, and includes being on time to class (otherwise, the students who present their material first are short-changed).

You are allowed one unexcused absence (documentation required for excused absences). Beyond one, you will receive a reduction of one-third letter grade for each unexcused absence. (e.g., A- down to B+, B down to B-)

BE ON TIME. Tardiness is unprofessional, and unacceptable. You will be allowed no more than one unexcused tardiness. Further tardiness will result in one-sixth letter grade for each occurrence. (e.g., A- down to B+, B down to B-)

Late assignments will result in a lower grade.

All work must be delivered in proper format and emailed to the instructor and

all classmates by 9AM on the day before class.

Per the 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%

A : Work of **excellent** quality. Outstanding application of the dramatic principles and fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines as specified in the syllabus.

B : Work of **good** quality. Above average fulfillments of course requirements and deadlines.

C : Work of **fair** quality. Minimum fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines for passing graduate credit.

C-: **FAIL to meet minimum grade for credit. NON PASSING GRADE.**

ASSIGNMENTS & SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE – ATMOSPHERE & VISUALIZATION

In class assignment – TRIP TO SCHOOL

Creating a sense of place and atmospheric locations is part of the writer's job. Lighting, time of day, weather, architecture, use of sound, props and objects all help create mood and the world of your story.

- List the places you went to school starting as far back as you can remember.
- List how you got to each school. Pick the hottest place/trip emotionally.
- List things, places, activities, people, clothes connected with that trip.
- Now describe one trip, tell us about how you got to school. (More “telling”, less “reading”.)

You'll have 15 minutes for writing the lists.

WEEK TWO: ROOMMATES

How to create of characters: strengths & weaknesses, power of the past, duality / personality split, desire versus need.

Roommates. Non-dialogue. Designed to introduce characters through visuals and props -- and conflict -- without seeing or hearing the characters themselves. In three parts. Length: A page and a half tops.

*First part: Describe through sight and sounds a significant space shared by two interesting characters who are living together in **harmony**. Second part: Describe the same space, but now the characters are in apparent **conflict**. Third part: One of the characters is now **gone**, the remaining one has the location to his or herself. This should not be a guessing game. The point is to engage the audience and let us clearly know who these people are, and what the conflict is about. The elements in the second part ought to be **planted** in the first part, and may be missing or changed, or used again in the third.*

You have 20 minutes to write.

Use time of day, light/darkness, weather, objects, colors, etc. to define the mood. Every sentence is a shot, etc. Discussions can lead to questions of genre, how atmosphere tells us what kind of picture we're in. In general, encourage the students to take risks and stretch the envelope. Show them that we value bravery and taking chances. They are encouraged to explore various genres, styles and forms of writing; including experimental and documentary. Different assignments will lend themselves to different forms.

The assignment is partially about how to write for the camera and not merely present the spectator with a laundry list of items.

WEEK THREE: PREPARATION FOR A DATE

Screenplay format. How and what to use.

Also designed to build audience engagement and expectations. Introduces the use of props, costume, and character revealing activity and action. Helps the writer practice time ellipsis, the technique of planting and payoff, and/or repetition with a variation. And, of course, preparation and aftermath. In two parts.

Length: No more than a page total.

*Pick an interesting character and place him or her **alone** in a location **significant** to that character. (A home, an office, a combat bunker.) Show the character preparing for some character-revealing event, such as a crucial job interview, a murder, a confession, an encounter with aliens. Whatever. The point is to show through props and movement not only what the event is, but how the character feels about what's about to happen. This should not be a guessing game. We are not given clues, but glimpses into the character's hopes and fears. It should be crystal clear what the event is when the character leaves the location. Then, ellipse time and show the character's return. (We do not see the primary scene of the event.) But when the character returns to his home, or aircraft hanger, or office... **we should know exactly what happened** and how the character feels about it by changes in demeanor, costume, props, etc.*

Build on the first atmosphere exercise, using light, and sound to build mood and atmosphere. Discuss character objective, obstacles and simplified dramatic structure. ("Somebody wants something badly but is having a hard time getting it.") Learning to use significant objects, as well as planting and payoff, are key in this exercise to reveal character and objective.

You have 20 MINUTES to write.

WEEK FOUR: Dialogue Scene – SEDUCTION / PERSUASION

The goal of this scene is to explore characters – their past and present relationships. This is a good scene to introduce the concept of exposition through conflict.

Length: 3 or 4 pages.

One character wants another character to do something. The seducer should know which "buttons" to push. The goal should be appealing to the person being seduced, but that person should have legitimate, character revealing opposition. This need not be sexual or romantic. The seduction/persuasion should escalate. The scene ends when the seducee agrees or doesn't.

You have 20 MINUTES to write.

WEEK FIVE - PITCHING 310 IDEAS

How to pitch. What makes a compelling short. View shorts.

Assignment for next week: Prepare 3 ideas to pitch in class as **5 page** CTPR 310 scripts. Review the COVID RULES!!!

WEEK SIX – PITCHING 310 IDEAS

Pitch ideas and exchange constructive criticism.

Assignment: Refine Pitches.

WEEK SEVEN – PITCHING 310 IDEAS

Re-pitch ideas. Select the two you intend to write.

ASSIGNMENT. Write your first draft.

WEEK SEVEN – WRITING FIRST DRAFT

Workshop scripts.

WEEK EIGHT: REVIEW & WORKSHOP FIRST DRAFTS 310 SCRIPT #1

Assignment: Revise 310 script #1.

WEEK NINE: REVIEW & WORKSHOP FIRST DRAFTS 310 SCRIPT #1

Assignment: Write first draft of 310 script #2.

WEEK TEN: REVIEW & WORKSHOP FIRST DRAFTS 310 SCRIPT #2

Assignment: Revise 310 script #2.

WEEK ELEVEN: REVIEW & WORKSHOP FIRST DRAFTS 310 SCRIPT #2

Students select one of the two revised scripts to pursue further.

Assignment: Rewrite selected 310 script.

WEEK TWELVE: REVIEW & WORKSHOP REWRITTEN 310 SCRIPT.

Assignment: Revise rewritten selected 310 script.

WEEK THIRTEEN: REVIEW REVISIONS.

Assignment: Final polishes of selected 310 script.

WEEK FOURTEEN: TABLE READS OF FINAL DRAFTS.

Assignment: Final Script is due.

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.

<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>
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