

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

**CTWR 439 “Writing the Original Dramatic Series Pilot”
Spring 2021**

Instructor: ALEXA ALEMANNI
Class Schedule: Wednesday 7-10pm
Class Location: Zoom
Office Hours: By appointment only
Contact Information: alemanni@usc.edu

Hour-Long Drama Series Pilot -- CTWR 439

COURSE GOALS:

Overview: Students are challenged to make the leap from a finite screenplay or episode to create the pilot for an original series involving dramatic elements that could propel storylines and characters for years. Coming up with a premise that introduces the main cast and incites the action in the pilot is similar to beginning any screenplay. But discovering “springboards” for future episodes, and enlarging relationships and issues so that stories will have “legs” requires a new layer of creativity and craft.

Specific Goals:

- Exposure to the process of writing a TV drama pilot
- Appreciation of high quality series concepts and pilots
- How to choose and shape your pilot world and characters
- How to outline the pilot
- How to complete the pilot script
- How to revise and polish the pilot script
- How to write a series bible

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this course is to write a professional-quality pilot script for an original one-hour drama series and a bible for the entire first season. The completed script and bible will be turned in during finals week and will count as the final for this course.

Course Reading:

Pilot scripts and readings will be provided throughout the class.

Required Text:

1. WRITING THE TV DRAMA SERIES — 4th Edition (2018) by Pamela Douglas
2. Pilot scripts provided throughout the class.

Grading Criteria:

All written assignments must be turned in on Blackboard as a PDF and emailed to your classmates as a PDF on time.

Because this is a workshop students must provide constructive feedback to one another, and participate in class discussions.

Writing Division: Curriculum: Syllabus: CTWR 439 “Writing the Original Drama Series Pilot”

All class work must be based on new, original ideas and completed on your own. No previously written scripts or treatments may be used.

Your final grade will be based on your written work as well as your attendance, and contribution to the workshop environment.

Attendance policy: Attendance is mandatory because of the workshop element of this class. The only way an absence can be excused is with medical documentation. Three absences will be cause to fail for the semester.

10% Participation in discussion of other students' work
30% Outline incorporating class notes
50% Final draft of pilot
10% Series bible

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 proofread 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:

Laptops are permissible for taking notes. No cell phones.

Writing Division's 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 Approved 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 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.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS:

1. JANUARY 20th

Introduction to principles of creating an original series. Clips from prototype pilots are shown and analyzed. How does a series get “legs?” How are “springboards” used? To what extent are “franchises” helpful? How are new series affected by the changing TV landscape? What qualities contribute to an effective pilot?

Brainstorming exercise on ideas.

Assignments:

- * Read the Preface, Introduction and John Wells comments in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4th Edition.
- * Read the pilot script of *The Chi & ER*, both available on Blackboard.
- * Prepare three ideas to present.

2. JANUARY 27th

In-class screening/reading of *The Chi & ER*. Analysis of elements that make it successful as a pilot.

Discussion of components necessary for pilot pitch / WB standard vs Netflix.

Pitch of three ideas.

Assignments:

- * Prepare to pitch your pilot concept/world/why next class. (Verbal Pitch)
- * Read Chapter One in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4th Edition.
- * Read Act I - Act 3 of *Killing Eve & Scandal*, both available on Blackboard.

3. FEBRUARY 3rd

Workshop student pitches on concept / world / why.

Discussion of *Killing Eve / Scandal*

Assignments:

- * Revise concept / world / why
- * Prepare character portion of your pitch.
- * Read Chapter Three in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4th Edition.
- * Read Act III & IV of *The Americans* & ACT IV & V of *Pose* both available on Blackboard.

4. FEBRUARY 10th

Workshop student pitches on characters.

Discuss *The Americans / Pose*

Review Act Outs / Pilot Structure

Assignments:

- * Revise pitch on characters.
- * Prepare pilot act questions / pilot arc / season arc
- * Read Chapter Four in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4th Edition.

5. FEBRUARY 17th

Workshop pilot arc / act questions / season arc

Discuss transition from story beats to outline

Assignments:

- * Outline Act I & 2
- * Email Act I & 2 to the class no later than Sunday February 21st by end of day.
- * Review pages 105 to 107 “How to Write Your Outline” in Writing the TV Drama Series.

6. FEBRUARY 24th

In-class feedback on Outline for Act I & 2

Assignment:

- * Revise and complete your outline.
- * Email completed outlines to the class no later than Sunday February 28th by end of day.

7. MARCH 3rd

In-class discussion of outlines.

Effective openings.

Assignment:

- * As soon as you have revised your outlines, start the script.
- * Upload completed final outlines to blackboard.
- * Complete first five script pages of Act 1 emailed to all no later than Sunday March 7th by end of day.

8. MARCH 10th

Act 1 discussion.

In-class feedback on script openings and character introductions.

Assignment: Write/Finish Act 1 of your pilot. Emailed to all no later than Sunday March 14th by end of day.

9. MARCH 17th

In-class feedback on Act 1.

Assignment: Write Act 2.

- * Continue to write your pilot.

10-13. MARCH 24th, MARCH 31st, APRIL 14, April 21st

Intensive workshopping on scripts in progress.

**** WELLNESS DAY APRIL 7****

Assignment:

- * Each week, email pages to everyone by the Sunday before class no later than midnight.
- * Read the pages and be prepared to give notes.
- * Re-write.

13. APRIL 21st

Workshop final script pages.

How to write a series bible. Examples are shown in class.

Assignment:

- * Write the bible for your series. Bibles due Sunday April 25th no later than end of day.

14. APRIL 28th

Workshop series bibles.

Assignments:

- * Revise the bible per class notes and continue re-writing.
- * Complete and deliver the re-written pilot script and bible by May 7th no later than end of day to Blackboard.

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>

PLEASE NOTE:

FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX

