

**CTWR 529**

Section 19254D - Intermediate Screenwriting Spring 2021

Instructor: Sean Hood  
Location: Online  
Time: 7 - 10 PM Tuesdays  
Office Hours: Zoom meetings by appointment  
Contact: **shood@usc.edu**

**COURSE OBJECTIVE:**

The objective of this course is to develop and execute:

- **Two** complete and revised narrative **short-film screenplays**, 8-10 pages each.
- An **original feature film story** in revised synopsis form (8-10 pages), ready for development into a screenplay. This will be turned in the last weeks of class and will count as the Final for this course.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This intermediate screenwriting course will build and expand on your previous classes and sharpen your storytelling craft through practical writing experience in the short- film form, leading to an extensive introduction to shaping a feature film story.

In a supportive workshop environment, we will examine the basics of the craft by way of key screenwriting terms, encourage productive and professional writing habits, and test unexplored territory of your imagination. Beginning with a few simple ideas, each student will **execute screenplays and treatments** with an emphasis on character development, visualization, tension and story structure, and then **rewrite** these pages based on feedback from the class. Each student is encouraged to find their **authentic voice** and **unique writing process**.

We will ask fundamental questions: Why are you writing this film? What do you want the audience/reader to feel? Or learn? What is this story's reason for being? What is its epiphany for the characters and the audience?

This is a workshop course, where every student presents material and gives constructive feedback on all other students' work. "Notes" are given both in class (over Zoom) and online (in the Weekly Feedback Forum.) Giving and receiving feedback is an essential screenwriting skill. Because of this, **student's weekly "notes" will be graded.**

While the live Zoom sessions will focus on worshipping stories, scripts and treatments, there will be additional materials in the form of prerecorded lecture videos, assigned reading and other materials available each week on **Blackboard**. These weekly lessons will define over fifty key screenwriting terms or "tools."

### **SKILLS DEVELOPED IN COURSE:**

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Pitch ideas verbally in a group setting.
- Write well-structured scenes and sequences.
- Create complex and memorable characters.
- Define over fifty key screenwriting terms and apply those “tools” to screenwriting.
- Give and receive effective feedback.
- Tell stories with pictures instead of writing “pictures of people talking.”
- Identify and amplify their “personal voice.”
- Work within their own unique writing process.
- Identify ideas that are workable as cinematic stories.

### **COURSE READING (REQUIRED):**

*The Tools of Screenwriting* by David Howard

*The Writer’s Journey* by Christopher Vogler

(Both these books are available new and used on Amazon.)

### **COURSE READING (SUGGESTED):**

Students are encouraged to read **professional screenplays**. Many Oscar nominated screenplays are available online. There will be a link to a **Screenplay Library** on Blackboard.

*Screenwriting is Rewriting* by Jack Epps (essential for serious screenwriters)

*Save The Cat* by Blake Snyder (just because everyone else has read it.)

### **LECTURE VIDEOS**

Each week the professor will record and post **lecture videos** on specific screenplay terms, the required reading, and other screenwriting topics.

Watching these videos is required and will be covered by the **weekly quiz** on Blackboard. Quizzes may be re-taken unlimited times and only the highest score is counted. They are meant to be low stress ways to make sure that you are doing the required reading.

**GRADING CRITERIA**

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and the student's demonstration of his or her achievement of the course's objectives, as reflected in the following assignments or ones substituted in their place:

Pitch 1 & 2 (Project 1)	Week 2	2%	50 points
Character Monologue (Project 1)	Week 3	4%	100 points
Step Outline (Project 1)	Week 4	4%	100 points
First Draft (Project 1)	Week 5	4%	100 points
Final Draft (Project 1)	Week 6	8%	200 points
Pitch (Project 2)	Week 7	2%	50 points
Character Monologue (Project 2)	Week 8	4%	100 points
Step Outline (Project 2)	Week 9	4%	100 points
First Draft (Project 2)	Week 10	4%	100 points
Final Draft (Project 2)	Week 11	8%	200 points
Pitch (Feature)	Week 12	4%	100 points
Rough Outline (Feature)	Week 13	4%	100 points
Outline (Feature)	Final	12%	300 points
Participation in class (feedback)	12 classes	12%	25 points each
Written Notes (in forum)	12 classes	12%	25 points each
Weekly Quizzes	12 Quizzes	12%	25 points each

As per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

- A: 100% to 94% -- **Outstanding** fulfillment of course requirements
- A-: 93% to 90% -- **Excellent** fulfillment of course requirements
- B+: 89% to 87% -- **Above-average** fulfillment of course requirements
- B: 86% to 83% -- **Good** fulfillment of course requirements
- B-: 82%-80% -- **Average** fulfillment of course requirements
- C+: 79% to 77% -- Work of **Fair** quality
- C: 76% to 73% -- **Opportunity for Improvement** in demonstrating “ownership” of concepts, in meeting deadlines, in participation.

## **NETIQUETTE:**

Durring Zoom Lectures:

- Keep yourself **muted** unless called on.
- When your camera is on, please **dress** as you would in the classroom, and **behave** as you would in a professional environment.
- If you have a **question, comment**, just want to **agree with a note** while someone else is speaking, use the **Chat** function.
- If you want to be called on, use the “raise your hand” function on Zoom. A **little blue hand** will appear. Don’t unmute until called on.
- I’ll be available on Zoom in the fifteen minutes before and after class.

Posting Notes in Forums:

- Write notes as if you were speaking in a class discussion: relaxed in tone but respectful, polite, and **professional** in your choice of words.
- Your professor will be joining in forum discussions as well.

## **COMMUNICATION WITH PROFESSOR:**

When you have questions or comments there are a variety of ways you can contact the Professor or the DAs directly. In order, they are:

1. For questions about the class, first check the syllabus.
2. For answers to questions about screenwriting or the class not covered by the syllabus, try the “**Ask Your Professor**” forum on the Discussion Boards. You may find the question is already answered. Response time: **48 hours**.
3. For short but important questions (or just to talk movies,) the Professor will be available fifteen minutes before and after each weekly Zoom session.
4. For questions about the suggested films and a recap of concepts we discuss in class you can drop by the professor’s general **office hours**. 3PM - 5PM Fridays.
5. If you have a question about the class or the terms that you would rather not post publicly, you can email your professor ([shood@usc.edu](mailto:shood@usc.edu).) **Response time 24**.
6. One-on-one meetings during office hours can be scheduled via email.

## **SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS:**

Students will submit all written work in **two ways**:

1. They will submit the assignment to the professor via Blackboard. An “assignment” link will be available in each weekly module.
2. They will post the assignment as an attachment on the **Weekly Feedback Forum** on Blackboard, where students will give written feedback.

## **WRITTEN NOTES:**

Contribution to the **Weekly Feedback Forum** is mandatory and weekly. Your contribution to the boards is graded the same way as participation in class.

Each week, to get full credit simply respond to each set of pages submitted (on time) by your peers. In a reply to each post of weekly pages contribute at least **three meaningful “page notes”** or **expand on page notes already given**.

Cursory, half-hearted, or offhand notes (“I agree with everything that’s been said” or “Great work.”) will get only partial credit. Conversely, feel free to respond to comments on that you receive about your own pages.

Both written and oral feedback are essential professional skills. So, the class requires both. Bigger, more general notes will be covered in class discussion, while more specific page and scene notes are often delivered in the forums. Sometimes because of time constraints, not everyone can deliver oral feedback; so written feedback, both general and specific can ensure that the writer gets complete feedback from everyone.

The more insightful and useful notes you give, the more insightful and useful notes you will get back! Screenwriting, like all filmmaking, is a collaborative medium.

## **GRADING RUBRICS:**

Grading Rubrics for written notes, participation, and weekly writing assignments and the final script will be available on Blackboard.

Students can expect grades and feedback from the professor before the following class after the class in which it was discussed. In other words, about one-week turnaround.

## **DEADLINES:**

Written Assignments	Noon on Monday (before Tuesday’s class.)
Weekly Quizzes	Tuesday at 7 PM, class time.
Written Notes	Tuesday at 7 PM, class time.

(Written notes are NOT required for assignments turned in late, but get extra credit. )

## **SCREENPLAY SOFTWARE:**

You will be required to write in standard script format using screenplay software. FINAL DRAFT offers a student discount. Celtx is a free software program. There are many others.

## **FILE FORMAT:**

Every file you hand into class (or in any professional situations) should be **PDF**.

You should NAME every file in the following way:

Your full name - assignment name (date).pdf

For Example: **Sean Hood - Character Monologue (8-13-2020)**

All documents should either have a **TITLE PAGE** with author name and date, or the information should appear at the top of the first page.

## **LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Unexcused late assignments will be penalized **20%** if handed in after the deadline but before class. They will be penalized **50%** if handed in after class.

If you anticipate needing to hand in an assignment late, please communicate with the professor well before the deadline. Often accommodations can be met for students who plan ahead. Unexpected emergencies do come up, but please treat class time and deadlines as you would in professional circumstances.

It's better to get an imperfect assignment in on time than a perfect assignment in late.

## **ATTENDANCE:**

Class attendance is mandatory. Treat it as you would a professional meeting with a studio or executive. (Although accommodations can be made for students in other time zones.)

You are allowed the equivalent of one unexcused absence. Two late arrivals equate to one full absence. Any tardies or absences beyond that will lower your grade.

More than one unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered a full point (ex: B to a (B-)). Your grade will be lowered by one point for every absence thereafter.

In order for an absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and may need to provide documentation at the next attended class session.

## Class Schedule (Overview)

### Week One (January 19)

#### **In Class:**

- Course Introduction and Overview
- Students introduce **story ideas**. Discussion of goals.

#### **For Next Week:**

- Write **synopses** of **TWO** short film ideas by Noon on Monday.
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- All students post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

### Week Two (January 26)

#### **In Class:**

- Students **pitch two ideas/synopses** to the class.
- Discussion of Pitches/Synopses

#### **For Next Week:**

- Write **Character Monologue** by Noon on Monday.
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

### Week Three (February 2)

#### **In Class:**

- Discussion of **Character Monologues**.

#### **For Next Week:**

- Write **Step Outline** for Project One
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Four (February 9)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **Step Outlines**

**For Next Week:**

- Write **First Draft** of **Project One**.
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Five (February 16)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **First Drafts of Project One**

**For Next Week:**

- Write **Final Draft** of **Project One**.
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Six (February 23)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **Final Drafts of Project One**.

**For Next Week:**

- Write **synopses** of **Project Two**.
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Seven (March 2)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **synopses of Project Two**.

**For Next Week:**

- Write **Character Monologue** for **Project Two**
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.



Week Eight (March 9)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **Character Monologue for Project Two**

**For Next Week:**

- Write **Step Outline for Project Two**
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Nine (March 16)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **Step Outline for Project Two**

**For Next Week:**

- Write **First Draft of Project Two**
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

**(No Class March 23)**

Week Ten (March 30)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **First Draft of Project Two**

**For Next Week:**

- Write **Final Draft of Project Two**
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Eleven (April 6)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **Final Draft of Project Two**

**For Next Week:**

- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Twelve (April 13)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **Final Draft of Project Two**

**For Next Week:**

- Write **synopsis** of **feature film** idea.
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Thirteen (April 20)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **synopsis of feature film idea**.

**For Next Week:**

- Write **Rough Outline of feature film** idea.
- Read your peer's work (that was handed in on time.)
- Post **written notes** in forum before class.
- Do required reading/viewing and take **quiz**.

Week Fourteen (April 27)

**In Class:**

- Discussion of **Rough Outline**.

**For Final Outline Deadline:**

- **Revise and Expand Outline** to Final form.

**FINAL OUTLINE DUE: MAY 10th**

## 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).

### 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.

*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) 740-9355(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.

*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 and 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) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

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

Non-emergency assistance or information.

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