

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

**CTWR 409: “Fundamentals of Screenwriting: Character, Conflict, & Story”
Spring 2021 – 4 units**

Instructor: Robert Ramsey
Class Schedule: Thursday 4-6:50 p.m.
Class Location: Online
Office Hours: By Appointment
Contact Information: robertra@usc.edu

Course Objective:

To learn the professional approach of writing relatable characters, in conflict driven scenes, with an authentic voice. In addition, students will learn the 3-act structure and how to create a compelling world. The culmination in this class will be the first act of a feature script.

Course Description:

As an introductory course for non-majors, “Fundamentals of Screenwriting” is a fundamental course that focuses on the craft of storytelling. The focus will be on discovering your creative voice, the mechanics of scene work, creating compelling character arcs, and understanding the 3-act structure of feature films.

Through scene work, character work and story development, students will learn the tools of crafting professional scenes. The culmination of this course will be a first act of a feature script (25-30 pages).

Course Reading:

The Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley

Screenplays:

“Eight Grade” by Bo Burnham

“Moonlight” by Barry Jenkins

“Booksmart” by Sarah Haskins

Additional scripts as assigned by instructor*

Grading Criteria:

Students will submit their work by 9 p.m. Wednesday as a PDF to robertra@usc.edu.

Participation:	10%
Scene: Three Memories	5%
Scene: Prep for Date	5%
Scene: Wrongest Person	5%
Scene: Character Intro	5%
Scene: Seduction/Persuasion	5%
Scene: Rewrite of a Scene	5%
Character Bios	15%
Outline:	15%
<u>First Act:</u>	<u>30%</u>
	100%

Per Writing Division policy, the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

A 100% to 94%
A- 93% to 90%
B+ 89% to 87%
B 86% to 83%
B- 82% to 80%
C+ 79% to 77%
C 76% to 73%
C- 72% to 70%
D+ 69% to 67%
D 66% to 63%
D- 62% to 60%
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 proof assignments 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 may be used for the purpose of taking notes during workshop. Cell phones should not be used in the classroom.

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:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Jan. 21

Week 1: Introduction to Course / Rules of Screenwriting / Finding Unique Characters
In-Class Reading: "The Social Network"

Assignment #1: THREE MEMORIES - 2-3 PAGES (5%)

Assignment #2: Read "Eight Grade."

Jan. 28

Week 2: Workshop THREE MEMORIES / DISCUSS "Eight Grade" / Review screenwriting format.

Assignment #1: Write "Preparation for a Date or Significant Event" (5%)

Assignment #2: Read "Moonlight"

Feb. 4

Week 3: Workshop "Prep for a Date or Significant Event" / Discuss "Moonlight"

Assignment #1: "Wrongest Person" (5%)

Assignment #2: Read "Booksmart"

Feb. 11

Week 4: Workshop "Wrongest Person" / Discuss "Booksmart"

Assignment #1: Write a "Character Introduction" scene (5%)

Assignment #2: Listen in on at least two (2) conversations during the next week. Take notes of each person's use of diction and point of view in the situation.

Feb. 18

Week 5: Workshop "Character Introduction" Scenes / Discuss research findings with an ear cocked toward creating dialog with authenticity.

Assignment #1: Write a "Seduction/Persuasion" scene. (5%)

Feb. 25

Week 6: Workshop "Seduction/Persuasion" Scenes / Discuss Authentic Characters

Assignment #1: Rewrite a scene using the tools learned over the last several weeks (5%)

March 4

Week 7: Workshop Rewritten Scenes / Discuss Character Development

Assignment #1: Three Feature Pitches/Log lines

March 11

Week 8: Workshop Three Pitches/Review of Character Bio / Discussion of Worldbuilding.

Assignment #1: Write THREE BIOS (15%)

Assignment #2: The Tools of Screenwriting – Basic Storytelling, pg 19-40

March 18

Week 9: Workshop Character Bios / Discuss Outlining / Three Acts / Eight Sequences

Assignment #1: Write an Outline of your feature screenplay, 2-3 pages (15%)

March 25

Week 10: Workshop Feature Outlines / The Importance of Genre

Assignment #1: Write first 10 pages of Act One
Assignment #2: Read The Tools of Screenwriting pg 41-95

Note: Workshop will be divided into two groups. Please continue to turn in your assigned pages by the deadline. Folks who need additional time on their outline will be in Group B.

April 1

Week 11: Workshop Group A First Act (first 10 pages)

April 8

Week 12: Workshop of Group B First Act (first 10 pages)

April 15

Week 13: Workshop Group A First Acts (Second 10 pages)

April 22

Week 14: No Class (Wellness Day)

April 29

Week 15: Workshop Group B First Acts (Second 10 pages)

Final Project: **Revised Act One of Feature Script (25-30 pages) due by 10a.m. on May 10. (30%)**

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.

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

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.

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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