

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

**CTWR 321: Introduction to Hour-Long Television Writing  
SPRING 2021**

Instructor: Alexa Alemanni  
Class Schedule: Friday 10-12:50  
Class Location: Zoom  
Office Hours: By Request  
Contact Information: [alemanni@usc.edu](mailto:alemanni@usc.edu)

**Course Objective and Overview:**

Our objective is to understand the structure of television drama, to understand the inner workings of a writers room, to understand how to break story for a season and for an individual episode, and how to take story to completion via notes and classroom (studio) feedback, and to replicate the experience of an actual writing staff.

We will accomplish this by writing scenes from various existing TV 1 hour Drama Series and we will culminate by writing TWO complete original episodes of a current TV 1 hour drama. This will serve as the final course project.

**Course Reading:**

*Writing the TV Drama Series* – Fourth Edition By Pamela Douglas  
Pilot scripts provided throughout the class.

**Grades:**

Attendance is mandatory because of the ‘workshop’ element of this class. Three unexcused absences will result in a FAILING GRADE.

**Grading Breakdown:**

10% Participation throughout the semester  
10% Assigned Scene work 1 & 2  
10% Writers Assistant Notes on your assigned week  
10% Two-Pager for Episode 1 & 2  
20% Act Outline  
20% Completed Act First Draft  
20% Completed Act Final Draft

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 proof 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.

### **Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:**

Please refrain from using cell phones in class. We will work in 48s, during writing room sessions, no laptops allowed except for the assigned writers room assistant for the week. If you have an emergency, you may excuse yourself from class to complete a phone call.

### **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 & ASSIGNMENTS**

### **1. Week One - Jan 15**

- \* Overview of syllabus
- \* Discussion of pilot structure & series structure.
- \* Differences with one hour network vs. cable, the effect of streaming, how it changes storylines. How a writers room runs, and what the structure of the semester will be.

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Watch the pilot episode of *Homeland*.

### **2. Week Two - Jan 22**

- \* Break the story backwards, we will take the pilot of *Homeland* and reduce it down to story cards, and a thematic POV for the season and the episode.
- \* Read / discuss a few pages from each show in preparation.

**Assignment:**

- \* Watch / read, do your research on the series we will vote to work on:
  - \* *Big Sky* (ABC), *We Are Who We Are* (HBO/Hulu), *Industry* (HBO), *David Makes Man* (OWN), *The Flight Attendant* (HBO), *The Great* (Hulu)
- \* Write two scenes from a show you personally most want to work on. Expectations for the scene will be discussed in class. Due on Tue Jan 26th uploaded to Blackboard and emailed to your classmates.

**3. Week Three - Jan 29**

- \* Workshop scenes.
- \* Talk about A, B & C storylines, thematic POV, acts out and more.
- \* Assign writers assistants. Vote on a show.

**Assignment:**

- \* Watch / read do your research on the series we selected. You are expected to be as knowledgeable about the show we have chosen as possible. Do your homework.
- \* Write two scenes from the show we have selected. Expectations for the scene will be discussed in class. Due on Tue Feb 2nd uploaded to Blackboard and emailed to your classmates.

**4. Weeks Four - Six Feb 5, 12 & 19**

- \* Workshop scenes
- \* Writers Room: Season arc, theme, story ideas.

**Assignment:**

- \* Writers Assistant shares notes every week with class no later than the following Sunday at midnight.

**5. Weeks Seven & Eight Feb 26 & Mar 5**

- \* Writers Room: Break Episode One.

**Assignment:**

- \* Writers Assistant shares notes every week with class no later than the following Sunday at midnight.
- \* Two Pager for Episode One due on Fri Mar 12th uploaded to blackboard.
- \* Break into Group A and Group B

\*\* WELLNESS DAY MAR 12 \*\*

**6. Weeks Nine & Ten Mar 19 & 26**

- \* Writers Room: Break Episode 2

**Assignment:**

- \* Writers Assistant shares notes every week with class no later than the following Sunday at midnight.
- \* Two Pager for Episode Two due on March 30th uploaded to blackboard.
- \* Group A turns in outline for episode one due on March 30th uploaded to blackboard and shared with your classmates.

### **8. Week 11 - April 2**

Workshop Outline for Episode 1.

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Group B turns in outline for episode two due on April 6th uploaded to blackboard and shared with your classmates.

### **9. Week 12 - April 9**

Workshop Outline for Episode 2

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Group B turns in script pages for Episode 1. Pages due on April 13th uploaded to blackboard and shared with your classmates.
- \* Group A turns in script pages for Episode 2. Pages due on April 20th uploaded to blackboard and shared with your classmates.

### **10. Week 13 - April 16**

Workshop Episode 1

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Group A Edit Episode 1. Final draft pages uploaded to blackboard by May 5th end of day.

### **11. Week 14 - April 23**

Workshop Episode 2.

Final thoughts on writers rooms, the business & more.

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Group B Edit Episode 2. Final draft pages uploaded to blackboard by May 5th end of day.

**WELLNESS DAY: APRIL 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](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:**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://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](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) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://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](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://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](http://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](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 Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://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](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.

### **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](mailto: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**