

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

CTWR 523: Introduction to the Screenplay
Section 19378R
SPRING 2021

Instructor: Robert Ramsey
Class Schedule: Monday 1-3:50 p.m.
Class Location: Via Zoom
Office Hours: By Appointment
Contact Information: Email: robertra@usc.edu
Cell: 323-394-9471

Course Objective:

Students will develop and write the first draft of a screenplay with an emphasis on character as story engine.

Course Description:

A well-told screen story contains three acts and is distinguished by a singular protagonist whose strong intentions determine the plot of the film. This course will embrace the eight sequence approach to plotting and drafting a feature screenplay. With the intention of defining terms and establishing reference points, we will begin by reviewing three act, eight sequence structure. In subsequent classes, students will develop and present feature ideas, expand them into detailed outlines, and then draft and present screenplays sequence by sequence in a collaborative and supportive workshop environment. The final assignment will be a strategic polish based on specific notes and feedback.

Course Reading:

T.B.D.

Grading Criteria:

Participation:	10%
Pitch:	10%
Outline:	20%
Draft:	40%
Polish:	20%

	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 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:

Laptops will be used in class for class-related purposes only. Cell phones should be turned off and stowed away except during breaks.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class.

On the third absence, students will have their final grade lowered by 10% and an additional 10% for each absence thereafter. Two late arrivals equate to one full absence.

Note: This is a change in policy. Instructors will no longer distinguish between an excused or unexcused absence. An absence will be an absence.

Please note that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

If you have an emergency and/or know you will miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

If a student has an emergency and additional accommodations are needed, those accommodations will need to come through the USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) office. The Writing Division recommends the student and/or advocate contact CSI at 213-821-4710 and their home department adviser for additional support.

The On-line Classroom:

Class dynamics are substantially compromised without the ability to see the people in class; therefore, the default is that students have their cameras on during synchronous online sessions. Those facing challenging situations, such as internet connectivity, illness, or home environments that make this difficult or impossible shall contact me to work out accommodations. I encourage you to use virtual backgrounds, and earphones or headsets, should your home environment benefit from these privacies.

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.

Students are not permitted to create their own class recordings without the instructor's permission. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

Presentation:

Please submit your work to instructor via email. Name each document you submit as follows: YourName_Assignment.pdf. Example: Ramsey_First and Second Sequences.pdf

Class Schedule

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

Week 1 (Jan. 18): Martin Luther King Jr. Day (no class).

Week 2 (Jan. 25): Review the three-act, eight sequence approach to screenwriting and the interplay of A and B plots. Discuss ideas for feature screenplays.

Assignment: Prepare a pitch for your feature, with an emphasis on your protagonist's wants and needs.

Week 3 (Feb. 1): Each student pitches their story, followed by class discussion. Split into Groups A and B.

Assignment: Write 3-5 page outline with sequence and act breaks. Eight sequences, Three acts.

Week 4 (Feb. 8): Group A presents outlines.

Week 5 (Feb. 15): President's Day (no class).

Week 6 (Feb. 22): Group B presents outlines.

Week 7 (March 1): Group A presents First and Second Sequences.

Week 8 (March 8): Group B presents First and Second Sequences.

Week 9 (March 15): Group A presents Third and Fourth Sequences (to midpoint).

Week 10 (March 22): Group B presents Third and Fourth Sequences (to midpoint).

Week 11 (March 29): Group A presents Fifth and Sixth Sequences (to the second act curtain).

Week 12 (April 5): Group B presents Fifth and Sixth Sequences (to the second act curtain).

Week 13 (April 12): Group A presents Seventh and Eighth Sequences.

Week 14 (April 19): Group B presents Seventh and Eighth Sequences.

Week 15 (April 26): Discuss polish strategy.

Finals Week: Final Polishes due Monday, May. 10.

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>

<p>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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