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

CTWR 549: Advanced Rewriting Workshop for Hour-Long Drama
(If this was TV show, it would need a shorter title)
Spring 2021

Instructor: Dara Resnik
Class Schedule: Tuesdays 7-10pm
Class Location: SCI 209
Office Hours: by appointment
Contact Information: dresnik@usc.edu 310-867-9559

Course Objective:
My objective during these Tuesday night gatherings is to teach the basic crafts of giving notes and rewriting. Both will be applicable to your career in this business no matter where you eventually work.

Course Description:
So here's something awesome: I was once you.

I mean, not exactly you-you, I'm pretty sure I'm still me and you're still you, but I attended SCA, where I learned the crafts of screenwriting, constructive criticism, and implementing notes. These skills were invaluable to me first as a creative executive who had to give notes to writers, then as a writer who needed to take notes from showrunners, and now as a showrunner who needs to both give notes to my staff and take notes from executives, all while retaining my vision of the project I sold to them.

The course is primarily structured as a workshop, which requires starting with a finished pilot that we will note and possibly re-break piece-by-piece, as well as reading/ commenting on the pilot and work of your peers. You'll learn how to re-write by doing, and just as importantly, you'll learn how to give notes by doing.

Together we will discover how to get to the "spirit of the note," how to roll up your sleeves and rewrite fully and deeply, and when to disregard a note entirely. And here's why all that's important: networks, studios, and showrunners are hiring you for YOUR VOICE. That's what they're buying from you. If they weren't, they'd just write it themselves. As the Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl so gorgeously put it in his 2013 keynote speech at SXSW:

"What matters most is that it's YOUR VOICE. Cherish it. Respect it. Nurture it. Challenge it. Stretch it and scream until it's f*cking gone. Because every human being is blessed with at least that, and who knows how long it will last . . ."

You need to rewrite. But you also need to retain your voice.

As for notes, it's show *business*. If you don't implement showrunners' and executives' thoughts, and learn how to express your own kindly and effectively, you won't work for very long, or at all. Remind me to tell you some stories about that.

We are going to learn how to both take/give notes, and hang onto your vision. Like

everything else in life, this is a balance.

The class is malleable. If it feels like we aren't spending enough time on a topic, we will stay with it, and if it feels like we are mired in something, we will move on. This syllabus is merely a guideline. As my daughter's preschool teacher once put it, I consider the class student-led, teacher-guided.

Course Reading:
I will send pilots and series bibles to look at from time to time.

Grading Criteria:
Attendance is mandatory. Three absences will result in a failing grade. Period.

PAGES ARE DUE NO LATER THAN NOON ON THE SUNDAY BEFORE CLASS.

Time-stamped via e-mail: 12pm or earlier. I am a single mother who also works full-time. I do not have time to read and grade your work thoroughly if it is late.

If it is one minute late… I WILL NOT READ IT. Clear? Cool.

Grading is my least favorite part of this gig. Out in the world, your success will be determined equally by the quality of your work, and the fact that you hand it in ON TIME, so that's how I'll grade you. We can talk about the practical applications of this in person, meanwhile for the purposes of this syllabus, your grades will break down as follows:

Participation: 10%
On-time delivery of materials: 45%
Revised Pilot: 45%

                                              100%

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%

The following was written by the administration and I'm obligated to leave it here:

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.

Recording Devices:
You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy: Please bring laptops. Cell phones should be on silent.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:
Students are expected 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 equates 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.

Class Schedule:
NOTE: Scripts must be written in Final Draft, Movie Magic, or Fade in. Please send work to the class in PDF format, titled with the date.

To afford each student enough individual time, classes will be divided into two groups (A & B). The teams will have their work examined on alternating weeks.

Week 1 – Establishing rules for the class and for your show

Discussion: Establish your world and ours. What is world-building? Why is it important? Suspension of disbelief, and how to make things up without the audience catching on.

Students introduce themselves and pitch their pilots.

Read syllabus.

What is a note? How do I give one without being a jerk?

Begin to discuss pilot structure.

ASSIGNMENT: Team A e-mails pilots to the professor and classmates no later than the Sunday following class at noon. Include a cover page describing the major changes you believe are necessary. Read Team A scripts and prepare written comments work.

<u>Week 2</u> – Characters

Discussion: How to break/re-break story TV-style.

Protagonist wants/needs. How is the protagonist's want/need going to drive the story in series? How many protagonists can we have? Can wants change?

Workshop – Team A scripts.

ASSIGNMENT: Team A – based on class feedback, begin a new outline (10-15 pages). I will send examples of outlines. Likely my own because I have them. Team B e-mails pilots to the professor and classmates no later than the Sunday following class at noon. Include a cover page describing the major changes you believe are necessary. Entire class read Team B scripts and prepare written comments work.

<u>Week 3</u> – Relationships

Discussion: Planting secrets and conflicts. How do the other characters relate to the protagonist? Are they obstacles or aids? What do they each want? Do this with characters already on the air.

Workshop — Team B scripts.

ASSIGNMENT: Team B begins a new outline (10-15 pages) based on class feedback. Team A e-mails a 10-15 page outline to professor and classmates by the Sunday following class at noon.

<u>Week 4</u> – Outlines and outlinitis

Discussion: How to break/re-break. What is outlinitis and how do you cure it? Is there an antibiotic? Hint: Nope.

Workshop — Team A outlines.

ASSIGNMENT: Team B e-mails a 10-15 page outline to professor and classmates by the Sunday following class at noon. Team A starts re-writing based on new outlines and class feedback. Come next week with your favorite opening scenes from pilots that have been on the air and be ready to explain what is great about them.

<u>Week 5</u> – The beginning

Discussion: What makes a great first scene? What is a story turn? What is an act break? Why does structure exist? How does binge culture change structure and storytelling?

Workshop —Team B outlines.

ASSIGNMENT: Team A e-mails 10 re-written pages (ideally teaser into first act) to professor and classmates by the Sunday following class at noon. Team B starts re-writing based on new outlines and class feedback.

Week 6 – Scene work

Discussion: What is a scene? What is it doing there? The but-so exercise. The be a good party guest rule. And other fun ways to make sure scenes should exist.

Workshop — Team A first acts.

ASSIGNMENT: Team B e-mails 10 re-written pages (ideally teaser into first act) to professor and classmates by the Sunday following class at noon. Team A continues re-writing based on new outlines and class feedback.

Week 7 – Tone

Discussion: What is tone? Why is it important? How do you put the reader in the right headspace to take in your story?

Workshop — Team B first acts.

ASSIGNMENT: Team A addresses notes AND e-mails another 10 re-written pages (first act into second) to professor and classmates by the Sunday following class at noon. Team B continues re-writing based on class feedback.

Week 8 – Dialogue

Discussion: When to show not tell or tell not show? Ascertaining each character sounds different. What is a non-line and do you care?

Workshop — Team A scripts.

ASSIGNMENT: Team B addresses notes AND e-mails another 10 re-written pages (first act into second) to professor and classmates by the Sunday following class at noon. Team A continues re-writing based on class feedback.

ALL students listen in to a real-life conversation and write it up into a two-page scene to bring to class and read out loud.

Week 9 – Dialogue part deux

Discussion: What is the difference between real-life dialogue and written dialogue? What version fits your show? How does tone intersect with dialogue?

Workshop — Team B scripts.

ASSIGNMENT: Team A addresses notes AND e-mails another 10 re-written pages (second act and onward) to professor and classmates by the Sunday before spring break ends at noon. Team B continues re-writing based on class feedback.

Week 10 – Theme

Discussion: What is your show trying to say? Why does it matter? Themes can vary from episode to episode and/or season to season. Depends on the show.

Workshop — Team A scripts

ASSIGNMENT: Team B addresses notes AND e-mails another 10 re-written pages (second act and onward) to professor and classmates by the Sunday following class at noon. Team A continues re-writing based on class feedback… you should be almost done. I'll send some show bibles for funsies.

Week 11 – The first season/Show bible

Discussion: Plotting the stories beyond the pilot. How to break your first season and beyond. Gridding and other fun tools.

Workshop — Team A scripts

ASSIGNMENT: Team A addresses notes AND e-mails another 10 re-written pages (second act and onward) to professor and classmates by the Sunday following class at noon. Team B continues re-writing based on class feedback.

Week 12 – How to pitch

Discussion: The 10 necessary elements for a great pitch. Practice pitches.

Workshop - Team B scripts

ASSIGNMENT: Everyone should be rounding the bases toward home…

Week 13 – The pitch

Discussion: Present 10-15 minute verbal pitches for your series.

ASSIGNMENT: Your completed second draft of the pilot script, a revised one-page summary of your first season, and a written series pitch.

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.

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

BUT THAT'S OK BECAUSE WE ARE ON ZOOM.