

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 366 63078R Playwriting II
Spring 2021 Monday & Wednesday 12 – 1:50 pm
Location: Online

Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Office: JEF 201, 950 W. Jefferson, Los Angeles 90089

Office Hours: Available: Mon & Wed 2:30 - 4 pm; Tuesday Noon – 3 pm; please note that office hours are by appointment only; contact me via email or phone, at least 24 hours in advance. For appointments outside these hours, I am available by videoconference. [*Spring 2021—Zoom only!*]

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IT Help: USC Information Technology Services
<http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts IT – Mr. Prakash Shirke, Contact Info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288.

Course Description and Overview

Catalogue description: 366 Playwriting II (4, FaSp) Continuation of the work begun in THTR 365.
Prerequisite: THTR 365.

Through letters, there is no road too difficult to travel, no idea too confusing to be ordered. It comes like rain from clouds; it renews the vital spirit. Inscribed on bronze and marble, it honors every virtue. It sings in flute and strings and every day is made newer.
— Lu Chi, *Wen Fu: The Art of Writing*, 200 A.D.

Learning Objectives

In this workshop, you will experience the creative process firsthand at both the intuitive and technical level while being guided through the writing of a play.

Playwriting 2 picks up where Playwriting 1 left off and expands on the exploration of the art and craft of dramatic writing. Our focus is not just a finished product but also is on *process*, so that we can go on this creative journey again and again. With that in mind, we'll investigate: sources of inspiration and strategies for creativity; character development; multiple options for generation of stories; tools for sustaining story—and suspense; intentional use of language; theatricality/spectacle; story structure; plus analysis and revision. All work is geared toward the completion of a full-length stage play (55 – 90 minutes long):

Emphasis is placed on empathy and metaphor as each person strives to:

- write a full-length play, partially revised;
- discover and evolve his/her own unique, artistic voice;
- develop a personalized creative process—including inspiration, exploring, drafting, revising;
- experiment with new modes of writing for theatre;

- experiment with new delivery systems for theatre in a time of coronavirus restrictions.

Development of the play is essential—as is development of the imagination. Thus, hand in hand with writing is the course goal of discovering and evolving your own unique, artistic voice. Each week discussion and writing exercises will accompany the workshopping of pages, i.e., presenting material for exploration and critique as a prelude to rewriting, expanding, and polishing.

Remember: We are seekers. There are untold stories out there and voices we have not heard from. Let's give them a chance to speak. How can we bring this to the stage?

We're also adopting key elements of USC's 21st-century vision as our own by:

- GOING GREEN
- CONNECTING
- TRANSFORMING

What does this mean?

[Spring 2021—Of course we're GOING GREEN. We're not using paper. We meeting online! Saving trees—and keeping healthy.] GOING GREEN means that we will save on time, energy, and paper. You will not print your work; instead, we will project your scenes, brainstorming materials, revision plans, etc. onto a screen. You won't print your Final Project; instead, you'll turn in the script electronically via Blackboard and I will give you feedback via comments on Blackboard. Handouts and course materials will be paperless, available online on BlackBoard.

CONNECTING means that we will make contact in several ways—with each other, with the creative community, with the world at large. We'll connect with each other in class to form a support network so that everyone feels secure taking artistic risks; we'll connect via text message and online to keep up to the minute on what's going on in class; you may even want to connect on your own in smaller groups using Zoom to form creative brainstorming teams. Feel free! We'll also stay attuned to what's going on in American theatre—[particularly in times of pandemic](#)—and we'll look at what's going on in the world and explore how we can use art for growth and healing. What new strategies have had to evolve to keep theatre alive? I would like for us to look at where we live—the West, in fact, the Western Edge. The Pacific Rim. What stories are unique to this place? How can we make a connection between where we are and the world in general?

TRANSFORMING means that we will be looking at theatre writing as a way to effect transformation in our lives, and in the lives of others; we'll look at creating theatre from a place of empathy, from a place of heart-driven concern for humanity; we'll look at culture and trends and attempt to define and redefine playwriting for the 21st century.

Prerequisite(s): THTR 365, Playwriting 1

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

AUBERGINE. Julia Cho.

STICK FLY. Lydia Diamond.

DESCRIBE THE NIGHT. Rajiv Joseph.

SONG OF EXTINCTION. EM Lewis.

MR. BURNS. Anne Washburn

And additional handouts to be supplied by instructor on Blackboard.

The School of Dramatic Arts' Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each student in playwriting courses to read at least seven plays as part of the course and to investigate them critically. You are also encouraged to read additional plays, particularly contemporary work. Plays will be suggested in class. The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Grading criteria: *The quality of work for the inspiration board, the reading and discussion segment, and the ongoing writing segment is determined by the thoroughness of the effort, the continuing process, and the imagination displayed. (More information below under the descriptions of the specific components of the grade.) The rubric for determining the quality of work for the Final Project is described below in the detailed description of the project.*

Grading Scale for SDA: **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

Grading Breakdown

Excellent: A (4) = 100-94; A- (3.7) = 93-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: D+ = 69 – 66; D = 65-64; D = 63 - 60 (1.3) = 60s; F (0) = 59 and below

- “Excellent” indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight; “Good” means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material; “Average” indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps; “Poor” indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student’s understanding of the class material; “Failure” is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material.

- When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been good, and will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

Grading Components

Your grade will be based on multiple components: a source/inspiration board (this is a presentation), ongoing writing and revision of your play, completion of reading assignments and presentations re: the reading (may be oral; may be written; may be quizzes), participation in class

exercises and discussion, providing feedback for other students' works-in-progress, and completion of your Final Project.

Please bear in mind that you earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline. Assignments are accepted only within one week of due date. After that, they are considered a missed assignment, which counts as zero.

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows (see below for details):

Inspiration Board	10 percent
Reading and Presentations; Posts; Quiz; Exercises	20 percent
Ongoing Research, Writing, Revision, Analysis	30 percent
Participation	15 percent
Final Project (revised draft of play) - Final Exam	25 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

The Inspiration Board is your starting point for what you will be writing about; it is part of your research. It's a presentation of the things that move you; it can be a combination of poetry, photos, doodles, news reports, artwork, charts and data, archival material, music, video—any kind of source material. It may be done as a simple projection of various items from your computer, or it may be done in a distinct format, such as Keynote, Tumblr, Prezi, Power Point; it may include items that inspire you in general, or items that relate particularly to what's on your mind right now (even if you don't know what to do with them), or items that are even more specific and directly relate to a play you want to write. The Inspiration Board is a tool with which you tap into your imagination; you can use it as an active, multimedia form of brainstorming, as a way to start to explore ideas, as a way to begin to frame your thoughts, and as a way to promote discussion with other artists to enhance your vision. The "board" part of the Inspiration Board is virtual—you will project your inspirations onto the screen.

Your Final Project is a REVISED draft of your full-length play. You may not have time for a completely polished rewrite of your full-length script, but you should at least take steps to begin the revision process. The project will be graded on both artistic merit AND progress, i.e., growth from early exploratory work to final draft. Elements to be assessed are: character development - 25 percent; language (distinct character voice; rhythm, pace, metaphor) – 25 percent; story/structure/theatricality – 25 percent; overall achievement (includes how well script works as a whole, plus professional appearance of script) – 25 percent.

Extra Points Projects: For extra points opportunities, you may write a short-short play (2 to 3 minutes) for a specific social justice issue. As an alternative, you may also want to try for the Judith Barlow Prize (details will be available on Blackboard) and/or you may also want to contribute a piece to a theatre documentary project with SACRIFICE ZONE: LOS ANGELES.

HINT: Keep a Creative Journal! This is an archive of your explorations for writing; it may include jottings off the top of your head, stuff from your Inspiration Board, research, ideas, resources for current and future writing, and exercises and raw material from class. It should include a character bank. NOTE: It's no longer necessary to keep an actual journal, on paper. Due to the proliferation of smart phone and tablet apps for storing notes, etc., the Creative Journal may now be electronic. But do keep one. It will make your writing so much easier!

Participation

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. This course is modeled along the lines of a professional, artistic workshop; thus, as a member of such a workshop, your participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your colleagues' work as well. Theatre is a highly collaborative, community-oriented medium and play development is a key part of the life of a playwright. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues' work. Absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare the assigned work that is due and turn it in immediately upon return to the workshop.

What does participation entail?

Participation includes: presentations; in-class exercises; discussion of assigned reading; and constructive, guided feedback provided for the other writers' work. The participation grade is determined as follows: For each class session, you get a check mark for showing up (which constitutes a B); you get a check mark with a plus sign (+) if you participate diligently (which constitutes an A); you get a check mark with a negative sign (-) if your participation is less than adequate (which constitutes a C). Please respect your community of writers and be on time. Chronic lateness will constitute a lowering of the participation grade. [\[\[Special note for Spring 2021: We are aware that some of you may experience difficulties with technology. The class will be recorded if you need to attend it asynchronously. An alternative exercise or assignment will be required if you miss the live session of a class and have to attend the recorded version.\]\]](#)

Assignments will be presented in class and/or submitted as PDFs, depending on the assignment. **Note:** *The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING state that no late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*

Additional Policies

1. You are entering into a collaborative relationship with fellow writers and, thus, it is your responsibility to be available to your workshop colleagues for feedback, analysis, and support.
2. All workshop members must be treated with respect.
3. You are required to attend the workshop and to be on time. Tardiness is defined as being 15 minutes late or more. Excessive tardiness will affect your ongoing writing and participation grade. Only one (1) unexcused absence is allowed. [\[\[Please note: As stated above, if you cannot attend the live session, you are required to keep up with the class by watching the recorded version and doing an alternative assignment.\]\]](#)
4. Absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance). [\[\[Note: In Spring 2021, inability to connect to the internet counts as an emergency. Please contact me via text or email when you are experiencing difficulties. **Communicate!**\]\]](#)
5. All assignments, written and/or otherwise, must be prepared on time and turned in (or presented) on the deadline date. Late assignments will be marked down due to the missed deadline. Assignments not turned in within a week of deadline count as missed assignments (zero credit).
6. IF YOU MISS CLASS: It is your responsibility—and SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY—to make up work you have missed and to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from your classmates or Blackboard [or the Zoom recording](#). I will not be repeating lectures or class discussion; office hours are not for the purposes of repeating lectures, but rather are for the

purpose of helping you with areas in which you need guidance or where you are confused or where you are dealing with challenges. Class materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. [The recorded session of the class will be available on your Zoom recordings in Blackboard.](#) For your syllabus, handouts, etc., go to Blackboard.

7. Please check your e-mail regularly to see if there are any changes in class meeting, etc. On rare occasions, it becomes necessary to make changes to class meeting details. If I am unable to provide you with this information in the preceding class, I will send you the information via e-mail and/or text message.
8. For collaborations, you may work using a number of collaborative tools, such as Slack, Google documents, Google Drive.
9. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail or text message at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee I will receive your message with sufficient time to make arrangements to meet with you. Please note that I have included multiple ways to contact me on the front page of this syllabus.

Zoom Etiquette

"Netiquette" or "internet etiquette," is important for collaborative work. Please respect the following guidelines:

- Whenever possible, please use your computer to log-in to the class rather than your phone. This will help us with the quality of visuals and audio, plus it will present fewer problems when sharing screens.
- If you have technical issues during class, please contact: USC Information Technology Services <http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts – Mr. Prakash Shirke. Contact Info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288.
- Your camera must be on at all times, unless you are requested to hide video.
- Please attempt to log-in from an environment that does not have distracting background noise, such as pets, family members, machinery, music. If you find yourself in a situation with distracting noise, please use ear buds or headphones.
- When not speaking (for example, during a reading of a scene, when you are not playing a role), please mute your microphone. During discussions feel free to leave your mic on.
- Remember that you are in class, therefore behavior appropriate to class should be followed. Please do not walk around, leave the room, read, play games, etc. during class.
- You may use your devices for research that enhances the discussion during class, but please stay attuned to what is going on while engaged in research.
- Try to take turns speaking. Remember that Zoom creates problems when voices overlap.
- The chat box will be available to you to use during class, however please don't abuse it. For example, remember that everyone can see what you type in the chat. Therefore your comments should not contain private messages to another class member—which can be read in the saved chat. Also, try to use chat to enhance the discussion, rather than interrupt it.
- Remember: The class session is being recorded. (This includes the chat.)
- Be respectful of others at all times.
- Remember: We're all in this together. Now more than ever.

Synchronous Session Recording notice

[Recordings of each class session will be available to class members on Blackboard.](#)

Sharing of Course Materials Outside of the Learning Environment

USC has a policy that prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Weeks 1 – 3 Jan 20 Jan 25, 27 Feb 1, 3	Preparation & Gathering Introduction: Where Are We and Where Are We Going? Assessment & Challenge. Consider: Surprising yourself; writing the best play you <i>can't</i> write; writing beyond your comfort zone. Consider: Uncovering the Stories That Haven't Been Told or Uncovering New Ways of Looking at Old Themes	Discussion: Elements of drama. Elements of ritual. Empathy - The Starting Point of the playwright; Metaphor – The Inner Heart of the Playwright's Work. Inspiration – from other art; current/historical events; myths; people. Ideas Unleashed—Reading other writers' contemporary plays. Why & how's a play's a play—and not a screenplay? Writing outside traditional expectations, roles, and rules. Consider: Theatricality, tone, style, and dealing with the impossible. Weekly Wrtnng X's.	Week 1: Begin to collect your resources, e.g., research, burning ideas, poetic impulses, images, emotional foundation, monologues, character banks, music/soundtrack. Week 1: Read the assigned plays. Week 2: On your own—Create your Inspiration Board. <i>Be prepared to present if called upon.</i> Week 2: Discussion of the five assigned plays. Week 3: Story meeting & brainstorming session: What MUST you write? Week 3: On your own - Create four characters for your character bank. Derive and develop at least one from myth , one based on historical research , one based on a current event , and one totally from your imagination . <i>Be prepared to present if called upon.</i> Write a monologue for at least one character. (Hint: Characters may start to generate story and scene ideas as they talk. Let them!) <i>Be prepared to present if called upon.</i>

			<p>Week 3: On your own—Begin to experiment with scenes.</p> <p>Beginning week 3: <i>Blog Posts</i> - Write a short entry about one of the assigned readings each week. 100 – 250 words.</p> <p>Note: We will be doing many things simultaneously. Some people will be working on different types of material. No worries. Please stay on top of things and continue to develop your work in your way.</p>
<p>Weeks 4 - 6</p> <p>Feb 8, 10 Feb 17 Feb 22, 24</p> <p>Note: No class Feb 15 – President’s Day</p>	<p>Exploration</p> <p>The Character’s Journey – A Mission of Transformation.</p> <p>Want Versus Need.</p> <p>Story Forms – A Range of Ways to Construct a Play.</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>Does it have to be linear?</p> <p>Translating “Reality” through Imagery.</p> <p>Taking on language: sound, rhythm, meaning, hidden life.</p> <p>Putting it all together: A preliminary look at structure and plot variations.</p> <p>Weekly Writing X’s</p>	<p>Week 4: Write an exploratory or experimental scene. (It could be for a short play, for your proposed full-length play, or simply an experiment.)</p> <p>Week 5: Write a new exploratory scene. (Note: It may be the first scene of your Final Project play, a scene from the middle, or the last scene of the play. It’s not necessary that you write in order at this point. You may also write a scene that is purely exploration and ultimately doesn’t make it into the play. That’s fine. This is all part of the process.)</p> <p>Week 6: Story meeting. Brainstorm further ideas for your Final Project Play.</p> <p>Blog Posts Weeks 4 - 7: Continue writing blog posts on the assigned plays—one for each play. 100 – 250 words.</p> <p>Hint: Look at your writing exercises and monologues for possible raw material for your play.</p>
<p>Weeks 7 - 8</p> <p>Mar 1, 3 Mar 8, 10</p>	<p>The Journey Continues</p> <p>Sensory Work/Metaphor: Staying Attuned to the Natural World, the Senses.</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>Consider also: Conflict & Contradictions; Miscommunication and Misdirection.</p> <p>Subtext.</p>	<p>Weeks 7 and 8: Workshop new scenes for your FPP. Present discussion/new ideas/plans for FPP.</p> <p>Midterm check in script; due March 10: Turn in script pages</p>

	Anticipating an Ending.	The Worst-Case Scenario—Pushing Your Character to the Edge.	from your FPP for midterm assessment. <i>What does this mean?</i> Turn in as much as you can to show what you are working on; you may even turn in a raw draft of the entire play-- which might mean that there are some scenes that are written and some that are merely ideas or early versions of what you may write. Again, this is a RAW draft, not a first draft. If, for example, there are scenes that you intend to write but haven't gotten around to writing, add a placeholder in the script or describe it in theatrical terms. See how far you can get in your script.
Week 9 Mar 15, 17	The Ongoing Writing Going Beyond: Ways to Risk, Ways to Play, and Looking for a Challenge	Discussion The Pitfalls of the Middle. Staying Motivated. Q&A: Feedback on the midterm pages.	Week 9: Present new scenes and project plans. Keep working on your play.
Weeks 10 - 12 Mar 22, 24 Mar 29, 31 Apr 5 No class April 7— Wellness Day	Continuing & Reimagining Exploration of Rewrite Tools. Traditional and Non-, Mechanical and Non-	Discussion What is missing? What does the play need? How to go deeper? Continue assessment of raw material, script pages, inspirational material, and imagine your way to a play.	Week 10, 11, 12: Present scenes from FPP. Week 12: Self-help. Assess the raw material you've created, along with the pages you've generated. Assess risk-taking and construct a challenge. Look to your sources of inspiration for your FPP. <i>Present your end-game plan.</i> Do revisions as needed. Prepare for presentations.
Weeks 13 – 15 Apr 12, 14 Apr 19, 21 Apr 26, 28	Works in Progress Time to fly!	Workshop In-class presentations of full scripts or large segments of scripts from each writer. Schedule TBA. Plus Week 15: End Game. Last Look Q&As. Where to go next—how to submit a script.	Weeks 13, 14, 15: Present your script or script segment according to the schedule as created in class. PROVIDE FEEDBACK to the other writers as their work is presented. Continue to refine, revise, rework your script. TURN IN: Your Final Project Full-length play. Due May 7, 2021.
FINAL Friday May 7	FINAL EXAM 11 am - 1 pm	FINAL PROJECT PLAY DUE by 1 pm May 7, 2021.	Date: For confirmation of the date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC <i>Schedule of Classes</i> at www.usc.edu/soc .

REMINDER: Use Blackboard as a resource. Class materials, information, handouts, additional essays, source materials, etc., are posted on the class site on Blackboard.

[W]e write because it gives us courage, and if courage, why not life? Because somehow finding ourselves repeatedly visa-less on the borders of love, we seek to write our way back in.—Ehud Havazalet, "To Live in Tiflis in the Springtime"

By failing to read or listen to poets, a society dooms itself to inferior modes of articulation--of the politician, or the salesman, or the charlatan--in short, to its own. It forfeits...its own evolutionary potential.—Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason*, 1996

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:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
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

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

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, 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

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

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

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.