

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS  
Writing Division  
CTWR 513: Writing the Short Script  
Fall 2021 – (Two Units, Required, Section 19224D)

Instructor: Don Bohlinger  
Class Schedule: Tuesday 10:00-12:50  
Class Location: SCA 362  
Office Hours: Friday 1-3, Tuesday 2-4, SCA 354, or by appointment  
Contact Information: [dfb@usc.edu](mailto:dfb@usc.edu), (email is best) Cell phone: 323 804 0110

**COURSE OBJECTIVE:**

This is an intensive screenwriting workshop designed to help you master the basic tools of writing for the cinematic arts (visualization, the scene, the short script.) Working together with 514a, the class will also provide weekly exercises designed to develop your cinematic imagination; you will be honing your skills of observation as well as studying how memory and experience can bring originality and brilliance to your characters and stories.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

513 is designed to fill your writer's toolbox, a supply of techniques and tricks of the trade that you will use throughout your career to help you to bring your film and television stories to life.

We will begin with visualization, the concept of telling a story with pictures. You will learn to bring the inner life of your characters to the screen without dialogue by using planting and payoff, action and activity, location, props, costume, atmosphere and motivation. We will discover that it is possible (and indeed necessary) to tell your stories visually, to make them compelling and rich with meaning by using these basic techniques.

Later, we will combine these techniques with dialogue in a second stage of exercises designed to teach you the major building block of cinema – the scene. We will expand our work with character and study the ingredients necessary to make any scene work. By exploring our character's goals, intentions, or "wants" we will discover that the lifeblood of any scene is conflict.

The third aspect of the class will deal with writing a short screenplay. We will combine the lessons learned in 513 (visualization, scene) with what we are learning in 514a (ideation, character, tension, and the three-act structure) to outline and write a short film script (10 minutes in length.)

Your final weeks of the class will be spent writing scenes for your 514a feature script and polishing your short script for production.

Members of the class will be graded on attendance (more than one absence will cause your grade to drop by a half-grade,) fulfillment of the weekly assignments, class participation (you must read and respond to your colleagues work), the final short script and your feature scenes.

**COURSE GOALS AND ASSIGNMENTS:**

Writers are encouraged to keep their scenes and characters unique and personal, to use their own experience and to strive to find their voice.

Writers will learn how to create compelling characters.

Writers will learn how to tell their stories visually.

Writers will learn how to write a dramatic scene.

Writers will learn how to write a short script.

Writers will learn how to rewrite their short script: character, theme, mood, dialogue and scene work will be emphasized.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

Weeks 1-3 will deal with visualization

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| Aug 24 | Atmosphere (In Class)<br>Homework: Type Feature Script (2 week assignment)<br>Read a feature script – answer story questions<br>Write Prep for a Date |
| Aug 31 | Prep for a date<br>Homework: Read a feature script – answer story question<br>Write Character Environment   |
| Sept 7 | Character Environment<br>Homework: Read a feature script – answer story questions<br>Write Seduction Scene  |

Weeks 4-6 will deal with the dramatic scene.

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| Sept 14 | Dramatic Scene – Seduction<br>Homework: Read a tv script – answer question<br>Write Interrogation scene                 |
| Sept 21 | Dramatic Scene – Interrogation<br>Homework: Read a script – answer questions<br>Write Creative Lie Scene                |
| Sept 28 | Dramatic Scene – Creative Lie<br>Homework – Read a script – answer questions<br>Write Supernatural Story/Practical Joke |

Weeks 7-9 will deal with writing the short script.

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| Oct 5  | Short Story Patterns<br>Homework: Read a script – answer questions<br>Write Memory, Experience, Observation |
| Oct 12 | Short Story Patterns<br>Homework: Read a script – answer questions<br>Write ten page script                 |
| Oct 19 | Short Script<br>Homework: Read a script – answer questions<br>Prepare Three Feature Pitches                 |

Weeks 10-15 will deal with writing scenes from your 514a feature script.

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| Oct 26 | Feature Idea                                     |
| Nov 2  | Feature Idea                                     |
| Nov 9  | Feature Script 1st 30                            |
| Nov 19 | Feature Script 2nd 30                            |
| Nov 16 | Feature Script 3rd 30                            |
| Nov 23 | Feature Script 4th 30                            |
| Nov 30 | Feature Script Final Revisions                   |
| Dec 9  | Final Date: Rewritten Short Script Due (12 Noon) |

**READING LIST:**

- 10 Feature Screenplays (you can substitute 3 Television Pilots)
- On Film-making, Alexander Mackendrick (recommended)
- Your Screenplay Sucks, William M. Akers (recommended)
- I will be handing out other materials in class and via email.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA:**

CTWR 513 grades will be based on careful consideration in the following areas of the students' work:

- Student must demonstrate understanding of the fundamental principles of visualization, creating compelling characters and writing the scene via the weekly assignments.
- The student must demonstrate an understanding of how to write a short script via the final short script assignment.
- The student must demonstrate the understanding of how to rewrite a scene.
- The student must demonstrate the ability to read and respond to other student's work.

**GRADING WEIGHTS:**

CTWR 513 grades are based on:

- Weekly Assignments.....30%
- Reading and Responding to Workshop Assignments.....20%
- Final Short Script.....20%
- Feature Script.....30%

**LETTER GRADES:**

100-93....A	82-80....B-	69-67.....D+
93-90.....A-	79-77....C+	66-63.....D
89-87.....B+	76-73....C	62-60.....D-
86-83.....B	72-70....C-	0-59.....F

**Presentation:**

As you are hoping to enter the film industry as professionals, I expect your work to be prepared in a professional manner. Screenplay formatting errors, typos, bad spelling or grammar and overall sloppiness are NOT ACCEPTABLE.

**Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is essential to your learning experience. 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

equates to one full absence. More than one unexcused absence will negatively affect your final grade.

Excused absences (or absences with “reasonable explanations”) 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. Students should let faculty know about any reasonable absences as a matter of professional courtesy, and also as a means of staying up to date with the class.

Your well-being is of utmost importance to the John Wells Writing Division and to your faculty. If you find yourself in a situation where you may need to miss several classes due to unforeseen circumstances, please contact your professor immediately so your professor can assist you in finding the appropriate University care and guidance.

### **Classroom Decorum**

The professor expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a fragile process and while we should ask questions, analyze and even challenge, we want to remain supportive, always keeping in mind that the screenplay is fragile work in progress. A working writer needs to develop the art of collaboration while working with their peers. As a working writer you will need to be able to work constructively with directors, producers and studio executives.

### **Laptop and Texting Policy**

Students may use their laptops at the discretion of the professor. Laptops may be used for note taking, but not for surfing the web unless it is part of a class project. Texting is not allowed during class time. Texting is distracting and disruptive. There is nothing that needs to be communicated to anyone except your classmates during class time.

Save your texting and surfing until class break.

### **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>

#### **PLEASE NOTE:**

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