

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMAMATIC ARTS
Writing Division
CTWR 514a: Basic Dramatic Screenwriting
Fall 2021 – (Two Units, Required, Section 19230D)

Instructor: Don Bohlinger
Class Schedule: Friday 10:00-12:50
Class Location: SCI 209
Office Hours: Friday 1-4, Tuesday 2-4, SCA 354, or by appointment
Contact Information: dfb@usc.edu, (email is best) Cell phone: 323 804 0110

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

This is an intensive screenwriting workshop designed to cultivate your cinematic imagination (the ability to discover and create unforgettable characters and stories) by honing your skills of observation as well as studying how memory and experience can bring originality and brilliance to those characters and stories. Once you have collected a notebook full of character and story ideas you will begin developing your first feature screenplay; the first draft of that screenplay is your final assignment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

514a is designed to spur your imagination through a series of exercises in ideation. Where do you find your characters and your stories? How do you make them personal, rich and full of meaning? What are the stories that captivate you? We will be responding to prompts designed to mine our own experiences, dreams, memories, and to sharpen our skills of observation. We will ask again and again: is there a story here? Is there a compelling character here? And more importantly: how do I tell my story and reveal my character in a way that is true to me as a writer and thus original? In assignments designed to inspire compelling characters and film ideas you will begin telling your stories to the class. One of these stories or characters will grow into your first feature screenplay.

The second aspect of the class will deal with writing your first feature script. Although we will touch briefly on story structure and the mechanics of screenwriting (don't worry, you will get more than your share of this before graduating), the main focus of this class is how to build a story from character. Who is your character? What is the situation that will compel the audience to watch? And what are the obstacles that block your character's progress, that prevent her from achieving her goal.

Both 513/514a classes are more about process than product; but in the end, if you stay true to who you are as a storyteller you will be surprised how compelling the final script will be.

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) and the final feature script.

WEEKLY PLAN:

The groundwork of this course is a weekly series of assignments that develop specific storytelling resources. They are presented and discussed in class. There will also be several in-class exercises. The work moves towards a 3-5 page prose treatment for your

feature script and culminates in the writing of your feature. In addition to other students' work there is some required reading and several recommended texts. Please note how the work of 513 overlaps with 514a after we complete the short script in 513.

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 feature script.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Aug. 27	Memory
Sept. 3	Experience
Sept. 10	Experience
Sept. 17	Observation
Sept. 24	Observation
Oct. 1	World
Oct. 8	Short
Oct 15	<i>Mid Semester Break</i>
Oct. 22	Feature Idea
Oct. 29	Feature Idea
Nov. 5	Feature 1st 30
Nov. 12	Feature 2nd 30
Nov. 19	Feature 3rd 30
Nov. 26	<i>Thanksgiving</i>
Dec. 3	Feature Final Pages/Questions
Dec. 13	Feature Due (Submit via email 12 Noon)

Lab on Diversity & Inclusion

A series of labs dealing with the subject of diversity and inclusion is required for all incoming graduate students and has been attached to this course. The classes will include a lecture and panel discussion with industry professionals, with a goal of increasing awareness and understanding of issues pertaining to diversity and inclusion. Attendance at these classes is mandatory. Absence can result your failing this course.

The Diversity and Inclusion classes meet on TBA dates and location.

READING LIST:

Where I'm Calling From, Raymond Carver, (recommended.) But we will be reading and talking about the first two stories in that collection: Nobody Said Anything and Bicycles, Muscles, Cigarettes.

On Writing, Stephen King (recommended)

10 Feature Scripts/TV Pilots

Other materials will be distributed in class and via email.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

CTWR 514a grades will be based the student's ability to demonstrate an understanding of the following fundamental principles of screen storytelling:

Ideation: the "where and how" to find your stories and characters

Observation exercises

Memory exercises

Experience exercises

How to create feature stories for screen.
How to develop and write the first draft of a feature screenplay (format counts.)
How to read and respond to your fellow student's work. (The writers table)

GRADING WEIGHTS:

CTWR 514a grades are based on:

Weekly Writing Assignments.....	40%
Reading and Responding to Workshop Assignments.....	20%
Final Feature Script.....	40%

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