

**Cinema-Television 514a**  
**Fundamentals of Screenwriting II (2 units)**  
**Basic Dramatic Screenwriting**  
**Fall 2021**

**Instructor:** Ted Braun  
**Email:** [tebraun@usc.edu](mailto:tebraun@usc.edu)

**Friday 10:00 am – 12:50 pm, SCA 345**  
**Office Hours: by appointment, SCA 348**

### Purpose

This is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you develop your imaginative resources – your faculties of memory and observation, your responsiveness to characters and worlds around you, and your ability to discover and create unforgettable stories. The emphasis is not on your capacity for invention, but your ability to respond to and develop your experience of the world.

The aim is for you find an engaging, empathetic cinematic character, develop a feature story that emerges out of that character's complex inner life, then write a feature screenplay of that story. Developing your capacity to make strong effective choices about what you write is a central goal of the course.

514a is taken in conjunction with Fundamentals of Screenwriting I, 513, which develops specific screenwriting skills and emphasizes technique and craft. In this course the emphasis is on the discovery and development of stories, and a way of telling them, that are yours alone. You then take that understanding and express it in the form of a feature screenplay. Together the courses provide you with a foundation for your future as a professional screenwriter.

### Plan

The groundwork of this course is a series of weekly assignments that develop specific storytelling resources. These are presented and discussed in class. In addition to that you'll engage in several in-class exercises. The work moves toward a short (3-5 page) prose treatment for a feature screenplay and culminates writing a screenplay of that story.

### Weekly Assignments

The course leads you through three sets of assignments that develop different aspects of your primary storytelling resource, your imagination.

The first assignments focus on what've you been through and what you see around you:

- Memory
- Experience
- Observation

The second set of assignments develop your ability to move what you've lived and know into imaginary circumstances:

- Fact v. Fiction
- Extreme Characters
- The World of a Story

The final set of assignments acquaint you with a process for finding and developing a feature story focused on an unforgettable, emotionally engaging main character:

- Main Characters
- Five Key Scenes
- A Feature Story

The weekly assignments generally ask you to prepare a story or stories for class. You are of course expected to write. But frequently you'll be asked to tell your story to the class, not to read what you've written. The idea is to develop your skills at holding an audience's attention and creating emotional and unforgettable tales.

In the middle of the term the classroom work overlaps with that in 513. You'll be writing your first short script. We will then return to assignments that develop a feature story out of the inner life of a single character. In the final weeks of the semester, we turn to writing a feature screenplay and the classroom work again overlaps with 513. Consult the last page of this syllabus – where the assignments for both classes are shown - for a clearer picture of exactly what's expected in the last few weeks of the term.

The give and take of classroom discussion is a substantial part of the course; it's expected that you participate and engage in the development of the stories of the other members of the class in a constructive, supportive and enthusiastic manner.

The syllabus is subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

### Schedule of Writing Assignments

August 27	Memory	October 22	Feature Idea ( <i>chars</i> )
September 3	Experience 1 & 2	October 29	Feature Idea ( <i>story</i> )
September 10	Observation	November 5	Feature 1st 30 p
September 17	True False	November 12	Feature 2 <sup>nd</sup> 30 p
September 24	Extreme Character	November 19	Feature 3 <sup>rd</sup> 30 p
October 1	World ( <i>photos</i> )	November 26	NO CLASS
October 8	World ( <i>story</i> )	December 3	Feature Final (Tue)
October 15	NO CLASS		

### Films & Screenplays

From time to time you'll be asked to view films or read screenplays to support discussion and provide an analytical and imaginative backdrop for our work.

#### Required Texts

The Tools of Screenwriting, Howard & Mabley  
My Last Sigh, Buñuel  
Fortunately, Charlip

#### Recommended Texts

To The Actor, Chekov (Xerox)  
On Directing, Clurman  
On Filmmaking Mackendrick  
King Lear, Shakespeare

### Grading

Your grade will be based on classroom participation (10%), in-class work (10%), the fulfillment and quality of the weekly assignments (40%), and the quality and fulfillment of the feature story and the feature screenplay (40%).

You can't participate in class if you're not in class. You're expected to be on time. Lateness and absences will affect your grade. (See attendance policy below.)

An "A" is for truly exceptional work; a "B" is for good work; and a "C" is for average work. Simply completing the assigned work is, in and of itself, no guarantee of a passing, let alone a high grade.

**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%

## Social Media & Recording

Class discussion should be considered private academic communications. We'll be sharing personal stories and intellectual property. If you tweet, have a blog, or engage in another form of ongoing posts, anything covered in this class - including lecture material and the assignments - is considered off limits. Recordings of class are not permitted without the instructor's permission and the consent of classmates. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction by the University.

## Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Phones off. Laptops closed.

## 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 in your failing this course. Any questions about the labs should be directed to Evan Hughes, Interim Assistant Dean of Diversity and Inclusion: [ehughes@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:ehughes@cinema.usc.edu).

The Diversity and Inclusion classes meet on the following dates in SCA 108.

**Friday, August 27; 2pm-2-5:50pm**  
**Friday, September 24; 2pm-5:50pm**  
**Friday, October 8; 2pm-5:50pm**  
**Friday, October 29; 2pm-5:50pm**  
**Friday, December 3; 2pm-5:50pm**

## Writing Division Attendance Policy:

This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is important. 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 equals one full absence. Two unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered by a half grade point (Ex. A to A-) Any further unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered another two thirds of a point (ex: B to a C+) for each absence

Excused absences 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.

If you find you must miss class due to personal emergency or personal crisis, please contact your professor as soon as possible so they can assist you in finding the appropriate University care and guidance. Your health and well-being are of utmost importance to the Wells Writing Division and to your Faculty.

Two absences result in your grade being lowered one step (A to an A-); a third absence in another two steps (A- to B+). Two late arrivals equal an absence.

### **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](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, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

#### **Support Systems:**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://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](https://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](http://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](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://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](http://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 Student Accessibility Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[osas.usc.edu](http://osas.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](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://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](mailto: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**

**FALL 2021**  
**Weekly Assignments**  
**513/514a**  
**Ted Braun**

**513**

**Tue. 10 – 12:50 pm**

Aug 24      Atmosphere & Starters (In Class)  
Aug 31      Preparation For A Date  
Sept 7      Roomates & Character/Environment  
Sept 14      Dramatic Scene  
Sept 21      Dramatic Scene  
Sept 28      Dramatic Scene  
Oct 5      Short Outlines (MID-TERM due)  
Oct 12      SHORT OUTLINE  
Oct 19      SHORT SCREENPLAY  
Oct 26      Feature Idea (Scenes)  
Nov 2      Individual Meetings(Revised Short)  
Nov 9      Feature Script 1<sup>st</sup> 30 p  
Nov 16      Feature 2<sup>nd</sup> 30 p  
Nov 23      Feature 3<sup>rd</sup> 30 p  
Nov 30      **Feature Final (Fri Group)**  
Dec 8      **HOLD FOR MAKEUP CLASS**

**514a**

**Fri. 10 – 12:50 pm**

August 27  
September 3  
September 10  
September 17  
September 24  
October 1  
October 8  
October 15  
October 22  
October 29  
November 5  
November 12  
November 19  
November 26  
December 3  
Memory  
Experience 1 & 2  
Observation  
True/False  
Extreme Character  
World (photos)  
World (story)  
NO CLASS  
Feature Idea (*Characters*)  
Feature Idea (*Story*)  
Feature Script 1<sup>st</sup> 30  
Feature 2<sup>nd</sup> 30 p  
Feature 3<sup>rd</sup> 30 p  
THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS  
**Feature Final (Tue Group)**