

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

**ADVANCED HALF HOUR TELEVISION SERIES
CTWR 534
#19253
Fall 2021**

**Instructor: F.J. Pratt
Class schedule: Wednesdays, 10am – 12:50pm
Class Location: SCI 209 (We're back in person!!!)
Office Hours: Whenever... I'm always available!
Email: fjpratt@usc.edu**

Course Objective

The course objective is to gain an understanding of and getting experience in, how to write an episode for a current half hour comedy series. At the end of the semester, the completed, polished script will be the final for the class as well as a viable sample of your writing.

Course Description

An introduction and guide to crafting a half hour comedy script for industry.

Course Reading

The TV Writer's Handbook by Ellen Sandler.
The best kind of reading is getting a hold of produced scripts!

Grading Criteria

On-time attendance, (should be a breeze, since everyone is home!) class participation and handing in assignment in a timely, complete manner are mandatory for the workshop process. In an ever-changing creative landscape, personal professionalism is one thing a writer can always depend on.

It goes like this...

10% participation (*this is a big deal with me. See below!*)

10% story pitches

25% story outline

15% first act

15% second act

25% final draft

The final draft will be accessed for the following qualities...

1. Does it realize the promise of the Story Outline?
2. Are the voices of the characters true to the original series?
3. Is the draft correct in structure and form?

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%

Expectation of Professionalism: All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper script 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: The use of personal laptops in class is encouraged. Cruising the Internet and or/texting while we are in session is a not. A warning for the first offence will be followed by a lowering of a grade for the second offence.

Writing Division Attendance Policy: Yes, we will be starting the Semester virtually. Students are expected log in on time, prepared for each class, and meet professional standards. Students are allowed two absences throughout the semester.

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: Exceptions will be made in the case of religious holidays and DSP accommodations.

In the case of medical emergencies, family emergencies, or allowances needed for personal well-being, all concerns must be communicated and approved by the Instructor. If there is a difference of opinion, the student can contact the Writing Division at (213) 740-3303 or writing@cinema.usc.edu

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.

Please be aware 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.

Sitcoms We Will Choose To Write

To be determined by the class on the first day. We will choose two shows to spec. Most likely they will be single cam shows. Multi is dead right now. No animation. Sorry, Adult Swim nerds.

Class Schedule and Assignments

WEEK 1: August 25th: OVERVIEW

An introduction to the course and you.

What have been your influences in comedy.

What are your feelings about television comedy.

The value of a spec script. Why you want to be read and what readers look for.

Crafting a draft from outline to polished script.

Story V. Character. What is a “voice.” How specific shows tell specific types of story.

Writing an artful story for an industry with rigid requirements.

The do's and don't of pitching. Why an idea is not a pitch.

ASSIGNMENT: Read assigned sit-com script.

Arc the main conflict for the characters and why it works for who they are.

Come up with two (2) separate ideas for your spec episode.

WEEK 2: September 1st : THE PITCH

Discuss the main conflict and resolution of the assigned script.

Create a story from personal experience. How a story explains a character. Why the best stories are all about character and not about story.

Real conflict and why it's so important.

Romantic comedies.

Notes – how to give ‘em. How to take ‘em.

In class pitching of spec ideas.

ASSIGNMENT: Rewrite and expand the pitch.

Read a sample of the episode you've chosen.

WEEK 3: September 8th : WORKING THE STORY

How different shows tell different stories.

The ensemble/ workplace comedy.

Continuation of the pitch process. Restructuring stories.

Discuss B and C stories
Introduction of the Beat Sheet.

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare beat sheet of your story. (Example provided)

WEEK 4: September 15th : STORY TIME

Family comedies and audience identification
What an "Act" needs to accomplish to be an Act.
Following the story to a clear, satisfying ending.
Pitch B and C stories
Explanation of an outline. Adding jokes, dialogue, etc.
Workshop of Beat Sheets

ASSIGNMENT: Write outline of your script.

(**NOTE**: Each student will make an individual appointment with the instructor to discuss their story.)

WEEK 5: September 22nd : THE OUTLINE

Outlines due.
Discussion and review of story outlines.
Hearing characters voices and rhythms.
If in doubt, what's the reality?
The beauty and elegance of the bad draft.

ASSIGNMENT: Refine and polish outlines.

WEEK 6: September 29th : “BUCKLE UP, WE START WRITING”

General notes on outlines from instructor.
Group work on outlines.
Assign A and B groups

ASSIGNMENT: Write Act 1 of script.

WEEK 7: October 6th: CHARACTERS

Avoiding clichés in story and jokes.
Presentation matters. Format and English.
Class review and reading of Act 1 work (Group A)

ASSIGNMENT: Refine Act 1.
Begin Act 2

WEEK 8: October 13th: BUILDING A RESOLUTION

Coming up with the *earned* ending. Examples and discussion of why you never forget some shows and instantly forget others. (Hint, it's all about the characters.)

Class review and reading of Act 1 (Group B)
ASSIGNMENT: Refine Act 1. Begin Act 2 (Group B)

WEEK 9: October 20th: WRITING IS RE-WRITING

Re-writing in comedy. Heightening motivation.

Adding obstacles to the protagonist's want. Punching up jokes.

Continue review of drafts. (Group A)

ASSIGNMENT: Complete Second draft of episode (Group A)

WEEK 10: October 27th : WHAT STAYS. WHAT GOES

Pace, rhythm and tone.

Compare current series first drafts to the AS BROADCAST draft.

Continue class review of second drafts.

ASSIGNMENT: Complete second draft of episode (Group B)

WEEK 11: November 3rd : THE ROOM

The rules (they're more like guidelines) of the writer's room. Written and unwritten.

WEEK 12: November 10th: Dealer's Choice

Script reading! We will read finished, polished work of your drafts. If we have already done so... and you have another script you wish to be read out loud, bring it!

WEEK 13: November 17th: Guest Speaker

You're all probably tired of hearing my voice... and I only really have three jokes... I just dress them up differently. Today, we will hear from a writer colleague/friend. They will share their professional wisdom, and heap praise, stating they owe their entire career to me.

WEEK 13: December 1st: Final Class! THE BUSSINESS PART

Outlets for getting read and being seen.

Finding an agent.

Freelance script assignments.

Getting on a show and working your way up.

The writing staff, jobs, titles, responsibilities.

Please note - dates and subjects can change at the discretion of the instructor.

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.

And lastly... F.J.'s pet peeves!

Promptness. I expect everyone to be online at 10am sharp! Our time together is limited... I want to torture you for the most time I can!

Grammar & Punctuation. We live in a world of spell check, so no excuses. If I see excessive grammatical screw-ups, it will affect the grade of your project. *(You can thank the nuns of Our Lady of Mercy who cursed me with this obsession!)*

Format: I expect you all to be versed in Final Draft. It's the industry standard for script programs. ALL SCRIPTS must be formatted correctly.

All assigned work must be uploaded to our Google Drive) **NO LATER THAN MONDAY at 6PM!** This will barely give us enough time to read everyone's work and be ready to discuss at class Wednesday.

Now, the best for last.... Drumroll please.... **RESPECT** for your fellow students. This creative world we live in can be rough on our psyche. There are no dumb questions or pitches. If there were, I'd be on the Mt. Rushmore of comedy writers!