

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
JOHN WELLS DIVISION
WRITING FOR SCREEN & TELEVISION

CTWR 529

Section 19256 - Intermediate Screenwriting (2 units)
Fall 2020
(prerequisites: CTWR 505/ CTPR 507)

Instructor: Rick Parks

Location: SCI 209

Time: TUES. 7-10 PM

Office Hours: contact me

Contact Info: rickpark@usc.edu
(818) 262-8091 (cell/text)

THE BEST WAY TO REACH ME IS TO TEXT ME!

When texting, please identify yourself (name, 529 class). Texts will be answered at the earliest possible convenience.

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

This course aims to sharpen your storytelling and screenwriting skills through practical writing experience in the **short-film** form, leading to an extensive introduction to *shaping a feature film story*.

In a supportive workshop environment, we will broaden your knowledge of screenwriting fundamentals, building on what you learned in 505 (Creating the Short Script). Our main focus will be on character and dramatic structure, as it applies to both long and short screenplay form.

Starting with a few simple ideas, each student will mold characters and spin stories from those characters, with an emphasis on learning techniques for character development, visualization, and structuring and reshaping the story until it best embodies the writer's vision.

COURSE GOALS:

Students will complete two major projects over the course of the semester:

- **One, 10 page, short-film screenplay**, written and revised, following the submission guidelines of CTPR 546 for possible production in that class.
- **An original feature film story**, in revised *synopsis* form (8-10 pages), (designed to be developed into a screenplay), which will be turned in the last week of class, and will count as the Final for this course.

The idea is to look forward to the realistic possibility of having your short screenplay produced, and to create a feature film story with the potential to become a first-rate screenplay.

Decorum:

The professor expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a fragile, evolving process and we can only expect success if we are *supportive and positive* in our feedback and criticisms of our fellow students.

Any negative attacks will reflect poorly on the student making the attacks and will affect their final grade. We are here to help each other become better writers. Rather than trying to tell a student what is wrong, this professor is more interested in revealing how to *make it better*. We should strive *at all times* for constructive criticism. Participation is graded.

Issues:

If any issues or concerns arise with any member of the classroom, which might affect a supportive learning environment, the professor would highly encourage the student to contact him privately to seek a resolution.

Individual Meetings:

Students are encouraged to take advantage of the professor's availability. The professor will answer questions in person or by email, skype or face time, but would rather answer them in depth during class, so that the other students may benefit from discussing individual story/character/structure problems.

HOMEWORK AND NOTES:

Homework is due, via **email**, at least 24/48 hours before class, in order to give your classmates (and the professor) time to read/analyze your work, and to be prepared to give coherent, well thought out and intelligent notes.

Notes on work (if assigned) are due (via email) at least 20 minutes before the class. They need not be extensive, but what I'm looking for is *critical faculty*.

Pretend you are a development executive and it's your job to shepherd this project, and to present the draft to your boss.

While line notes are important, what I'm really looking for is your ability to tell if the deeper things in the script, such as plot, character, and theme are working.

While it's natural to focus on what is *not* working, it can be *more important or helpful to identify where writing is successful*. A writer may be *unaware* of what is working, and by hearing "do more of this," we might establish a benchmark and direction to which the writer may aspire.

Imperative reading:

(In addition to selected and assigned screenplays)

Save The Cat by Blake Snyder - Michael Wiese Productions, -try AMAZON

The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler 3rd ed. Michael Wiese Productions

The Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley

PRESENTATION:

As this is a writing class, assignments must be properly formatted and PROOFREAD.

You will be held to professional standards – typos, abused homonyms ("there, their, they're", etc.), grammatical and spelling errors may cause your draft to be returned unread.

NOTE: Exceptions will be made for students whose primary language is not English!

All work must be original and originate in this class – no revisions of work started in other classes or adaptations of others' work will be accepted without the prior permission of the instructor.

Assignments are due, unless requested by the instructor, no later than 24 hours BEFORE each class. Remember, YOU are responsible for the instructor receiving your work.

FINAL DRAFT:

As the professor (and his working peers) prefers Final Draft and the school provides it, in at least a discounted or temporary format, he would prefer that *unless noted**, all screenwriting assignments be submitted in the **Final Draft program**, (<https://www.finaldraft.com>) so that if and when you are writing any scene work, both you and he can benefit from collective NOTES on your work, and you might as writers become proficient with the industry standard.

*some homework is assigned in prose format and can be submitted in any writing program.

Name every document you email me (or the group) as follows:

YOUR FIRST NAME assignment name.whatever

For Example: **KAREN memory.doc**, or: **BOB memory.pdf**, or: **THANOS memory.fdx**

UNEXCUSED, LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE DOCKED 50%.

(Please note that all dates and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor).

Unless otherwise modified by the Professor, all assignments are DUE on the day and time indicated. IF YOU DON'T MEET THE DEADLINE, YOUR ASSIGNMENT

MAY NOT BE READ AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A LATE ASSIGNMENT GRADE.

The professor peruses and discusses on-time projects first, so if your work is late, we may not get to it during class.

It is your responsibility to check the schedule regularly to stay on track.

Be prepared to share your opinions/observations about the work.

Your opinion is vitally important.

ATTENDANCE:

Class attendance is mandatory, and includes being on time (otherwise, the students who present their material first are short-changed your brilliance).

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 available assignments of your colleagues and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

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, but *they must be negotiated in advance*.

If you find you must miss class due to a 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 both him and the Wells Writing Division Faculty.

SICK POLICY

If you have a legitimate excuse or emergency which precludes you from attending, you are responsible for contacting the professor in ADVANCE about your issue. Any genuine illness will be accommodated for, and I will attempt to make up that missed class either over the phone, face-time, skype, or ZOOM.

Recording Devices: You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

GRADING

MID TERM GRADES will be available by Mid October.

There will be no final exam during final exam week, your treatment is your final.

Please refer to the School's standardized definition of grades.

Incompletes are assigned only when work is not completed because of documented illness or other emergency occurring after the 12th week of the semester.

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and the student's demonstration of his or her achievement of the course's objectives, **as reflected in the following assignments** or ones substituted in their place:

Pitch 1 (Project 1) 05%
Character Profile (Project 1) 05%
Step Outline (Project 1) 05%
Draft 1 (Project 1) 10%
Draft 2 (Project 1) 05%
Pitch (Feature) 05%
Character Profile (Feature) 05%
Beats (cards) first act 05%
Beats (cards) second act pt.1 05%
Beats (cards) second act pt.2 05%
Beats(cards) third act 05%
Beat sheet (Feature) 20%
first 10 pages 10%
Participation in class, critiques, etc... 10%

LETTER GRADES:

91-100.... A	78-80....B-	65-67.....D+
88-90.....A-	75-77....C+	61-64.....D
85-87.....B+	71-74....C	58-60.....D-
81-84.....B	68-70....C	0-59.....F

THE DAY TO DAY OF IT ALL:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

SESSION #1:

CONTENT: Overview of the class, syllabus & schedule. What to expect.

Ideation – how to do all this

- Who is this story about? (Protagonist)
- What is this story about? (central conflict/goal).
- How is this compelling and not just a slice of life?
- Where/when does this story take place? (setting/world)
- What is the tone /genre of the story?

in-class lecture about standard formatting - tricks

HW: Prepare 3 ideas for potential short film project (project1). Keep each pitch below 5 minutes. Each idea should address: 1) The central character or characters, 2) What the character(s) will encounter in the body of the story – i.e. the subject or central "conflict" of the story, 3) an indication of how the story will resolve.

HW: PIVOTAL PERSON - (PROSE--not to be shared with the class) biggest influence - *antagonist*
Describe in detail an event in your life where someone "pushed your buttons" and made you react to their intent in a completely unexpected way; someone who changed you in a moment and made you see yourself or the world differently. Writing characters from an emotional place. (2-6 pages max)

Also, now is a good time to *begin* thinking of **IDEAS (IDEATING) FOR YOUR FEATURE FILM STORY**, which you'll be working on later in the semester. Allow time for these ideas to develop and mature. Explore these ideas carefully, and review them each week to see how you can enrich them.

SESSION #2:

CONTENT: Pitch at least one of the potential storylines for short (546) film project.

Keep the pitches under 5 minutes. Feedback.

Lecture: Character, voice, rhythm, POV character worksheets and Bios

CHARACTER WORK SHEET (e-distributed by prof)

HW: Based on feedback, **choose the story** you want to develop as Project 1.

ALSO: PIVOTAL PERSON - POV that same pivotal moment from their POV. Walk a mile in their shoes. Writing and understanding the complete 'antagonist'.

ALSO: Write a **CHARACTER PROFILE** of your first short's PROTAGONIST.

Let the character speak in his/her own voice, revealing as much as possible about some aspect of that character's life. Try to capture their unique speaking rhythms and point-of-view. (1/2 page PROSE)

DO THE SAME FOR THE CATALYST (antagonist)

See if you can let each character reveal something to us that the character doesn't yet know or understand about himself/herself. Hint: What the character thinks about things won't be as important as how he or she *feels* about things.

SESSION #3:

CONTENT: Character profiles feedback

Lecture: FEATURE Story structure – SNYDER/VOGLER

HW: Write a BEAT-BY-BEAT **STEP OUTLINE** of your (short) story.

Tell the story as it will unfold on the screen: Include the setting, the major characters, the main story beats, and the resolution. Make us want to see this movie! Write in the present tense only, and limit your description to what we will actually see and hear on the screen, in the order we'll see and hear it.

SESSION #4:

CONTENT: Feedback on the Outlines

Lecture: Scene Structure SNYDER/VOGLER part two (time permitting)

HW: Write the FIRST DRAFT of your Project 1 screenplay (8-10 pages). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' First Drafts to class.

SESSION #5:

CONTENT: Feedback on the First Drafts

LECTURE/ASSIGNMENT: Visualization: Tell a story with pictures - ACTIONS not WORDS

- Planting and Payoff
- Location, props, costumes, atmosphere
- Correlative, feelings, motivation
- Writing scene description

HW: Write the **FINAL DRAFT** of your Project 1 script (8-10 pages).

Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' Final Draft to class.

SESSION #6:

CONTENT: Feedback on the Final Drafts of Project 1

LECTURE: Dialogue

HW SEND IN A SHORT LIST OF FEATURE IDEAS

Prepare at least **two** of your *favorites*. For each, answer the following questions: 1) What is the story in 3 sentences? 2) Who is the protagonist? 3) Who/what is the antagonist? 4) What are 2-3 obstacles that the protagonist will overcome? 5) What is the protagonist's arc? 6) What is/are the central theme/s? 7) How will the story resolve? 8) What is your personal connection to the story?

SESSION #7:

CONTENT: FEATURE IDEAS

EXERCISE: DISCUSS FEATURES vs SHORTS

LECTURE: CARDING and CHARACTER

EXERCISE: Describe your feature story in ONE SENTENCE,

HW: Begin a CHARACTER STUDY of your FEATURE'S lead (use the worksheet and begin a list of traits. Do the same for your Catalyst character. *Want/need for main character, main tension, world of story, etc. Possible narrative approach? (i.e. voice over, untraditional chronology.* Send in all you can before class.

SESSION #8:

CONTENT: Discuss character study

HW: **CARD WHAT YOU KNOW FOR YOUR FEATURE** (be prepared to discuss)
FIND POSSIBLE PIVOT POINTS AND NAME THEM (Snyder/Vogler)

SESSION #9:

CONTENT: What you know- Discuss the cards you have

HW: Card first act of your feature

SESSION #10:

CONTENT: First act cards --

Discuss first act cards. Suggest possible changes, looking forward to second act. Can the story be improved using screenwriting techniques? i.e. complications, reversals, planting and pay-off.

LECTURE: FIRST PAGES!

HW: Card act two/ pt. one

Write the opening scene, first ten pages

NOTE: The deadline for submitting screenplays for possible production in CTPR 546 is NOV. 3rd. Consult the 546 Submission Guidelines (available on the SCA Community website, in the Writing Division office, and in SPO) for detailed instructions on how to submit.

SESSION #11:

CONTENT: Discuss act two/ pt. one cards

WRITING: Discuss first pages

HW: Card act two/ pt. two

SESSION #12:

CONTENT: Discuss act two/pt. two cards

HW: THIRD ACT -- FINISH CARDING - GIVE US ALL THE BEATS YOU CAN

HW: ONLY NOW MAY YOU CREATE A BEAT SHEET (OUTLINE)

HW: ALL CARDS SHOULD BE FINISHED AFTER THIS CLASS AND COMPILED INTO A SYNOPSIS/BEAT SHEET TO BE REVIEWED BY BOTH INSTRUCTOR AND PEERS

SESSION #13:

CONTENT: Discuss outlines

HW: Write more - finish what you can

Revise the SYNOPSIS/BEAT SHEET for your feature film idea.

Focus especially on the conflict, obstacles and twists that will sustain your plot and give it the breadth of a feature film. **Turn in your completed beat sheets by** [date]

NOTE: Syllabus and assignments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

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/sssa

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.

<p style="text-align: center;">PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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