

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

**CTWR 533 (#19382R)
Rewriting the Feature Screenplay
Fall 2021**

Instructor: Donald H Hewitt
Class Schedule: Mondays 10am – 12:50pm
Class Location: SCA 363
Office Hours: By appointment only
Contact Information: DHHewitt@usc.edu

Course Objective:

The goal of this course is not just to rewrite your feature screenplay but to learn the re-write process.

Course Description:

The first draft of *The Sixth Sense* was a serial killer movie. The film that was sold was the tenth draft. A great rewrite is substantive. It is not just tweaking the descriptions and polishing your dialogue. Rewriting is a thorough examination of every element of your story – character, theme, plot, ...everything.

Screenwriting is a process. No one sits down and knocks out a perfect screenplay. It's just impossible. Rewriting is arguably the most important part of the process. In this course you will learn a system to breakdown the rewriting into a step-by-step process. We'll begin with notes, then organize the notes and create a strategic game plan, focusing on tackling the big problems first. Then you'll rewrite your screenplay over a series of passes, each focusing on a specific area – strengthening characters, story, theme, conflict. Then a pass to add depth and layers. Finally, you will polish dialog and description.

A key aspect of working in the entertainment industry is collaboration. You must be comfortable discussing your own work as well as articulating your ideas regarding others work.

Course Reading:

Screenwriting is Rewriting by Jack Epps, Jr. (former chair of USC's Writing Division)
Bloomsbury Academic, New York, London, 2016, ISBN: 9781628927405. Available only on Amazon.

Your classmates screenplays. It is critical to read your fellow classmates work so you can fully participate in the discussions.

Grading Criteria:

All assignments are to be posted 1 hour prior to class on Blackboard (blackboard.usc.edu). Screenplay pages must be in PDF and notes should be .doc format. All file names should have your last name as well as the screenplay title.

Grading Breakdown

Participation:	10%
Game plan & Rewrite outline:	30%
Notes on fellow student's work	10%
Screenplay:	
15 pages due each week	
Each worth 5% for a Total of	30%
Final Polished draft	20%

	100%

** Please note: You will receive a ZERO for screenplay if you do not turn in a completed final draft.

As per 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%

Expectation of Professionalism:

All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper 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:

Laptops are permitted for classwork only. All other uses are strictly forbidden. Cell phones are NOT permitted.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class.

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: This is a change in policy. Instructors will no longer distinguish between an excused or unexcused absence. An absence will be an absence.

Please note 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.

If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

Feedback Etiquette:

Feedback is an important part of my class (it's a huge part of the film and television business too.) Participation is 10% of your grade so I encourage everyone to give feedback following classmates' presentations. However, the feedback must be constructive. It is imperative that the workshop environment be one where students feel safe to experiment.

How to give feedback:

- Tell the writer which parts of the presentation were most intriguing and entertaining.
- Let the writer know if anything confused you.
- Point out specific spots that dragged or felt redundant.
- Remember that what you are saying is your opinion, not fact.

How to receive feedback:

- Don't defend your work. Some students spend more time talking during their critique than listening. This wastes everyone's time.
- Listen to the feedback, write it down, and take time to mull it over. Don't immediately reject a note. You'll be amazed at how many times a "stupid" note will become the key to solving all your problems a few days later.
- When utilizing the notes, it's up to you to decide which notes will help you and which notes won't. Some students execute every note given to them and end up with a jumbled mess. Some students reject every note given to them and their work never improves. Do your best to find a happy medium.

Other important Student Etiquette:

The screenplays we are working on are works-in-progress and it's important that the work we do stays in classroom. If you're excited about another student's project and would like to share it with someone outside of the class, please contact the student who's work it is first, and ask permission. But as a general rule it would be best to not share your fellow students stories with people outside of our class.

Class Schedule:

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

Week 1: August 23

Syllabus and class goals

Meet and Greet

Students pitch their screenplays starting with Logline and genre. Be prepared to discuss the premise, the story, the characters – especially the main character and how they arc.

Split the class into two groups (A & B)

Lecture on the Rewrite Process

ASSIGNMENT for week 2:

Reread your own screenplay, making extensive notes as you read. An example of a well annotated screenplay can be found starting on pg 297 of *Screenwriting is Rewriting* in Part 4 *Examples, Student Notes and Game Plans*.

Use the Screenplay Rewrite Checklist to examine the strengths and weaknesses of your script.

Read **Group A** screenplays and fill out the checklist for each of them. Post your Group A notes and be prepared to discuss in class.

Week 2: August 30

Give Feedback and Discuss Group A screenplays.

Lecture Organize notes into a Summary of Feedback.
Creating a Game Plan.

ASSIGNMENT for week 4 (No Class on week 3 – Labor Day):

Group A compile a 1-2 page summary of the Feedback. Then create a Rewrite Game Plan. Examples of both can be found starting on pg 302 of *Screenwriting is Rewriting* in Part 4 *Examples, Student Notes and Game Plans*.

Read **Group B** screenplays and fill out the checklist for each of them. Post your **Group B** notes and be prepared to discuss in class.

Week 3: September 6 – LABOR DAY – NO CLASS.

Week 4: September 13

Give Feedback and Discuss Group B screenplays.

Lecture on Rewriting for Character

ASSIGNMENT for week 5:

Group B compile a 1-2 page summary of the Feedback. Then create a Rewrite Game Plan. Examples of both can be found starting on pg 302 of *Screenwriting is Rewriting* in Part 4 *Examples, Student Notes and Game Plans*.

Group A Read Chapters relevant to their main issues from *Screenwriting is Rewriting*.

Week 5: September 20

Review and discuss note summaries and Rewrite Game Plans.

Lecture Rewriting for Structure
Outline/Beat Sheet with intentions

ASSIGNMENT for week 6:

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Both Groups begin Outline.

Group B Read Chapters relevant to their main issues from *Screenwriting is Rewriting*.

Week 6: September 27

Students “pitch” their outlines receive feedback.

Lecture on Setup and First Act

ASSIGNMENT for week 7:

Revise outline with changes in **bold**.

Begin rewriting your screenplay! Students are expected to write approximately 15 pages per week for the next 6 weeks. Group A will table read next week. Group B pages will receive feedback on Google drive.

Week 7: October 4

Students in Group A present their first 15 pages.

Lecture on Relationships

ASSIGNMENT for week 8:

Students will read Group B pages and post feedback on Google Drive by Wednesday at midnight.

Students continue writing their screenplay – approximately 15 more pages.

Week 8: October 11

Students in Group B present their next 15 pages.

Lecture on Obstacles – creating dramatic tension

ASSIGNMENT for week 9:

Students will read Group A pages and post feedback on Google Drive by Wednesday at midnight.

Students continue writing their screenplay – approximately 15 more pages.

Oct. 14-15 Fall recess

Week 9: October 18

Students in Group A present their next 15 pages.

Lecture on Stakes

ASSIGNMENT for week 10:

Students will read Group B pages and post feedback on Google Drive by Wednesday at midnight.
Students continue writing their screenplay – approximately 15 more pages.

Week 10: October 25

Students in Group B present their next 15 pages.

Lecture on Character Arc

ASSIGNMENT for week 11:
Students will read Group A pages and post feedback on Google Drive by Wednesday at midnight.
Students continue writing their screenplay – approximately 15 more pages.

Week 11: November 1

Students in Group A present their next 15 pages.

Lecture on Theme

ASSIGNMENT for week 12:
Students will read Group B pages and post feedback on Google Drive by Wednesday at midnight.
Students continue writing their screenplay – approximately 15 more pages.

Week 12: November 8

Students in Group B present their next 15 pages.

Lecture on Fulfilling Resolutions

ASSIGNMENT for week 13:
Students will read Group A pages and post feedback on Google Drive by Wednesday at midnight.
Students should complete their first revision. If first revision is complete, compile notes on revisions and create rewrite game plan for next pass.

Week 13: November 15

Students present final pages of first Revision or students present game plan for polish pass.

Lecture on Consistency and Final Polish

ASSIGNMENT for week 14: Students should complete game plan for polish or begin final polish.

Week 14: November 22

Students present game plan for polish pass. Or present polished scenes.

Lecture to be determined or Guest Speaker.

ASSIGNMENT for week 15: Work on final polish.

Nov. 24-28: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: November 29

Students present polished scenes.

Lecture to be determined or Guest Speaker.

ASSIGNMENT for final: Complete final polish.

Dec. 3: Fall semester classes end

Study days: December 4-7

Finals Week: Monday, December 13 – adjusted time: 8:00am - 10:00am

FINAL ASSIGNMENT: Complete Revised draft of your screenplay is due by end of examination period – 10am on December 13.

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/>

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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

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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.

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