

THTR 416: Creating Content for the Actor

Units: 2

Fall 2020 – Tue/Thur – 12-1:50pm

Location: MCC 107

Instructor: Matthew Montgomery

Office Hours By Appointment: Appointments held via Zoom.

Contact Info: mramire1@usc.edu

Timeline for replying to emails/calls within 24 hours.

IT Help: Customer Support Center

Contact Info: consult@usc.edu

Course Description

This course focuses on the development of skills to create content for stage and screen. It is designed to give the actor a fundamental understanding of the basics of dramatic writing, specifically the screenplay. Students will examine the differences between the play and the screenplay with a particular emphasis on what makes a successful script. The course also aims to sharpen the storytelling skills of the actor through practical writing experience. Students will be challenged to use their intellectual imagination to shape their own stories and scripts. Students will learn how to critique each other's work with constructive criticism and will be responsible for giving feedback in class.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and define the structure within a screenplay.
- Organize a collection of creative research and ideas.
- Pitch an original idea for a short film.
- Create and develop a portfolio of writings along with consistent writing habits.
- Evaluate and critique work written by your fellow writers.

Course Notes

Please check Blackboard often for any class announcements or updates on assignments. Lecture slides may occasionally be used and will always be posted on Blackboard following class. Some multimedia including videos may be provided throughout semester and will also be posted on Blackboard or Google Drive.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Final Draft software, or any other screenwriting software.

Recommended Preparation:

Feedback and constructive criticism is essential to the process of creating content in any form. Students are expected to come prepared to each class with any work due from the previous week for feedback from their classmates.

Required Readings

Screenplay, by Syd Field
Published by Bantam Dell
ISBN 978-0-385-33903-2

Suggested Readings:

In addition to the required reading, it is highly recommended that students accompany their reading with this text.

The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri

Published by Simon & Schuster

ISBN 9780671213329

Save the Cat by Blake Snyder

Published by Michael Wiese Productions

ISBN 9781932907001

Description and Assessment of Assignments

- **PARTICIPATION (10%):** Your engagement is essential to the learning process. Attendance is requisite to understanding the material, but contribution to class discussions will broaden the course experience.
- **CLASS EXERCISES (15%):** Individual and group exercises will be given throughout the semester. For each unit(s), you will be told which exercises will contribute to this element of your grade.
- **DIGITAL RESEARCH JOURNAL (15%):** Students will keep a digital research journal throughout the semester of various topics and ideas. It can include images, articles, short written passages, or anything that inspires a story. These will be collected at the end of the semester.
- **PITCH (10%):** Students will pitch an idea for an original film/tv or stage production with a focus on short content.
- **MIDTERM (15%):** In-class exam on topics covered thus far and a rough outline of final project.
- **PORTFOLIO (20%):** Students will create a portfolio of their writings throughout the semester to be turned in at the end of the course. Portfolios must contain at least the following:
 - Significant Object & Event (4 points)
 - Non-Dialogue & Dialogue Scenes (4 points)
 - Character Biography (4 points)
 - Planting & Paying Off (4 points)
 - Exposition In Dialogue (4 points)
- **FINAL (15%):** Final draft of pitched project (10-15 pages) as well as an open-book in-class written exam covering topics discussed in class and in *Screenplay* by Syd Field. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** The Final Examination will take place according to the USC Final Examination Schedule.

Grading Breakdown

Final course grade is determined by the average of all four assignments/examinations, as well as in-class exercises and participation. See grading scale below for more info.

Assessment Tool (assignments)	% of Grade
Participation	10%
Class Exercises	15%
Research Journal	15%
Pitch	10%
Midterm	15%
Portfolio	20%
Final	15%
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale

“Excellent” indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight. “Good” means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material.

“Average” indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps. “Poor” indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student’s understanding of the material. “Failure” is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material. Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

Excellent: A (4) = 100-94; A- (3.7) = 93-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: the D range (.7-1.7) = 60s; F (0) = 59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

No late work will be accepted. If illness or emergency interferes with the completion of assignments, contact Mr. Montgomery at least 24 hours before the due date.

Grading Timeline

Grading and feedback to be given within 48-72 hours after hand-in date.

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course evaluation

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students’ experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with with me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

Additional Grading Criteria

When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been good but will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

EDI @SDA: Professional Development/Mandatory EDI Training

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

As part of our EDI initiatives and call to action, some workshops will be offered to faculty and staff and to students. Competencies that will be included: Anti-Racism (Faculty/Staff) and Equity Mindedness (Faculty/Staff), and then Theater Intimacy & Building Cultures of Consent (Students, Faculty/Staff). More details will follow. NOTE: All SDA classes will be cancelled to support involvement in this effort.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week	Topic	In-class work & Assignments
Week 1 8/24 & 8/26	Introduction to Course ----- Types of Scripts; Ideation Where to begin? What is story? What do you want to write?	Review Syllabus ----- Assignment: Read A Screenplay Assignment: Significant Object (1-3 pages)
Week 2 8/31 & 9/2	Fundamentals of the Screenplay ----- Screen Selection of Short Films – Application of Structure	Review on Structure (you know this) ----- Start Research Journal: This can include images, articles, short written passages, or anything that inspires a story. These will be regularly referred to in class and will be collected at the end of the semester.
Week 3 9/7 & 9/9	Loglines ----- Loglines	Research Loglines ----- Assignment: Logline Collection
Week 4 9/14 & 9/16	Pitch Fest Students pitch their original projects and provide feedback. ----- Character Development Psychological vs. Physiological	Assignment: Read Chapters 3-5 on character building. ----- Assignment: Character Biography Write a character biography for the protagonist of your project. (1-3 pages)
Week 5 9/21 & 9/23	Character Development Backstory & Relationships ----- Building the World Given Circumstances & Conflict	Assignment: Relationship Journal Entry Write a short journal entry in the voice of your protagonist about their relationship with another character. (1 page max) ----- Assignment: Write about the world of your story. What are the given circumstances and how do these particular given circumstances provide the backdrop for the main conflict? Be as specific as possible. (1-3 pages)

Week	Topic	In-class work & Assignments
Week 6 9/28 & 9/30	The Arc of the Scene Writing the Outline ----- Writing the Outline	Assignment: Freeform Scene Writing Write a short scene that is related to your story in some way (it doesn't have to end up in your final draft). ----- Assignment: Start working on your outline for your final project. Due next Thursday.
Week 7 10/5 & 10/7	MIDTERM: OUTLINE DUE ----- Action & Behavior Externalizing the Conflict	In class: Students will present and talk about their outlines and provide feedback for each other. ----- In class: Review outline with partner. Assignment: Revise your outlines (if needed).
Week 8 10/12 & 10/14	Action & Behavior Externalizing the Conflict ----- Planting & Paying Off Examples From Scenes	In class: Go over revised outlines with class. ----- Assignment: Planting & Paying Off Write a short scene where there is a plant and pay off of a significant object. If you can, use the significant object from the writing assignment earlier in the semester. (1-3 pages)
Week 9 10/19 & 10/21	Dialogue Examine dialogue from films. ----- Dialogue Exposition: Necessary Facts	Assignment: Research dialogue in a screenplay or movie and be prepared to bring an example to discuss on Thursday. ----- Assignment: Exposition In Dialogue Write a short exposition scene from your project (it doesn't have to end up in your final draft).
Week 10 10/26 & 10/28	Scene Work: Exposition Scenes ----- Writer's Room	In class: Table Read Exposition Scenes ----- In class: Discuss projects at length.

Week	Topic	In-class work & Assignments
Week 11 11/2 & 11/4	Revision Stage: Rough Draft Due By Beginning of Class ----- Revision Stage: Process	Exercise: Group feedback in class. Assignment: Pair up and read partner's material before next class. Be ready to provide feedback. ----- In class: Pair Up Pair up with writing partner and give feedback to each other.
Week 12 11/9 & 11/11	Revision Stage: Revisions Due ----- Individual Meetings	Assignment: Premise - Research Journal Develop a premise for a new story. ----- Individual meetings will be assigned by time slot the week before. The purpose of these meetings is talk individually about your goals beyond the scope of this class.
Week 13 11/16 & 11/18	Final Revisions ----- Creating Content	In class: Reflections On Revisions ----- In class: List practical steps for developing your own production. Assignment: Make any final revisions and/or polishes to your final script.
Week 14 11/23 & 11/25	Starting a New Concept While Finishing Another One ----- New Concept	Assignment: Go back to the logline and research where the idea begins -----
Week 15 11/30 & 12/2	Tentative Guest Lecturer & Next Steps ----- Conclusions & Wrap Up	----- Assignment: Make any final revisions and/or polishes to your final script.
FINAL EXAM	TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14th 11AM-1PM	PORTFOLIOS DUE WITH FINAL DRAFT

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your 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. 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:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, 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

uscса.usc.edu

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