

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

**CTWR 403: Writing the Narrative Podcast  
Spring 2022**

Instructor: Jeremy Novick  
Class Schedule: Monday 7pm – 10pm  
Class Location: SCB 304  
Office Hours: By Appointment w/ Instructor  
Contact Information: jnovick@usc.edu

**Course Objective:**

“Writing the Narrative Podcast Series” is a class designed to explore the design and functional storytelling elements of the Podcast as writers create and develop their own Podcast series.

**Course Description:**

Over the last several decades, the art of storytelling has expanded and been re-shaped to fit a growing number of content platforms, to the benefit of a growing and more sophisticated audience. Ironically, one of the most popular emerging content sources is the direct descendant of Radio, a seminal source of mass media storytelling.

The podcast has emerged as a go-to, easy-access platform for engaging narrative entertainment – be it personal commentary, journalistic feature story, adaptation, or original narrative. In terms of dramatic or comedic narrative, the podcast is true to its radio roots as “theatre of the mind”. Therefore, the challenge for the writer is to express the world through imaginative description and aural background, as well as dialogue that clearly reflects the nature and dynamics of the characters. It is the mission of this class to lay the groundwork for students to develop and write pilot episodes from original or adapted material.

The class will be run as a writing workshop that includes lecture(s) on adaptive storytelling and the narrative arc of a podcast series, as well as SCA and Industry guests who have written, produced or greenlit specific Podcast projects.

Each student will write a Pilot Script and Series Bible to be delivered as their final project.

**Course Listening:**

**(NOTE: These podcasts are all available free on all major platforms)**

The Horror of Dolores Roach

If I Go Missing the Witches Did it

Next Stop

Limetown

Blackout

Edith!

Last Known Position

Welcome to Night Vale

Edith!

Unwanted

**Grading Criteria:**

Work should be turned in via Blackboard or email to instructor and classmates by end of day Saturday before class, allowing time for us to read and prepare for class.

Participation:	10%
Pitch:	10%
Outline:	10%
Pilot First Draft:	30%
Series Bible:	15%
Final Materials:	25%
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	100%

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. Our class is meant to be a safe environment for everyone to workshop their ideas and help each other get better!

**Recording Devices:**

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

**Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:**

Laptops are permitted in class, provided they do not become a distraction. Please refrain from using your cell phones, however, unless it's an emergency, in which case, of course, please excuse yourself and make any calls or texts you need to.

**Writing Division's NETIQUETTE:**

*During Zoom Workshop Classes*

- Keep yourself muted unless called on.
  
- If your camera is on, please dress as you would in the classroom, and behave as you would in a professional environment.

- If you want to ask a question out loud, use the “raise your hand” function on Zoom. A little blue hand will appear so I know you want to speak.

#### *Posting in Approved Forums*

- Write as if you were speaking in a class discussion: relaxed in tone but respectful, polite, and professional in your choice of words.

- Post thoughtful and meaningful responses to questions and answers. The point is to have an ongoing discussion with your Blackboard Group of ten students and one DA. Your professor will be joining discussions as well.

#### **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 will hold up the business of the class. Please make your best effort to be on time.

If you have a conflict that will cause you to miss class, you need to secure the instructor’s approval of that absence in advance of the class. 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. In addition, due to current Covid protocols, if you are feeling ill, without time to test before class, please notify your instructor, do not attend class and get a test. If you test positive, inform your instructor and quarantine for the Health Department’s designated period of time.

If you miss class without informing your instructor, it will be considered an unexcused absence. Unexcused absences can lower your final grade for the course. 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.

### **Class Schedule:**

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

#### **Week One—Introduction: Theatre of the Mind**

Introduction, course objectives. Writing for the eye vs. the ear. Doubling down on Character. Breakdown of a successful narrative fiction podcast.

**Assignment:** In class, we will perform a group writing exercise focusing on sound design and camera-less storytelling. On your own, prepare 3 short pitches (premise, world, main character(s)) for a potential podcast series.

#### **Week Two – No class (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)**

#### **Week Three – Breaking New Ground**

Review and selection of pitches (**10% of Final Grade**). Visit with Neely Oeftering, sound designer/editor at QCode Media. The utilization of sound and atmosphere. How much can Sound tell the story? Discussion on creating a character breakdown, and discovering the controlling theme of the series.

**Assignment:** Prepare character breakdowns for your series, and a brief exploration of your series' central theme and conflict.

#### **Week Four—Simple Stories, Complex Characters**

Review Character/Conflict Breakdowns. Character Arc, aka “character defines story.”

**Assignment:** Each student will prepare a brief synopsis of their pilot episode.

#### **Week Five—A Gripping Pilot**

Review and discussion of pilot synopses. Discussion of character-driven story, and how a pilot propels a series. Visit from Kwynn Perry, writer/director of *The Burned Photo*.

**Assignment:** Each student will prepare an outline of their pilot episode, to be finalized by Week Nine (**10% of Final Grade**).

#### **Week Six—Starting Strong**

Review and discuss Group A's outlines in class (Group B will receive notes via email). Discussion about cold opens, teasers, and character introductions. How to capture the audience's attention right away.

**Assignment:** Continue writing and re-writing pilot outlines.

#### **Week Seven – No class (Presidents Day)**

**Assignment:** Continue working on outlines. I will be available for office hours if needed.

#### **Week Eight – Mystery and Cliffhangers, “Turning the Page”**

Review and discuss Group B's outlines in class (Group A will receive notes via email). Discussion about cliffhangers, narrative drive, and keeping the pages turning.

**Assignment:** Continue writing and re-writing pilot outlines.

### **Week Nine— "Show, Don't Tell (But Don't Show, Either)"**

Review and discuss Group A's outlines in class (Group B will receive notes via email). Discussion of dialogue, action, and description in a camera-less medium. The goal here is for both groups' outlines to be approved and sent to script.

**Assignment:** Each student will commence writing their pilot episode, to be delivered by Week Twelve **(30% of Final Grade)**.

### **Week Ten— "Hitting Subscribe"**

Review and discuss Group B's initial script pages in class (Group A will receive notes via email). Discussion about connecting the pilot story to the next episode, creating series questions and arcs.

**Assignment:** Continue writing pilot script.

### **Week Eleven – Refining the Series Theme and Character Arc**

Review and discuss Group A's outlines in class (Group B will receive notes via email). Review and discuss the series arc of each series. How the series arc informs the pilot re-write. Zoom visit with Justin Molito, WGA-E representative involved with the WGA Audio Alliance (TBD subject to Justin's availability)

**Assignment:** Continue writing pilot script.

### **Week Twelve— Building a Series**

Review and discuss Group B's outlines in class (Group A will receive notes via email). First Drafts should be submitted by Saturday before Week Thirteen's class. Discussion of series bibles (model provided) and how to write a compelling, productive bible.

**Assignment:** Submit First Drafts by Saturday before Week Thirteen class. Commence writing a prototype Series Bible (Model provided). Each student will begin their Series Bible to be delivered by the end of class **(15% of Final Grade)**.

### **Week Thirteen and Fourteen – Adaptation**

Review and discuss series bibles in class (We will get to everyone's bibles in class, and also give notes via email). Discussion on how series arc will inform pilot re-write and Final Draft. Discussion of how podcasts are adapted into derivative material (features, television, etc.).

**Assignment:** Students will put together a 1-page Adaptive Document, outlining the potential of their series for adaptation. **(NOTE: Completed Podcast Pilot Script, Series Bibles and Adaptive Media Document to be completed and delivered in Finals Week.)**

### **Week Fifteen— Roundtable**

Review Adaptive Documents. Meet with a panel of Podcast Writers, Producers and Marketers to discuss the current and future Podcast marketplace and the adaptive nature of Podcasts for the TV and film Marketplace.

### **Finals Week**

Delivery of Completed Podcast Pilot Script, Series Bible and Adaptive Media Document. **(25% of Final Grade)**

## 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](https://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](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://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](https://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](http://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](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**