

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
The John Wells Division of
Writing for Screen and Television

CTWR 413: Writing the Short Script I
Spring 2022 ~ 2 Units

SYLLABUS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Instructor: Vincent Robert

Please feel free to address me as Vincent; I don't know who this
Professor Robert guy is...

Contact Info: 310.994.4236 (cell)

vrobert@usc.edu (email)

Section #: 19184D

Class Schedule: Wednesdays, 10:00 AM - 12:50 PM

Office Hours: Wednesdays from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.**

THE BEST WAY TO REACH ME IS TO TEXT ME! When texting,
please identify yourself (name, 413 class). Texts will be answered at
the earliest possible convenience whenever I'm in production.

I'm available for phone or Zoom conferences. Text me in advance at
least 2 days ahead to set a time and we'll make it happen.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

Students will write and revise two 5 page scripts for possible 310 use, then choose one
and rewrite it in preparation for 310 production. The Production Division has strict
requirements for this script, and a 310 instructor will visit the class with information.

This will count as the Final for this course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

- Introduction to the craft of screenwriting.
- To learn and practice the elements of a “Good story well told.”
- To strengthen & deepen your ability to conceive compelling ideas, characters and stories through experience and observation
- To learn to write from a visual and aural perspective.
- To learn narrative structure
- To learn the building blocks of the dramatic scene.
- To write a short script screenplay
- This is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you will learn and develop your craft as a storyteller. You will learn to draw on your memories, experiences, observation and of course imagination to create compelling characters and stories for the screen.
- This is a workshop class. Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both in and outside the class, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting. You will learn to bring your visual and aural senses to your writing, to see and hear your film as you write it, developing and exploring your characters through situations of conflict.
- At the end of the class you will apply your skills to writing a short **5 page max CTPR 310 script**.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

You should read as many screenplays (in standard screenplay format) as possible to familiarize yourself with the styles and form of other professional writers. It's the best way to truly experience how the visuals and dialogue of an influential film first played out on the page. You will learn a lot.

You will be assigned some scripts to read on your own time and be prepared to discuss them in class. Additionally the following books are highly suggested:

David Howard & Edward Mabley, THE TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING (St-Martin's Press)

Dannenbaum, Hodge, Mayer, CREATIVE FILMMAKING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Jack Epps, Jr., SCREENWRITING IS REWRITING: THE ART AND CRAFT OF PROFESSIONAL REVISION, annotated edition (Bloomsbury Academic)

Dara Marks, INSIDE STORY (Three Mountain Press)

Margaret Mehring, THE SCREENPLAY: a blending of film form and film content (Focal Press). OUT OF PRINT BUT EXCELLENT IF YOU CAN FIND IT.

Jean-Paul Ouellette, THE NEW ELEMENTS OF STANDARD SCREENPLAY FORMAT (Yankee Classic Pictures).

William Goldman, ADVENTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE (Grand Central Publishing)

GRADING

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and growth through the semester, as well as 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:

Trip to School	05%
Roommates	05%
Preparation for a Date	05%
Observation	05%
Wrongest Person / Intruder	05%
Seduction / Persuasion	05%
Pitch 1	05%
Pitch 2	05%
Script 1 Draft 1 (S1D1)	05%
Script 1 Draft 2 (S1D2)	05%
Script 2 Draft 1 (S2D1)	05%
Script 2 Draft 2 (S2D2)	05%
Selected Script Draft 3 (SSD3)	10%
15 Years On	05%
Selected Script Draft 4 (SSD4)	15%
Participation in class, critiques, etc...:	10%

All work must be delivered in proper format and delivered to the instructor and all classmates by the timetable indicated in the Class Schedule. Late assignments will result in a lower grade.

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%

A : Work of **excellent** quality. Outstanding application of the dramatic principles and fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines as specified in the syllabus.

B : Work of **good** quality. Above average fulfillments of course requirements and deadlines.

C : Work of **fair** quality. Minimum fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines for passing graduate credit.

C-: **FAIL to meet minimum grade for credit. NON PASSING GRADE.**

PARTICIPATION

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 your colleagues' assignments and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

WRITING DIVISION ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance is mandatory and students are expected to be **on time** and prepared for each class (otherwise, the students who present their material first are short-changed).

Tardiness is unprofessional, disrespectful to the class and unacceptable. You will be allowed no more than one unexcused tardiness. Further tardiness will result in one-third letter grade for each occurrence (e.g., A- down to B+, B down to B-).

You are allowed one unexcused absence (documentation required for excused absences — see below). Two late arrivals equals one full absence. Two unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered by one-third letter grade for each unexcused absence (e.g., A- down to B+, B down to B-).

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, DSP accommodations and so on.

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 Wells Writing Division recommends the student and/or advocate contact CSI at 213-821-4710 and their home department adviser for additional support.

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.

INCOMPLETES

Incompletes are assigned only when work is not completed because of **documented** illness or other “emergency” occurring **after the 12th week** of the semester. Students who wish to get an incomplete must present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

CLASSROOM DECORUM

The School expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a fragile process and while we should ask questions, analyze and even challenge, we want to remain supportive, always keeping in mind that the screenplay is a work-in-progress. A working writer needs to develop the art of collaboration while working with their peers.

SURFING AND TEXTING POLICY

This is not allowed during class time, unless required by the instructor. Please save your texting and surfing until class break.

INTERNET POLICY

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet. Violations are subject to university disciplinary policy.

COMPUTER USE

Laptops and tablets may be used in class for class related matters. Their use beyond class related matters can result in loss of the privilege to use them.

Cell phone use is not permitted during class time, barring a life or death emergency.

THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

Students must have their cameras on during synchronous online sessions. Those facing challenging situations, such as internet connectivity, illness, or home environments that make this difficult or impossible shall contact me to work out accommodations. I encourage you to use virtual backgrounds, and earphones or headsets, should your home environment benefit from these privacies.

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

Students are not permitted to create their own class recordings without the instructor's permission. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

EXPECTATION OF PROFESSIONALISM

I EXPECT YOUR WORK TO BE WRITTEN IN A PROFESSIONAL MANNER --
ASSIGNMENTS NOT MEETING THAT STANDARD WILL BE RETURNED UNREAD.

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.

Name every document you email the group as follows:

- **YourFirstName_Assignment.Format.**
 - Ex: Vincent_ScriptDraft1.pdf
- **Save and send all your work as PDF files.**
- **When emailing a script. NUMBER YOUR SCENES** before saving it as a PDF.
- Put your **name** and **title** on the **FRONT or FIRST PAGE** of your material.

PLEASE NOTE:

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

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

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 here. **IF YOU DON'T MEET THE DEADLINE, YOUR ASSIGNMENT MAY NOT GET READ AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A FAILING GRADE FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT.** We also may not get to your assignment during the class.

BE AWARE THAT SOME ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE THE TUESDAY MORNING BEFORE CLASS. Those are indicated as such on the following schedule. It is your responsibility to check this schedule regularly to stay on track.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Always bring everyone's scenes to class, as you may be called upon to participate in a cold reading of certain passages. Nothing drives a point home to a writer like hearing his / her / their words read back aloud!

SESSION #1:

DATE: 1/12

CONTENT: Overview of the class & syllabus. Atmosphere & Visualization
Group intro. What is a story? Inner Need. Roots of Inner Need

EXERCISE: **Trip to School** (15 minutes)

Creating a sense of place and atmospheric locations is part of the writer's job. Lighting, time of day, weather, architecture, use of sound, props and objects all help create mood and the world of your story. Focus on specificity and emotion.

- List the places you went to school starting as far back as you can remember
- List how you got to each school. Pick the hottest place/trip emotionally
- List things, places, activities, people, clothes connected with that trip
- Now describe one trip, tell us about how you got to school. (More "telling", less "reading")

VIEWING: Start with why (time permitting)

ASSIGNMENT: **Roommates**. Non-dialogue. Designed to introduce characters through visuals and props -- and conflict -- without seeing or hearing the characters themselves. In three parts. Length: a page and a half tops.

Part 1:

Describe through sight and sounds a significant space shared by two interesting characters who are living together in **harmony**.

Part 2:

Describe the same space, but now the characters are in apparent **conflict**.

Part 3:

One of the characters is now **gone**, the remaining one has the location to his or herself. This should not be a guessing game.

The point is to engage the audience and let us clearly know who these people are, and what the conflict is about. The elements in the second part ought to be **planted** in the first part, and may be missing or changed, or used again in the third.

DEADLINE: Wednesday 1/19 (next class)

TURN IN: Share **PDF** of scene on Zoom Chat at class time. We will read them in class and discuss together.

SESSION #2:

DATE: 1/19

REVIEW: **Roommates**. Feedback and discussion

CONTENT: Discussion of main character roles and goals

ASSIGNMENT: **Preparation for a Date or Significant Event**

Also designed to build audience engagement and expectations. Introduces the use of props, costume, and character revealing activity and action. Helps the writer practice time ellipsis, the technique of

planting and payoff, and/or repetition with a variation. And, of course, preparation and aftermath. In two parts.

Length: No more than a page total.

Part 1:

Pick an interesting character and place him/her/them **alone** in a location **significant** to that character. Challenge yourself to stage it in an interesting place other than the usual bathroom or bedroom. Ex: what if they had to get ready in the middle of an amusement park, or a combat bunker? How would that present conflicts, obstacles and struggles that would elevate the scene while being more visually interesting?

Show the character preparing for some character-revealing event, such as a crucial job interview, a murder, a confession, an encounter with aliens. Whatever. The point is to show through props and movement not only what the event is, but how the character feels about what's about to happen. This should not be a guessing game. We are not given clues, but glimpses into the character's hopes and fears.

It should be crystal clear what the event is when the character leaves the location.

Part 2:

Then, ellipse time and show the character's return. (We do not see the primary scene of the event.) But when the character returns to his/her/their original location, **we should know exactly what happened** and how the character feels about it by the changes in demeanor, costume, props, etc.

DEADLINE: Wednesday 1/26

TURN IN: Share **PDF** of scene on Zoom Chat at class time. We will read them in class and discuss together.

SESSION #3:

DATE: 1/26

REVIEW: **Preparation for a Date or Significant Event.** Feedback and discussionCONTENT: Correlative & character inner desires revealed through action.
Discussion: effective exposition that emphasize character backgrounds and story need-to-know

VIEWING: The Abyss (time permitting)

ASSIGNMENT: **Selection and Observation****Part 1:**

Go to an open-air public place – outdoor market, a mall, a metro station – busy, with a range of people. **STAY MASKED AND SAFE!** Watch until someone really captures your attention. Then observe everything you can about them: their figure, clothes, walk, the things they carry, particular movements, gestures, haircut. Don't follow them. Don't write anything. Once you're certain you have your person and have really studied them, go home.

Write as much detail as you can on a 3x5 file card. Put it in an envelope and seal it. Get out a phone book (or some 21st Century equivalent). Open randomly. Put a finger on a family name. Write it on the envelope. Then do the same for the first name. Onto the envelope. Do the same for an address. Onto the envelope. You're done for the day.

Part 2:

Repeat your trip on the next day. Pick another person. Another return home to record the observations. Another envelope with first and family name and address.

Part 3:

On the third day, open the two envelopes. Place the cards side by side. Ask yourself: "What would Character X do to Character Y to provoke Character Y to an extreme action?"

If that's not enough, ask: "What's the tragic secret that either of them has, that he/she/they would kill to preserve?" Then write a short story built around these two characters and that conflict.

Length: 2 – 3 pages.

DEADLINE: Wednesday 2/2 (next class)

TURN IN: Share **PDF** of scene on Zoom Chat at class time. We will read them in class and discuss together.

SESSION #4:

DATE: 2/2

REVIEW: **Selection and Observation.** Feedback and discussion

CONTENT: Discussion: finding effective characters; vernacular and voice; dialogue functions; cross-cutting to build suspense

ASSIGNMENT: **“Wrongest” Person / Intruder**

A dialogue scene between **two** characters. Should build and employ many of elements already introduced (especially “Preparation for a Date”). Preparation, planting and pay-off, etc. (For some reason, writers tend to forget the simplest elements, like sound and light to help the audience expect a romantic or violent scene...)

Designed to reveal character through conflict, to build suspense through cross-cutting and a ticking clock, and to practice dialogue -- including attitude, vernacular / voice, scene / plot advertising, exposition.

Length: Not more than 3 or 4 pages.

The setup: Character A prepares some location for Character B's arrival, but Character C shows up instead! This should be, for what we know of Character A and his/her/their plans, the absolute worst person to appear.

Character A must get rid of Character C before he/she/they crosses paths with Character B! But, Character A cannot come out and say exactly why Character C must leave. (“Listen mom, you gotta bail because I was about to smoke crack with my favorite girl...” That cannot happen.)

For this to work, the audience must know what is being planned and the stakes involved. Also, Character C must be entirely motivated to stay. (Mom is sick and took the day off, for example.). The scene ends immediately when Character B arrives, whether Character A is successful in getting rid of character C, or not.

DEADLINE: Wednesday 2/9 (next class)

TURN IN: Share **PDF** of scene on Zoom Chat at class time. We will read them in class and discuss together.

SESSION #5:

DATE: 2/9

REVIEW: **“Wrongest” Person / Intruder.** Feedback and discussion

ASSIGNMENT: **Seduction / Persuasion (Dialogue Scene)**

One character wants another character to do something. This needs not be sexual or romantic. The seducer should attempt to manipulate the seducee into agreeing by pushing all that person’s “buttons”. The person being seduced should have legitimate, goal-driven opposition to this — they want something of their own that happens to be different. The seduction/persuasion should escalate. The scene ends when the seducee agrees or doesn’t — or when a new element is introduced that changes all expectations and sets up a very different direction for whatever the potential next scene would be.

Length: 3 or 4 pages.

DEADLINE: Wednesday 2/16 (next class)

TURN IN: Share **PDF** of scene on Zoom Chat at class time. We will read them in class and discuss together.

SESSION #6:

DATE: 2/16

REVIEW: **Seduction / Persuasion.** Feedback and discussionCONTENT: VISIT FROM 310 PROFESSOR to describe the parameters of the class
(20 minutes)

Structure, Pitching 310 ideas (finish Act 3, talk scene structure)

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare 3 ideas to pitch in class as **5 page maximum** CTPR 310 scripts.
Pitch should be a couple of sentences.Students should consider the production limitations of the 310 project;
limiting the number of locations, physical complexity of action, use of
minors, etc.

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 2/23 (next class)

TURN IN: Oral pitches

SESSION #7:

DATE: 2/23

REVIEW: Pitching 310 ideas

CONTENT: Discussion: how is a screenplay different other forms of fiction;
formatting; writing efficiently

EXERCISE: n/a

ASSIGNMENT: Pick 2 ideas out of your 3 pitches. Refine and expand pitches

DEADLINE: Wednesday, 3/2 (next class)

TURN IN: Oral pitches

SESSION #8:

DATE: 3/2

REVIEW: Pitching expanded 310 ideas #1 and #2

EXERCISE: n/a

CONTENT: Scene structure

ASSIGNMENT: Write First Draft of 310 script #1 (aka S1D1)

Also, read the other students' scripts and come ready with notes. Use the class concepts in your feedback

TURN IN: Email group your First Draft (S1D1)

DEADLINE: **Tuesday, 3/8 at 10:00am** (the day before next class)**SESSION #9:**

DATE: 3/9

REVIEW: Workshop First Drafts of 310 Scripts #1 (S1D1)

CONTENT: Scene and sequence structural concepts

EXERCISE: n/a

ASSIGNMENT: Draft 2 of 310 Script #1 (S1D2)

Also, read the other students' scripts and come ready with notes. Use the class concepts in your feedback

TURN IN: Email group your Revised Draft (S1D2)

DEADLINE: **Tuesday, 3/22 at 10:00am** (the day before next class)

NO CLASS:

DATE: 3/16

CONTENT: SPRING BREAK

SESSION # 10:

DATE: 3/23

REVIEW: Workshop Revised Drafts of 310 Scripts #1 (S1D2)

CONTENT: n/a

ASSIGNMENT: Write First Draft of 310 Script #2 (S2D1)

Also, read the other students' scripts and come ready with notes. Use the class concepts in your feedback

TURN IN: Email group your First Draft (S2D1)

DEADLINE: **Tuesday, 3/29 at 10:00am** (the day before next class)**SESSION # 11:**

DATE: 3/30

REVIEW: Workshop First Drafts of 310 Scripts #2 (S2D1)

CONTENT: n/a

ASSIGNMENT: Write Draft 2 Draft of 310 Script #2 (S2D2)

Also, read the other students' scripts and come ready with notes. Use the class concepts in your feedback

TURN IN: Email group your Revised Draft (S2D2)

DEADLINE: **Tuesday, 4/5 at 10:00am** (the day before next class)

SESSION #12:

DATE: 4/6

REVIEW: Workshop Revised Drafts of 310 Scripts #2 (S2D2)

CONTENT: Select one of the two scripts to pursue further (aka Selected Script)

ASSIGNMENT: Write Third Draft of selected 310 script (SSD3)

Also, read the other students' scripts and come ready with notes. Use the class concepts in your feedback

TURN IN: Email group your Third Draft (SSD3)

DEADLINE: **Tuesday, 4/12 at 10:00am** (the day before next class)**SESSION #13:**

DATE: 4/13

REVIEW: Workshop Third Drafts of selected Scripts (SSD3)

CONTENT: n/a

EXERCISE: n/a

ASSIGNMENT: **Fifteen Years On** — Monologue

Project yourself into the future, 15 years after the conclusion of your script. Your protagonist, now older, has the benefit of hindsight on the events described in your story.

Looking back at everything that took place then, why does he/she/they think they had to go through that? What did they learn from it all?

In the voice of the character, write a stream-of-consciousness answer. Let it be as long as need be until you feel you've nailed it and that you've really captured both the voice of the character and the lesson of the story on a deep, core level

Edit the answer down to one page.

Look back at your script now. What would you change about its end that would both illustrate this lesson and set the table for the character's later perspective?

Length: 1 page.

DEADLINE: Wednesday 4/20 (next class)

TURN IN: Share **PDF** of scene on Zoom Chat at class time, then read it to the group. Discuss.

SESSION #14:

DATE: 4/20

REVIEW: **Fifteen Years On.** Feedback and discussion

CONTENT: Review of the concepts covered in class

Isolate and discuss one concept well executed in each student script

ASSIGNMENT: Write Fourth Draft of selected 310 script (SSD4)

Also, read the other students' scripts and come ready with notes. Use the class concepts in your feedback

TURN IN: Email the group your Fourth Draft (SSD4)

DEADLINE: **Tuesday, 4/26 at 10:00am** (the day before next class)

SESSION #15:

DATE: 4/27

REVIEW: Workshop Fourth Drafts of selected Scripts (SSD4)

ASSIGNMENT: Summary Project: Write up notes for everyone's final project, including your own. USE THE CONCEPTS WE DISCUSSED IN CLASS.

TURN IN: Email your notes to your colleagues and instructor

DEADLINE: **Wednesday, 5/4 at 10:00am**

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” <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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

Have a great summer!
