

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

**CTWR 421: Writing the Hour-Long Dramatic Series**  
**SPRING 2022**

Instructor: Alexa Alemanni  
Class Schedule: Mondays, 10-1pm  
Class Location: Online / SCA 362  
Office Hours: By Appointment  
Contact Information: [alemanni@usc.edu](mailto:alemanni@usc.edu)

**Course Objective:**

Our goal is to write a polished hour-long episodic script with a complete understanding of the process: How to mimic the world of the series. How to choose and pitch a spec story for that series. How to grid and outline an hour-long episode. And finally, how to write the script.

**Course Description:**

This course is conducted as a writers' room, with the operating principle that we are interdependent and that twelve brains are better than one. Everyone will be involved in the conception and realization of everyone else's script.

**Course Reading:**

***Writing the TV Drama Series*** by Pamela Douglas, 4th edition - required for anyone who has not read this book in a previous class.

**Script Format:**

All scenes will be written in standard script format using professional screenwriting software such as "Final Draft." **Please note: Celtx, the free software available online is NOT acceptable for this class.**

**Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:**

Laptops are to be used solely for scene work being discussed in class, and only with the permission of the instructor. Cell phones will be turned off.

**Grading Criteria:**

Grades: 10% = Verbal notes on other students' work  
20% = Pitches  
20% = Grids  
20% = Outline incorporating class notes  
15 % = First draft of script  
15 % = Rewritten Script

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. **Spellcheck and proofread** your assignment prior to submission.

**Netiquette:**

Keep yourself **muted** unless called on.

Keep your camera **on**, **dress** as you would in the classroom, and behave as you would in a professional environment. In order to be counted as **present**, your camera must be turned on.

**Internet Policy:**

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere on the internet.

**Recording Devices:**

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

**Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:**

Laptops may be used for the purpose of taking notes during workshop. Cell phones should be turned off. Students using phones will be asked to leave class.

**Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

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:**

### **Week 1: January 10th**

- \* Introductions and syllabus.
- \* Identify five possible shows to write and strategize the best spec series.
- \* Introduction to the principles of writing episodic TV drama – structure and act breaks.
- \* Watch Act 1 of *Homeland* / Turn into Scene Cards / Story Cards

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Turn in Scene Cards / Story Cards for your assigned Act

### **Week 2: January 24th**

- \* Discuss preparing story cards vs. scene cards look at various examples
- \* Screening: ***Scandal Act 1***
- \* Scene cards & story cards for Scandal Act 1
- \* **Vote** on which two shows we will write.

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Prepare SCENE CARDS & STORY CARDS for either **POSE** or **SCANDAL** (depending on whether you are interested in the network / streaming show we choose, or if they're both streaming we will do **THE AMERICANS** instead of **SCANDAL**)

### **Week 3: January 31st**

- \* **Screening:** Act 1 of the two shows we voted on.

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Create SCENE CARDS & STORY CARDS and/or a GRID of the season-ending episode of the last full season of the show you want to write.

### **Week 4: February 7th**

- \* Discuss the two shows we've chosen in terms of theme, tone, characters and structure.
- \* Discuss structure of each show

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Prepare two different pitches for your episode – "A" stories only – and **write them up** as two fat paragraphs and be prepared to pitch both "A" stories.

### **Week 5: February 14th**

- \* Hear all "A" story pitches. Class weighs in on the strongest stories.
- \* Discuss theme.

Screening:

#### **Assignment:**

- \* Pick an A storyline, prepare pitches for your "B, C and D" stories.

### **Week 6: February 28th**

Pitch "B", "C" and "D" stories. Class chooses the strongest stories.

Assignment:

- \* Prepare STORY CARDS for your episode.

**Week 7: March 7th**

- \* Walk us through your story.
- \* Discuss the next steps if you were in a room, and how to make it work for you

Assignment:

- \* Prepare a FULL GRID / SCENE CARDS for your episode
- \* Prepare your outline for Teaser & Act 1
- \* (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY THURSDAY EACH WEEK)

*SPRING BREAK*

**Week 8: March 21st**

- \* Workshop Teaser & Act 1 (depending upon your structure, could also be 1 & 2)

Assignment:

- \* Revise & finish your outline
- \* (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY THURSDAY EACH WEEK)

**Week 9: March 28th**

- \* Workshop second half of outline

Assignment:

- \* Write Teaser and Act One (depending on your structure choice)
- \* (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY THURSDAY EACH WEEK)

**Week 10: April 4th**

- \* Workshop Teaser and Act One

Assignment

- \* Write Act Two
- \* (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY THURSDAY EACH WEEK)

**Week 11: April 11th**

- \* Workshop Act Two

Assignment:

- \* Write Act Three
- \* (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY THURSDAY EACH WEEK)

**Week 12: April 18th**

- \* Workshop Act Three

Assignment:

- \* Write Act Four
- \* (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY THURSDAY EACH WEEK)

### **Week 13: April 24th**

\* Workshop Act Four

#### **Assignment:**

\* Revise revise revise

\* Final draft due to Blackboard by **May 6th end of day**

### **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>

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](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>

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