

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

**CTWR 439: Writing the Original
Dramatic Series Pilot
Section 19227R
Spring 2022**

Instructor: Harold Apter
Class Schedule: Wednesday 7:00 – 9:50 PM
Class Location: SCA 362
Office Hours: By Appointment
Contact Information: haroldapter@gmail.com
818-259-5703 (cell)

Course Objective:

Create an original dramatic series, including a first script and a summary of characters and story lines.

Course Description:

This is an exciting and challenging time in the television universe. Audiences have become more specifically targeted by age, race, sex and diversity. The bottom line is that it's become increasingly possible for anything you've ever dreamed of putting on television to find a home.

However, along with increased demand for material there is also increased competition. The market is flooded with spec scripts and pitches from writers of every age and background. Therefore, to successfully break through all the noise, your material must stand out above the rest. This course is designed to help you do exactly that.

You will be given the opportunity to conceive a drama series that reflects your own unique writer's "voice". You may choose to write in a serialized form or stand-alone episodic style (i.e., procedural drama). You may write family drama, action, comedy, political drama, procedural or a hybrid of any of those. You will be encouraged to push the envelope and be inventive. Don't necessarily focus on what's popular on television now. What's trending often changes with the wind. Focus on what moves you. What you want to watch. Be passionate and courageous in your choice. You will live with it for a long time. As a creator of a television series, you'll want that series to remain viable for at least five seasons or more. Develop a world that can sustain itself for at least that long. Characters with whom you can empathize. Basic human conflicts that will continue to fascinate. Those are the essential elements of every successful series.

Class will be held in a writers' room environment. You will be expected to read and stay current with everyone's work. As new material is workshopped in class you will be asked to conduct yourself in very much the same manner as a member of a writing staff, giving constructive notes to aid each writer in developing their material with the goal of making each original series the best it can be.

Suggested Course Reading:

“Writing the TV Drama Series” by Pamela Douglas,
“Difficult Men” by Brett Martin,
“The Tools of Screenwriting” by David Howard & Edward Mabley.
“Aristotle’s Poetics”

Grading Criteria:

Class Participation: 10%
Synopses/Bios: 15%
Outline/Revisions: 25%
Pilot Script: 50%

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 permissible for taking notes. No cell phones.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is important.

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 and topics are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE DUE NO LATER THAN 11:59 PM SUNDAY EVENINGS VIA EMAIL TO THE PROFESSOR AND CLASS. PLEASE USE WORD OR pdf FORMAT FOR ALL ASSIGNMENTS. SCRIPT PAGES MUST BE PROFESSIONALLY FORMATED (Final Draft, Movie Magic, etc.) AND DELIVERED IN pdf FORMAT.

YOU ARE EXPECTED TO READ ALL YOUR CLASSMATES ASSIGNMENTS AND BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS AND GIVE NOTES ON THEM IN CLASS.

Week 1 – 1/12: Introductions. Reading of syllabus. Discuss difference between writing a feature and writing a pilot. Introduction of the pilot "world" and act structure. How does a series gain legs? Begin to discuss ideas for series. What makes a series work?

Assignment: Watch the pilot episode of your current favorite TV drama. Read the pilot script (if you can find it) for comparison. *If you can't find it let me know and I will try to help. Most are out there somewhere on the web.* Watch the episode again and take notes on act structure, A, B and C storylines and character introductions. Submit this to the class and instructor Sunday night. Keep it simple!

Prepare a simple three line pitch for your pilot (up to three, if you're not sure). Who is it about? What is it about? Who is your least likely audience?

Week 2 - 1/19: Discuss your pilot notes. Pitch concepts.

Assignment: Complete a 2-3 page synopsis incorporating your chosen series premise, overview of series and/or first season and the bios of five continuing characters.

Week 3 – 1/26: Workshop synopses. Discuss character arcs and series themes.

Assignment: Write 8-10 page scene outline including A/B/C stories and act breaks.

Week 4 – 2/2: Discuss outlines with emphasis on escalating dramatic stakes.

Assignment: Revise outlines.

Week 5 – 2/9: Discuss outlines and revision process.

Assignment: Begin teasers.

Week 6 – 2/16: Workshop teasers.

Assignment: Write the next three scenes in Act One.

Week 7-10, 2/23 – 3/23: Workshop Acts One through Three.

Assignment: Write a minimum of three scenes per week.

NOTE: NO CLASS 3/16, SPRING BREAK

Week 11-15, 3/30 – 4/27: Workshop Acts Four through Five. Write series "mini bible."

Assignment: Maintain writing pace to allow time for revision and editing.

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/>

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 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.

<p style="text-align: center;">PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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