

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

CTWR529: Intermediate Screenwriting
Spring 2022 – 2 units

Instructor: Jody Wheeler
Class Schedule: Tuesday 7:00-9:50 PM
Class Location: SCI 209
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Information: jwheeler9@usc.edu

Course Objective:

Our goal is to broaden your knowledge of screenwriting fundamentals, building on what you learned in 505 (Creating the Short Script). Our main focus will be on character and dramatic structure, as it applies to both long and short screenplay form.

Once you've nailed down your ideas, you will develop two projects: a 10-page short script, suitable for 546 production, and a 10-20 page outline for a feature film script or dramatic television pilot. You will also take a stab at writing the first 10 pages of your feature or TV pilot.

As you work on your feature outline, you will sharpen your knowledge of dramatic structure, creating a story with high stakes and strong dramatic tension. You will learn to test your main character by increasing the obstacles, both internal and external, and by employing such techniques as revelations and reversals. And you will develop a more complete understanding of three-act structure and sequences.

Course Goals:

Write a 10-page script ready for 546 production
Write a Beat Sheet and Treatment for a Feature Script
Write First 10 pages of the First Act

Course Reading / Media:

The Dark Place by Jody Wheeler
The Dark Place (2014)
<https://www.amazon.com/Dark-Place-Blaise-Embry/dp/B00PFL8YEI>
Others as assigned.

Recommended Reading / Media:

The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri

39 Steps To Better Screenwriting by Paul Chitlik
Breathing (Atmen) (2011)
<https://www.kanopy.com/product/breathing-atmen>

Grading Criteria:

Short Film Script: 30%
Feature Outline / Treatment: 40%
First 10 Pages 10%
Participation: 20%

Your grade will be based upon fulfillment of the weekly assignments, the quality of your work, and your participation in class.

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:

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.

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 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 not be used in the classroom.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to be on time, prepared for each class, and meet professional standards.

Students are **allowed two absences** throughout the semester.

On the third absence, students will have their final grade lowered by 10% and an additional 10% for each absence thereafter. Two late arrivals equate to one full absence.

NOTE: Exceptions will be made in the case of religious holidays and DSP accommodations.

NOTE: CTWR529 only meets once a week and attendance is a vital component for your success.

In the case of medical emergencies, family emergencies, or allowances needed for personal well-being, 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 Writing Division recommends the student and/or advocate contact CSI at 213-821-4710 and their home department adviser for additional support.

Please be aware that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit, please check with your home department.

COVID: Please follow all USC COVID Policies. If you suspect you are sick, do not come to class.

Class Schedule:

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

Week 1 (1/11):

- *Topics:* Introductions. Shorts vs. Features. How to think about stories. What is this film about. Who is this film about? What does everyone want? What's stopping everyone

from getting what they want? How do they change in the end? Conflict. Conflict. Conflict.

- *In class writing exercise*
- *For Next Class:* Watch “The Dark Place” Feature. 2. Read “The Dark Place Script”. 3. come up with story ideas for your short and feature.

Week 2 (1/18):

- *Topics:* Stories. Three Act Structure. Spines. Inciting Incidents. Beatsheets. Protagonists. Antagonists. How characters suit the premise. Conflict. Character sketches. What gives a story a beginning, a middle, and an end?
- *Discussion* of “The Dark Place” Film and Script *and* your story ideas for your short and feature.
- *For Next Week:* Create story outline, character sketches, premise for your **short film**.

Week 3 (1/25)

- *Topics:* Character arc. Conflict. What you must know about every character at the beginning of each scene. How to write a beat sheet. How to write a treatment.
- *Read and Discuss:* Your story outlines, sketches, and premise.
- *For Next Week:* Write a beat sheet and a treatment for your short film script.

Week 4 (2/1):

- *Topics:* Only what the audience can see or hear. Reveal character or advance the plot. Come in late and leave early. Parts of a Scene
- *Read and Discuss:* your beat sheet / treatments for your script.
- *For Next Week:* Write your short film script

Week 5 (2/8):

- *Topics:* Are these characters interesting? Do we want to spend time with them? Will these characters tell your story and prove your premise? Are all of your characters plausible within the genre you’ve chosen?
- *Read and Discuss:* your short film scripts.

Week 6 (2/15):

- *Topics:* Dialogue. Subtext. Visual storytelling versus dialogue. What kind of dialogue to avoid.
- *Read and Discuss:* the rest of your short film scripts.
- *For Next Week:* Write story, spine, characters, premise for your feature script.

Week 7 (2/22):

Your Completed Short Film Script is Due!

Topics: Obstacles and twists. Emotions Maintaining conflict, building subplots, set-ups and pay-offs.

- *Read and Discuss:* Story, Spine, Characters. Premise
- *For Next Week:* Write the Beat Sheet For the Your Film

Week 8 (3/1):

- *Topics:* Normal Worlds and Inciting Incidents. First Act Choices.
- *Read and discuss* your beat sheets
- *For Next Week:* Write Treatment for First Act of Your Film

Week 9 (3/8):

- *Topics:* Midpoint reversal. Creating surprise yet still making sense (especially at turning point). Do we care what happens?
- *Read and Discuss:* First Act Treatments
- *For Next Week:* Write Act Two(a) treatment

Week 10 (3/15):

- *Topics:* Low Points
- *Read and Discuss:* Act Two(a) treatment
- *For Next Week:* Write Act Two(b) treatment

Week 11 (3/22)

- *Topics:* *The Final Challenge*
- *Read and Discuss:* Act Two(b) treatments
- *For Next Week:* Write treatment for Act Three

Week 12 (3/29)

- *Read and Discuss:* Act Three Treatments

Week 13 (4/5)

- *Open if we fall behind.*
- *For Next Week:* write the First 10 pages of your script

Week 14 (4/12)

Read and Discuss: First 10

Week 15 (4/19)

Read and Discuss: First 10

Week 16 (4/26)

- *Revising overall story*
- *Review / Any other catch up that needs doing*

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.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

ombuds.usc.edu

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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