USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
Writing Division
CTWR 505: Writing the Short Script
(Two Units, Required, Section #19285D)

Instructor: Don Bohlinger
Class Schedule: Wednesday, 2-5:50
Class Location: SCA 316
Office Hours: By Appointment (Zoom)
Contact Information: dfb@usc.edu, 323 804-0110

"*In dreams begins responsibility.*" – *W.B. Yeats*

Your point of view, which is your voice, your person, isn't something you have to get. It's something you have to uncover. – Hanif Kureishi

"Directing students should spend a year making films with their typewriters."
–   Alfred Hitchcock

"But if you genuinely want to make films, then write screenplays. All you need to write a script is paper and pencil. It's only through writing scripts that you learn specifics about the structure of film and what cinema is." -- Akira Kurosawa

GOALS OF THIS COURSE:

- Ideation: To develop your cinematic imagination; you will be honing your skills of **observation** as well as studying how **memory** and **experience** can bring originality and brilliance to your characters and stories (with emphasis on your 507/508 scripts.)

- Character: To strengthen & deepen your ability to conceive characters that will lead to compelling stories.

- Voice: To explore and develop your artistic point of view and original cinematic voice. *(Who are your cinematic heroes and why?)*

- Research: To develop ideas for stories and characters through observation of, research into, and direct experience with real life.

- Visualization: To learn to write from a visual and aural perspective.

- Technique: To understand the structure and *economy* of effective screenwriting.

- Dramatic Scene: To develop a fundamental understanding of the dramatic scene.

- <u>Short Scripts</u>: To learn to write effective and moving short scripts (508.)

- <u>Rewriting</u>: To understand the importance of rewriting.

     This is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you will develop your resources as a storyteller: your memory and observation, your responsiveness to stories around you, and of course your imagination, your ability to create and develop compelling dramatic characters and cinematic conflict.

     We will begin with **visualization**, the concept of telling a story with pictures. You will learn to bring the inner life of your characters to the screen without dialogue by using planting and payoff, action and activity, location, props, costume, atmosphere and motivation. We will discover that it is possible (and indeed necessary) to tell your stories visually, to make them compelling and rich with meaning by using these basic techniques.

     Later, we will combine these techniques with dialogue in a second stage of exercises designed to teach you the major building block of cinema – the scene. We will expand our work with character and study the ingredients necessary to make any scene work. By exploring our character's goals, intentions, or "wants" we will discover that the lifeblood of any scene is **conflict**.

     The class will take place in a workshop setting. Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both non-dialogue and dialogue, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting. You will learn to hear your film as you write it, while at the same time you will discover the importance of character as it is explored through situations of conflict. You will also be learning how to be an active member of a "writer's room."

     During the last four weeks of the semester you will apply all your skills to writing and rewriting *the 5 page, CTPR 508 screenplay*.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Week 1: 1/12
- Discuss class expectations, deadlines, syllabus.
- Screen two short films
- In-class assignments: Mood (horror/romance/comedy)
- Homework:. Trip To School
  - List the places you went to school.
  - 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 to the class, tell us how you got to school. (More "telling", less "reading".) 1-2 Pages.

Week 2: 1/19
- Screen and discuss two short films
- Discuss Trip To School Prompt.
- Homework: Before and After Date.

- Homework: Read 1ˢᵗ Script – answer three questions (email to instructor)

Week 3: 1/26
- Screen and discuss two short films.
- Workshop Before and After Date Assignment (preparation and aftermath)
  Homework: Memory Assignment #2: Describe the following memories:
    • My favorite toy as a child.
    • A secret place I used to go.
    • The most frightening person in my childhood. (1 page each. Describe the specifics of objects, person, place. Feelings and mood they engendered.) Email to instructor.
    .

Week 4: 2/2
- Breakout Groups – planting/payoff/mood (Unfamiliar/Familiar/Sad)
- Discuss assignments.
- Homework: Read Second Script. Answer five questions. Email responses.
- Homework: adapt one of the memory prompts into a short film (no dialogue)

Week 5: 2/9
- Discuss short film ideas.
- Breakout group – Roommates Assignment...
- "Experience" assignment: Choose A or B and write about it. My moment of greatest pride <u>and</u> moment of deepest embarrassment. Or…. My moment of greatest joy <u>and</u> moment of greatest terror.
- .Write up the moments to be pitched in class.

Week 6: 2/16
- Discuss experience assignments.
- Screen short films based on experience.
- Homework: read final script and answer seven questions. Email to instructor.
- Homework: dramatic scene – write seduction scene…

Week 7: 3/2
- Read and discuss seduction scenes in class.
- Homework: write an interrogation scene.

Week 8: 3/9
- Discuss interrogation scenes.
- **508 FACULTY VISIT 505 TO DISCUSS PARAMETERS OF CLASS.**
- Homework: Bring in three 508 ideas to pitch (one page each!)

Week 9: 3/16 Spring Recess

Week 10: 3/23

- Discuss 508 ideas…
- Breakout groups – workout best one with team…
- Homework: choose one 508 idea and write it up as a 5 page screenplay. (508 narratives should have a maximum of 2 pages of dialogue!)
- Deliver script to class by 9AM the day before class.

Week 11: 3/30
- Discuss 508 script 1.
- Homework: Choose another idea and write a 5-page script.
- Deliver script to class by 9AM the day before class.

Week 12: 4/6
- Discuss 508 script 2.
- Homework: Choose final 508 Project and rewrite it.
- Deliver script by 9AM the day before class.

Week 13: 4/13
- Discuss Revised 508 Project
- Homework: Further revisions to 508 script
- Deliver script by 9AM the day before class.
- Homework: Create a mood board for the 508 script

Week 14: 4/20
- Present and discuss 508 projects and mood boards.
- Final Homework: final revision and polish to 508 script.
- 508 Scripts should be submitted to Production – tba

Week 15: 4/27
- Present and discuss 508 projects and mood boards.
- 508 Scripts should be submitted to Production – tba

May 9th, 11-1 -- FINAL PROJECT/MOOD BOARD DUE

READING LIST:

1. *The Tools of Screenwriting: A Writer's Guide to the Craft and Elements of a Screenplay*, by David Howard & Edward Mabley (suggested)

2. *Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out*, Dannenbaum, Hodge, Mayer (Fireside, 2003) (suggested)

3. *Three feature screenplays or pilots (__required__, provided by instructor)

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

CTWR 505 grades will be based on careful consideration in the following areas of the students' work:

- Student must demonstrate understanding of the fundamental principles of ideation, visualization, creating compelling characters and writing the scene via the weekly assignments.
- The student must demonstrate an understanding of how to write a short script
- The student must demonstrate the understanding of how to rewrite a scene.
- The student must demonstrate the ability to read and respond to other student's work. Class participation includes full involvement in and contribution to all class discussions, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule) the assignments of the other students and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.
- Class attendance is mandatory, and includes being on time to class (otherwise, the students who present their material first are short-changed).
- Tardiness is unprofessional, and so will be considered unacceptable.
- Assignments turned in late will be marked down.

Grading Weights:
CTWR 505 grades are based on:

- Weekly Assignments (including 3 Scripts)………..............50%
- Reading and Responding to Workshop Assignments….......20%
- Final 508 Script...30%

LETTER GRADES:
100-93....A	82-80....B-	69-67.....D+
93-90......A-	79-77....C+	66-63.....D
89-87......B+	76-73....C	62-60.....D-
86-83......B	72-70....C-	0-59.......F

Classroom Decorum

The professor 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 fragile work in progress. A working writer needs to develop ***the art of collaboration*** while working with their peers. As a working writer you will need to be able to work constructively with directors, producers and studio executives.

Laptop and Texting Policy

Students may use their laptops at the discretion of the professor. Laptops may be used for note taking, but not for surfing the web unless it is part of a class project. Texting is

not allowed during class time. Texting is distracting and disruptive. There is nothing that needs to be communicated to anyone except your classmates during class time.

Save your texting and surfing until class break. Cell phones off.

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 additon, 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.

Script Format and Delivery:

Screenwriting format will be covered in class. To help you learn format and an expressive, cinematic writing style, I urge you to read as many professional screenplays as possible. You will be required to read and analyze three screenplays provided by the instructor. By the third session I expect your screenplay assignments to be written in a professional format. I recommend using Final Draft – it is the professional standard for feature scripts and television. If you don't own the software, you can download a free demo version from the Final Draft website (http://www.finaldraft.com/downloads/demo-final-draft.php). You may use this demo version to do all your assignments. *Celtx* software program is also available for free.

Name every document you email to the group as follows: lastname.assignmentname.pdf Put your name and assignment name in a header or title page. All work must be delivered via email in PDF format at least 24 hours before class time.

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

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

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*Note: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure this letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.- 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The telephone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

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 Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/. 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/.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the *Department of Public Safety* http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses

and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.htmlprovides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu/*will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

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

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