

CTWR 421: Advanced Hour-Long Television Drama
2 units – Section 19318

SYLLABUS – SPRING 2022

Instructor: Siavash Farahani
Class Schedule: Tuesday, 7pm – 10 pm
Class Location: Online/SCB 304
Office Hours: By Appointment
Contact Information: sfarahan@usc.edu

The speculative one-hour drama script is foundational to a TV writer’s portfolio. In this class, the student will be introduced to the tools of the craft of writing the episodic TV drama. We will cover the vast canvas of hour-drama television available today – from network to cable to streaming dramas and how they differ in structure, tone, content, and broadcast cycle. In addition, students will create a mock TV Writers’ Room and continue participation in this workshop process throughout length of the course.

Course Objective

Create a professional quality one-hour speculative script for an existing drama series (either cable, streaming, or network), with an emphasis on conception, pitching, structure, and episode integration into existing show. Completed second draft of teleplay will count as the final for the course. If no second draft is completed, first draft of script will be evaluated for the final.

Course Goals

- Create and pitch a story for an existing drama series
- Outline a one-hour script for an existing drama series
- Write first draft of a one-hour script for an existing drama series

Course Reading

- Writing the TV Drama Series (third edition) by Pamela Douglas
- Save the Cat Blake Snyder

Grading Criteria

In-class participation:	10%
Assignments 3 @ 10% each:	30%
Story pitch:	10%
Script Outline:	20%
First Draft:	30%

 TOTAL 100%

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.

All work is to be delivered via e-mail before or by **9 am on MONDAY MORNING prior to class** for table read and discussion.

If work is not delivered by this deadline, notes from professor are not guaranteed. Late assignments will result in grade being lowered 5 points for every 12 hours it is delayed (95 → 90 if delivered after Sunday at 9 am but before Sunday night; 95 → 85 if delivered before Monday morning at 9 am, etc.)

All work must be sent in .PDF format. Clearly titled with last name of student and assignment.

A grade of incomplete will be considered only after the twelfth week of classes. The only acceptable reason for taking an incomplete in the course is personal illness or family emergency. Students must inform the professor on or before the twelfth week and present verifiable evidence in order for an alternative make-up plan to be developed.

Note About Grades While Writing Draft

In addition to the quality of the writing of the pages, their timely delivery WILL also be graded. For every act that is handed in late, 5 points will be deducted from the First Draft grade. For example: if you hand in Acts 2 and 4 late, and you get a 90 on your First Draft, your grade will be an 80.

Turning in assignments on time, both in class and in the real world, is paramount.

NOTE: 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. Class attendance is mandatory and students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Tardiness is unprofessional and disrespectful to the 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.

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 internet use is restricted to classroom purposes.

NO CELLPHONE USAGE WHATSOEVER will be tolerated. Cell phones must be turned off or silenced (no vibrate) before class begins. No other e-mailing, text messaging, tweeting, web surfing, game-playing, etc. will be tolerated. Anyone found doing this will be asked to leave *immediately* and they will be marked as absent (unexcused).

The Online Classroom

Class dynamics are substantially compromised without the ability to see the people in class; therefore, the default is that students 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.

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.

Class Schedule

** NOTE: All dates subject to change at professor's discretion

Week 1 – Jan 11, 2022

Introductions. Review syllabus. Lecture: The principles of a character driven “Good Story Well Told.” Writing episodic one-hour TV, and how it differs from feature films, half-hour multi-camera, and half-hour single camera. Discuss network vs. cable/streaming drama – differences in structure, tone, content, broadcast cycle. Discuss landscape of television.

Assignment #1: Watch the pilot episode of one recent English language hour drama series. (Network, cable or streaming) Write/turn in paragraph summarizing the story (**10% of grade**).

Week 2 – Jan 18, 2022

Discuss Assignment #1. Discuss difference CHARACTER and PLOT. Review hour-drama act structures and story lines (A, B, C). Breakdown how they apply to episodes watched in Week 1.

Assignment #2: Watch episode 2 of the same series from last week. Identify the A, B, C stories organized by character(s). Break down episode by beats per act. (**10% of grade**)

Week 3 – Jan 25, 2022

Discuss Assignment #2. Class chooses 2 series to speculate for the semester. Discuss the “Writers’ room” is – how it functions, what are the rules, what are the dynamics and culture. Discuss how to find a story for existing series while making it personal to you as a writer.

Assignment #3: Analyze your chosen series. Write/turn in one page or less on its creative components, i.e., is it serialized, procedural? Who are main characters? What drives them and makes them compelling? What are the plots, sub-plots, themes etc that make this show compelling. What is your connection to the material? Write 3 ideas for potential story lines for your episode (no more than a few sentences per idea. **10% of grade**).

Week 4 – Feb 1, 2022

Discuss Assignment #3. Workshop potential character arcs and storylines for your episode.

Assignment #4: Choose an idea for your episode based on feedback from the class. Create a one page summary/pitch for your episode that incorporates your A, B, C plot + character arcs Pitch your episode to class next week (**10% of grade**).

Week 5 – Feb 8, 2022

“Breaking” the episode. Workshop story summary/pitch into outline. Discuss how to break your episode – demonstrate “carding”, writing to act breaks. For purposes of this class – episode will be structured into 4-6 ACTS (depending on the format of the chosen show). **The room is divided into groups A & B.**

Assignment: Both groups write outline/beat sheet for the episode. (no more than 2-3 pages, bullet points not prose. (**20% of grade**))

Week 6 – Feb 15, 2022

Workshop outline/beat sheet for both groups.

Assignment: Both groups revise outline based on feedback and start writing Teaser/ACT 1. Group A table read ACT I next week.

Week 7 – Feb 22, 2022

Group A table read Teaser/ACT I, feedback and discussion.

Assignment: Group A will revise and start working on ACT 2. Group B will continue to work on Teaser/ACT 1 for table read next week.

Week 8 – March 1, 2022

Group B table read Teaser/Act I, feedback and discussion.

Assignment: Group B will revise and start working on ACT 2. Group A will continue to work on ACT 2 for table read next week.

Week 9 – March 8, 2022

Group A table read and workshop ACT 2.

Assignment: Group A will revise and start working on ACT 3. Group A will continue to work on ACT 2 for table read next class.

Week 10 - March 15 NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

Assignment: Both groups keep writing to their goals.

Week 11 – March 22, 2022

Group B table read and workshop ACT 2.

Assignment: Group B will revise and start working on ACT 3. Group A will continue to work on ACT 3 for table read next class.

Week 12 – March 29, 2022

Group A table read and workshop ACT 3.

Assignment: Group A will revise and start working on ACT 4. Group B will continue to work on ACT 3 for table read next class.

Week 13 – April 5, 2022

Group B table read and workshop ACT 3.

Assignment: Group B will revise and start working on ACT 4. Group A will continue to work on ACT 4 for table read next class.

Week 14 – April 12, 2022

Group A table read and workshop ACT 4.

Assignment: Group A will revise and start working on ACT 5/Epilogue. Group B will continue to work on ACT 4 for table read next class.

Week 15 – April 19, 2020

Group B table read and workshop ACT 4.

Assignment: Group B will revise and start working on ACT 5/Epilogue. Group A will continue to work on ACT 5/epilogue. Continue working on script. Both completed first draft of script is due May 4th 2022,

Week 16 – April 26 FINAL CLASS

Final class: Discuss issues students may have with story holes, character development, lulls in dramatic pacing. Discuss script editing. Discuss scene/act transitions, character development. Discuss script in-progress: how does it “sit in the pile” of existing show?

Review all act outs. Discuss the WGA; its role and importance to the working writer. Discuss career paths for becoming a writer on one-hour show. Discuss conceptualizing the next teleplay in your TV portfolio: an original TV pilot.

FINAL DUE: Wednesday May 4, 2022 by noon – First draft of script (30% of grade)

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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