

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

CTWR 409 Fundamentals of Screenwriting: Character, Conflict & Story
SPRING 2022
4 Units

Instructor: Benita (Bonnie) Garvin
Class Schedule: Monday, 10 AM-1 PM
Class Location: TBD
Office Hours: By appointment only
Contact: bgarvin@usc.edu

Course Objective

Learn how to approach writing as a professional including: finding your authentic voice, writing and developing relatable characters in conflict driven scenes, world building and the 3-Act story structure.

The goal of the semester will be the first act of a character driven feature script, 25-30 pages in length.

Course Description

The purpose of this class is to understand the craft of storytelling. You'll learn the mechanics of a scene, how to create dramatic character arcs, engaging and believable dialogue and creating compelling world. Class time will be used to workshop and develop story, characters and scenes.

ALL WORK IS DUE DIRECTLY TO ME VIA EMAIL SATURDAY BY NOON.

Course Reading

"The Tools of Screenwriting" by David Howard and Edward Mabley

SCREENPLAYS:

Promising Young Woman
Moonlight

Additional scripts may be assigned by instructor

*Note: to the extension possible, I'll try and assign scripts similar in tone to your project.

Grading

Participation:	10%
Scene: Atmosphere.	5%
Scene: Conflict	5%
Scene: Payoff	5%
Scene: Character	5%
Scene: Dialog	5%
Scene: Rewrite	10%
Character Bios	10%
Outline:	15%
First Act	30%
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	100%

As per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

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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 may be used for notes ONLY. Cell phones are not allowed to be used in class.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:***

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

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

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

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

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@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 advisor for additional support.

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

CLASS SCHEDULE:

(schedule may be altered at the discretion of the professor)

WEEK 1

Introduction to Course. Finding unique characters. Examples and discussion. Creating world and atmosphere.

ASSIGNMENT: Read "Promising Young Woman. Write an "atmosphere" scene.

WEEK 2

Workshop atmosphere scenes. Discuss "Promising Young Woman" - interior/exterior life of characters and conflict.

ASSIGNMENT: Write a direct conflict scene. Read first three chapters of "Tools of Screenwriting."

WEEK 3

Workshop conflict scene. How to plant and payoff to create tension. Screen scenes "50/50."
ASSIGNMENT: Write a scene utilizing plant and payoff.

WEEK 4

Workshop plant and payoff scenes. Finding conflict in the world of the story.
ASSIGNMENT: Listen and tape two conversations. Type them up. What do they tell you about character and dialogue? Write character introduction scene.

WEEK 5

Workshop character intro scene. How to make dialogue authentic and reveal character
ASSIGNMENT: Write an authentic dialogue scene. Continue reading "Tools of Screenwriting."

WEEK 6

Workshop dialogue scene. How to approach rewriting
ASSIGNMENT: Rewrite one of your scenes. Read "Moonlight."

WEEK 7

Workshop rewritten scenes. What makes characters compelling and memorable?
ASSIGNMENT: Choose a character from scene work and write a 2-page bio about them.

WEEK 8

Read and discuss character bios.
ASSIGNMENT: Write a page bio on two important people in your main character's life. Be specific about the role they play and delineating the conflict between them.

WEEK 9

How to break and build your story from Character through theme and premise
ASSIGNMENT: Watch "The Edge of Seventeen." Begin your first act of outline.

WEEK 10

Workshop outline.
ASSIGNMENT: Finish "Tools of Screenwriting." Write a paragraph on the ending of your film.

WEEK ELEVEN

Workshop outline. Setting out and fulfilling the character's journey.
ASSIGNMENT: Write the first five pages of Act One

NOTE: We'll divide into two groups to workshop material. Please continue to turn in your pages by deadline. If you're not presenting in class, you'll get notes directly from me.

WEEK 12

Group A: Workshop first 5 pages

Group B: Keep writing (you'll receive notes directly)

ASSIGNMENT: Write the next 10 pages

WEEK 13

Group B: Workshop pages

Group A: Keep writing (you'll receive notes directly)

ASSIGNMENT: Write the remainder of Act One

WEEK 14

GROUP A: Workshop pages

GROUP B: Continue writing (you'll receive notes directly)

ASSIGNMENT: Final touches on Act One

WEEK 15:

Individual meetings with students to discuss Act One

FINALS WEEK: ACT ONE OF FEATURE SCRIPT DUE

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/ssu

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.

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This is an update on Attendance policy

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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