

ARTS

CTWR 415a: Advanced Writing
SYLLABUS (2 Units)

Instructor: Sean Hood
Email: shood@usc.edu
Section: # 19366R

Class meets: Mon 10:00-12:50PM
Location: SCA 363
Office hours: By appointment, Zoom

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To learn the principles and elements of writing a feature-length story.
- To create a story with strong dramatic tension and engaging characters.
- To write a 3-act **scene-by-scene outline** and the **first act** of a screenplay.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is an introductory course in developing a feature-length screenplay in which you will develop your resources a storyteller, your memory and observation, your responsiveness to stories around you, your imagination, and ultimately your ability to create and develop compelling dramatic characters and great cinematic tales.

The course will lead you through three fundamental aspects of storytelling:

1. How to get started, stimulating inspiration for your work.
2. How to acquire resources for discovering new characters, new worlds and fresh ideas.
3. Techniques for developing (“breaking”) your stories into a detailed outline.

To this end, you will be given **weekly assignments** that you will either write in class, or prepare as homework. You are expected to deliver them to me (via Blackboard,) but you will generally not be asked to read what you’ve written aloud in class. Instead you will simply tell your stories, developing your skills at holding an audience’s attention.

The give-and-take of **classroom discussion** is a substantial aspect of the course; you are expected to participate and engage in the development of the stories of the other members of the class. Be as constructive, supportive and enthusiastic as you can!

For many of you this semester will be your first foray into developing a feature screenplay. As legions of writers have noted, **story is character** – as John Galsworthy wrote, “The best plot is a human being.” If you create living, breathing, complex characters, they help you to generate the story and make it more unpredictable. So we will start off with the creation and development of our characters, making sure we know who they are and what they want.

By the middle of the semester you will focus on a single feature idea, presenting it as a short **(3-5 page) treatment**. Then, we’ll work on premise, story structure, scene structure and conflict as you write the **scene-by-scene outline**. As you finish the outline, we will move into writing the **first act** of the screenplay itself, hopefully one that you'll love and want to continue working on in future semesters.

Each weekly class session will include **lectures** on elements of screenwriting, including slide presentations and video clips. The schedule and assignments may be adjusted to help us accomplish what we want to more effectively. There will also be **individual conferences** addressed to the needs of each student and his or her material.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Attendance** is mandatory. Unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered. Students will read each other’s work and provide constructive, considered feedback to their fellow writers. Energetic, positive, courteous participation in class is an invaluable part of the course (and it’s fun).

Here is the official Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by one full point (ex: A to B). A third unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered another full point (ex: B to C). Two late arrivals equate to one full absence. In order for an absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session. Please note 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.

If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

2. **Deadlines:** Assignments are to be completed and submitted by specified due dates as discussed in class. Consistently late work will cost you a grade.

3. **Submission:** In order that your assignments will be read and discussed in class so be sure to upload them to the Weekly Discussion Forum on Blackboard.

Please do not use computers crashing, printers breaking, and other mechanical failures as reasons for not completing your assignments. Back up to flashdrives, whatever, and print out often for your own safety and peace of mind.

SCRIPT FORMAT:

GET SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE. You will be required to write in standard script format (use a screenwriting program like Movie Magic, Final Draft, etc.).

Good writing is rewriting and it's also proofreading. Make sure to correct all typos, dropped words, bad grammar and misspellings.

REQUIRED READING:

THE TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING by David Howard and Edward Mabley, and 3 FEATURE SCREENPLAYS, to be assigned

GRADING CRITERIA:

Classroom participation - 10%
 Character bios and premise - 20%
 3-Act outline - 40%
 Draft of Act 1 - 30%

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

94-100.... A	80-82....B-	67-69.....D+
90-93.....A-	77-79....C+	63-66.....D
87-89.....B+	73-76....C	60-62.....D-
83-86.....B	70-72....C-	0-59F

Outstanding work will get an A. Good work will get a B. Ordinary, average work will get a C. And so on.

SEMESTER SCHEDULE:

JAN 10 **LECTURE:** Discovering your story; elements of character , world and theme. Introduction to course. Review of syllabus. Course goals and student expectations. Roundtable introductions.

ASSIGNMENT: Three “*germs*” for a possible story.

JAN 17 Martin Luther King Day

JAN 24 **LECTURE:** Main character, goals and obstacles.

IN CLASS: Pitch three ideas. Be prepared to discuss.

ASSIGNMENT: Choose story. Write character bios, including leads’ & secondary characters’ wants and goals.

JAN 31 **LECTURE:** How story grows from character.

IN CLASS: Discuss and critique character bios, discuss the emerging shape of your story.

ASSIGNMENT: 3-5 page treatment - a version of story, with a sense of beginning, middle and end.

FEB 7 **LECTURE:** Basic structure; main tension, culmination, resolution, sequences.

IN CLASS: Discuss and critique three-page version of story.

ASSIGNMENT: Half of Act 1 outline completed. Bring in brief descriptions of opening and closing scenes of Act 1.

FEB 14 **LECTURE:** Midpoints and Act Breaks.

IN CLASS: Discuss Act 1 and story structure.

ASSIGNMENT: Finish Act 1 outline; begin Act 2 outline. Bring in brief descriptions of opening and closing scenes of Act 2.

FEB 21 President's Day

FEB 28 **LECTURE:** Plant and Payoff, Advertising

IN CLASS: Discuss openings and closings of Act 2

ASSIGNMENT: Finish Act 2 outline; bring in description of opening & closing scenes of Act 3.

MAR 7 **LECTURE:** Subplots and complications. Secondary Characters.

IN CLASS: Discuss Act 3 openings and endings.

ASSIGNMENT: First half of Act 3 outline; cast list.

MAR 13 Spring Break

MAR 21 **LECTURE:** Dramatic irony; Recognition and Revelation.

IN CLASS: Discuss cast list and secondary character subplots.

ASSIGNMENT: *Write opening scene of screenplay*; continue work on outline.

MAR 28 **LECTURE:** Dialogue & Subtext. Behavior.
IN CLASS: Read and workshop opening scenes.
ASSIGNMENT: Finish outline of screenplay. Rewrite scene.

APR 4 **LECTURE:** Location, environment, atmosphere, tone
IN CLASS: Workshop rewritten opening scenes.
ASSIGNMENT: 2nd scene of Act 1.

APR 11 **LECTURE:** Story and Structure of Scenes
IN CLASS: Discuss 2nd scenes of Act 1.
ASSIGNMENT: 1st 10 pages of Act 1 due.

APR 18 **LECTURE:** Tension in Scenes
IN CLASS: Workshop new Act 1 pages.
ASSIGNMENT: 2nd 10 pages of Act 1.

APRIL 25 **LECTURE:** Culminations and Climaxes
IN CLASS: Workshop new Act 1 scenes.
ASSIGNMENT: Last 5-10 pages -- finish Act 1 of screenplay.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

Students with Disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on disability is required to register with Disability Services 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. Telephone 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 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**