

**School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
CTWR 422: Creating the Dramatic Television Series
Section 19432D
(2 Units)
Spring 2022**

Instructor: Joshua Senter
Class Schedule: Wednesday 10-12:50 pm
Class Location: SCI 209
Office Hours: Wednesday 3-5 pm by appointment via ZOOM
Contact Information: joshuasenter@me.com

“There is no path, just go!” -author unknown

Course Objective:

Our goal is to create an outline for the pilot of a new dramatic TV series by taking a deep dive into its concept, characters, and plot.

Course Description:

This course is conducted just like the development of a real-world original TV series in which the class takes on the roles of writers, executives, and producers. Everyone will be involved in the conception and realization of everyone else’s original TV series with emphasis on pitching our written work to one another and pitching ways to improve that work. Participation is key! You will get out of this course as much as you are willing to put into it. Notes must be taken and implemented on every element of the TV series outline we discuss. A final revised TV series outline will be turned in at the end of class.

Course Reading:

***Still the Night Call* by Joshua Senter** with an emphasis on the deep dive into the main character, Calem Honeycutt, and the world building of the book.

***Writing the TV Drama Series* by Pam Douglas**

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Laptops are to be used solely for scene work being discussed in class, and only with the permission of the instructor. In the early weeks of class, notes will be taken by hand. Cell phones will be turned off. **If you use your phone in class, you will be asked to leave class and will be given an "F" for that day.**

Grading Criteria:

If you cannot make class, you are expected to have someone else turn in your homework for you on that day, or make private arrangements with me. **Late work will not be accepted for any reason.**

**Grades: 20% = Quality of verbal notes on other students' work
20% = Clearly and enthusiastically pitching to the rest of the class**

20% = First Draft Outline
10% = Quiz
30% = Finished Outline

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:

All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format, **Word or PDF docs with Helvetica Neue 12 pt. type single spaced. If there is more than one page, ALL PAGES MUST BE NUMBERED AND INCLUDE THE STUDENT'S NAME AND THE TV SERIES TITLE IN THE FOOTER!** Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Always "Spellcheck" and proofread your assignment prior to submission.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class.

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

Note: This is a change in policy. Instructors will no longer distinguish between an excused or unexcused absence. An absence will be an absence.

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/or know you will miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

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.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

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

Week 1 (January 12) – “CONCEPT”

Introductions and the reading of the syllabus.

Introduction to writing episodic TV drama. I will pitch two TV series: *The Fifth Letter* and *The Cancel Club*. Discussion on the importance of CONCEPT/LOGLINE and how the PERSONAL MOTIVATION that lies behind every concept is what makes a series not just important to you but ultimately to a buyer and an audience.

HOMEWORK: Write three original LOGLINES for original TV series ideas (three to four sentences each) to be shared in class the following week.

Week 2 (January 19) – “LOGLINE”

Everyone must pitch their three LOGLINES to the class. We will discuss each LOGLINE and each student must decide on one LOGLINE to flesh out as a full-fledged TV SERIES PILOT OUTLINE.

Screen: *Berlin Babylon* (pilot)

HOMEWORK: Pick out two of your favorite MAIN CHARACTERS from a TV series to discuss the following week in class.

Week 3 (January 26) – “CHARACTER”

Discussion on what makes great characters in television.

Screen: *The Sopranos* (pilot)

Each student will share their two favorite TV series characters and explain why those characters are important to the concept and story of the TV series on which they are featured.

I will share CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS from two of my own TV series pitches. Discussion on the importance of having at least six main characters in any dramatic series and how those characters' interactions are the blueprint for ALL STORY.

HOMEWORK: Breakdown THREE of the MAIN CHARACTERS from the logline/TV series you are developing. Each character breakdown should be one paragraph at least six to twelve sentences long.

Week 4 (February 2) – “CHARACTER CONT'D”

Each student will pitch their THREE MAIN CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS to the class. The class will discuss ways of improving those character descriptions to get to the heart of what each student wants their TV series to be about and to help hone what they are attempting to say as a writer through their characters.

Screen: *Lost* (pilot)

HOMEWORK: Breakdown the FINAL THREE MAIN CHARACTERS from the TV series you are developing.

Week 5 (February 9) – “CHARACTER CONT’D”

Each student will pitch their FINAL THREE MAIN CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS. The class will discuss ways of improving those character descriptions to get to the heart of what each student wants their TV series to be about and to help hone what they are attempting to say as a writer through their characters.

Screen: *Mad Men* (pilot)

HOMEWORK: Read three different TEASERS for the TV series pilot of *The Fifth Letter* to discuss the following week.

Week 6 (February 16) – “TEASERS”

Discussion of the three different TEASERS for the opening of the TV series pilot, *The Fifth Letter*. We will watch the TEASERS of three produced TV pilots (TBD) and discuss what makes those TEASERS work to perfectly tee up the worlds, characters, and concepts of their respective series.

HOMEWORK: Write THREE DIFFERENT (one to two paragraph) TEASERS for your own TV series outline.

Week 7 (February 23) – “TEASERS”

Each student will pitch their THREE TEASERS aloud to the class. We will select ONE TEASER from each student to improve upon and flesh out further.

HOMEWORK: Read *The Fifth Letter* pilot outline.

Week 8 (March 2) – “A STORY”

Discussion of *The Fifth Letter* pilot outline.

Screen: *Desperate Housewives* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good A STORY. Delineate what the A STORY should be for each student’s TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (four to five paragraphs) of the A STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

Week 9 (March 9) – “B STORY”

Screen: *Six Feet Under* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good B STORY. Discussion on what the B STORY should be for each student's TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three to four paragraphs) of the B STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

(March 15-22: SPRING BREAK)

Week 10 (March 23) – “C STORY”

Screen: *Succession* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good C STORY. Discussion on what the C STORY should be for each student's TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three paragraphs) of the C STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

Week 11 (March 30) – “D STORY”

Screen: *The West Wing* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes good D STORIES. Discussion on what the D STORIES should be for each student's TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three paragraphs) of the D STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

Week 12 (April 6) – “SEASON 1”

QUIZ ON *STILL THE NIGHT CALL*

Discussion on world building and how to break an entire first season of a TV series both for cable, network, and streaming.

HOMEWORK: Write at least two paragraphs describing SEASON ONE of your TV series for your outline.

Week 13 (April 13) – “SEASON 2 & 3”

Discussion on how to break the second and third seasons for a TV series both for cable, network, and streaming.

HOMEWORK: Write two paragraphs describing SEASON TWO AND THREE of your TV series for your outline.

Week 14 (April 20) – “PITCHING”

Discussion on best practices for pitching your TV series to producers and executives.
Answer session for any outstanding questions the class may have.

HOMEWORK: Use class notes previously given to revise each element we have created over the course of class to form a COMPLETE ORIGINAL TV SERIES OUTLINE that includes a LOGLINE, CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS, TEASER, A, B, C, & D STORIES, and SEASON ARCS.

Week 15 (April 27) – LAST DAY OF CLASS

FINAL COMPLETED OUTLINES 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:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776

osas.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.

Campus Support & Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

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) 442-1200 - 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.

<p>PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACE IN THE SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
