

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

**CTWR: 533: REWRITING THE FEATURE SCREENPLAY
Section 19382R
Spring 2022**

Instructor: Robert Ramsey
Class Schedule: Mondays 10 AM-12:50 PM
Class Location: SCA 363
Office Hours: By Appointment
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There is a famous quote attributed to the renowned sculptor Michelangelo: “Every block of stone has a statue inside of it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.” Let us rewrite the quote for screenwriting: “Every screenplay has a movie inside of it and it is the task of the screenwriter to discover it.”

—Jack Epps, Jr.
“Screenwriting is Rewriting”

Course Objective:

Students will master skills and techniques used by professional screenwriters as they rewrite their own feature screenplays with an emphasis on the protagonist as plot engine.

Course Description:

The first draft of a screenplay is often an ungainly creation, the product of a desperate lunge to get it all down, rife though it may be with inconsistencies, mis-characterizations and plot holes. The craft and magic that beguiles us when watching our favorite films is the product of countless rewrites, sometimes by subsequent writers. Screenplays remain works in progress until the movie is finished.

Before launching into a rewrite, the screenwriter must identify the essential characters, plot, tone and thematic elements that make the story worth telling, and devise a strategy by which to strengthen the structure, elevate the stakes and improve the lines of tension in order to tell that story in the most entertaining way possible.

We will begin by reading each other’s scripts and providing feedback. Each student will then devise their own rewrite strategy and present new work for cold table reads every other week in a collaborative workshop environment.

It is often the case that second drafts may function more correctly than their predecessors while simultaneously losing some the magic that made the first draft sizzle. Fortunately, the skills that helped you sort the mess that was your first draft will serve you well in subsequent drafts when you sort new problems with greater confidence. To that end, the final project will be a specific, surgical pass to rewrite (read: improve) a targeted element of your screenplay.

Course Reading:

“Screenwriting is Rewriting” by Jack Epps, Jr.

Grading Criteria:

Participation:	10%
Rewrite Mission Statement:	10%
Sequence Revisions:	60%
Final Polish:	20%

	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%

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 and Cell Phones will be used for class-related activity ONLY!

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

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. Two late arrivals equal one full absence. Two unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered by a half grade point (Ex. A to A-) Any further unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered another two thirds of a point (ex: B to a C+) for each absence .

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.

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.

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.

Class Schedule:

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

Week 1 (Aug. 22): Introduction to course, discussion of the Pass Method, divide into Groups A and B.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Group A scripts and prepare notes.

Reading: Chapters 1-4 of "Screenwriting is Rewriting."

Week 2 (Aug. 29): Discuss "Screenwriting is Rewriting." Discuss Group A scripts.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Group B scripts and prepare notes.

Reading: Chapters 5-9 of "Screenwriting is Rewriting"

Week 3 (Sept. 5): LABOR DAY

Week 4 (Sept. 12): Discuss Group B scripts.

ASSIGNMENT: Write your Rewrite Mission Statement.

Week 5 (Sept. 19): All Students present Rewrite Mission Statements.

ASSIGNMENT: Begin rewrites.

Week 6 (Sept. 26): Group A presents new material.

Week 7 (Oct. 3): Group B presents new material.

Week 8 (Oct. 10): Group A presents new material.

Week 9 (Oct. 17): Group B presents new material.

Week 10 (Oct. 24): Group A presents new material.

Week 11 (Oct. 31): Group B presents new material.

Week 12 (Nov. 7): Group A presents new material.

Week 13 (Nov. 14): Group B presents new material.

Week 14 (Nov. 21): Group A presents new material.

Week 15 (Nov. 28): Group B presents new material.
ASSIGNMENT: Begin final strategic polish.

Finals Week: Strategic Polishes due Dec. 10!

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.

<p style="text-align: center;">PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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