

IMPORTANT:

Please refer to the [USC Center for Excellence in Teaching](#) for current best practices in syllabus and course design. This document is intended to be a customizable template that primarily includes the technical elements required for the Curriculum Office to forward your proposal to the UCOC.

**CTWR 550 Advanced Story Development
Section 19151R****Units: 2****Spring 2023 —****Wednesdays, 10am-12:50pm Pacific****Location: SCA Room 203****Instructor: Bob Tzudiker****Office:** By appointment before or after class.**Office Hours:** Schedule via email**Contact Info:** tzudiker@usc.edu

323-969-1981

323-804-4666 text

Prerequisite(s): One from CTWR 514A or CTWR 523**Recommended Preparation:**

We may read and discuss Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, any translation EXCEPT that of Seamus Heaney. Best play ever written, but we may not get to it.

We will be discussing Jule Selbo's character outline method, which can be found in her book *Screenplay: Building Story Through Character*. We may reference the first four chapters, but I will provide a summary, too. The book is not required reading, but I find it handy.

Course Notes

Letter grade. Each assignment constitutes 5% or 10% of your grade. Assignments should be emailed to me and the class by 7pm on the Mondays preceding our next class, unless otherwise specified.

We may find the need to break into A/B groups in order to have time for full discussions of your work.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

No required reading.

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

In this semester, we will work together to develop several stories from initial idea to a well-developed story in the form of various types of outlines.

Over the semester, you will create at least THREE STORIES complete with premises, characters and basic plots and turn TWO of them into full beat sheets. These must be feature films, although one may be a one-hour pilot episode. Do not use previously worked-on material.

The syllabus is subject to change at any time in order best to serve the needs of the class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Our goal is to develop outlines for films that express a personal vision that makes your story unique. Not everyone likes to outline, but it is a crucial skill and often demanded in a professional situation.

The ability to envisage a filmed story before writing the full script requires an understanding of the fundamentals of your story's structure. The goal is to develop a "feel" for when a story is both coherent and exciting before it is fully written. A good outline is a work of art made from highly compressed descriptions of events.

The outlines will take various written forms, so that you may develop a toolkit of outlining styles. A crucial aspect of the class is to verbally communicate the story. We will be telling more than selling, which requires everyone's full attention and engagement so that we may learn from one

another. We will also give attention to what forms of response are helpful to each individual, and what forms hinder creative momentum.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Week 1 (January 11): THE IDEA.

What makes a good idea? How do we know, before an idea has taken form, whether it will sustain itself? We will look for the core drivers in the ideas for stories that will sustain themselves at feature length. We'll introduce the idea of the physics of story, in particular momentum and friction.

We will discuss various forms of outlines, starting with a simple 5- or 7-beat outline.

BRING AT LEAST TWO FEATURE STORY IDEAS TO THIS FIRST CLASS (5% of grade). Be ready to BRIEFLY (in 2-5 minutes) describe your ideas. You will not be forced to stick with these ideas, but with luck, you will identify what story you want to work on first this semester.

ASSIGNMENT for next class (for 5% of grade): Decide which story you will outline first and prepare a 5/7-beat outline.

Week 2 (January 18): DEVELOPING THE IDEA

I've heard of ideas that flower effortlessly into stories, but I have never seen one myself. What do we do when this doesn't happen? When you don't know the route, how do you know which turn to take?

Each story has its characteristic signposts, but let's start by asking our characters. We will discuss a character outline, á la Jule Selbo's 11-Step Character Outline.

ASSIGNMENT (5%): Develop your character outline. Be brief for each step. Be prepared to verbally communicate it to the class. As you work on this form of outline, keep a separate file for yourself of images and events that occur to you. Never assume you will remember good ideas.

Week 3 (January 25): CHARACTER

We will hear character pitches and discuss them.

The next step is to prepare an outline that consists of outrageous headlines that one might find in a tabloid newspaper (Google “newspaper” if the reference is too archaic). The goal is to name your major beats with as much energy and exaggeration as you can muster. Headlines grab attention by appealing to basic emotions, and it is these emotions that will be the real drivers of your story.

ASSIGNMENT (5%): This assignment has two parts: First, outline your whole story in the form of tabloid headlines (probably 7-15 headlines). Second, prepare a beat outline of your first act.

Week 4 (February 1): OPENINGS

We will discuss the headline outlines in class, and talk about opening sequences.

We will experiment with writing a full opening sequence for two reasons: first, to make sure we all understand the “voice” of the piece and second, so I can make sure I understand the film you are envisioning.

ASSIGNMENT (5%) Write an opening sequence of no more than 5 pages. These pages should communicate something about the core idea and the world you are creating. During the writing you should make notes of story ideas that are likely to arise.

Week 5 (February 8): MOVING FORWARD

We will discuss the opening sequences, mainly to see if these have changed our understanding of the stories.

You will be preparing beat sheets for the entire film. A beat sheet consists of extremely brief summaries of each substantial change within the story. (I prefer my beat sheets to fit on a single sheet of paper so I can see the whole all at once. But this extreme brevity may not suit you.) Each beat will be just a few words — reminders, really — that mark each event.

We will likely split into two groups to allow time for discussion of the next assignment.

ASSIGNMENT (10%): Outline to the end of the story.

Week 6 (February 15): THE FULL STORY 1 - A

We will discuss the full outlines, likely for A group. A Group then revises their outlines and prepares their next story.

Week 7 (February 22): THE FULL STORY 1 - B

Discuss full outlines of B group.

ASSIGNMENT (5%): Prepare core idea and 5/7 Step Outline for your next story.

Week 8 (March 1): STORY 2 – PROSE

We discuss the second ideas and 5/7 step outlines. We will next experiment with writing a prose description of your full story. While outlines are granular, treatments partake more of the continuous nature of a film. The writing of a treatment can give an opportunity to acquire momentum in the telling, which may reveal surprises in the story.

ASSIGNMENT (10%): Write a prose mini-treatment of up to ten pages double-spaced. (If five pages successfully communicates your story, write just five.) As you write, keep a separate file for yourself that will be your head start for your beat sheet for Story 2.

SPRING BREAK

Week 9 (March 15): STORY 2

We discuss mini-treatments and the experience of writing them, and the different feel of an outline versus prose.

ASSIGNMENT (10%): Do a full beat sheet for Story 2.

Week 10 (March 22): B Group

Discuss beat sheets for Story 2

ASSIGNMENT (5%): TBD

Week 11 (March 29): A Group

Discuss beat sheets for Story 2.

ASSIGNMENT (5%): TBD

Week 12 (April 5): Story 3 Ideas

Discuss ideas for Story 3.

ASSIGNMENT (10%): Outline Story 3 with the outline style of your choice, and start a full beat outline.

Week 13 (April 12):

Discuss Story 3 outlines.

ASSIGNMENT (5%): Complete Story 3 beat outline. Pick one of your stories and bring in a question about that story for the class to answer.

Week 14 (April 19): LAST CLASS

Review and discuss outlines and questions.

Grading Breakdown

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
Participation		15
Weekly assignments		85
TOTAL		100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72

D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments will be emailed to professor and fellow students unless otherwise discussed in class. Assignments are due by 7pm Monday evenings.

Grading Timeline

Grades will be calculated mid-semester and at the end, except when a student is not meeting expectations.

Additional Policies

Late assignments will have their maximum grade reduced by one grade level for each day the assignment is late, unless special permission is granted. (“A” level work would get a maximum grade of “A-.”)

Non-attendance can be the basis for lowering the 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:

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>
