

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

**CTWR 403: Writing the Narrative Podcast
Spring 2023**

Instructor: Jeremy Novick
Class Schedule: Monday 7pm – 10pm
Class Location: SCB 304
Office Hours: By Appointment w/ Instructor
Contact Information: jnovick@usc.edu

Course Objective:

“Writing the Narrative Podcast Series” is a class designed to explore the design and functional storytelling elements of the Podcast as writers create and develop their own Podcast series.

Course Description:

Over the last several decades, the art of storytelling has expanded and been re-shaped to fit a growing number of content platforms, to the benefit of a growing and more sophisticated audience. Ironically, one of the most popular emerging content sources is the direct descendant of Radio, a seminal source of mass media storytelling.

The podcast has emerged as a go-to, easy-access platform for engaging narrative entertainment – be it personal commentary, journalistic feature story, adaptation, or original narrative. In terms of dramatic or comedic narrative, the podcast is true to its radio roots as “theatre of the mind”. Therefore, the challenge for the writer is to express the world through imaginative description and aural background, as well as dialogue that clearly reflects the nature and dynamics of the characters. It is the mission of this class to lay the groundwork for students to develop and write pilot episodes from original or adapted material.

The class will be run as a writing workshop that includes lecture(s) on adaptive storytelling and the narrative arc of a podcast series, as well as SCA and Industry guests who have written, produced or greenlit specific Podcast projects.

Each student will write a Pilot Script and Series Bible to be delivered as their final project.

Course Listening:

**(NOTE: These podcasts are all
available free on all major platforms)**

The Horror of Dolores Roach
If I Go Missing the Witches Did it
Next Stop
Limetown

Blackout
Edith!
Last Known Position
Welcome to Night Vale
Edith!
Unwanted

Grading Criteria:

Work should be turned in via Blackboard or email to instructor and classmates by end of day Saturday before class, allowing time for us to read and prepare for class.

Participation:	10%
Pitches:	10%
Pilot Outline:	10%
Pilot First Draft:	15%
Series Bible:	15%
Adaptive Document:	10%
Final Materials:	30%

	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.

Spellcheck and proofread your assignment prior to submission. We are all taking the time to read your work; you should, too.

Internet Policy:

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere 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 the purpose of taking notes during workshop. Cell phones should be turned off. Students using phones will be asked to leave class.

Please note: You should always have a notebook/pen available.

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, etc.

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 the 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: All dates, assignments, and subjects are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

On Homework: All homework is due on the Sunday before class, by 1pm. Please submit in PDF format to the entire class and myself, at jnovick@usc.edu

Week One — Introduction: Theatre of the Mind

- Introduction, course objectives. Writing for the eye vs. the ear. Doubling down on Character. Breakdown of a successful narrative fiction podcast.
- We'll listen to an audio drama as well to get a feel for the medium.
- **Assignment #1 – Pitches: Prepare 3 brief pitches for a potential podcast series. You should be ready to talk about your premise, your world, your characters & conflict, and what makes it an audio drama (10%).**

Week Two – No class (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

Week Three – Breaking New Ground

- Pitch your stories and select which one you'll be writing (**10% of Final Grade**).
- TBD Guest Speaker. The utilization of sound and atmosphere. How much can Sound tell the story? Discussion on creating a character breakdown, and discovering the controlling theme of the series.
- **Assignment #2 – Breakdowns:** Write a 2-3 page breakdown of your main characters, the central conflict(s), and the underlying theme(s) of your show.

Week Four—Simple Stories, Complex Characters

- Workshop series breakdowns and discuss how your characters define your story.
- **Assignment #3 – Synopses: Prepare a 1-2 page synopsis of your pilot episode, including A-Story, as well as any B or C-Stories the episode will include.**

Week Five—A Gripping Pilot

- Workshop pilot synopses
- TBD Guest Speaker
- **Assignment #4 – Outlines: Prepare an outline for your pilot episode (10%).**

(Note: Starting at this point, in-class workshopping will be divided into A & B groups. Each week, we will discuss one group's work in class, and send notes via email to the other group. Continue to turn in your assigned pages by the deadline as normal each week, regardless of what group you are in.)

Week Six—Starting Strong

- Workshop outlines (Group A in class / Group B via email).
- Discussion about cold opens, teasers, and character introductions. How to capture the audience's attention right away.

Week Seven – No class (Presidents Day)

- Continue working on outlines, and schedule a 30-minute office hours with me this week.

Week Eight – Mystery and Cliffhangers, “Turning the Page”

- Workshop outlines (Group B in class / Group A via email).
- Discussion about cliffhangers, narrative drive, and keeping the pages turning. The goal here is for both groups' outlines to be approved and sent to script.
- **Assignment #5 – Pilot Scripts: Start writing your pilot episode (15%).**

Week Nine—“Show, Don't Tell (But Don't Show, Either)”

- Workshop script pages (Group A in class / Group B via email).
- Discussion of dialogue, action, and description in a camera-less medium. The goal here is for both groups' outlines to be approved and sent to script.

Week Ten—Hitting Subscribe

- Workshop script pages (Group B in class / Group A via email).
- Discussion about connecting the pilot story to the next episode, creating series questions and arcs.

Week Eleven – Refining the Series Themes and Character Arcs

- Workshop script pages (Group A in class / Group B via email).
- Discussion about our North Star. Are we staying true to the ideas and themes that made us excited about the story in the first place?

Week Twelve—Building a Series

- Workshop script pages (Group B in class / Group A via email).
- Discussion about what a series bible is in podcasting, where our characters – and our series – are headed and how to break the rest of a season, while staying committed to our characters, arcs, themes, and North Stars.
- **Assignment #6 – Bibles: Start Writing your series bibles (15%).**

Week Thirteen – Why Is This Podcast Different From All Others?

- Workshop series bibles (Group A in class / Group B via email).
- Discussion about how, in future drafts, we can add more to our stories to make it a unique listening experience.

Week Fourteen – Adaptation

- Workshop series bibles (Group B in class / Group A via email).
- Discussion of how podcasts are adapted into derivative material (features, television, etc.).
- **Assignment #7 – Adaptive Documents: Prepare a 1-page adaptive document outlining the potential of their series for adaptation (10%).**
 - How does your story lend itself not just to the audio drama medium, but to film and television as well? What elements might have to change, and what would an adaptation look like? What makes your story important right now? Who is the audience, and why does it need to be told?

Week Fifteen—Roundtable

- Workshop adaptive documents (whole class).
- Discuss the rewriting process.
- Podcast panel -- Writers, Producers and Executives will come in discuss the current and future audio drama marketplace.

Finals Week

- **Final Assignment: Delivery of completed pilot script, series bible and adaptive document. (30%).**

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