School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
CTWR 453: Advanced Feature Rewriting

Instructor: Sean Hood
Class Schedule: 4:00-6:50pm Thursday
Class Room: SCA 363
Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom.
Email Address: shood@usc.edu

Course Objective:

The objective of this course is to learn the professional craft of rewriting, to practice the craft by generating, discussing and receiving notes for revision, and to apply the craft by completing a rewrite of an original screenplay.

Course Description

From the first draft to the final day of shooting, professional screenwriters face a process of continual reevaluation, ongoing critique and shifting circumstances. They spend most of their time embroiled in rewrites. This course is designed to give students the tools to approach this process in a professional way.

From a purely artistic perspective, rewriting one's own material is the most challenging, painful and ultimately rewarding discipline a writer (or filmmaker) ever faces. Said John Irving, "The most important and essential element of writing is rewriting." This course is also designed help the students face this challenge with confidence and creativity.

The class will lead students step-by-step through the revision of an original feature script, moving from broad discussions of the author's original intent, to a more detailed "game plan" for the rewrite, and finally to the most specific areas of scene and dialogue. Each aspect of the screenplay will be analyzed and reconsidered, with emphasis on story and character fundamentals.

This course will not only help students to improve their scripts, it will allow them to practice skills of analysis, discussion and presentation they will need in future projects throughout their professional careers. With this in mind, students will be expected to participate in all discussions and to help their fellow students develop their outlines and screenplays.

Ultimately, each student is required to complete an extensive rewrite (or rewrites) by the end of the semester. A dialogue polish does ***not*** constitute an extensive rewrite. Since each screenplay offers unique challenges for each writer, the instructor will take into account the progress of each student on an individual basis.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Receive, organize, digest and utilize notes.
2. Create a strategic game plan for rewriting.
3. Execute game plans through focused passes on the script.
4. Strengthen the main character and story arc.
5. Strengthen the character relationships, plot complications and theme.
6. Assemble a last set of notes for future revisions.

Course Reading:

Students will be required to read each other's original screenplays as well as each other's ongoing revisions. Because of sheer volume of this material as well as the time and care taken in its analysis, reading from the textbook will be mostly optional:

Screenwriting is Rewriting by Jack Epps Jr. Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2016

Assignments:

The writing assignments will be due by **midnight Tuesday** previous to each class. This is a firm deadline and the late delivery of assignments will impact your grade for the course. If you finish the work earlier, please send it in. All written assignments will be uploaded to the weekly discussion forum on Blackboard.

You'll be expected to come to class with typed notes on your colleagues' pages for the class discussion. These written notes will be then uploaded to the weekly discussion forum on Blackboard after class, sometime on **Thursday.**

Grading Criteria:

Grading will depend on the quality and improvement of student's written work and in-class presentations, as well as the student's involvement in the class discussions.

The course aims to prepare students to be working professionals. With that in mind, grading will reflect the standards and expectations students will encounter in the "real world." So, all assignments must be submitted *on time*. Students must attend all classes, arriving *on time*. Students who cannot make a class or complete an assignment must contact the professor via email *before* they miss a class or fail to complete an assignment.

When judging a screenwriter's work, industry professionals often ask if a writer can "deliver." Professional work is "delivered" on-time, proofread, and carefully thought out. Slip-shod or hurried work is rarely tolerated. So in determining a final grade, *hard work and professionalism* will be as important as originality and skill.

Likewise, working as a professional requires the skills of collaboration and communication. So as they would be in any story meeting in the entertainment industry, students are expected to be involved in each and every discussion. Failing to read and engage with other students' material will affect the students' final grades.

Specific areas that will be considered in determining a final grade are:

- Classroom Participation – 5%
- Written Feedback (Notes) – 5%
- Gameplan and Outline – 10%
- Bi-Weekly Revised Pages – (10% each) 40%
- Final rewritten and polished screenplay – 40%

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%

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected 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 equates 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.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

As the class is discussion based, cell phones should be turned off. You may use your laptop when giving and receiving notes, but for those reasons only.

<u>**Class Schedule**</u>

<u>**Week**</u> 1 **– Thursday, January 12**

- Lecture: **The Rewrite Process**
- Introductions.
- Review of Syllabus.
- Discussion of class goals.
- Splitting the class into two Groups.

<u>**Assignment Due**</u> **– Tuesday, January 17 Midnight**

- Reread your own script from beginning to end.
- Annotate draft as you read.
- Using Rewrite Questionnaire, summarize the scripts's strengths and weaknesses.
- Read GROUP A scripts (for class discussion.)
- Using Rewrite Questionnaire, prepare written notes on GROUP A scripts.

<u>**Week 2**</u> **– Thursday, January 19**

- Lecture: **Rewriting The Story**
- Organizing feedback/notes into a Summary of Feedback.
- Critique and discussion of GROUP A screenplays.
- All deliver 1-2 pages of <u>written notes</u> on screenplays written by GROUP A.

<u>**Assignment Due**</u> **– Tuesday, January 24 Midnight** (after Labor Day)

- GROUP A delivers a 1-2 page <u>Summary of Feedback</u>
- Read GROUP B scripts (for class discussion.)

<u>**Week 3**</u> **– Thursday, January 26**

- Lecture: **Rewriting Character**
- How to create a <u>Gameplan and Outline</u> for the rewrite.
- Critique and discussion of GROUP B screenplays.
- All deliver 1-2 pages of <u>written notes</u> on screenplays written by GROUP B.
- Each student in GROUP A makes an **Appointment With The Professor** for the next week.

<u>**Assignment Due**</u> **– Tuesday, January 31 Midnight**

- GROUP B delivers a 1-2 page <u>Summary of Feedback</u>
- GROUP A delivers a 2-3 page <u>Gameplan and Outline</u> detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.

Week 4 – Thursday February 2

- Lecture: **Rewriting Structure**
- Constructing a Game Plan.
- Discussion of Group A's <u>Gameplan and Outline.</u>
- Each student in GROUP B makes an **Appointment With The Professor** for the next week.

Assignment Due – Tuesday, February 7, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers a 2-3 page <u>Gameplan and Outline</u> detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.
- GROUP A begins writing.

Week 5 – Thursday, February 9

- Lecture: **The Set Up and First Act**
- Discussion of Group B's <u>Gameplan and Outline.</u>

Assignment Due – Tuesday, February 14, Midnight

- GROUP B begins writing.
- GROUP A delivers revised <u>Sequences One and Two</u> (The First Act)

Week 6 – Thursday, February 16

- Lecture: **Subplots and Relationships**
- Discussion of Group A's work.

Assignment Due – Tuesday, February 21, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised <u>Sequences One and Two</u> (The First Act)

Week 7 – Thursday, February 23

- Lecture: **The 2nd Act, Building to The Midpoint**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Tuesday, February 28, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers revised <u>Sequences Three and Four</u> (up to the Midpoint)

Week 8 - Thursday, March 2

- Lecture: **Building Sequences: structure, tension, mini-movie**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Tuesday, March 7, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised <u>Sequences Three and Four</u> (up to the Midpoint)

Week 9 – Thursday, March 9

- Lecture: **End of the 2nd Act**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Spring Break – March 12-19

Assignment Due – Tuesday, March 21, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers revised <u>Sequences Five and Six</u> (Complete Second Act)

Week 10 – Thursday, March 24

- Lecture: **Rewriting Scenes**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Tuesday, March 28 Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised <u>Sequences Five and Six</u> (Complete Second Act)

Week 11 - Thursday, March 30

- Lecture: **The Third Act**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Tuesday, April 4, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers revised <u>Sequences Seven and Eight</u> (The Third Act)

Week 12 – Thursday April 6

- Lecture: **Rewriting**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Tuesday April 11, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised <u>Sequences Seven and Eight</u> (The Third Act)

Week 13– Thursday April 13

- Lecture: **Polishing**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Tuesday April 18, Midnight

If you are behind, submit missing sequences . You may submit Optional Polish Pages

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Week 14 – Thursday April 20

Lecture: **Hero's Journey's, Saved Cats, and other templates**.
Discussions of the submitted catch-up sequences and Polish Pages.

Assignment Due – Tuesday April 25, Midnight

Anyone who wants to can deliver Optional Polish pages or missing sequences.

Week 15 – Thursday April 27

Lecture: **Special Guest**
Final notes on submitted pages and encouragement.
Discussions about transitioning from film school to professional life.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE – Thursday **May 5, Midnight**

Students who are late with their work will get an **entire letter drop** for each day they are late. (For example: A- to B-)

<u>Statement on Academic Integrity</u>:

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