

CTWR 416: MOTION PICTURE SCRIPT ANALYSIS
Spring 2023

Professor: Sean Hood, shood@usc.edu

Meeting Time: Tuesday 1 PM - 4:50 PM

Location: SCA 108

Office hours: By appointment via Zoom.

DAs: TBD

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

Students will learn to identify patterns of structure, tension, and characterization in feature films using **fundamental screenwriting terms**. This will provide students with a toolbox to bring to their work, whether that be writing, directing, producing, editing, cinematography, or work in any medium propelled by cinematic storytelling.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this class we will share the experience of viewing and enjoying thirteen feature films and one TV pilot - all with different narrative approaches. We will discover how these films were put together, what screenwriting methods were employed, and how these techniques can help us become better storytellers ourselves.

There is no one method, no master story form that must be slavishly followed to write scripts for narrative films. While this course will give you a thorough understanding of three-act structure and the “sequence approach,” we will also focus on more general, fluid screenwriting concepts such as character, character arc, and theme. We will learn specific techniques: planting and pay-off, ellipsis, twist, moments of revelation and recognition, exposition, backstory and ways of creating empathy for the central character. Most of the analysis will be done from the screenwriter’s point of view, but we will also examine the roles of the director, cinematographer, editor, and composer - as indicated by the script.

The analyzed movies present a range of narrative techniques, story patterns, structures, styles and genres, and diverse filmmakers and characters. We do this to explore how the same tools are used by different filmmakers, in different ways, depending on their peculiar goals. Every film has been chosen to illustrate specific approaches and techniques.

For writers, the purpose of this class is to build your own screenwriter's toolbox (a place to go to find ways of fixing your own screenplays.) By learning how other filmmakers solved the very problems you are facing in your own work, you will gain an understanding of how to achieve better screenplays and characters yourself.

However, since film is a collaboration of storytellers, and the story is “rewritten” multiple times as the film is prepped, rehearsed, shot, edited, and mixed, this

course is designed for **anyone** working in the cinematic arts - including television, animation, gaming, new media and transmedia - who needs to more deeply understand how audiences are engaged with moving pictures.

We will NOT take a top-down approach - stressing templates, plot points and obligatory page numbers. **The map is not the territory**. The techniques and story patterns we teach work from the bottom up, helping you tell **your own story** more clearly, more engagingly, and to deeper effect. Ultimately, by learning these terms and concepts and then learning to identify them in the movies you watch, we hope to inspire you to tell your stories in the most original and effective way possible.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS:

Each week of class you will be required to...

- Attend a **lecture**, in which a film is screened and analyzed.
- Post to class **discussion board**. This essential element takes the place of class discussion. I hope to develop an ongoing dialogue!
- Take a weekly **quiz**.

There will also be an in-class **midterm**, and a take-home **final**.

Posting in Forums:

- Write as if you were speaking in a class discussion: relaxed in tone but respectful, polite, and **professional** in your choice of words.
- Post thoughtful and meaningful posts and responses. The point is to have an ongoing dialogue about screenwriting topics raised by the films. Your professor will be joining discussions as well.

QUIZES AND TESTS:

All written material is expected to be turned in **on time**. Late work will be graded down. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Discussion Boards and Quizzes are due the following Tuesday before class.

COURSE GOALS:

By the end of the class students will be able to:

1. Define 150 screenwriting terms. (We learn approximately ten a week)
2. Provide examples of each of these terms in the films screened in class.
3. Describe the structure of the films shown in class.
4. Identify and describe these terms in a film seen for the first time.
5. Diagram the sequence structure of a film seen for the first time.
6. Analyze films from a professional perspective: not “Did I like it or not?,” but rather “Did it work? If so, why?”

COURSE ASPIRATIONS

By the end of this course we hope students will be inspired to:

1. Compare and contrast these concepts in other cinematic media including television, short films, new media, gaming, and transmedia.
2. Apply these tools to cinematic arts regardless of role (writer, director, producer, cinematographer, animator, game designer, ect.)
3. Apply these tools to students’ own scripts and films.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE (subject to change)

- 1/10 **North By Northwest**
- 1/17 **School of Rock**
- 1/24 **Portrait of a Lady On Fire**
- 1/31 **Finding Nemo**
- 2/7 **Ladybird**
- 2/14 **A Separation**
- 2/21 **Midterm** - Multiple choice, short answer - Definitions and Examples
Atlanta (TV Pilot)
- 2/28 **Creed + Guest Speaker**
- 3/7 **4 months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days**
- SPRING BREAK
- 3/21 **The Babadook** (2014)
- 3/28 **Mad Max: Fury Road**
- 4/4 **Parasite**
- 4/11 **Mulholland Dr.** (2001)
- 4/18 **TBD**
- 4/25 TBD Take-Home [**Final Exam**] - Movie Breakdown

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

CNTV 416 grades will be based on careful consideration in the following areas:

Discussion Boards	15%	150 points (10 per week)
Weekly Quizzes	30%	300 points (20 points each)
Mid-Term	20%	200 points
Final	35%	350 points

Total	100%	1000 points
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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%

ATTENDANCE

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 equals 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.

PARTICIPATION

Participation in the **Discussion Board** is mandatory and weekly. We grade your contribution to the boards the same way we would grade participation in class. Each week, to get full credit simply **respond to the weekly topic** and then contribute at least **two comments** to ongoing discussions. *In other words, we are asking for a minimum of two or three thoughtful, developed, and relevant sentences for each weekly module.*

Cursory, half-hearted, or offhand comments will get only partial credit. Generalized film critique, back and forth discussion, and additional comments are encouraged, and will count to your “overall” points for Participation.

DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRICS

Each week you can earn 10 points on the weekly discussion topics.

(Rubric with regard to post and to comments)

Outstanding	Competent	Minimal	Problematic	No Coments
10 points	8 Points	6 Points	4 Points	0 Points
Contributed at least two comments that were thoughtful, relevant, and fully developed	Contributed at least one thoughtful, relevant, and developed comment.	Made only cursory, half-hearted, or offhand comments.	Only made comments that were unhelpful or off topic.	Made no comments this week.

Treat the Discussion Board as if it were a professional forum such as feedback group or writers’ room. As long as you just **show up** and **contribute**, getting full credit for participation should be low-stress, easy and enjoyable.

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 CELLPHONE POLICY:

Laptops may be used for taking notes and tests. Cellphones should be turned off during class time just as they would be in a movie theater.

COMMUNICATION

When you have questions or comments there are a variety of ways you can contact the Professor or the DAs directly. In order, they are:

1. For questions about the class, first check the **syllabus**.
2. For expanded answers to questions about the terms, the movies we stream, or the class itself, try the “**Ask Your Professor**” forum on the Discussion Boards. You may find the question is already answered. Response time: 48 hours, but DAs or other students often post answers before the professor.
3. For short but important questions, the Professor and DAs will be available fifteen minutes before and after each class.
4. For questions about the suggested films and a recap of concepts we discuss in class you can drop by the professor’s general **office hours**.
5. If you have a question about the class or the terms that you would rather not post publicly, you can email your DA. **Response time 24 hours**
6. If it you have an issue or question that is sensitive or private in nature, you can email the professor. **Response time 48 hours**.
5. If need to meet with the professor one-on-one, please make an appointment by contacting your DA. They will schedule a Zoom time, and provide a link.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

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/sssa

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