

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

**CTWR 321: Introduction to Hour-Long Television Writing
Section 19353 D
(2 Units)
Spring 2023**

Instructor:	Joshua Senter
Class Schedule:	Friday 10-12:50 pm
Class Location:	SCA 362
Office Hours:	Friday 1-2 pm SCA 259
Contact Information:	joshuasenter@me.com

OVERVIEW:

Welcome to the Writers' Room. This is the place where you will learn what it takes to go from the blank page to a finished teleplay. Where you will work as a team, even if that means losing some of your favorite ideas and best lines. Where you will discover how to mine the fields of established dramas to find the rhythm, tone and voice of a series. By the end of the semester, you will understand what it takes to create an excellent television episode by collaborating on scripts that will be filled with solid ideas, tight dialogue and the kind of authenticity that only comes from honest writing, real world experience and/or journalistic research. We are going to aim high.

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

Our objective is to understand the structure of television drama and to replicate the responsibility of being part of a collaborative team: The television writing staff. We will choose an existing dramatic series and create a 10-arc season. As a class, and divided into two groups, we will write two episodes of that arc. The two scripts will serve as the final course project.

COURSE GOALS:

- Exposure to the process of writing episodic TV drama
- Appreciation of outstanding television series writing
- How to choose an arced storyline from an existing series
- Study of effective scenes from excellent TV scripts
- Overall development of writing and structure skills

Script Format: Laptops are required. All scripts will be written in standard script format using professional screenwriting software such as "Final Draft" or "Movie Magic."

Please note: The free scriptwriting software, Celtx, does NOT work for this class.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy: Laptops are to be used solely for work being discussed in class, and only with the permission of the instructor. Cell phones will be turned off. Please note: You should always have a notebook/pen available.

GRADES:

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory due to the workshop nature of this class.

**** Assignments:** All work is expected to be submitted on **THURSDAY, THE DAY BEFORE CLASS** by 10 am sharp. Late work will cost you a grade. Consistently late work will cost you two grades. Good writing means rewriting - and proofreading. Sloppy scene work with typos, dropped or misused words and bad grammar is unprofessional, unacceptable and will be reflected in your grade.

20% GRID, One-Sheet and *The Tell-Tale Heart*

20% Pitches of "A , B, C and D" stories

10% Arcing of episodes

20% Outlines

30% Contribution, verbal and written, to the writing of spec episodes

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%

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**.

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. Always proofread your assignment prior to submission.

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.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Please Note: All assignments and class content are subject to change.

Week 1: January 13

Introduction to the principles of writing for an episodic TV drama series. How episodic series writing differs from other kinds of screenwriting in conception, intention, characterization and structure: The short story (film) vs. chapters in a book (TV series). What is a story? What is drama? What is the importance of conflict?

Assignment #1: Write one scene from a show you personally most want to work on. Due on **Thursday, January 26th by 10AM**, emailed to your classmates. We will arc out an entire new season and write two episodes within that season. Submit in PDF format.

Week 2: January 20

Discuss the series the class will write.

Structure week: Learning the GRID. Watch PILOT, practice GRID entries for each scene.

Assignment #1: GRID the pilot episode for the series we'll write, and submit in PDF format to joshuasenter@me.com.

Assignment #2: Use an actual script from our series to create a one-sheet on the correct character names for all major characters (and how they're used in dialogue headings) and major series locations. Submit in PDF format to joshuasenter@me.com

Example: Pilot for *Grey's Anatomy*

CHARACTER NAME

Dr. Meredith Grey
Dr. Derek Shepherd
Dr. Richard Webber

DIALOGUE HEAD

Meredith
Derek
Richard

INTERIORS

Seattle Grace Hospital
E.R.
Patient Room
Elevator
Corridor
Nurses' Station

EXTERIORS

Seattle Grace Hospital
Ambulance Bay
Seattle (stock footage)

Week 3: January 27

Workshop and discuss scenes – how to begin and end a scene, tighten dialogue and avoid exposition. Discuss the arcing of storylines and how they can progress over an entire season.

Assignment: Watch at least **three episodes** of the series – *including the episode that will LEAD INTO our season* - and make notes on its characters, tone, theme, the world in which it takes place and the format. Write up **TWO** possibilities of where the **A story can progress over a new season**. Submit in PDF format to joshuasenter@me.com

Week 4: February 3

Create a writers room and **WHITE BOARD ALL THE "A" STORY POSSIBILITIES, VOTING ON THE BEST ONES**. Begin to arc out a ten-episode season, paying attention to the main through-line as well as some of the ancillary character arcs.

Assignment: Write up **TWO** possibilities for each of the **B, C and D stories**. Submit in PDF format to joshuasenter@me.com

Weeks 5-6: February 10, February 17

Pitch the A, B and C stories and vote on the best ones. Class time is spent arcing out the ten-episode season. **CHOOSE WHICH EPISODES TO WRITE. CHOOSE TWO SHOWRUNNERS, ONE FOR EACH EPISODE.**

In Class Assignment: Showrunners work with their teams to GRID their episodes.

Week 7: February 24

ALL WRITERS WHITE BOARD THE GRID FOR THE FIRST EPISODE.

Assignment #1: TEAM ONE creates an OUTLINE for EPISODE #1 (Showrunner #1 assigns team members to outline each act. Showrunner collates OUTLINE and submits OUTLINE to instructor and team members.

Assignment #2: Everyone (both teams) writes their own teaser for episode #1. Submit in PDF format to joshuasenter@me.com

Week 8: March 3

ALL WRITERS WHITE BOARD THE GRID FOR THE SECOND EPISODE.

Assignment #1: TEAM TWO creates an OUTLINE for EPISODE #2.

Assignment #2: Everyone writes their own teaser for the second episode. Submit in PDF format to joshuasenter@me.com

Week 9: March 10

Workshop the teasers to both episodes. Professor chooses the winning teasers.

Assignment: TEAMS ONE and TWO write their FIRST ACT. Showrunners assign scenes and collate.

SPRING BREAK: March 12-19

Week 10: May 24

Workshop the First Acts.

Assignment: TEAMS WRITE SECOND ACTS. Showrunners assign scenes and collate.

Week 11: MAY 31

Workshop the Second Acts.

Assignment: TEAMS WRITE THIRD and FOURTH ACTS. Showrunners assign scenes and collate.

GOOD FRIDAY: Friday, April 7 (No Class)

Week 12: April 14

Workshop third and fourth acts.

Assignment: Showrunners assign rewrites on both episodes and collate.

Week 13: April 21

Workshop full scripts.

Assignment: Showrunners assign rewrites on both episodes and collate.

Week 14: April 28

Complete scripts due IN CLASS.

Reading of full scripts. Closing remarks.

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” <https://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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call. Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

**Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible,
<http://emergency.usc.edu>**

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

PLEASE NOTE:

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY
INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**