

**School of Cinematic Arts**  
**Writing Division**  
**CTWR 422: Creating the Dramatic Television Series**  
**Section 19432D**  
**(2 Units)**  
**Spring 2023**

Instructor: Joshua Senter  
Class Schedule: Wednesday 10-12:50 pm  
Class Location: SCI 209  
Office Hours: Wednesday 3-5 pm by appointment via ZOOM  
Contact Information: [joshuasenter@me.com](mailto:joshuasenter@me.com)

**Course Objective:**

Our goal is to create an outline for the pilot of a new dramatic TV series by taking a deep dive into its concept, characters, and plot.

**Course Description:**

This course is conducted just like the development of a real-world original TV series in which the class takes on the roles of writers, executives, and producers. Everyone will be involved in the conception and realization of everyone else's original TV series with emphasis on pitching our written work to one another and pitching ways to improve that work. Participation is key! You will get out of this course as much as you are willing to put into it. Notes must be taken and implemented on every element of the TV series outline we discuss. A final revised TV series outline will be turned in at the end of class.

**Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:**

Laptops are to be used solely for scene work being discussed in class, and only with the permission of the instructor. In the early weeks of class, notes will be taken by hand. Cell phones will be turned off. **If you use your phone in class, you will be asked to leave class and will be given an "F" for that day.**

**Grading Criteria:**

If you cannot make class, you are expected to have someone else turn in your homework for you on that day, or make private arrangements with me. **Late work will not be accepted for any reason.**

**Grades:** 20% = Quality of verbal notes on other students' work  
20% = Clearly and enthusiastically pitching to the rest of the class  
20% = First Draft Outline  
10% = Quiz  
30% = Finished Outline

As per **Writing Division** policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

A	100% to 94%	C	76% to 73%
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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, **Word or PDF docs with Helvetica Neue 12 pt. type single spaced. If there is more than one page, ALL PAGES MUST BE NUMBERED AND INCLUDE THE STUDENT'S NAME AND THE TV SERIES TITLE IN THE FOOTER!** Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Always "Spellcheck" and 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 that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

#### **Week 1 (January 11) – “CONCEPT”**

Introductions and the reading of the syllabus.

Introduction to writing episodic TV drama. I will pitch two TV series: *The Fifth Letter* and *The Cancel Club*. Discussion on the importance of CONCEPT/LOGLINE and how the PERSONAL MOTIVATION that lies behind every concept is what makes a series not just important to you but ultimately to a buyer and an audience.

HOMEWORK: Write three original LOGLINES for original TV series ideas (three to four sentences each) to be shared in class the following week.

### **Week 2 (January 18) – “LOGLINE”**

Everyone must pitch their three LOGLINES to the class. We will discuss each LOGLINE and each student must decide on one LOGLINE to flesh out as a full-fledged TV SERIES PILOT OUTLINE.

Screen: *Tell Me Lies* (pilot)

HOMEWORK: Pick out two of your favorite MAIN CHARACTERS from a TV series to discuss the following week in class.

### **Week 3 (January 25) – “CHARACTER”**

Discussion on what makes great characters in television.

Screen: *The Sopranos* (pilot)

Each student will share their two favorite TV series characters and explain why those characters are important to the concept and story of the TV series on which they are featured.

I will share CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS from two of my own TV series pitches. Discussion on the importance of having at least six main characters in any dramatic series and how those characters' interactions are the blueprint for ALL STORY.

HOMEWORK: Breakdown THREE of the MAIN CHARACTERS from the logline/TV series you are developing. Each character breakdown should be one paragraph at least six to twelve sentences long.

### **Week 4 (February 1) – “CHARACTER CONT'D”**

Each student will pitch their THREE MAIN CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS to the class. The class will discuss ways of improving those character descriptions to get to the heart of what each student wants their TV series to be about and to help hone what they are attempting to say as a writer through their characters.

Screen: *Lost* (pilot)

HOMEWORK: Breakdown the FINAL THREE MAIN CHARACTERS from the TV series you are developing.

### **Week 5 (February 8) – “CHARACTER CONT'D”**

Each student will pitch their FINAL THREE MAIN CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS. The class will discuss ways of improving those character descriptions to get to the heart of

what each student wants their TV series to be about and to help hone what they are attempting to say as a writer through their characters.

Screen: *Mad Men* (pilot)

HOMEWORK: Read three different TEASERS for the TV series pilot of *The Fifth Letter* to discuss the following week.

### **Week 6 (February 15) – “TEASERS”**

Discussion of the three different TEASERS for the opening of the TV series pilot, *The Fifth Letter*. We will watch the TEASERS of three produced TV pilots (TBD) and discuss what makes those TEASERS work to perfectly tee up the worlds, characters, and concepts of their respective series.

HOMEWORK: Write THREE DIFFERENT (one to two paragraph) TEASERS for your own TV series outline.

### **Week 7 (February 22) – “TEASERS”**

Each student will pitch their THREE TEASERS aloud to the class. We will select ONE TEASER from each student to improve upon and flesh out further.

HOMEWORK: Read *The Fifth Letter* pilot outline.

### **Week 8 (March 1) – “A STORY”**

Discussion of *The Fifth Letter* pilot outline.

Screen: *Desperate Housewives* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good A STORY. Delineate what the A STORY should be for each student’s TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (four to five paragraphs) of the A STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

### **Week 9 (March 8) – “B STORY”**

Screen: *Six Feet Under* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good B STORY. Discussion on what the B STORY should be for each student’s TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three to four paragraphs) of the B STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

### **(SPRING BREAK)**

### **Week 10 (March 22) – “C STORY”**

Screen: *Succession* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good C STORY. Discussion on what the C STORY should be for each student's TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three paragraphs) of the C STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

### **Week 11 (March 29) – “D STORY”**

Screen: *The West Wing* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes good D STORIES. Discussion on what the D STORIES should be for each student's TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three paragraphs) of the D STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

### **Week 12 (April 5) – “SEASON 1”**

Discussion on world building and how to break an entire first season of a TV series both for cable, network, and streaming.

HOMEWORK: Write at least two paragraphs describing SEASON ONE of your TV series for your outline.

### **Week 13 (April 12) – “SEASON 2 & 3”**

Discussion on how to break the second and third seasons for a TV series both for cable, network, and streaming.

HOMEWORK: Write two paragraphs describing SEASON TWO AND THREE of your TV series for your outline.

### **Week 14 (April 19) – “PITCHING”**

Discussion on best practices for pitching your TV series to producers and executives. Answer session for any outstanding questions the class may have.

HOMEWORK: Use class notes previously given to revise each element we have created over the course of class to form a COMPLETE ORIGINAL TV SERIES OUTLINE that includes a LOGLINE, CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS, TEASER, A, B, C, & D STORIES, and SEASON ARCS.

### **Week 15 (April 26) – LAST DAY OF CLASS**

**FINAL COMPLETED OUTLINES DUE.**

## **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**