

THE SCREENPLAY
CTWR 414
#19187
SCA 342
Thursdays 1-4 PM
FALL 2023
Professor: Bonnie Garvin
bgarvin@usc.edu
Available by scheduled appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVE

This course inspires you to tell stories that come from the heart. It is also meant to give you a deeper understanding of story structure.

To complete the course, you will complete one 10-page script suitable for 480, as well as a step outline for a feature screenplay and the first act of that screenplay.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students develop several story outlines, write a short script for possible production, a feature film outline and first act.

The course is intended to teach you to tell compelling stories by exploring the differences between a short and full-length scripts. Among the things we'll cover are: creating three-dimensional characters who reveal themselves through actions as well as dialogue; text and subtext, as well as realistic vs. stylized dialogue; the difference between plot vs. story. We'll also analyze how screenplays are structured and explore techniques for keeping the reader (and audience) engaged.

You'll learn the benefit of participating in critical feedback in a supportive environment with an "ear" toward understanding and interpreting notes so that subsequent scripts will improve. You will be expected to read the work of your classmates and offer helpful criticism.

ASSIGNMENTS

You must use Final Draft or Movie Magic screenwriting software. Scripts must be properly formatted and PROOFREAD. **Revisions must be red-lined to show changes.** Weekly assignments must be printed out in a hard copy and turned into me.

In addition, you will be given specific films to watch and/or read scripts you're assigned.

GRADES

Assignments: 30%;

Participation 5%

Short film script w/revisions: 30%

Full-length screenplay outline and pages: 35%

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

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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. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

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 Cell Phone Policy:

EXPLAIN YOUR POLICY ON LAPTOPS AND CELL PHONES.

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 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.

Class Schedule:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

WEEK ONE – ELEMENTS OF STORYTELLING

Introduction. Review syllabus. Screen shorts and discuss short film structure.

Discuss differences between shorts and features. Conflict: what is it, how to you depict it. How to create a compelling character.

Assignment: Find a personal conflict that occurred during your break. Turn it into a 3-4 scene using TWO characters.

WEEK TWO – CREATING STORY STRUCTURE

Read and discuss scenes. Discussion on the how to pitch a story.

Assignment: Chose two story ideas for a short. Make it personal and specific. Write them up in a paragraph telling ONLY what will be shown on screen. Before each of the two ideas write the answer to the following questions: What is the character's conflict or problem? What is at stake? What action does your take to overcome problem/conflict? What does character learn by the end?

WEEK THREE – HONING YOUR PITCH

Pitch your story ideas. Discuss what is the best way to communicate your ideas.

Assignment: Outline the visuals beats of your short. READ: THE HATE U GIVE

WEEK FOUR – BUILDING STORY STRUCTURE

Workshop story beats.

Assignment: Write the first draft of your short.

WEEK FIVE – INTERPRETING NOTES

Workshop shorts.

Assignment: Rewrite your script, IN REVISION MODE, based on the notes you received.

WEEK SIX – REWRITING

Read and discuss shorts. How did they evolve? What did you learn from the rewriting process?

Assignment: Final revisions to your short. READ: PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN

WEEK SEVEN – DEVELOPING AN OUTLINE

Shorts due. In class pop quiz re: film script. Lecture on breaking story and how to outline. Demonstration of working with index cards.

Assignment: Answer questions on handout. Prepare your pitch from point of view of main character. Pitch should be no more than 3-4 minutes long.

WEEK EIGHT - WHAT YOUR FIRST ACT NEEDS

Pitch your story. Discussion on the demands of the First Act.

Assignment: Outline the story beats of your First Act.

WEEK NINE – DEVELOPING YOUR FIRST ACT

Review First Act story beats.

Assignment: Revise First Act.

WEEK TEN – DEVELOPING YOUR SECOND ACT

Review and workshop revisions. Techniques for driving the Second Act.

Assignment: Outline Second Act

WEEK ELEVEN – DIFFICULTIES OF THE MIDDLE

Workshop outlines. Discuss problems with keeping scripts alive in their hefty middle.

Assignment: Revisions on Second Act Outline

WEEK TWELVE – MORE TO LEARN FROM REVISIONS

Workshop Revisions. How to bring your story to a successful end.

Assignment: Write Third Act outline. Begin work on First Act.

WEEK THIRTEEN – WHERE BEGINNING AND END MEET

Workshop opening of screenplay (1/2 class).

Assignment: Write/rewrite the first act of screenplay. REVISION MODE for all changes.

WEEK FOURTEEN – CONTINUATION OF WEEK 13.

Workshop opening of screenplay. (1/2 class).

Assignment: Write/rewrite the first act of screenplay. REVISION MODE for all changes.

FIFTEEN – WORK DUE

Final questions, readings. Discussion on integrating writing into every day.

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.

A.I. Policy

The uses of generative Artificial Intelligence to create narrative continue to evolve throughout the media workplace. However, it is vital that before relying on AI to assist in aspects of storytelling that we learn to source and execute our work via our own unique imagination.

Creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course. All assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

PLEASE NOTE:

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