

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
The John Wells Division of Writing for Screen & Television

CTWR 421: Writing the Hour-Long Dramatic Series
FALL 2023

Instructor: Alexa Alemanni
Class Schedule: Tuesdays, 1:00pm - 3:50pm
Class Location: SCA 363
Office Hours: By Appointment
Contact Information: alemanni@usc.edu

Course Objective:

Our goal is to write a polished hour-long spec script with a complete understanding of the process: How to mimic the world of the series. How to choose and pitch a spec story for that series. How to break and outline an hour-long episode. And finally, how to write the script.

Course Description:

This course is conducted with elements of a writers' room, with the operating principle that we are interdependent and that twelve brains are better than one. Everyone will be involved in the conception and realization of everyone else's script.

Course Reading:

Writing the TV Drama Series by Pamela Douglas, 4th edition - required for anyone who has not read this book in a previous class.

Script Format:

All scenes will be written in standard script format using professional screenwriting software such as "Final Draft."

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. Cell phones will be turned off.

Grading Criteria:

Grades: 10% = Verbal notes on other students' work
20% = Practice scene / story cards
20% = Pitches / 2 pagers / story beats (rounds 1 & 2)
25% = Outline
25% = Final draft of script

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%
C+ 79% to 77%

D- 62% to 60%
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. **Spellcheck and proofread** 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 on the internet.

Recording Devices:

You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Laptops may be used for the purpose of taking notes during workshop. Cell phones should be turned off. Students using phones will be asked to leave class.

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.

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:

Week 1: August 22nd

- * Introductions and syllabus.
- * Introduction to the principles of writing episodic TV drama – structure and act breaks.
- * Watch Act 1 of *Bel-Air* / Turn into Scene Cards / Story Cards
- * Introduction to Miro
- * Strategize the best spec series, evaluate our list of options.

Assignment:

- * Watch: Act 1 of *Scandal, Pose, Americans*
- * Turn in Scene Cards for Act 1 from either *Scandal, Pose, Americans*

Week 2: August 29th

- * Discuss preparing story cards vs. scene cards look at various examples
- * Story cards for Act 1 of *Scandal / Pose / Americans*
- * **Vote** on which three shows from the list we will write.

Assignment:

- * Story cards for the pilot episode of the show you want to write.

Week 3: September 5th

- * **Screening:** Act 1 of the three shows we voted on.
- * Discussion theme / structure of each show

Assignment:

- * Story cards for the finale episode of the last full season of the show you want to write.

Week 4: September 12th

- * Discuss the three shows we've chosen in terms of theme, tone, characters and structure.

Assignment:

- * Prepare two different pitches for your episode – "A" stories only – and **prepare to pitch** either in story cards / or paragraph form (no more than 2)

Week 5: September 19th

- * Hear all "A" story pitches. Class weighs in on the strongest stories.
- * Discuss theme.

Assignment:

- * Pick an A storyline, prepare pitches for your "B, C and D" stories.

Week 6: September 26th

- Pitch "B", "C" and "D" stories, and prepare to present either in story cards / or two-pager form (no more than 2 pages) Class chooses the strongest stories.

Assignment:

- * Make adjustments, write your TWO-PAGER for your episode.
- * TWO-PAGER DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY)

Week 7: October 3rd

- * Notes/Feedback on 2-pagers
- * Discuss the next steps

Assignment:

- * Prepare your outline for Teaser & Act 1
- * (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY EACH WEEK)

Week 8: October 10th

- * Workshop Teaser or Act 1 (depending on structure of your show)

Assignment:

- * Revise & finish your outline
- * (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY EACH WEEK)
- *

Week 9: October 17th

- * Workshop Act 1 / Act 2 & Act 2 / Act 3 (depending on structure of your show)

Assignment:

- * Revise & finish your outline
- * (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY EACH WEEK)

Week 10: October 24th

- * Workshop Act 3 / Act 4 & Act 4 / Act 5 (depending on structure of your show)

Assignment:

- * Write Teaser or Act One (depending on the structure of your show)
- * (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY EACH WEEK)

Week 11: October 31st

- * Workshop Teaser / Act 1

Assignment:

- * Write Act One or Act Two (depending on the structure of your show)
- * (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY EACH WEEK)

Week 12: November 7th

- * Workshop Act 1 / 2

Assignment:

- * Write Act Two or Act Three (depending on the structure of your show)
- * (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY EACH WEEK)

Week 13: November 14th

- * Workshop Act 2 / 3

Assignment:

- * Write Act Three or Act Four (depending on the structure of your show)
- * (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY EACH WEEK)

Week 14: November 21st

- * Workshop Act 3 / 4

Assignment:

- * Write Act Four or Act Five (depending on the structure of your show)
- * (PAGES DUE TO WHOLE CLASS ON EMAIL CHAIN BY FRIDAY EACH WEEK)

Week 15: November 28th

- * Workshop Act 4 / 5

Assignment:

- * Revise revise revise
- * Final draft due to Blackboard by **December 8th end of 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” <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>

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