

**Cinema-Television 513
Fundamentals of Screenwriting I
Writing The Short Script (2 units)
Fall 2023**

Instructor: Ted Braun
Email: tebraun@usc.edu

Tuesday 10:00 am – 12:50 pm, SCA 362
Office Hours: by appointment, SCA 348

Purpose

This is an intensive introductory course in writing for the screen that rests upon a given: your desire to bring new stories into the world. The emphasis is on developing specific screenwriting skills, particularly the ability to write effective cinematic scenes. The aim is to enable you to draw a story from your imagination and express it in the form of a short screenplay. To do that you will learn fundamentals of dramatic screenwriting - tools screenwriters use to communicate with clarity and emotional force.

This course is taken in conjunction with Fundamentals of Screenwriting II, 514a, where the emphasis is on the workings of your imagination and the discovery of material: those stories, and ways of telling them, that are yours alone. 514a emphasizes imagination and originality. This course, 513, develops specific screenwriting skills and emphasizes technique and craft. Together the pair of courses provides you with a foundation for your future as a professional screenwriter.

Plan

The core of this course is a series of weekly assignments that develop your ability to externalize, dramatize, and shape a story. Assignments are read aloud and discussed in class. They culminate in a short screenplay, 10-15 pages, of your own choosing. The short script is an opportunity for you to combine the techniques you've learned; your goal is to write an unforgettable screenplay about an engaging character in an emotional cinematic way. It's expected this short script will be executed with professional polish and skill. The bar is high.

Weekly Assignments

There are three sorts of weekly assignments. The first ask you to write scenes that tell us something about a character or characters using what we can see and hear – not what they say. The assignments focus on:

Externalization

- The creation of atmosphere and mood
- Behavior that reveals character
- The things people surround themselves with that define who they are (costume, props, setting)
- Manipulation of these elements to create expressive effects - through planting and payoff, contrast, and the use of time

The next assignments ask you to write dramatic scenes and invite you to transform life, in all its richness, into something with cinematic shape and meaning – in a word, you will learn:

Dramatization

- The goal or intention of a character in a scene – their “picture of happiness”
- Conflict - between characters, within characters, and with the environment
- Ways in which the action of a scene changes the characters (polarity or arc)
- Emotional identification – how to draw the audience into an empathetic relationship with a character

The final assignments ask you to write story outlines for short films. These assignments focus on:

The telling of a story

- Ways in which information is revealed to the audience
- Relationships between what the audience knows and the characters know
- Story patterns
- Types of tension
- The differences between suspense and surprise, dramatic irony, and mystery
- The division of a story into three parts or acts

You’ll be expected to rewrite your work regularly.

Assignments are due fourteen hours before class - one .pdf file emailed to the instructor by 8 pm the night before we meet. You should also bring two printed copies to class – one for you and one for the instructor.

Assignments should be professionally presented - properly formatted and free of typos, misspellings, errors in grammar and syntax. Late assignments are not accepted and receive a failing grade.

Your work in 513 during the middle of the semester and the final weeks of the course overlaps with that of 514a. At that point we’ll establish a new routine for delivering and distributing work. Consult the last page of this syllabus – where the assignments for both classes are shown - for a clearer picture of exactly what’s expected in the last few weeks of the term.

The syllabus is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion.

Schedule of Writing Assignments

Aug 22	Atmosphere (In Class)	Oct 17	SHORT SCREENPLAY
Aug 29	Preparation for a Date	Oct 24	Feature Idea (<i>Key Scenes</i>)
Sept 5	Roommates & Character/Env	Oct 31	NO CLASS (ind. meetings)
Sept 12	Dramatic Scene	Nov 7	Feature Script 1 st 30 p
Sept 19	Dramatic Scene	Nov 14	Feature 2 nd 30 p
Sept 26	Dramatic Scene	Nov 21	Feature 3 rd 30 p
Oct 3	Short Outline (MIDTERM)	Nov 28	Feature 4 th 30 p (Fri)
Oct 10	SHORT OUTLINE	Dec 7	HOLD FOR MAKEUP

Films

From time to time the viewing of films and/or reading of screenplays will be assigned to support discussion and provide an analytical and imaginative backdrop for your work.

Required Texts

The Tools of Screenwriting, Howard & Mabley

Fortunately, Remy Charlip

Your Screenplay Sucks, William M. Akers (His title. Not my sentiments.)

King Lear, Shakespeare

Grading

Your grade will be based upon fulfillment and quality of the weekly assignments (30%), the quality of two rewritten scenes at mid-term (20%), your participation in class (10%), and the quality of your final short screenplay (40%).

You can't participate in class if you're not in class. You're expected to be on time. Lateness and absences will affect your grade. (See attendance policy below.)

An "A" is for truly exceptional work; a "B" is for good work; and a "C" is for average work. Simply completing the assigned work is, in and of itself, no guarantee of a passing, let alone a high grade.

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%

Social Media & Recording

Class discussion should be considered private academic communications. We'll be sharing personal stories and intellectual property. If you tweet, have a blog, or engage in another form of ongoing posts, anything covered in this class - including lecture material and the assignments - is considered off limits. Recordings of class are not permitted without the instructor's permission and the consent of classmates. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction by the University.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy

Phones off. Laptops closed.

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.

Two absences result in your grade being lowered one step (A to an A-); a third absence in another two steps (A- to B+). Two late arrivals equal an absence.

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 Student Accessibility Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

osas.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.

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

FALL 2023
Weekly Assignments
513/514a
Ted Braun

513

Tue. 10 – 12:50 pm

August 22	Atmosphere & Starters (In Class)
August 29	Preparation For A Date
September 5	Roommates & Character/Environment
September 12	Dramatic Scene
September 19	Dramatic Scene
September 26	Dramatic Scene
October 3	Short Outlines (MID-TERM due)
October 10	Short Outline
October 17	Short Screenplay
October 24	Feature Idea (<i>Scenes</i>)
October 31	Individual Meetings (Revised Short)
November 7	Feature B 1st 30 p
November 14	Feature B 2 nd 30 p
November 21	Feature B 3 rd 30 p
November 28	Feature A Final 30
December 7	HOLD FOR MAKEUP CLASS

514a

Fri. 10 – 12:50 pm

August 25	Memory
September 1	Experience 1 & 2
September 8	Observation
September 15	True/False
September 22	Extreme Character
September 29	World (photos)
October 6	Extreme Character/World (story)
October 13	NO CLASS
October 20	Feature Idea (<i>Characters</i>)
October 27	Feature Idea (<i>Story</i>)
November 3	Feature Screenplay A 1st 30p
November 10	Feature A 2 nd 30p (Make Up Date)
November 17	Feature A 3 rd 30 p
November 24	THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS
December 1	Feature B Final 30