

Cinema-Television 514a (19230D)
Basic Dramatic Screenwriting (2 units)
Fundamentals of Screenwriting II
Fall 2023

Instructor: Ted Braun
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Friday 10:00 am – 12:50 pm, SCI 209
Office Hours: by appointment, SCA 348

Purpose

This is an introductory course in writing for the screen in which you develop your imaginative resources – your faculties of memory and observation, your responsiveness to characters and worlds around you, and your ability to discover and create unforgettable stories. The emphasis is not on your capacity for invention, but your ability to respond to and develop your experience of the world.

The aim is for you find an engaging, empathetic cinematic character, develop a feature story that emerges out of that character's complex inner life, then write a feature screenplay of that story. Developing your capacity to make strong effective choices about what you write is a central goal of the course.

514a is taken in conjunction with Fundamentals of Screenwriting I, 513, which develops specific screenwriting skills and emphasizes technique and craft. In this course the emphasis is on the discovery and development of stories, and a way of telling them, that are yours alone. You then take that understanding and express it in the form of a feature screenplay. Together the courses provide you with a foundation for your future as a professional screenwriter.

Plan

The groundwork of this course is a series of weekly assignments that develop specific storytelling resources. These are presented and discussed in class. In addition to that you'll engage in several in-class exercises. The work moves toward a short (3-5 page) prose treatment for a feature screenplay and culminates writing a screenplay of that story.

Weekly Assignments

The course leads you through three sets of assignments that develop different aspects of your primary storytelling resource, your imagination.

The first assignments focus on what've you been through and what you see around you:

- Memory
- Experience
- Observation

The second set of assignments develop your ability to move what you've lived and know into imaginary circumstances:

- Fact v. Fiction
- Extreme Characters
- The World of a Story

The final set of assignments acquaint you with a process for finding and developing a feature story focused on an unforgettable, emotionally engaging main character:

- Main Characters
- Five Key Scenes
- A Feature Story

The weekly assignments generally ask you to prepare a story or stories for class. You are of course expected to write. But frequently you'll be asked to tell your story to the class, not to read what you've written. The idea is to develop your skills at holding an audience's attention and creating emotional and unforgettable tales.

In the middle of the term the classroom work overlaps with that in 513. You'll be writing your first short script. We will then return to assignments that develop a feature story out of the inner life of a single character. In the final weeks of the semester, we turn to writing a feature screenplay and the classroom work again overlaps with 513. 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 give and take of classroom discussion is a substantial part of the course; it's expected that you participate and engage in the development of the stories of the other members of the class in a constructive, supportive, and enthusiastic manner.

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

Schedule of Writing Assignments

August 25	Memory	October 20	Feature Idea (<i>chars</i>)
September 1	Experience 1 & 2	October 27	Feature Idea (<i>story</i>)
September 8	Observation	November 3	Feature Script 1 st 30
September 15	True False	November 10	Feature 2 nd 30 p
September 22	Extreme Character	November 17	Feature 3 rd 30 p
September 29	World (<i>photos</i>)	November 24	NO CLASS
October 6	Ext. Ch./World (<i>story</i>)	December 1	Feature Final 30 Tue
October 13	NO CLASS		

Films & Screenplays

From time to time you'll be asked to view films or read screenplays to support discussion and provide an analytical and imaginative backdrop for our work.

Required Texts

The Tools of Screenwriting, Howard & Mabley
Fortunately, Charlip
King Lear, Shakespeare

Recommended Texts

My Last Sigh, Buñuel
To The Actor, Chekov (.pdf)
On Directing, Clurman
On Filmmaking, Mackendrick
This Year You Write Your Novel, Mosley

Grading

Your grade will be based on classroom participation (10%), in-class work (10%), the fulfillment and quality of the weekly assignments (40%), and the quality and fulfillment of the feature story and the feature 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.

Lab on Diversity & Inclusion

As part of SCA's [stated values and commitment to building more inclusive media industries](#), all incoming graduate students will attend five sessions in their first semester focused on building stronger, more welcoming and equitable media communities. Each student will select a date for a professional development training based in the principles of transformative justice, and then, four 90-minute seminars of their choice throughout the semester. Feel free to attend more than four sessions if they are of interest to you. Session topics and schedule will be available on the first week of classes. Attending these five sessions is part of 514a and will be factored into the course grade.

If you have any questions about this lab contact diversity@cinema.usc.edu.

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.

In addition, due to current Covid protocols, if you are feeling ill without time to test before class, please notify your instructor, do not attend class and get a test. If you test positive, inform your instructor and quarantine for the Health Department's designated period of time.

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 I I, "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.

<p style="text-align: center;">PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>

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