

**CTWR 514A: BASIC DRAMATIC SCREENWRITING
FALL 2023, Section 19234D**

Instructor: Ivy Sunderji
Email: pivy@usc.edu
Friday 10am-12:50pm
SCA 203
Offices Hours by appointment

PURPOSE

This is an introductory course in screenwriting taken concurrently with CTWR 513. It is designed to help you develop your generative imagination in order to tell stories that engage and connect with an audience. You each have specific memories, lived experiences, observed moments, and stirring emotional reactions that fund your own personal cinematic “bank”. You draw from this bank every time you write to build the stories you aim to tell.

How do you choose what details and moments to put in a scene or story? This course is designed to help you build confidence in your imaginative capacity, your unique point of view, and your ability to choose what is compelling, generative, and helpful to engage an audience.

This class will take a character-based approach to storytelling. Writers often start with an idea for a “high concept”, but that is not the purpose of this class. The goal here is to start with an idea for an emotionally compelling main character and to discover the story that emerges from well-dramatized emotional moments that progressively reveal their complexity to the audience.

PLAN

The course will build your confidence in making emotionally rich, cinematic choices in your scenes through weekly assignments. Midway through the class, you will write a 3-5 page treatment for the story for a feature screenplay. By the end of the semester, you will have completed the first draft of this feature screenplay.

ASSIGNMENTS

This class has three sets of assignments designed to develop your imagination for storytelling.

The first will use what you know through life: memories, experiences, and observations.

The second use lived experiences in imaginary scenarios: fact vs. fiction; extreme characters, and the world of a story.

The third focuses on generating an unforgettable story from a character: main characters, five key scenes, and writing the feature story.

GRADING

Grades are based on participation and in-class work (10%), on-time completion and quality of assignments (40%), 3-5 page feature treatment (10%), and complete feature screenplay (40%).

SCHEDULE

Aug 25	Memory	Oct 20	Feature Idea (characters)
Sept 1	Experience 1 & 2	Oct 27	Feature Idea (story)
Sept 8	Observation	Nov 3	Feature Script Discussions
Sept 15	True False	Nov 10	NO CLASS – VETERAN’S DAY
Sept 23	Extreme Character	Nov 18	Feature Script Discussions
Sept 29	World (photos)	Nov 24	NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING
Oct 6	World (story)	Dec 1	Feature Script Discussions
Oct 13	NO CLASS – FALL RECESS		

513 AND 514A CONCURRENT COURSE INFORMATION

These are concurrent courses that have distinct agendas and are graded separately, but the work in both courses will overlap and converge during the semester for both the short script and the feature screenplay. The following information is the same for both courses:

EXPECTATIONS

This is a workshop-based course. To be considered “In Attendance” for the class, you must be on time and participate. I aim to give breaks at the top of the hour. A professional screenwriter career requires talking and pitching ideas as well as writing. In addition to completing the writing assignments, you will also be asked to tell stories out loud for certain assignments. This is good practice for both the reality of the working life of a screenwriter as well an opportunity to hone your verbal storytelling skills and ability to connect emotionally with an audience.

Workshop provides the opportunity to practice being a good listener and a good collaborator. When giving or receiving feedback, try to remember that everyone is doing the best they can, we all have vulnerabilities and blind spots, and everyone has big gifts to offer. Generosity of spirit, constructive engagement, and the benefit of the doubt are all essential to success.

This class is intensive, and my goal is as your professor to help succeed in whatever ways I can. Effort matters, and it is important to try your best and do your work with integrity. That said, **the safety and wellbeing of everyone in the class is always my highest priority**. If you are feeling unwell or need support, please communicate with me. I’d prefer you take care of yourself and others, stay home if you are ill, and I will do my best to provide appropriate help.

DEADLINES

Your work is due at 5pm the night before class. It must be properly formatted with YOUR LAST NAME_ASSIGNMENT NAME as the document name and submitted as a PDF via email. Assignments must be submitted on time and formatted as requested.

TECHNOLOGY

Please do not use your cell phone during class. It should remain silent and unseen.

Laptops are allowed only at the discretion of the instructor. Use of your laptop for anything other than to aid your engagement with the class will count as an absence.

Your work is your intellectual property, and it is often very personal for a variety of reasons. Please keep what happens in class private and off social media.

Recording the class is not allowed.

Generative AI is a rapidly evolving tool rife with plagiarism concerns, and it is not a substitute for original thought or expression. Your writing should be completed in your own voice.

WRITING DIVISION POLICY FOR GRADES AND ATTENDANCE

This is the 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%

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.

GRADUATE EQUITY & INCLUSION LABS

As part of our [stated values and commitment to building more inclusive media industries](#), all incoming graduate students will attend four graduate lab sessions in their first semester focused on building stronger, more welcoming and equitable media communities. Sessions will be offered throughout the semester, and you may attend any four of your choosing. We always welcome participation, so feel free to attend more than four sessions if they are of interest to you. Session topics and schedule are available here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Yu5VJxLNon6Ar_k9SI8DOfFevhe7ggUsx-vL7RJNvzY/edit?usp=sharing.

Attending four sessions is part of CTWR 514a and will be factored into the course grade.

ACCESSIBILITY

Any student requesting an academic accommodation for a disability is required to register with OSAS. Details for how to obtain a letter of verification for approved accommodations can be found online: (<https://osas.usc.edu/new-students/when-how-to-register/>) Please be sure this letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. For any questions, OSAS is located in GSF 120. Telephone is (213) 740-0776.

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.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT:

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.

OSAS - (213) 740-0776
<https://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