

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

CTWR 521: Advanced Hour Long Drama  
FALL 2023

**Instructor:** Professor Nicole Jefferson Asher  
**Class Schedule:** Wednesdays, 7:00pm - 9:50pm  
**Class Location:** SCA 363  
**Office Hours:** By Appointment  
**Contact Information:** [njeffer@usc.edu](mailto:njeffer@usc.edu)

**Course Objective:**

The goal is for each student to write a polished, hour-long spec script while gaining a complete understanding of the craft of television writing. Students will learn how to mimic the voice, tone and world of a current television series, how to choose and pitch a spec story, and finally, how to outline and write an hour-long episode.

**Course Description:**

This course is conducted like a professional TV writers' room. Each student 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.**

**Script Format:**

All scenes and scripts must be written in standard script format with professional screenwriting software such as "Final Draft."

**CLASS SCHEDULE: subject to change at the discretion of the professor**

**Week 1: August 23th**

- \* Introduction to the principles of writing episodic TV drama – concept, character, tone, world, structure and act breaks.
- \* Discuss the criteria for a good spec script.
- \* Skills Review - logline, pitch, beat sheet, and outline.
- \* Discuss possible shows for the class to spec.

**Assignment:**

- \* Watch the entire 10 episode season of *Station 11* on HBO.
- \* Watch the pilot episode of any of the series you are considering writing. If you have time, please also read the pilot/and or watch as many additional episodes as possible.

**NOTE: In order to participate in class discussions, give notes and support your fellow classmates, each student is required to be current on all of the shows chosen to spec this semester. This will be the foundation of your participation grade.**

**Week 2: August 30th**

- \* As a class, we will “break” season 1 of Station 11.
- \* Class will narrow down the choices of series to spec.

**Assignment:**

- \* Choose the series you feel you can write the strongest spec from. Email me your choice by MONDAY, Sept 4th at 5pm.
- \* Prepare to pitch the class TWO IDEAS for a spec episode.

**Week 3: September 6th**

- \* Pitch ideas for your spec to the entire class for feedback.
- \* Structure /thematic discussion on our chosen spec shows.

**Assignment:**

- \* Write Beat Sheet for your episode. (A sample beat sheet will be provided.)

**Week 4: September 13th**

- \* Workshop Beat Sheet
- \* Discuss Outlines

**Assignment:**

- \* Write outline.
- \* OUTLINES DUE IN MY INBOX BY MONDAY SEPT. 18 BY 4PM.

**Week 5: September 20th**

- \* Workshop Outlines
- \* Discuss Teasers and First Acts

**Assignment:**

- \* Write Teaser / Act 1

**Week 6: September 27th**

- \* Workshop Teaser / Act 1
- \* Discuss Second Acts

**Assignment:**

- \* Write Act 2

**Week 7: October 4th**

- \* Workshop Act 2
- \* Discuss Third Acts

**Assignment:**

- \* Write Act 3

**Week 8: October 11th**

- \* Workshop Act 3
- \* Discuss Fourth and Fifth Acts

**Assignment:**

- \* Write Act 4 and 5 / Revise Act 3

**Week 9: October 18th**

- \* Workshop Act 4 and 5

**Assignment:\*TBD**

**Week 10: October 25th**

\* How to approach notes, rewrites, and polishes

**Assignment:**

\* **Excellent work. Take a well deserved week off!**

**Week 11: November 1st**

INTRO TO ROADMAP PROCESS OF COORDINATING NOTES. We will work on a Road map of your changes in class.

**Assignment:**

\* Begin revisions.

**Week 12: November 8th**

\* Workshop revisions in class. EACH STUDENT MUST BRING IN ONE SCENE/SEQUENCE or STORY PROBLEM to work on with the class.

**Assignment:**

\* Continue working on revisions

**Week 13: November 15th**

\* Workshop revisions. EACH STUDENT MUST BRING IN ONE SCENE/SEQUENCE or STORY PROBLEM to work on with the class.

**WEEK 14: **\*\*THANKSGIVING BREAK\*\*** NO CLASS**

**Week 15: November 29th**

\* Workshop Revisions - each student must share 10 PAGES and/or ONE ACT to be read aloud in class.

**Assignment:**

\* **FINAL DRAFT DUE BY DECEMBER 8TH, 5PM**

**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 must be turned off.

**Grading Criteria:**

**Grades:** 10% = Pitch  
10% = Participation  
40% = Outline  
40% = Final draft of script

Per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade/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%  |

**Expectation of Professionalism:**

All material must be turned in on time and in the proper format. Work containing grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos will not be accepted. Spellcheck and proofread your assignment very carefully prior to submission.

**Internet Policy:**

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapped, or posted anywhere on the internet.

**Recording Devices:**

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

**Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is vital to the success of the class. Participation includes full involvement in all class discussions and offering constructive notes on fellow classmate's work. Again, each student is expected to be current on all of the TV series discussed in class. Failure to keep current with impact your grade. Class attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each 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 John Wells Writing Division and to your Faculty.

Due to the current COVID protocols, if you are feeling ill, and cannot get a COVID test before class, please notify your instructor. Do not attend class, please get a COVID 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:**

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 A.I. 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 A.I.-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

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>

**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 — <http://dps.usc.edu>**

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