CTWR-526
Advanced Storytelling for Interactive Media

Units: 4.0
Fall 2023

Tuesday 7pm-9:50pm
Location: SCI 209

Instructor: Marianne Krawczyk
Office: TBD
Office Hours: Office hours (by appointment only): Tuesdays, 2pm to 5pm Los Angeles time
Contact Info: mkrawczy@usc.edu

Lab Instructors:
Office Hours: Scheduled on Zoom

IT Help: Creative Tech.
Contact Info: creativetech@cinema.usc.edu

Course Description This course builds on foundational knowledge and understanding of narrative, with the goal of helping students refine their skills in character development, story/plot development, setting, and dialogue.

Beyond traditional storytelling techniques, the second half of the course will explore more advanced topics such as expansive world building, pacing, genre-specific conventions, IP/Franchise development, as well as an exploration into the world of AI narrative development.

By the end of this course, students will have a solid foundation in advanced narrative design, enabling them to craft compelling stories that keep players entertained and engaged.

Learning Objectives

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of story-telling required for game writing

- Students will value diverse stories that explore social justice issues and ethical and humanistic themes.

- Students will demonstrate proficiency in discussing the aesthetics of game writing.

- Students will demonstrate proficiency in giving and taking notes from the professor and classmates.

- Students will demonstrate the ability to offer constructive criticism and collaborate with others in a writers' group.

- Students will acquire basic understanding of game-story development.

- Students will learn what is expected of a game writer.

- Students will examine challenges and conflicts in writing/storytelling for games.

- Students will explore *player agency* and the challenges it presents.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Develop a *Narrative Design Document* based on an established narrative chosen from an approved list. This Document will include:

  - Part 1: Story outline that includes:
    - Genre, perspective, player mode, ratings, open world (sandbox)/ linear.
    - Outline of entire story: 5-10 pages. Critical Path:

  - Part 2: Character documents:
    - Protagonist and antagonist bios and art.
    - 3 NPCs short bios.
    - 3 Factions of enemy AI.

  - Part 3: Environment *look & feel* pages that deliver on narrative points.
    - Visuals of primary environments. (Concept art)
    - World or primary environment sketch.
    - Map of world
    - Backstory for the world – one page.

  - Part 4: Design elements that deliver on narrative points.
    - Mechanics
    - Loop

  - Part 5: Sample script pages that include:
    - Sample barks page.

- The *Narrative Design Document* due at the end of the semester will be delivered in portfolio style during finals week

- Students are responsible for a Green Light Pitch - PowerPoint presentation of your game/story to be presented at the end of semester.

Required Texts:

One of these: (Cliff Notes are acceptable)

- Lord of the Flies
- Civil War of Caesar
- Hamlet, Macbeth or The Tempest
- Treasure Island
- Frankenstein
- Any of the Brothers Grimm folktales.

Recommended Game:

- The Fidelio Incident – available on Steam

Recommended texts:

- Game Development Essentials: Game Story & Character Development: by Krawczyk, Marianne; Novak, Jeannie

- 1001 Video Games You Must Play Before You Die: General editor: Tony Mott

· *Extra Lives, Why Video Games Matter* by Tom Bissell

Prerequisite(s): CTWR 518
Co-Requisite(s): None.
Concurrent Enrollment: None.
Recommended Preparation: Experience as a user of interactive media and games.

Course Notes
Letter Grade.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required
Screenwriting software, Google Slides, Google Docs all available at no cost.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials
None.

Description and Assessment of Assignments
 TBD

Grading Breakdown

Assessment Tool (Assignments)	% of Grade
Participation	25
Concept Pitch	0
5th Element Game	10
Story	10
character	10
environment	10
VO script/Barks	10
Narrative Design Deck Presentation	25

Narrative Design Doc	25
TOTAL	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A   95-100
A-   90-94
B+   87-89
B   83-86
B-   80-82
C+   77-79
C   73-76
C-   70-72
D+   67-69
D   63-66
D-   60-62
F   59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy
Assignments should be handed in via Google Drive. Timing TBD

Grading Timeline
Feedback will be shared within two weeks of a hand in. Kinda.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Date	Session Topic	Presenter	Lab Deliverables and Activities
Week 1	8/22/23	Introductions, Intro deck, discussion of Syllabus/course overview, Portfolio sign up, grouping **Assignment**: 5TH ELEMENT	**Marianne**	N/A
Week 2	8/29	PRESENT 5th Element game **Assignment:** Literary choice and pitch (Group 1)	**All**	Workshop and present/discuss 5th Element game.
Week 3	9/5	PRESENT - 5th Element game continued Literary choice and pitch (Group 1) **Assignment:** Literary choice and pitch (Group 2)	**Group 1**	- Workshop and discuss 5th Element game. - Workshop and discuss literary choice group 1
Week 4	9/12	20 minute portfolio review - LECTURE: Story - character deck - lecture PRESENT - Literary choice and pitch (Group 2) **Assignment:** Group 1 Slide deck thru character.	**Group 2 Marianne**	Workshop and discuss literary choice group 2
Week 5	9/19	20 minute portfolio review Group 1 Slide deck thru characters: Present. **Assignment:** Group 2 Slide deck thru . **Assignment:** Group 1 story pages of design doc.	**Group 1**	Group 1 Slide deck thru environment: Present.
Week 6	9/26	20 minute portfolio review Group 2 Slide deck thru environment: Present. **Assignment:** Group 2 story pages of design doc.	**Group 2**	Group 2 Slide deck thru environment: Present.
Week 7	10/2	20 minute portfolio review LECTURE: Worldbuilding **Assignment**: Watch last kingdom season 1 find the narrative loop in each episode. **Assignment:** Group 1&2 Character pages, environment pages of design doc. **Assignment**: Worldbuilding Group 1	**Guest**	Group 2 story pages of design doc.
Week 8	10/10	Fall break - No class	**All**	N/A

Week 9	10/17	20 minute portfolio review Group 1 worldbuilding presentation LECTURE: Narrative loop in Last Kingdom Assign small groups distribute games for week 10 assignment **Assignment:** Worldbuilding group 2	**Group 1 & 2 & Marianne**	- Watch last kingdom season 1 find the narrative loop in each episode - Group 1&2 Character pages and environment pages of design doc: read and note design docs - Worldbuilding Group 1
Week 10	10/24	20 minute portfolio review Narrative Design guest Lecturer (Likely zoom) Group 2 worldbuilding presentation **Assignment:** Physical game mechanics to narrative presentation (group assignment) **Assignment: Design pages and loop/ mechanics slides (all)**	**Marianne**	Worldbuilding group 2
Week 11	10/31	20 minute portfolio review LECTURE: dialog VS Vo Vs barks Possible guest lecturer on VO acting Present mechanics to narrative deck **Assignment**: Group 1 & 2 barks, skins	**Guest or Marianne**	- Physical game mechanics to narrative presentation (group assignment) - Design pages and loop/ mechanics slides (all)
Week 12	11/7	Catch up all Present barks and skins **Assignment**: - Playing with AI - Twine games	**Marianne or Guest**	Group 1 & 2 barks, skins
Week 13	11/14	Accessibility (guest) Present Twine version of game as well as an AI version of high level game idea/pitch	**Guest**	- Playing with AI - Twine games
Week 14	11/21	Thanksgiving - no class		N/A
Week 15	11/28	Group 1 Presentation final deck		Group 1 final deck
Week 16	**12/5**	Group 2 Presentation final deck		Group 2 final deck

WEEK 1

- Introductions: who we are and why we are here.
- Intro deck
- Course overview
- Portfolio sign up
- Grouping
- **Assignment**: 5TH ELEMENT

WEEK 2

- PRESENT 5th Element game - all
- **Assignment:** Literary choice and pitch (Group 1)

WEEK 3

- PRESENT 5th Element game - Continued
- Literary choice and pitch (Group 1)
- **Assignment:** Literary choice and pitch (Group 2)

WEEK 4

- 20 minute portfolio review
- Story - Character deck - lecture
- Literary choice and pitch (group 2)
- **Assignment:** Group 1 Slide deck Story and Character.

WEEK 5

- 20 minute portfolio review
- Group 1 Slide deck thru characters:
- **Assignment:** Group 2 Slide deck Story and Character .
- **Assignment:** Group 1 story, character pages of design doc.

WEEK 6
- 20 minute portfolio review
- Group 2 Slide deck thru characters:
- **Assignment:** Group 2 story pages of design doc.

WEEK 7

- 20 minute portfolio review
- Worldbuilding
- Screen Last Kingdom pilot
- **Assignment:** Watch last kingdom season 1 find the narrative/plot loop in each episode. Be prepared to present.
- **Assignment:** Group 1&2 read and note design docs. (story & character)
- **Assignment:** Worldbuilding group 1

WEEK 8

- Fall Break

WEEK 9

- 20 minute portfolio review
- Group 1 worldbuilding presentation
- Narrative loop in Last Kingdom
- Assign small groups distribute games for week 10 assignment
- **Assignment:** Worldbuilding group 2

WEEK 10

- 20 minute portfolio review
- Group 2 worldbuilding presentation
- Narrative Design guest Lecturer (Likely zoom)
- **Assignment:** Physical game mechanics to narrative presentation (group assignment)
- **Assignment:** Design doc pages for world building (all)

WEEK 11

- 20 minute portfolio review
- dialog Vs Vo Vs barks
- Possible guest lecturer on VO acting
- Present mechanics to narrative deck
- **Assignment:** Group 1 & 2 barks, skins

WEEK 12

- Catch up week
- Present barks and skins

- **Assignment:**
  - Playing with AI
  - Twine games

WEEK 13

- Accessibility (guest)
- Present Twine version of game
- Present AI version of high level game idea/pitch. (all)
- **Assignment:** Read and not all of the worldbuilding pages from design doc
- **Assignment:** Prep final slide presentation as needed

WEEK 14

- Thanksgiving

WEEK 15

- Catch up - group 1
- Final deck presentation (Group 1)

WEEK 16

- Catch up - group 2
- Final deck presentation (Group 2)

FINAL

Tuesday, December 12
Final Design Doc due
Final slide deck due

Additional Policies

Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes
The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor *before the assignment due date* and present verifiable evidence in order for a deadline extension to be granted. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor or student assistant before final grades are due.

For assignments turned in after the assignment deadline without prior permission from the instructor, a penalty will be imposed equal to 10% of the total available points for the assignment, for each day or part of a day that the assignment is late, up to a maximum of seven days.

Attendance Policy
Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late to three classes, more than ten minutes late to a single class, or leaving early, will be marked as having an absence from class, unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructor. The following guidelines are from the Interactive Media & Games Division handbook regarding absences and grading and apply to all students.

Guidelines for absences affecting grading
- Two absences: lowers grade one full grade point (for example, from A to B)
- Three absences: lowers grade two full grade points
- Four or more absences: request to withdraw from course (instructor's discretion)

Additionally, we may ask you to withdraw if your total absences become excessive.

However, these guidelines may be altered in respect of absences that are for illness, family emergencies, and (with advance notice) commitments related to a scholarship you are receiving, e.g. for a varsity sport or commitments related to your professional practice, such as to attend a festival where you are showing a game or a conference where you are speaking. You must contact us as soon as possible regarding your absence. Generally, we will expect to hear from you before class; in exigent circumstances I would expect to hear from you within 24 hours. If we do not hear from you in a timely fashion you may forfeit your option to make up what you have missed.

All that said:

1.	**If you are sick, stay home.** You need to be healthy to learn, and so do your classmates (and instructor).
2.	We do not distinguish between mental health and physical health. If you cannot complete an assignment on time or come to class because of mental health

issues, you must contact us promptly, just as with physical health problems. See the Support Systems section below for additional information.

Social Media Use in Class
Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructor. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class.

Video and Audio Recording in Class
Video and audio recording during class meetings is not permitted, except by prior arrangement with the instructor and the class members.

Content Warnings
If you include content in the work that you produce which may cause distress to your fellow students, please tell me (the instructor) before showing the work in class and make a verbal "content warning" immediately before you present the work in class. Also include a written content warning, either at the beginning of a piece of written work or in the dev blog of a project, when you submit the work for grading.

This is not intended to limit the subject matter that you address with your work: it is intended to expand it. This simple approach is intended to create an environment in which you are free to address any subject matter that you wish, no matter how challenging, explicit or controversial, in a spirit of respect and consideration for your classmates and instructor.

Students who ever feel the need to step outside class during the presentation or discussion of work that warrants a content warning may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see us individually.

The next paragraph contains potentially triggering topics—please feel free to skip ahead.

Content which requires a content warning includes graphic depictions or descriptions of violence, sexual acts, racial, sexual or cultural stereotyping, abuse (especially sexual abuse or torture), self-harming behavior such as suicide, self-inflicted injuries or disordered eating, eating-disordered behavior or body shaming, and depictions, especially lengthy or psychologically realistic ones, of the mental state of someone suffering abuse or engaging in self-harming behavior.

If you have any questions about what requires a content warning, relating to story, game mechanics, and interaction patterns, please let me (the class instructor) know.

If you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to material presented in class, either with the class or with us afterwards, we welcome such discussion as an appropriate part of our coursework.

Inclusivity and Diversity
In this class, we make a commitment together to foster a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that you will be expected to offer content warnings when appropriate, use students' preferred pronouns, and respect self-identifications. While debate and discussion are welcome, please remain aware of the implications of your words and the images that you include in your work. If the instructor or another student points out that something you have said or shared with the group might be offensive, avoid being defensive; this is a valuable opportunity for us to grow and learn together. If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are encouraged to speak with either the undergraduate or graduate advisor for your program.

In making games and interactive media in a professional and ethical way, it is important that you consider diversity. When looking at your projects, you should consider who is depicted and how this work will impact others. What kinds of individuals and communities are represented in your work? What point of view does your work express? This class may assist you in learning how to make work that includes diverse viewpoints, and may discuss racial, religious, gender and sexual orientation issues in the context of games and interactive media.

Guidelines for Group Critique
Giving and receiving constructive feedback is a key element of critique. Follow these guidelines:

1. Pair your critiques with compliments. Before pointing out something that you think could be improved, point out something that you like or something that you think has exciting potential.

2. Consider suggesting possible solutions. It can be discouraging to simply hear what somebody thinks is "wrong." Offering ideas for changes or additions that you think might improve your classmates' work can emotionally and intellectually inspire them.

3. Speak from the "I." Rather than stating your critique as fact or your suggestions as imperatives, start your sentences with phrases like "I think…" or "I feel…" or "If this were my game, I would…" Many people use the technique popularized by design firm IDEO, and make a statement in the form of "I like… I wish… what if..?"

4. Listen carefully and calmly. Avoid the urge to defend your work, unless you feel like that defense adds something important to the conversation. Thank your colleague for their feedback.

If you have a question…
1. First, check the class website and the syllabus. Most questions about logistics, assignments, and expectations can be found already listed there.

2. If the information you are looking for is not on the syllabus, contact the course Student Assistant.

3. If the Student Assistant is unable to answer your question, or your question is of a sensitive nature and you would feel more comfortable speaking with the instructor, you can email the instructor at the address listed above. You can usually expect a response within twenty-four hours during the standard work week.

4. Schedule an appointment during office hours. Office hours are a wonderful opportunity to speak with an instructor one-on-one. Note the office hours listed at the top of the syllabus and email the instructor at least twenty-four hours in advance to schedule an appointment.

Fair Use
Fair use is a legal principle that defines certain limitations on the exclusive rights of copyright holders. The Interactive Media & Games Division of USC's School of the Cinematic Arts seeks to apply a reasonable working definition of fair use that will enable students and instructors to develop multimedia projects without seeking authorization for non-commercial, educational uses. In keeping with section 107 of the Copyright Act we recognize four factors that should be considered when determining whether a use is fair: (1) the purpose and character of use, (2) the nature of the copyrighted work, (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole, and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. In general, we regard the reproduction of copyrighted works for the purposes of analysis or critique in this class to be covered by the principle of fair use.

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**Citation Guidelines**

Where appropriate, all projects will need to include academically appropriate citations in the form of a Works Cited section, which covers all sources, in order to receive a passing grade. The Works Cited is either included in the project or as a separate document, as appropriate to your project. The style we use is APA 7th edition and you may refer to these guidelines. (Other styles may be used, by arrangement with the instructor.)

Note for Students with Disabilities
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to us as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am - 5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Disruptive 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.

Learning Experience Evaluations
This will be your opportunity to provide feedback about your learning experience in the class. This feedback helps the instructor determine whether students are having the intended learning experiences for the class. It is important to remember that the learning process is collaborative and requires significant effort from the instructor, individual students, and the class as a whole. Students should provide a thoughtful assessment of their experience, as well as of their own effort, with comments focused on specific aspects of instruction or the course. Comments on personal characteristics of the instructor are not appropriate and will not be considered. For this feedback to be as comprehensive as possible, all students should complete the evaluation.

Syllabus Updates:
This syllabus is liable to change up to the beginning of class and possibly over the semester. Please check the posted syllabus regularly and note all changes that are shared by the instructor in class.

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:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Acessibility Services - (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.

Campus Support & Intervention - (213) 821-4710
campussupport.usc.edu
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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
ombuds.usc.edu
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

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