

School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
CTWR 533: Rewriting The Feature Screenplay

Instructor: Sean Hood
Class Schedule: 10:00 - 12:50 PM Monday
Class Room: SCA 363
Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom.
Email Address: shood@usc.edu

Course Objective:

The objective of this course is to learn the professional craft of rewriting, to practice the craft by generating, discussing and receiving notes for revision, and to apply the craft by completing a rewrite of an original screenplay.

Course Description

From the first draft to the final day of shooting, professional screenwriters face a process of continual reevaluation, ongoing critique and shifting circumstances. They spend most of their time embroiled in rewrites. This course is designed to give students the tools to approach this process in a professional way.

From a purely artistic perspective, rewriting one's own material is the most challenging, painful and ultimately rewarding discipline a writer (or filmmaker) ever faces. Said John Irving, "The most important and essential element of writing is rewriting." This course is also designed help the students face this challenge with confidence and creativity.

The class will lead students step-by-step through the revision of an original feature script, moving from broad discussions of the author's original intent, to a more detailed "game plan" for the rewrite, and finally to the most specific areas of scene and dialogue. Each aspect of the screenplay will be analyzed and reconsidered, with emphasis on story and character fundamentals.

This course will not only help students to improve their scripts, it will allow them to practice skills of analysis, discussion and presentation they will need in future projects throughout their professional careers. With this in mind, students will be expected to participate in all discussions and to help their fellow students develop their outlines and screenplays.

Ultimately, each student is required to complete an extensive rewrite (or rewrites) by the end of the semester. A dialogue polish does *not* constitute an extensive rewrite. Since each screenplay offers unique challenges for each writer, the instructor will take into account the progress of each student on an individual basis.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Receive, organize, digest and utilize notes.
2. Create a strategic game plan for rewriting.
3. Execute game plans through focused passes on the script.
4. Strengthen the main character and story arc.
5. Strengthen the character relationships, plot complications and theme.
6. Assemble a last set of notes for future revisions.

Course Reading:

Students will be required to read each other's original screenplays as well as each other's ongoing revisions. Because of sheer volume of this material as well as the time and care taken in its analysis, reading from the textbook will be mostly optional:

Screenwriting is Rewriting by Jack Epps Jr. Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2016

Assignments:

The writing assignments will be due by **11:59 PM Friday** previous to each class. This is a firm deadline and the late delivery of assignments will impact your grade for the course. If you finish the work earlier, please send it in. All written assignments will be uploaded to the weekly discussion forum on Blackboard.

You'll be expected to come to class with typed notes on your colleagues' pages for the class discussion. These written notes will be then uploaded to the weekly discussion forum on Blackboard after class, sometime on **Monday**.

Grading Criteria:

Grading will depend on the quality and improvement of student's written work and in-class presentations, as well as the student's involvement in the class discussions.

The course aims to prepare students to be working professionals. With that in mind, grading will reflect the standards and expectations students will encounter in the "real world." So, all assignments must be submitted **on time**. Students must attend all classes, arriving **on time**. Students who cannot make a class or complete an assignment must contact the professor via email **before** they miss a class or fail to complete an assignment.

When judging a screenwriter's work, industry professionals often ask if a writer can "deliver." Professional work is "delivered" on-time, proofread, and carefully thought out. Slipshod or hurried work is rarely tolerated. So in determining a final grade, **hard work and professionalism** will be as important as originality and skill.

Likewise, working as a professional requires the skills of collaboration and communication. So as they would be in any story meeting in the entertainment industry, students are expected to be involved in each and every discussion. Failing to read and engage with other students' material will affect the students' final grades.

Specific areas that will be considered in determining a final grade are:

- Classroom Participation – 5%
- Written Feedback (Notes) – 5%
- Gameplan and Outline – 10%
- Bi-Weekly Revised Pages – (10% each) 40%
- Final rewritten and polished screenplay – 40%

As per 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%

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by one full point (ex: A to B). A third unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered another full point (ex: B to C). Two late arrivals equate to one full absence. In order for an absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session. If you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the grade required for credit, check with your home department. If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

As the class is discussion based, cell phones should be turned off. You may use your laptop when giving and receiving notes, but for those reasons only.

Use of AI not permitted

Since creativity, writing skill, and discovering one's personal voice are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Using AI-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Class Schedule

Week 1 – Monday, August 21

- Lecture: **The Rewrite Process**
- Introductions.
- Review of Syllabus.
- Discussion of class goals.
- Splitting the class into two Groups.

Assignment Due – Friday, August 25 Midnight

- Reread your own script from beginning to end.
 - Annotate draft as you read.
 - Using Rewrite Questionnaire, summarize the scripts's strengths and weaknesses.
 - Read GROUP A scripts (for class discussion.)
 - Using Rewrite Questionnaire, prepare written notes on GROUP A scripts.
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Week 2 – Monday, August 28

- Lecture: **Rewriting The Story**
- Organizing feedback/notes into a Summary of Feedback.
- Critique and discussion of GROUP A screenplays.
- All deliver 1-2 pages of written notes on screenplays written by GROUP A.

Assignment Due – Friday, September 8 Midnight (After Labor Day)

- GROUP A delivers a 1-2 page Summary of Feedback
 - Read GROUP B scripts (for class discussion.)
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Week 3 – Monday, September 11

- Lecture: **Rewriting Character**
- How to create a Gameplan and Outline for the rewrite.
- Critique and discussion of GROUP B screenplays.
- All deliver 1-2 pages of written notes on screenplays written by GROUP B.
- Each student in GROUP A makes an **Appointment With The Professor** for the next week.

Assignment Due – Friday, September 15 Midnight

- GROUP B delivers a 1-2 page Summary of Feedback
- GROUP A delivers a 2-3 page Gameplan and Outline detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.

Week 4 – Monday September 18

- Lecture: **Rewriting Structure**
- Constructing a Game Plan.
- Discussion of Group A's Gameplan and Outline.
- Each student in GROUP B makes an **Appointment With The Professor** for the next week.

Assignment Due – Friday, September 22, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers a 2-3 page Gameplan and Outline detailing WHICH problems the writer will address and HOW the writer plans to address them.
 - GROUP A begins writing.
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Week 5 – Monday, September 25

- Lecture: **The Set Up and First Act**
- Discussion of Group B's Gameplan and Outline.

Assignment Due – Friday, September 29, Midnight

- GROUP B begins writing.
 - GROUP A delivers revised Sequences One and Two (The First Act)
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Week 6 – Monday, October 2

- Lecture: **Subplots and Relationships**
- Discussion of Group A's work.

Assignment Due – Friday, October 6, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences One and Two (The First Act)
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Week 7 – Monday, October 9

- Lecture: **The 2nd Act, Building to The Midpoint**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Friday, October 13, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Three and Four (up to the Midpoint)

Week 8 - Monday, October 16

- Lecture: **Building Sequences: structure, tension, mini-movie**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Friday, October 20, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Three and Four (up to the Midpoint)
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Week 9 – Monday, October 23

- Lecture: **End of the 2nd Act**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Friday, October 29, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Five and Six (Complete Second Act)
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Week 10 – Monday, October 30

- Lecture: **Rewriting Scenes**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Friday, November 3 Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Five and Six (Complete Second Act)
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Week 11 - Monday, November 6

- Lecture: **The Third Act**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Friday, November 10, Midnight

- GROUP A delivers revised Sequences Seven and Eight (The Third Act)
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Week 12 – Monday November 13

- Lecture: **Rewriting**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP A's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Friday November 17, Midnight

- GROUP B delivers revised Sequences Seven and Eight (The Third Act)
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Week 13– Monday November 20

- Lecture: **Polishing**
- Discussion and analysis of GROUP B's work. Deliver written notes.

Assignment Due – Friday November 23, Midnight

If you are behind, submit missing sequences . You may submit Optional Polish Pages

Week 14 – Monday November 27

Lecture: **Hero's Journey's, Saved Cats, and other templates.**
Discussions of the submitted catch-up sequences and Polish Pages.

Assignment Due – Monday December 11, Midnight

Anyone who wants to can deliver Optional Polish pages or missing sequences.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE – Monday December 11, Midnight

Students who are late with their final script will get an **entire letter drop** on the final assignment for each day they are late. (For example: A- to B-)

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086
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.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101
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
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
Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
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.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

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