

CTWR 516: ADVANCED MOTION PICTURE SCRIPT ANALYSIS
Fall 2023

Professor: Sean Hood, shood@usc.edu
Meeting Time: Friday 9:00 AM - 12:50 PM
Location: SCA 112
Office hours: By appointment via Zoom.
DAs: TBD

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

Students will learn to identify patterns of structure, tension, and characterization in feature films using **fundamental screenwriting terms**. This will provide students with a toolbox to bring to their work, whether that be writing, directing, producing, editing, cinematography, or work in any medium propelled by cinematic storytelling.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this class we will share the experience of viewing and enjoying thirteen feature films and one TV pilot - all with different narrative approaches. We will discover how these films were put together, what screenwriting methods were employed, and how these techniques can help us become better storytellers ourselves.

There is no one method, no master story form that must be slavishly followed to write scripts for narrative films. While this course will give you a thorough understanding of three-act structure and the “sequence approach,” we will also focus on more general, fluid screenwriting concepts such as character, character arc, and theme. We will learn specific techniques: planting and pay-off, ellipsis, twist, moments of revelation and recognition, exposition, backstory and ways of creating empathy for the central character. Most of the analysis will be done from the screenwriter’s point of view, but we will also examine the roles of the director, cinematographer, editor, and composer - as indicated by the script.

The analyzed movies present a range of narrative techniques, story patterns, structures, styles and genres, and diverse filmmakers and characters. We do this to explore how the same tools are used by different filmmakers, in different ways, depending on their peculiar goals. Every film has been chosen to illustrate specific approaches and techniques.

For writers, the purpose of this class is to build your own screenwriter's toolbox (a place to go to find ways of fixing your own screenplays.) By learning how other filmmakers solved the very problems you are facing in your own work, you will gain an understanding of how to achieve better screenplays and characters yourself.

However, since film is a collaboration of storytellers, and the story is “rewritten” multiple times as the film is prepped, rehearsed, shot, edited, and mixed, this

course is designed for **anyone** working in the cinematic arts - including television, animation, gaming, new media and transmedia - who needs to more deeply understand how audiences are engaged with moving pictures.

We will NOT take a top-down approach - stressing templates, plot points and obligatory page numbers. **The map is not the territory**. The techniques and story patterns we teach work from the bottom up, helping you tell **your own story** more clearly, more engagingly, and to deeper effect. Ultimately, by learning these terms and concepts and then learning to identify them in the movies you watch, we hope to inspire you to tell your stories in the most original and effective way possible.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS:

Each week of class you will be required to...

- Attend a **lecture**, in which a film is screened and analyzed.
- Post to class **discussion board**. This essential element takes the place of class discussion. I hope to develop an ongoing dialogue!
- Take a weekly **quiz**.

There will also be an in-class **midterm**, and a take-home **final**.

Posting in Forums:

- Write as if you were speaking in a class discussion: relaxed in tone but respectful, polite, and **professional** in your choice of words.
- Post thoughtful and meaningful posts and responses. The point is to have an ongoing dialogue about screenwriting topics raised by the films. Your professor will be joining discussions as well.

QUIZES AND TESTS:

All written material is expected to be turned in **on time**. Late work will be graded down. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Discussion Boards and Quizzes are due the following Tuesday before class.

COURSE GOALS:

By the end of the class students will be able to:

1. Define 150 screenwriting terms. (We learn approximately ten a week)
2. Provide examples of each of these terms in the films screened in class.
3. Describe the structure of the films shown in class.
4. Identify and describe these terms in a film seen for the first time.
5. Diagram the sequence structure of a film seen for the first time.
6. Analyze films from a professional perspective: not “Did I like it or not?,” but rather “Did it work? If so, why?”

COURSE ASPIRATIONS

By the end of this course we hope students will be inspired to:

1. Compare and contrast these concepts in other cinematic media including television, short films, new media, gaming, and transmedia.
2. Apply these tools to cinematic arts regardless of role (writer, director, producer, cinematographer, animator, game designer, ect.)
3. Apply these tools to students’ own scripts and films.

WEEKLY SCREENING SCHEDULE (subject to change)

8/25 **North By Northwest**

9/1 **School of Rock**

9/15 **Finding Nemo**

9/22 **Ladybird**

9/29 **A Separation**

10/7 **Midterm** - Multiple choice, short answer - Definitions and Examples

Atlanta (TV Pilot)

10/7 **Creed + Guest Speaker**

FALL RECESS - Optional Lecture on **Portrait of a Lady on Fire**

10/20 **4 months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days**

10/27 **The Babadook**

11/3 **Mad Max: Fury Road**

VETERAN'S DAY - Optional Lecture on **TBD**

11/17 **Parasite**

THANKSGIVING

12/1 **Mulholland Dr. (2001) + Take Home Final Exam**

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

CNTV 416 grades will be based on careful consideration in the following areas:

| | | |
|-------------------|-----|-----------------------------|
| Discussion Boards | 15% | 150 points (10 per week) |
| Weekly Quizzes | 30% | 300 points (20 points each) |
| Mid-Term | 20% | 200 points |
| Final | 35% | 350 points |

| | | |
|-------|------|-------------|
| Total | 100% | 1000 points |
|-------|------|-------------|

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% |

ATTENDANCE

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 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 Wells Writing Division and to your Faculty.

PARTICIPATION

Participation in the **Discussion Board** is mandatory and weekly. We grade your contribution to the boards the same way we would grade participation in class. Each week, to get full credit simply **respond to the weekly topic** and then contribute at least **two comments** to ongoing discussions. *In other words, we are asking for a minimum of two or three thoughtful, developed, and relevant sentences for each weekly module.*

Cursory, half-hearted, or offhand comments will get only partial credit. Generalized film critique, back and forth discussion, and additional comments are encouraged, and will count to your “overall” points for Participation.

DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRICS

Each week you can earn 10 points on the weekly discussion topics.

(Rubric with regard to post and to comments)

| Outstanding | Competent | Minimal | Problematic | No Coments |
|---|---|---|--|-----------------------------|
| 10 points | 8 Points | 6 Points | 4 Points | 0 Points |
| Contributed at least two comments that were thoughtful, relevant, and fully developed | Contributed at least one thoughtful, relevant, and developed comment. | Made only cursory, half-hearted, or offhand comments. | Only made comments that were unhelpful or off topic. | Made no comments this week. |

Treat the Discussion Board as if it were a professional forum such as feedback group or writers’ room. As long as you just **show up** and **contribute**, getting full credit for participation should be low-stress, easy and enjoyable.

INTERNET POLICY

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

RECORDING DEVICES:

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

LAPTOP AND CELLPHONE POLICY:

Laptops may be used for online attendance and tests, but should be shut during class. Cellphones should be turned off during class time just as they would be in a movie theater. Both slides and lecture synopsis will be available on Blackboard.

COMMUNICATION

When you have questions or comments there are a variety of ways you can contact the Professor or the DAs directly. In order, they are:

1. For questions about the class, first check the **syllabus**.
2. For expanded answers to questions about the terms, the movies we stream, or the class itself, try the “**Ask Your Professor**” forum on the Discussion Boards. You may find the question is already answered. Response time: 48 hours, but DAs or other students often post answers before the professor.
3. For short but important questions, the Professor and DAs will be available fifteen minutes before and after each class.
4. For questions about the suggested films and a recap of concepts we discuss in class you can drop by the professor’s general **office hours**.
5. If you have a question about the class or the terms that you would rather not post publicly, you can email your DA. **Response time 24 hours**
6. If it you have an issue or question that is sensitive or private in nature, you can email the professor. **Response time 48 hours**.
5. If need to meet with the professor one-on-one, please make an appointment by contacting your DA. They will schedule a Zoom time, and provide a link.

USE OF AI NOT PERMITTED

Since creativity, analytical thinking, and personal responses 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 screenwriting concepts will prepare you for a competitive industry. 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 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