School of Cinematic Arts
Writing Division
Instructor: David Hollander
Class Schedule: Tuesday 10:00 a.m.–12:50 p.m.
Class Room: SCA 362
Office hours: By appointment. Tuesdays 1:00–2:00 p.m.
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Course Objective:

To teach methods for rewriting the feature-length screenplay.

Overview:

Rewriting one's own material is, for most writers, the most difficult discipline. To succeed, we must return to our original intent, discover what needs improvement, and plan how to revise our screenplay — and that's all before we start actually writing pages. Rewriting is an arduous process that demands both craft and patience. In this course, we will examine approaches and create strategies that will serve you in not only your work on your current script but for every other script you write.

As screenwriters, we address our first drafts with care, optimism and excitement. When we get to the point where we complete a first draft we may find ourselves initially satisfied with the work. And then, a day or two later, we may read what we've written and despair. The script might feel like a mound of unformed clay or a slab of marble or a half-painted canvas. If we want to truly discover what it is we are writing, it's only now that the process of discovery begins. We need to bifurcate our creative process, to learn to be both creator *and* critic, artist *and* curator. We need to make hard decisions about the genre, the convention, the story, the structure, the characters' wants and needs, the pacing, the point of view. We aim to commit to simplicity and to making clear choices and then we need to start over and <u>execute</u>.

Screenplays are architecture, blue prints. As writers, we can mistake the form for literature, for poetry or even for fiction. And while the form holds room for all of that, at its core we

are charged with creating an instructional manual for our collaborators. We need to write something that can be understood in order to be interpreted.

We look to simplify and clarify while still being artful enough to withhold exposition and obviousness. We look to remove the unnecessary, to be efficient, clear and, most importantly, we attempt to create structure that serves the emotional intention of our script. After all, we are trying to communicate not just information but *feeling*. And we must go through the process of creating clarity and structure that is always in service to the emotional life and language of our characters' wants and needs.

Process:

Nearly all of rewriting is accomplished in the process of planning, listening to constructive criticism, curating the best ideas, then pruning and clarifying. This process should not be rushed. The actual writing can happen very quickly once the writer identifies the *purpose* of the rewrite and creates the best plan of attack. This will often involve reviewing the basics of screenwriting — because if the foundation isn't correct, there's no use adding a layer of paint.

This course will be a workshop setting. We will carefully and respectfully read each other's work and come to class prepared to discuss what we have read. We will learn how to best give and receive notes. We will examine scripts in progress each week focusing initially on the premise and structure of each script and on clarifying and deepening its characters. Then, in a second round on each script, we will cast a ruthless gaze on individual scenes, dialogue and transitions. In the words of William Faulkner, we will learn to "kill all your darlings."

Each week we will review where you are in your process and assign specific tasks for the week ahead. Please come to class each week with an open mind, a willingness to grow and a desire to move your story in new directions.

Class Schedule:

Week 1.

Come to the first class prepared to discuss your scripts. Bring a <u>printed script to be handed in to the professor</u>.

We will examine the process of rewriting a script paying particular attention to the role of conflict, character, and meaning. Students will be asked to present a succinct synopsis of the premise and themes of their screenplay and their goals for the revisions. We may look at the premises underlying various familiar movies and how the characters are used to realize the goals of the story.

Homework: read everyone's scripts in the "A" group and write notes in the form of questions and objective reflections.

Weeks 2-4.

Read and critique all scripts ("A" group week 2, "B" group week 3) focusing on character, conflict and meaning. Written notes for all "B" group scripts.

At this point, we will have a sense of what this particular group of scripts needs. There will be exercises assigned: one based in the art of cutting the script to its core, the other looking at the pivotal scenes and making sure our basic building blocks are clear and well written.

During the course of this work, we will begin to focus on making plans for revising your premise and returning to a step outline for your script. When a student meets their deadline their work will then be addressed in workshop form by the entire class.

Note: Students must submit that assigned work to me and to their classmates, in PDF format, <u>no later than 48 hours prior to the start of class</u>. Each class member must read the submitted work and send their notes to me before the start of class.

Weeks 5-7.

Many writers will begin rewriting scripts and present questions and concerns in rewrites for class discussion, including scenes and/or character or structural problems. Others might return to their work on outlines and premise.

Homework: Students will work toward a revised First Act or revised outline. Again, work is due 48 hours before class begin and notes are due before the start of class. Revised first acts will be due no later than 48 hours prior to week 8 class.

Weeks 8-11.

Begin the second round of workshops on the scripts focusing on where each writer is in their process with the ultimate goal of refining characters, scene work, dialogue and transitions.

Homework: Week 8, first quarter of Act II. Week 9, up to the midpoint. Week 10, the third quarter of Act II. Week 11, complete Act II.

Week 12.

Act III — ending.
As we polish our scripts, class time will be used to address specific questions within scenes regarding dialogue and character. Also, we will consider emergency structural questions regarding openings and endings or other key moments in the script.

Weeks 13/14.

Further polishing of the script.

Week 15.

Last class. Summation. This last session may be the most important of the semester in that we will be working on memorializing our approach to rewriting both as a group and as individuals. After class ends and before the end of the semester, I will expect each student to send a one-page written protocol to the entire class of how they plan to approach rewriting their future scripts.

<u>FINAL SCRIPTS ARE DUE NO LATER THAN THE START OF THE LAST CLASS SESSION.</u>

Requirements:

Each student must complete an extensive rewrite (or rewrites) by the end of the semester. A dialogue polish does ***not*** constitute an extensive rewrite. Since each screenplay brings unique challenges to each writer, I will take into account the progress of each student on an individual basis.

Suggested reading:

<u>A Swim in a Pond in the Rain</u> by George Saunders.

<u>Screenwriting is Rewriting</u> by Jack Epps, Jr.

Reading from these books will be assigned on an ad hoc basis.

Grading Criteria:

Grading depends on depth and breadth of thought in assignment preparation as well as serious and constructive class participation. All assignments must be submitted on time. If you cannot make a class, you must contact me by email or through the Writing Division office **before** you miss the class. All work must be delivered in a professional manner. That means it must be on time, proofed, neat, and well thought out. Hurried or slipshod work is not expected or appreciated when determining your final grade. Working as a professional writer involves collaboration. Because of this, lack of involvement or failure to contribute to other students' ideas may adversely affect your grade.

Areas that will be considered in determining your final grade are:
Classroom participation — 10%
Classroom presentations — 15%
Weekly assignments (including notes on other writers' scripts) and page revisions — 40%
Completed rewritten screenplay 35%

An "A" is for truly exceptional work; a "B" is for good work; and a "C" is for average work. Simply completing the assigned work is, in and of itself, no guarantee of a high grade.

Per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

A 100% to 94. A- 93% to 90. B+ 89% to 87%. B 86%-83%. B- 82% to 80%. C + 79% to 77%. C 76% to 73%. C- 72% to 70%. D+ 69% to 67%. D 66% to 63%.D- 62% to 60%. F 59% to 0%.

Please note that you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit.

EXPECTATION OF PROFESSIONALISM:

Filmmakers collaborate. Professional filmmakers collaborate professionally, which in our class means participating respectfully and delivering work punctually. All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be

penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof-read your assignment prior to submission.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Class attendance is mandatory, and students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Tardiness is unprofessional and will hold up the business of the class. Be on time.

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.

If you have a conflict that will cause you to miss class, you need to secure the instructor's approval of that absence in advance of the class. 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. 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.

If you miss class without informing your instructor, it will be considered an unexcused absence. Unexcused absences can lower your final grade for the course. 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.

LAPTOP AND CELLPHONE POLICY:

As this is a seminar, we want to be in conversation with each other, not with people, places, things outside the classroom. Hence: no open laptops, no tablets, phones or smartphones in use during class time. If you want to take notes, use paper.

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.

ZOOM 'NETIQUETTE,' IF REQUIRED:

Class dynamics are substantially compromised without the ability to see the people in class; therefore, the default is that students have their cameras on during synchronous online sessions. Those facing challenging situations, such as internet connectivity, illness, or home environments that make this difficult or impossible shall contact me to work out accommodations. I encourage you to use virtual backgrounds, and earphones or headsets, should your home environment benefit from those privacies.

Keep yourself muted unless called on. When your camera is on, please dress as you would in the classroom, and behave as you would in a professional environment.

Students are not permitted to create their own class recordings without the instructor's permission. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), 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 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]().

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

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.

COURSE CONTENT DISTRIBUTION AND SYNCHRONOUS SESSION RECORDINGS POLICIES:

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](), page 13).

COURSE EVALUATIONS:

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. The process and intent of the end-of-semester evaluation should be provided. In addition, a [mid-semester evaluation]() is recommended practice for early course correction.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS:

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.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS/COURSE CONTINUITY IN A CRISIS:

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. Please activate your course in Brightspace with access to the course syllabus. Whether or not you use Brightspace regularly, these preparations will be crucial in an emergency. USC's Brightspace learning management system and support information is available at https://www.brightspacehelp.usc.edu/

Food and Drinks other than water are not permitted in any instructional spaces.