

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
John Wells Division of Writing
CTWR 415b: Advanced Writing
SPRING 2024
(Four units, Section # 19203)

Instructor: Laura Kittrell
Class Schedule: Mondays, 4pm – 6:50pm
Class Location: SCA 342
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Information: lkittrel@cinema.usc.edu

GOALS OF THIS COURSE:

To develop feature-writing skills through writing a polished, first-draft feature screenplay based on 415A outlines and pages. That process will include:

- Discovering and distilling the story you’re telling: “This is the story of a person who...”, to inform behavior, themes
- Fueling the story through an internal character journey
- Practicing story structure and other tools used by great, diverse storytellers
- Developing skills in writing stage direction and dialogue to strengthen and unify a screenplay’s effect
- Learning the importance of narrative rhythms which exist inside scenes, inside sequences, and for the full feature.
- Discovering and heightening theme to make a screenplay resonate

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to help students develop the skill of writing feature-length screenplays. Our goal is process over product. We hope the semester may produce excellent screenplays, but the value in the class is *skills*, not just pages. First among those skills is uncovering what story you’re telling and how your character’s internal emotional journey drives it. Next is applying the craft of story and screenplay structure to your story’s emotional, narrative elements, firmly secured in the character’s emotional arc. Critical to all of this is hearing and interpreting notes – yours and those of others – to deepen your story, discover what is and isn’t working, and then polish/rewrite.

Required Course Reading

1) *Screenwriting is Rewriting* by Jack Epps, Jr. Bloomsbury Academic, New York, London, 2016, ISBN: 9781628927405

Though this book is about rewriting a completed script, we will adapt its early chapters on character, notes and structure.

ACCESS TO THIS BOOK IS A COURSE REQUIREMENT (It is available in print or as an e book on Amazon. Email me if this is a financial hardship. We'll find a solution and I'll keep it confidential.)

2) You may be required to read portions of professional screenplays to study scene writing, dialogue, stage direction and structure.

3) Students will read their peers' work. Your peers are your first audience, so reading pages and giving written notes will be a major factor in the class.

Recommended Course Reading

The Tools of Screenwriting, by David Howard & Edward Mabley. Griffin Reprint, 1995

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

(Subject to revision by the professor)

All students are expected to read each other's pages, which have been delivered by the Friday deadline before the Monday classes, both their own group and the other group. Bring written notes on each other's work to class for discussion and to send on to your classmates each week.

Class 1, January 8

In-class pitches of feature projects developed in 415A. Discussion of the writing process, the syllabus and class expectations and deadlines.

Assignments -- Fill out a questionnaire provided by the professor. E-mail treatments from 415A to professor and to classmates by noon on Friday January 19th. Read classmates' treatments and be prepared with any questions/notes for the following class. Select a scene from an existing movie to screen in class that feels representative of your script.

NO CLASS: January 15, Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday

Class 2, January 22

Screen scenes from existing movies. Be prepared to discuss how it relates to your script.

Further discussion of treatments, possible weaknesses, and story strengths.

Assignments – Write outlines and e-mail to class and professor by noon, Friday Jan 26.

Class 3, January 29

Discuss/workshop outlines.

Assignments -- Outline revisions based on class notes. E-mail outline to the professor only by noon, Friday Feb. 2.

Class 4, February 5

Discuss moving from outline to screenplay; discuss scene structure. Discuss lingering outline/story issues with entire class.

Assignments – Begin writing Act I.

Class 5, February 12

Discuss/workshop progress and pages.

Assignments – Finish Act I and establish main tension. E-mail pages to class and professor by noon, Friday Feb. 23

Reading: Chapter 1 & 2: NOTES, and INTERPRETING NOTES, in “Screenwriting is Rewriting”

NO CLASS: February 19, President’s Day

Class 6, February 26

Workshop first act and discuss how any revisions will affect the rest of the outline.

Assignment – Revise Act I and adjust acts II and III of outline as needed. E-mail pages to class and professor by noon, Friday, March 1.

Reading: Chapter 12: PLOT, in “Screenwriting is Rewriting”

Class 7, March 4

Workshop outline revisions.

Assignment -- Begin writing Act II.

Reading: Chapter 16: COMPLICATE, COMPLICATE, COMPLICATE, in

“Screenwriting is Rewriting”

NO CLASS: March 11, Spring Recess

Class 8, March 18

Workshop ongoing progress and pages.

Assignment -- Finish Act II. E-mail pages to class and professor by noon, Friday, March 22.

Class 9, March 25

Workshop ongoing progress and pages.

Assignment -- Revise Act II and adjust outline for Act III as needed. E-mail pages to class and professor by noon, Friday, March 29.

Class 10, April 1

Workshop ongoing progress and pages.

Assignment -- Begin writing Act III.

Class 11, April 8

Workshop ongoing progress and pages

Class 12, April 15

Workshop ongoing progress and pages.

Assignment -- E-mail rough draft to class and professor by noon, Friday, April 19.

Class 13, April 22

Workshop ongoing progress and pages.

Recommended reading: Chapter 3: GAME PLAN, in “Screenwriting is Rewriting”

Class 14, April 29

Workshop ongoing progress and pages.

COMPLETED FIRST DRAFT DUE (VIA E-MAIL) 5-6-24

As noted above in the weekly plan and the following chart, homework will be due **12PM (noon) Fridays** before Monday classes unless otherwise noted. A “reply all” thread will be established in e-mail that includes all class members and professor for easy distribution. For direct communication with professor e-mail to: lkittrel@cinema.usc.edu

Assignments arriving after 12PM (noon) Fridays will drop half a grade.

I encourage all students to **SEND WHATEVER YOU HAVE** by the deadline, finished or not, good writing or not. You really will learn more from failure than success.

E-mail Formats: Assignments delivered by email should be in **PDF format**.

Pages should be sent in pdf format by the Friday deadline before the Monday class. Final revised outlines will be sent to the professor and will be followed-up with one-on-one meetings in preparation for starting the first draft.

Be sure to send your pertinent pages by the deadline before class discussion of your work.

CLASS DEADLINE DATES DISCUSSED IN CLASS

1-29 Outlines
2-2 Revised outlines
2-23 Act I
3-1 Revised Act I // remaining outline
3-22 Act II
3-29 Revised Act II // remaining outline
4-15 Rough Draft
5-6 Completed First Draft

GRADING WEIGHTS:

CTWR 415b grades are based on:

- Classroom participation: 10%
- Written notes for classmates: 20%
- Written and verbal assignments: 30%
- Completed screenplay: 40%

LETTER GRADES:

100-93....A
93-90.....A-
89-87.....B+
86-83.....B

82-80....B-
79-77....C+
76-73....C
72-70....C-
69-67.....D+
66-63.....D
62-60.....D -
0-59.....F

The screenplay written in this class must be the original work of the writer. No adaptations will be accepted without the prior written permission of the instructor.

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 your assignment prior to submission.

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 Cell Phone Policy:

Cell-phones are prohibited in class; laptops may be used for note taking, or reading assignments, with permission by the professor.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is important. Participation includes full involvement in, and contribution to, class discussion, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule) the assignments of your colleagues and offering thoughtful constructive comments.

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 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 .

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.

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.

Note: 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 this letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.- 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The telephone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

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:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.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 Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on

call engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of 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.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.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.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

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) 442-120 – 24/7 on

call dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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