

**School of Cinematic Arts
The John Wells Division of
Writing for Screen and Television**

**CTWR 453: Advanced Feature Rewriting
Spring 2024 - Section 19230**

Instructor: Scot Armstrong
Class Schedule: Monday, 10AM-1 PM
Class Location: SCA 361
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Information: scotarms@usc.edu

Course Objective

To develop feature-rewriting skills through rewriting an already written screenplay. That process will include:

- Learning the process of rewriting
- Receiving and organizing notes
- Creating a strategic game plan
- Discovering and distilling the story you're telling: "This is the story of a person who..." to inform behavior, themes
- Fueling the story through internal character journeys
- 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 inside scenes, sequences, and for the full story
- Writing within a genre to play up/subvert it
- Discovering and heightening theme to make a screenplay resonate emotionally

Course Description

The objective of this class is to learn how to rewrite a feature-length screenplay. Rewriting one's own material is for many writers the an important discipline in the field of screenwriting. To succeed, you must return to your original intent, discover what needs improvement, and plan how to revise your screenplay — and that's all before you start actually writing pages.

You may find it difficult to gain perspective and insight toward your screenplay. You may be attached to material that isn't working. You may have chosen the wrong approach. In this class, you'll learn to let go and embrace new ideas, a necessary step in taking your work to a new level.

Come to class each week with an open mind, a willingness to grow and a desire to move your story in new directions. In the workshop environment of this class, all students will be involved in discussions of each project.

Recommended Course Reading

- 1) *The Tools of Screenwriting*, by David Howard & Edward Mabley.
- 2) *Story*, by Robert McKee
- 3) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell
- 4) *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, by Christopher Vogler

Grading Criteria

Homework will be due **10AM FRIDAY** before Monday classes unless otherwise noted. Students will submit assignments via **Google Drive and Blackboard** as a **PDF document**.

Assignments arriving after 10AM Friday will drop from A to A-.

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.

Please arrive in class on Monday with written notes for your peers.

Classroom Participation:	30%
Written and Verbal Assignments:	30%
Completed Screenplay:	40%

Filmmakers collaborate. Professional filmmakers collaborate professionally, which in our class means participating respectfully and delivering work punctually.

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.

Formats: Assignments delivered by email should be in **PDF format**. The **file names** should consist of the "*student's last name_ assignment name_date.pdf*" (Example: *Gonzales_1st Sequence Revisions_1-15-24.pdf*)

Writing Division 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:

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 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.

Classroom Decorum

The professor expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a sensitive process and while we should ask questions, analyze and even challenge, we want to remain supportive, always keeping in mind that the screenplay is a work-in-progress. A working writer needs to develop *the art of collaboration* while working with their peers. No phones while in class.

Internet Policy:

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, snapchatted, or posted anywhere else on the internet. Violations are subject to university disciplinary policy.

Laptop Policy:

Laptops may be used in class but only for purposes of classwork. Students should not be surfing during class time unless instructed otherwise by the instructor. Violation of policy could result in laptop privileges being suspended.

*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 Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

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

SYLLABUS

Syllabus and assignments are subject to change at instructor's discretion. If changes to the schedule occur, students will receive an emailed notice.

Assignments are due by on Blackboard and by email to SCOTARMS@USC.EDU and TO THE CLASS by 12:00 PM (NOON) FRIDAY, unless otherwise instructed.

On class days, you must bring notes for workshopped scripts.

WEEK 1 (1/8/24)

In Class:

- 1) Go over syllabus
- 2) Overview of the class and approaches to rewriting
- 3) Elevator pitch of script to be rewritten

Assignments For Week 2/3:

- 1) Read all screenplays. Write notes, focusing on main character arcs and relationships **(Due 1/19)**
- 2) Prepare pitch on how main character's arc will be more realized. **(Due 1/12)**

WEEK 2 (1/15/24)

NO CLASS. MLK DAY

WEEK 3 (1/22/24)

In Class:

- 1) Discussion of notes
- 2) Discussion of outlining methods, and how a rewrite outline is different from a first draft outline

Assignments for Week 4:

- 1) Create a beat sheet of your current script. With each beat, add an idea on how to change for the better.
- 2) Watch a movie that matches your script's genre and prepare a beat sheet for it. Be ready to discuss in class how it has informed the structure of your own work.

WEEK 4 (1/29/24)

In Class:

- 1) Discussion of beat sheets.

- 2) Discuss developing an outline from the beat sheet, using principles of structure discussed in class

Assignment for Week 5

- 1) Rewrite your opening scene
- 2) Create a new outline based on discussion in class

WEEK 5 (2/5/24)

In Class:

- 1) Discussion of outlines and opening scenes
- 2) How to rewrite dialogue

Assignments for Week 6

- 1) Revise outline based on notes in class. **(Due 10AM Wednesday, 2/7)**
- 2) **If given approval**, rewrite first 15 **(Due 10am Friday 2/9)** (Group A)
- 3) If not given approval, continue working on outline. (Group B)

WEEK 6 (2/12/24)

In Class:

- 1) Workshop Group A, First 15
- 2) Workshop Group B, Outline

Assignments for Week 7

GROUP A ONLY:

- 1) Write Act 1, due **10am FRIDAY 2/16**

GROUP B ONLY:

- 1) Write Act 1, due **10am FRIDAY 2/23**

WEEK 7 (2/19/24)

NO CLASS. PRESIDENTS DAY

No class this week, but students should give group A notes based on their Act 1

WEEK 8 (2/26/24)

In Class:

- 1) Workshop Group B, Act one

Assignments for Week 9

GROUP A ONLY:

- 1) Write Act 2A, due **10AM FRIDAY 3/1**

GROUP B ONLY:

- 1) Write Act 2A, due **10AM FRIDAY 3/8**

WEEK 9 (3/4/24)

In Class:

- 1) Workshop Group A, Act 2A

Assignments for Week 10

GROUP A ONLY:

- 1) Write Act 2B, due **10AM FRIDAY 3/15**

GROUP B ONLY:

- 1) Continue writing Act 2A, due **10AM FRIDAY 3/8**

WEEK 10 (3/11/24)

NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK

WEEK 11 (3/18/24)

In Class:

- 1) Workshop Group B, Act 2A

Assignments for Week 12

GROUP A ONLY:

- 1) Continue writing Act 2B, due **10AM FRIDAY 3/22**

GROUP B ONLY:

- 1) Write Act 2B, due **10AM FRIDAY 3/29**

WEEK 12 (3/25/24)

In Class:

- 1) Workshop Group A, Act 2B

Assignments for Week 13

GROUP A ONLY:

- 1) Write Act 3, due **10AM FRIDAY 4/5**

GROUP B ONLY:

- 1) Continue writing Act 2B, due **10AM FRIDAY 3/29**

WEEK 13 (4/1/24)

In Class:

- 1) Workshop Group B, Act 2B

Assignments for Week 14

GROUP A ONLY:

- 1) Continue writing Act 3, due **10AM Friday 4/5**

GROUP B ONLY:

- 1) Write Half Act 3, due **10AM FRIDAY 4/12**

WEEK 14 (4/8/24)

In Class:

- 1) Workshop Group A, Act 3

Assignments for Week 15

GROUP B ONLY:

- 1) Continue writing Act 3, due **10AM FRIDAY 4/12**

WEEK 15 (4/15/24)

In Class:

- 1) Workshop Group B, Act 3

Assignments for Week 16

- 1) Prepare notes for final polish to discuss in class

WEEK 16 (4/22/24)

In Class:

- 1) Discuss notes on polish draft
- 2) Final questions

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Completed, polished first draft due **11:59PM on Monday, May 6th**