

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

CTWR 514b: Screenwriting Fundamentals II
Section 19237D
Spring 2024

Instructor: Harold Apter
Class Schedule: Tuesday 4 – 6:50 PM
Class Location: SCB 304
Office Hours: By Appointment (Zoom preferred)
Contact Information: hapter@usc.edu / haroldapter@gmail.com
818-259-5703 (text/phone)

CLASS OBJECTIVE:

You will develop two feature-length story ideas presented both orally and in written form. From those ideas, we will choose one to develop into a sequence breakdown, then step outline and finally into a first draft feature screenplay.

CLASS GOALS:

- Expand the process first presented in 514a of developing an idea into a feature screenplay.
- Create unique characters with strong inner lives and complex relationships.
- Establish a clear personal connection to the story being told in order to drive and enliven the story.
- Deepen understanding of narrative cinematic technique and structure established in earlier courses.
- Acquire complete command of format, visual writing style, and dialogue.
- Develop robust skills in outlining, tracking a story's dramatic through-line while continually inching toward the best synthesis of the author and idea.

RECOMMENDED READING:

The Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley. Various screenplays from produced films.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Every class session you will be given a writing or story development assignment. You will generally present your work aloud and you will comment on each other's work. This process of creating, presenting, giving and taking feedback are the core hallmarks of this class. In later stages of the semester, written material will be given to instructor and classmates as part of the process and written material will be required for mid-semester and final evaluations. All students will give feedback verbally and in writing to each other throughout the development process.

SCHEDULE OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

PLEASE NOTE:

ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE NO LATER THAN MIDNIGHT ON THE SUNDAY EVENING BEFORE OUR TUESDAY CLASS.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE REFLECTED IN YOUR GRADE.

All assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1

Jan 9: Course introduction. Discuss previous semester, expectations, how to develop and manage ideas

In-class Story #1: pitches of first story ideas

Assignment: Two-page story summary and character sketches

Week 2

Jan 16: Story #1: Summaries, characters, questions

Assignment Story #2: Develop second story pitch

Week 3

Jan 23: Story #2: Discuss character, goal, world, obstacles

Assignment: Two-page story summary and character sketches

Week 4

Jan 30: Discuss summaries, characters, questions.

Decide between two story ideas for semester script

Assignment: Character exploration/development = protagonist

Assignment: Character constellation

Week 5

Feb 6: Discuss protagonists and character constellation

Hand-out: Sequence breakdown

Assignment: Write a one page sequence breakdown

Week 6

Feb 13: Discuss and elaborate on sequence breakdowns

Assignment: Revise sequence breakdown

Step outline of act one of script

Week 7

Feb 20: Discuss step outlines of first acts

Assignment: Step outlines of act II

Mid-term to hand in: REVISED SEQUENCE BREAKDOWN

Week 8

Feb 27: Discuss act II step outlines + breakdowns + act III
Assignment: Write first sequence.

Week 9

Mar 5: Discuss first sequences, ongoing step outlining
Assignment over the break: Complete first act, continue and revise step outline to end of script

Mar 12: SPRING BREAK.

Week 10

Mar 19: Discuss first acts
Assignment: First half of act II

Week 11

Mar 26: Discuss first half of Act II
Assignment: Second half of Act II

Week 12

Apr 2: Discuss second half of Act II
Assignment: first half of Act III

Week 13

Apr 9: Discuss first half of Act III
Assignment: Second half of Act III

Week 14

Apr 16: Discuss second half of Act III
Assignment: Completion of draft

Week 15

Apr 23: Finishing pages of first draft
Assignment: Game plan for next draft

FINAL DUE: May 3
Game plan for rewrite of project

GRADING WEIGHTS:

CTWR 514b grades are based on:

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

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-read 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 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 third 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 ongoing 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