

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
The John Wells Division of Writing for Screen & Television

CTWR 206b: Writing the Screenplay
Section 19156
(2 Units)
Spring 2024

Instructor: Jeremy Novick
Class Schedule: Fridays, 1-3:50 pm
Class Location: SCA 363
Office Hours: By Appointment
Contact Information: jnovick@usc.edu

Course Objective:

Our goal is to learn the skills and techniques utilized by professional screenwriters to ideate, outline, and draft feature-length screenplays in a workshop setting. The first semester of this two-semester course culminated in students writing and presenting a full outline and the first act of their feature screenplays. In this second semester, students will draft the second and third acts of their screenplays. The final assignment is a strategic polish.

Course Description:

This course is partly instructional – with lectures and materials aimed at teaching the basics of character development, structure, and scene work – but it is mostly practical application. We will learn how to write a screenplay the best way there is to learn: *by writing one*. In trying, at times failing, and ultimately succeeding, we will all cultivate a better personal understanding of our own personal voices and styles, our diverse and complimentary points of view on the world, and of what makes “a good story well told.”

Suggested Course Reading:

The following titles are suggested reading by the instructor. While these books are not required for the course, they are invaluable tools that students will be able to refer to throughout the course and long into their careers:

The Tools of Screenwriting, by David Howard and Edward Mabley

Screenwriting is Rewriting by Jack Epps, Jr.

Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters by Michael Tierno

Screenplays to be assigned by the instructor on a case-by-case basis.

Script Format:

All scenes will be written in standard script format using professional screenwriting software such as "Final Draft." **If you don't have access to screenwriting software, please see me immediately, and we will work on an alternative solution together.**

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Laptops are to be used solely for scene work being discussed in class, and only with the

permission of the instructor. Cell phones will be turned off. **Please note: You should always have a notebook/pen available.**

Grading Criteria:

Students will turn in their work by 1pm on the Sunday before class, by a method to be determined by the instructor. All work will be sent to the instructor, as well as all classmates, so that feedback can be given. This deadline is extremely important. As a workshop-style course, it is vital that we read each other's material and come prepared for class, and we must be respectful of each other's time in doing that work. If you repeatedly fail to meet weekly deadlines without communication, it will affect grading.

Grading Breakdown

- 10% = Participation
- 10% = Act One/Outline Review
- 10% = Sequence Three
- 10% = Sequence Four
- 10% = Sequence Five
- 10% = Sequence Six
- 10% = Sequence Seven
- 10% = Sequence Eight
- 10% = Rewrite Plan
- 10% = Final Revised Script

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%
C+	79% to 77%	F	59% to 0%

Expectation of Professionalism:

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. **Spellcheck and proofread** your assignment prior to submission. We are all taking the time to read your work; you should, too.

On the subject of reading work, this is a workshop class at its heart. As such, it is imperative that we all read everyone's work prior to class time and are prepared with thoughtful, constructive, and respectful notes. Failure to come prepared to class will be reflected in grading. The workload here is significant, but it is worth it. You will get out of this class what you put into it.

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:

Laptops may be used for the purpose of taking notes during workshop only. Cell phones should be turned off. Students using phones will be asked to leave class.

Please note: You should always have a notebook/pen available.

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, etc.

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 the 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.

A.I. Policy

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 storytelling, 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.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

All dates, assignments, and subjects may change at the discretion of the professor.

January 12, Week 1: Give, Don't Take

- Welcome back discussion, review syllabus and goals for the semester, brief lecture on what our stories are here to do.
- **Assignment: Complete the "Wilderness Map" Self-Assessment worksheet (10%)**

January 19, Week 2: A Map Through the Wilderness

- Review Wilderness Map self-assessments.
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Three (10%)**

January 26, Week 3: Sequence Three

- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Four (10%)**

February 2, Week 4: Sequence Four

- Review pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Five (10%)**

February 9, Week 5: Guest Speaker

- TBD Guest Speaker Michael Wright – Former head of Dreamworks, TNT, and current President of MGM+
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Five (10%)**

February 16, Week 6: Sequence Five

- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Six (10%)**

February 23, Week 7: Sequence Six

- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Seven (10%)**

March 1, Week 8: Sequence Seven

- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Eight (10%)**

March 8, Week 9: Sequence Eight / Jeremy's Nine-Step Guide on How to Rewrite Everything

- Review Pages
- Lecture on rewriting
- **Assignment: Work on rewrite plan (10%)**

March 15 – No Class (Spring Break)

March 22, Week 11: The Rewrite Plan

- Review Rewrite Plans

March 29, Week 12: Second Draft Review

- Review Pages

April 5, Week 13: Guest Speaker

- Review Pages
- TBD Guest Speaker Brad Rosenfeld – Literary Agent, founding partner Culture Creative Entertainment

April 12, Week 14: Second Draft Review

- Review Pages

April 19, Week 15: Second Draft Review

- Review Pages

April 26, Week 16: Second Draft Review

- Review Pages

Finals Week: Final script due during Finals Week (10%)

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” <https://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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

<p style="text-align: center;">PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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