

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

**CTWR 321: introduction to Hour-Long Television Writing
Spring 2024**

Instructor: Alexa Alemanni
Class Schedule: Fridays 10-1pm
Class Location: SCA 362
Office Hours: By request
Contact Information: alemanni@usc.edu

Course Objective:

Our objective is to understand the structure of television drama, to understand the inner workings of a writers room, to understand how to break story for a season and for an individual episode, and how to take story to completion via notes and classroom (studio) feedback, and to replicate the experience of an actual writing staff.

Course Description:

We will accomplish this by writing scenes from various existing TV 1 hour Drama Series and we will culminate by writing TWO complete original episodes of a current TV 1 hour drama. This will serve as the final course project.

Course Reading:

Writing the TV Drama Series – Fourth Edition By Pamela Douglas
Pilot scripts provided throughout the class.

Grading Criteria:

All work will be turned in via blackboard, and workshopped in class.

THE TOPICS LISTED BELOW ARE MERELY AN EXAMPLE.

Participation:	10%
Assigned Scene Work 1 & 2:	10%
Writers Assistant Notes	10%
Episode Story for Episode 1:	10%
Episode Story for Episode 2 :	10%
Act Outline	15%
Completed Act First Draft	15%
Completed Act Final Draft	20%

	100%

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. 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:

Laptops are permissible when we are workshopping material, lectures & notes. During writers room sessions laptops are only permissible during breaks, or unless you are the writers assistant for the week.

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 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.

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.

Class Schedule:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

CLASS SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS

1. Week One - January 12th

- * Overview of syllabus
- * Discussion of pilot structure & series structure.
- * Differences with one hour network vs. cable, the effect of streaming, how it changes storylines. How a writers room runs, and what the structure of the semester will be.
- * Difference between plot and story
- * Break down Act 1 of *Bel Air*.

Assignment:

- * Watch the pilot episode of *Homeland*.

2. Week Two - January 19th

- * Break the story backwards, we will take the pilot of *Homeland* and reduce it down to story beats, and a thematic POV for the season and the episode.
- * Read / discuss a few pages from each show in preparation.

Assignment:

- * Watch / read, do your research on the series we will vote to work on:
 - * *Wednesday (Netflix)* *My Life with the Walter Boys (Netflix)* *Buccaneers (Apple+)* *The Irrational (NBC)* *Black Cake (Hulu)* *Poker Face (Peacock)* *Kings of Napa (OWN)* *The Changeling (Apple+)* *School Spirits (Paramount Plus)* *Mayfair Witches (AMC)* *The Diplomat (Netflix)* *The Night Agent (Netflix)* *Silo (Apple+)* *Gen V (Prime)* *Monarch: Legacy of Monsters (Apple+)* *Lawmen Bass Reeves (Paramount+)* *Found (NBC)* *Sullivan's Crossing (CW)* *Obliterated (Netflix)* *House of the Dragon (HBO)* *The Old Man (FX)* *The last of Us (HBO)* to work on.
- * Write a scene from one of the shows you're curious about. Expectations for the scene will be discussed in class. Due on **Friday January 26th** uploaded to Blackboard and emailed to your classmates.

3. Week Three - January 26th

- * Workshop scenes.
- * Talk about A, B & C storylines, thematic POV, acts out and more.
- * Assign writers assistants for each week. Vote on a show.

Assignment:

- * Watch / read do your research on the series we selected. You are expected to be as knowledgeable about the show we have chosen as possible. Do your homework.
- * Write one scene from the show we have selected. Expectations for the scene will be discussed in class. Due on **February 2nd** uploaded to Blackboard and emailed to your classmates.

4. Week Four - February 2nd

- * Workshop scenes & analyze the show we have selected.

Assignment:

Make sure you're all caught up on the show we are working on!

5. Weeks 5 & 6 & 7 - February 9th, 16th & 23rd

- * Start Writers Room: Season arc, theme story ideas
- * Start breaking episode 1

Assignment:

- * Writers Assistant shares notes every week with class no later than the following Saturday at midnight

5. Weeks 8 & 9 - March 1st & 8th

- * Writers Room: Finish the break of episode 1
- * (possibly start episode 2)

Assignment:

- * Writers Assistant shares notes every week with class no later than the following Saturday at midnight.
- * Two Pager/Story Summary for Episode One due on **Sunday March 16th** uploaded to blackboard ONLY.

6. Week 10 - March 22nd

- * Writers Room: Finish Breaking Episode 2.

Assignment:

- * Writers Assistant shares notes every week with class no later than the following Saturday at midnight.
- * Two Pager/Story Summary for Episode 2 due on **Sunday March 24th** uploaded to Blackboard and shared with your classmates.
- * Outline for Episode One due on **Friday March 29th** before the start of class

7. Week 11 - March 29th

- * Workshop Outline for Episode 1

Assignment:

- * Outline for Episode 2 due on **Friday April 5th** before the start of class.

8. Week 12 - April 5th

- * Workshop Outline for Episode 2

Assignment:

- * Writers Assistant shares notes every week with class no later than the following Saturday at midnight.
- * Script Pages Episode 1 due on **Friday April 12th** before the start of class.

9. Week 13 - April 12th

- * Workshop Script Pages for Episode 1

Assignment:

- * Writers Assistant shares notes every week with class no later than the following Saturday at midnight.
- * Script Pages Episode 2 due on **Friday April 19th** before the start of class

10. Week 14 - April 19th

- * Workshop Script Pages for Episode 2

11. Week 15 - April 26th

- * Special Guest Speaker
- * Final thoughts on writers room, staffing & more

Assignment:

- * Episode 1 & 2. Final draft pages uploaded to blackboard by **May 5th** by end of day.

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/sssa

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