

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Playwriting 1, THTR-365 63077 (4 units)
Spring 2024 Tuesdays and Thursdays 4-5:50pm
Location: DMC 106

Instructor: Oliver Mayer

Office: MCC #101C

Office Hours : appointment or walk-in (call first).

Contact Info: omayer@usc.edu, 310 867 9192

Course Description and Overview:

Essential elements of playwriting through weekly assignments, students' initiative, occasional productions of scenes, and extensive classroom analysis.

Learning Objectives:

This course will explore what a play can do. Although this is a writing course, we will be reading and discussing eight separate dynamic play texts. The goal is to analyze dramatic writing, and to use our findings as points of departure for new work. Through weekly writing exercises presented in class we will build dramatic writing muscles, which we will eventually use in a Final Scene for each student, performed by professional actors.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

Baker, Annie, **THE FLICK**, Samuel French.

Bilodeau, Chantal, **SILA**, Talonbooks.

Fornes, Maria Irene, **PLAYS**, PAJ.

Guare, John, **SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION**, Random House.

Mayer, Oliver, **THE HURT BUSINESS**, Hyperbole.

Valdez, Luis, **ZOOT SUIT**, Arte Publico.

Williams, Tennessee, **A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE**, Penguin.

Wilson, August, **JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE**, NAL Trade.

Supplementary materials will appear online on Blackboard as well as via hard copy.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments:

Remember that professors do not "give" grades: students earn grades. Your final grade is up to you. Meeting course requirements does not equal excellence; I am looking for uncommon effort and commitment in each assignment. Dramatic writing demands bravery, chance-taking, and an active sense of play. The writing exercises will be your opportunity to be brave on the page. Students will be evaluated based on individual progress, receiving extended feedback for each assignment. Late assignments (weekly exercises) can be emailed to me at omayer@usc.edu; the midterm and final exams are mandatory and cannot be missed or made up on a later date.

Assignment Rubrics: **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **A-/B+** of good quality; **B** of average quality; **I expect no lower grade from you.**

Grading Timeline: We can discuss grades during my office hours. Please come see me.

Grading Breakdown: Your final grade consists of:

Overall Weekly Grade: 30% **Final Scene Presentation: 30%**
Midterm Exam: 20% **Final Exam 20%**

This class will use the following grading scale:

96-100%=A **95-91%=A-** **88-90%=B+** **85-87%=B**
81-84%=B- **78-80%=C+** **77-75=C** **71-74%=C-**
66-64%=D **67-70%=D+** **61-63%=D-**

Weekly Writing Assignments: These are given both in-class or as homework. Students must be prepared to read aloud their work, for both peer review and my feedback. Absent students should email me or their fellow students about assignments given in-class and/or as homework. These should be turned in on time at the next class.

Final Scene Presentation: The Final Scene will allow you the chance to utilize the sum of knowledge acquired over the course. It will almost always be a revised and expanded scene from one of the writing assignments. Once chosen, you will turn in a rough draft of the scene and receive my comments. The week after that you will turn in your completed and revised scene. All scenes will be presented during the final week of Spring Term. I will grade scenes based upon the boldness of your use of dramatic methods and strategies worked on over the course of the semester, as well as by your ability to be brave and take chances. **It is imperative that you attend the presentations during the last week of class, as they connect directly to your final exam.**

Attendance: While you are not graded on attendance, you will be graded on participation which requires your being in class. After two absences, excused or not, the third absence will affect your grade. Three tardy tallies will count as an unexcused absence. Be on time.

Midterm Exam: Midterm occurs in class on **Tuesday, February 22**. Be on time and be prepared to define specific terms used in class **IN YOUR OWN WORDS**. Midterms will be returned in class on February 27.

Final Exam: Students will judge each other's Final Scenes based on essential dramatic questions provided by me. The exam will consist of oral presentation of written responses, and discussion of each student piece, and will occur on **Tuesday, May 7 from 4:30-6:30pm**. Attendance **MANDATORY** – no exceptions.

Discussion Etiquette: I expect honesty and compassion, particularly when you respond to the work of your student colleagues. Both are essential. Try not to rewrite the work of others; rather, identify moments in the work where you have questions or thoughts.

When listening to others critique your work, keep an open heart and mind. Take notes and remember to breathe.

Additional Policies: We do not use a great deal of technology in this course. That said, we will share weekly new scenes online. We also will accept printed hard copies of scenes. Sometimes the work flows best in handwritten mode, as sometimes pen and paper is the best technology for the work at hand.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown:

JANUARY 9 INTRODUCTIONS. What is a play? What can it do? CREDO assignment.
JANUARY 11 THE BIRD, dramatic action, and the thundercloud of common crisis. Read CREDOS.
JANUARY 16 Read BIRD scenes and CREDOS. Come to Matt Lillard interview at 6pm.
JANUARY 18 A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE. Openings, Character, Place.
JANUARY 23 STREETCAR. Character voices. Read OPENING scenes.
JANUARY 25 Guest Lecturer TBD
JANUARY 30 Guest Lecturer TBD
FEBRUARY 1 SARITA Scenes that make you BLUSH. Read VOICE scenes.
FEBRUARY 6 SARITA. MUSIC. Read BLUSH scenes.
FEBRUARY 8 THE FLICK. The unsaid. Read MUSIC scenes.
FEBRUARY 13 THE FLICK. VALENTINES. Read UNSAID scenes.
FEBRUARY 15 YOUNG VALIANT. Duende and the Family Play. Read VALENTINE scenes.
FEBRUARY 20 YOUNG VALIANT. Pushing the Envelope. Read FAMILY scenes.
FEBRUARY 22 MIDTERM EXAM in class. Spot in-class writing.
FEBRUARY 29 MIDTERMS RETURNED. Read SPOT scenes.
MARCH 5 JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE. Arias & Jubas. Read ENVELOPE scenes.
MARCH 7 JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE. Blood Offerings. Read ARIAS & JUBAS.
MARCH 12 SPRING BREAK
MARCH 14 SPRING BREAK
MARCH 19 ZOOT SUIT. History, Activism & Language. Read BLOOD OFFERING scenes.
MARCH 21 ZOOT SUIT. Alienation. Read LANGUAGE scenes.
MARCH 26 SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION. Presentation vs Representation.
MARCH 28 SIX DEGREES OF SEPEARATION. Anecdote vs. Experience.
APRIL 2 SILA. Humans and Other Animals. Read SIX DEGREES scenes.
APRIL 4 SILA. Telling Stories About What Matters. Read ANIMAL scenes.
APRIL 9 BLADE TO THE HEAT. Spectacle vs. Intimacy. Read MATTERS scenes.
APRIL 11 BLADE TO THE HEAT. Metaphors. Read SPECTACLE/INTIMACY scenes.
APRIL 16 FIRST DRAFT OF FINAL SCENES due.
APRIL 18 FIRST DRAFTS RETURNED WITH NOTES
APRIL 23 FINAL SCENES presentations
APRIL 25 FINAL SCENES presentations.
MAY 7 FINAL EXAM 4:30-6:30pm. Be there. No exceptions.

Attendance at Productions and Events: Throughout the semester, there will be many opportunities to attend SDA shows and events on campus, and productions around town. I will give you advance notice about attending and will secure free tickets when possible. While attendance is not mandatory, I strongly recommend that you make the time. You learn so much from seeing how others solve dramatic questions (or not). Some dates to add to your calendar: Thursday, Jan 18 Matt Lillard (on campus); Tuesday, Jan 23 MFA writers short plays at Villa Aurora (off campus); NWF 3 Play Productions (Mar 1-3/Mar 8-10/April 5-7, all on campus); April 15-21 NWF 2 concert readings (on campus). Again, you don't need to attend them all, but if you can, make it a priority.

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:

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.
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. 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. 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: 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community.
dps.usc.edu

USC

Libraries: Need to do research but don't know where to start? Searching for a book, article, or data to support your argument? Not sure how to cite a source in your bibliography?

Ask a librarian! Research help is available:

- In person and by phone, chat and email at Ask a Librarian
- Through research guides and FAQs
- By contacting your subject librarian