

SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
CTPR 406
VISUAL STORY & COMMUNICATION
SYLLABUS FALL 2024

AUDITING IS NOT PERMITTED

PROFESSOR: Bruce Block

PROFESSOR'S CONTACT: BAB@usc.edu

CLASSROOM & TIME: SCA 112; Tuesdays 9:00AM – 11:50AM

SA: TBD

SA'S CONTACT:

UNITS: 2

OFFICE HOURS: Monday mornings by appointment only; in-person or Zoom.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Just as a writer is concerned with story structure or a musician with musical structure, a picture maker must be concerned with visual structure. Visual structure is the 'language' available to all picture makers yet it is often misused or simply ignored. The key to successfully using visual structure is an understanding of the basic visual components of space, line, shape, color, tone, movement, and rhythm. It is through the control of these basic visual components that a picture maker stirs an audience's emotions, communicates moods and ideas and creates a visual style. This class links visual structure and story structure together. Auditing this class is not permitted.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

This course introduces students to the basic visual principles of Contrast & Affinity, Visual Structure, and the Seven Basic Visual Components. Students will be able to use these principles in their creation of live-action and animated film or video projects, digital games, advertising, graphics, live performance, corporate and industrial exhibitions, streaming content or any type of visual communication in any medium.

PREREQUISITES:

This class does not have prerequisites. It is open to USC undergraduates who want to understand and harness the relationship between story structure and visual structure. Auditing is not permitted.

TESTS:

The mid-term test and the final exam are designed to measure the students' understanding of the basic visual components as they have been discussed in class. Tests are multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false type questions. Some parts of the tests also involve pictorial examples. All tests are completed in class. There are no take-home tests or exams.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Each student takes five pairs of original photos that are assigned during the semester to demonstrate their understanding of the visual components. Photos are due seven days after they are assigned. Students are required to re-do these photo assignments if their submitted examples lack a full realization of the visual component being illustrated. Photos cannot be created or manipulated using AI or computer software. All photos are submitted on Blackboard. Professor Block will review your photos posted on Blackboard. "Good" means the photo is correct. If a photo does not fully illustrate the assigned visual concept, Professor Block will describe the problem and ask you to "please re-do" the photo. Re-do photos are due within 6 days of the photo review. Students must re-do their photos until they receive a "good" review.

LECTURES:

During the lectures, students must take notes which includes drawings and diagrams. It is recommended that students use paper & pencil for this notetaking. Computers are also fine although drawing is difficult. Video and/or audio recording including photography of any kind are not allowed in class. USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

READING & REFERENCES:

The required textbook for the class is *The Visual Story* by Bruce Block (third edition). The lectures are divided into topics that coincide with the book's chapters.

GRADING:

Final course grade is based on:

- Mid-term Test: 30 points
- Final Exam: 40 points
- Photo Assignments: 30 points

The class does not allow make-up tests or extra credit assignments. Auditing is not permitted.

Letter grade	Numerical point range
A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance in class is mandatory. Students are expected to be on time, prepared for each class and remain in class until the class ends. One absence may result in a student's grade being lowered by one notch (IE: A becomes A-). Two absences will result in a student's grade being lowered by two notches (IE: A becomes B+). A third absence will result in a student's grade being lowered a full letter (IE: B+ becomes C+). Grades will be lowered by one full letter for every additional absence.

Tardiness: A student is deemed late if they arrive 15 minutes after the class is scheduled to start. One late arrival may not affect a grade. Two late arrivals equate to one absence and the student's grade will be lowered one notch (IE: A becomes A-). Three late arrivals will result in a grade being lowered by two notches (IE: A- becomes B). Four late arrivals will result in a grade being lowered three notches (one full letter: B becomes C). Tardiness of more than 45 minutes will count as an absence.

Timely attendance is mandatory and failure to attend all class sections from beginning to end may affect grades.

- Exemptions will be allowed on a case-by-case basis, and must be supported by a written accommodation request from the USC Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS).
- Students who become ill and need to self-isolate will be supported in their efforts to stay current with classwork and assignments. Faculty are not required to provide an option for students to Zoom into class.

Students must contact the professor or SA 24 hours prior to class start time if they need to miss class.

CLASS SCHEDULE FOR LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Listing of material for each class is approximate since discussion lengths will vary.

CLASS 1: Orientation and overview of the visual components. Basic visual terms are defined. Space is introduced and organized into categories.
Reading assignment: *The Visual Story*, Chapter 3.

CLASS 2: Discussion of Space continues.

CLASS 3: Discussion of Space is completed.
Photo assignment #1: Space.
Reading assignment: *The Visual Story*, Chapter 9.

CLASS 4: Visual structure. The relationship between visual and story structures is discussed.

CLASS 5: Screening of a *Feature Film TBA*. Discussion and review of the film's visual structure.
Reading assignment: *The Visual Story*, Chapter 4.

CLASS 6: Line & Shape. Linear motif and shape motif are discussed.
Photo assignment #2: Line Orientation.
Reading assignment: *The Visual Story*, Chapter 6.

CLASS 7: Mid-Term exam. Closed book. Bring a pencil or pen.
Color systems are discussed to simplify and control an extremely misunderstood visual component.
Photo assignment #3: Color.

CLASS 8: Screening of a *Feature Film TBA*. Discussion and review of the film's visual structure.
Reading assignment: *The Visual Story*, Chapter 5.

CLASS 9: Discussion of Color completes. Tone is discussed.
Reading assignment: *The Visual Story*, Chapter 7.

CLASS 10: Movement. The three types of movement are discussed and defined.
Photo assignment #4: Movement.

CLASS 11: Screening of *Feature Film TBA* followed by a review and discussion.
Reading assignment: *The Visual Story*, Chapter 8.

CLASS 12: Rhythm. Visual rhythm is discussed.
Photo assignment #5: Rhythm.

CLASS 13: Rhythm completes.

CLASS 14: Review of all visual components, visual structure & story structure.

CLASS 15: Screening of short films demonstrating various principles of visual structure. Final assignments are due and submitted online as a pdf.

EXAM WEEK: Final exam in class.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy:

Since creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, the photo assignments must be created by the student working individually. Students may not have another person or entity complete any portion of the assignments. 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.

Please ask the instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Photography and audio and video recording in class is prohibited.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class is prohibited, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express written permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

PLEASE NOTE:

FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACE IN THE SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX