USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

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CTWR 413: Writing the Short Script 1
FALL 2024 SYLLABUS (2 Units)

Instructor: Erick Castrillon   Class time: Wed 10:00 AM - 12:50 PM
Email: ecastril@usc.edu   Location: SCA 259
Section: 19180   Office hours: By appointment

"The writing became so fluid that I sometimes felt as if I were writing for the sheer pleasure of telling a story, which may be the human condition that most resembles levitation."
– Gabriel García Márquez

"Every painter paints the cosmogony of himself."
– Salvador Dalí

"Is my responsibility first and foremost to the film, which is to tell the truth? Or is it to my family, which is to protect them? Sometimes I couldn't do both."
– Lulu Wang

GOALS OF THIS COURSE:

• Introduction to the craft of screenwriting.

• To learn and practice the elements of a "Simple story well told."

• To strengthen & deepen your ability to conceive compelling ideas, characters and stories through experience and observation

• To learn to write from a visual and aural perspective.

• To learn narrative structure.

• To learn the building blocks of the dramatic scene.

• To write a short script screenplay.

This is an introductory class in writing for the screen in which you will learn and develop your craft as a storyteller, drawing on your memories, experiences, observation, and of course imagination to create compelling characters and tales.

Together we will read and critique a series of weekly assignments, both in and outside the class, designed to help you understand the fundamentals of screenwriting. You will learn to bring your visual and aural senses to your writing, to see and hear your film as you

write it, developing and exploring your characters through situations of conflict.

At the end of the class you will apply your skills to writing a short narrative *5-6 page CTPR 310 script.*

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.

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.

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 the workshop. Cell phones should not be used in the classroom.

WRITING DIVISION ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are expected be on time, prepared for each class, and meet professional standards.
CTWR 413 only meets once a week and timely attendance is mandatory and failure to attend all class sessions from beginning to end may affect grades.
Students are allowed two absences throughout the semester.

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On the third absence, students will have their final grade lowered by 10% and an additional 10% for each absence thereafter. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

NOTE: Exceptions will be made in the case of religious holidays and DSP accommodations.

In the case of medical emergencies, family emergencies, or allowances needed for personal well-being, all concerns must be communicated and approved by the Instructor. If there is a difference of opinion, the student can contact the Writing Division at (213) 740-3303 or writing@cinema.usc.edu

Exemptions to the attendance policy 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 no longer required to provide an option for students to zoom into class. However, Faculty may choose to use zoom at their discretion in an effort to help students stay current in their course work.

If a student has an emergency and additional accommodations are needed, those accommodations will need to come through the USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) office. The Writing Division recommends the student and/or advocate contact CSI at 213-821-4710 and their home department adviser for additional support.

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

CLASS SCHEDULE

NOTE: SYLLABUS MAY SHIFT ACCORDING TO CLASS NEEDS.

WEEK ONE – Intro to Dramatic Storytelling / MEMORY AND HONESTY

In Class: Introduction of the course and overarching objectives.

In Class Discussion: what is a story
1. Honest writing
2. Character wants and needs
3. Character Arch (change)
4. Go over screenwriting glossary—key terms that will become your cinematic toolbox.

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In class assignment – Core Memory Confession

- Recall several important moments in your life. Was this moment traumatic? Embarrassing? Silly? Happy? Exciting? Straight up messed-up? Choose one of the events above and recall what led up to this moment. Recall things, places, activities, people, clothes connected with that core moment that changed you. Now briefly share this event in detail with the whole class, allowing yourself to become vulnerable by inhabiting your core memory. (More "telling", less "reading").

Assignment for next week:

1. Read first assigned short script– who is the main character, what does he/she/they actively want in the story? Who is the main opposition? What elements from the screenwriting glossary did you notice?
2. Start a daily dream journal.
3. *2nd "Memory" Prompt* Describe the following memories:

- That secret you knew about your parents/sibling/friend/teacher… etc.
- That one day you or someone you knew messed up big, big time.

1 page each. **Be ready to share with the class**. Describe in vivid detail: who were the people involved? Where did it happen? What feelings, textures, and moods do you recall? What is the conflict between the people in your story?

WEEK TWO – INTRO TO SCREENWRITING TECHNIQUE

In Class: How Scripts Work. Learn **Professional Screenplay format** and how to use style techniques to express your personal voice. What are the elements used in screenwriting?

Discuss: The style choices made in the screenplay you've read. What are you favorite line(s) of description and why?

Discuss: Memory prompts. Note the importance of props, characters, locations. What kind of character relationships and conflicts emerged? Is this honest writing?

Assignment for Next Week

1. *Keep up with the daily dream journal.*
2. *This exercise introduces the use of props, costume, and character revealing activity and action. Helps the writer practice time ellipsis, the technique of planting and payoff, and/ or repetition with a variation. And of course preparation and aftermath. In two parts. Length: Screenplay format. No more than a page total. (Scene 1 = ¾ page, Scene 2 = ¼ page)*

*Pick an interesting character and place him or her **alone** in a location **significant** to that character. (A home, an office, a combat bunker.) Show the character preparing for*

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some character-revealing event, such as a crucial job interview, a murder, a confession, an encounter with aliens. Whatever. The point is to show through props and movement not only what the event is, but how the character feels about what's about to happen. This should not be a guessing game. We are not given clues, but glimpses into the character's hopes and fears. It should be crystal clear what the event is when the character leaves the location. Then, ellipse time and show the character's return. (We do not see the primary / middle scene of the event.) But when the character returns to his home, or aircraft hanger, or office... **we should know exactly what happened** *and how the character feels about it by changes in their demeanor, costume, props, etc.*

WEEK THREE **– WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY: Characters Moving Through Conflict and Obstacles: Intro to Story Structure**

In Class: How to create three-dimensional characters that that pursue goals and face conflict as they move through your story. The Character Rubric: Beyond Want and Need. Arcs and Arc Symmetry.

Screen Short film and discuss what makes effective dialogue and how to develop an 'ear' for dialogue.

Discuss: Review/critique "Preparation for a Date."

Assignment for Next Week:

1. Keep up with daily dream journal.
2. Building on the personal experiences and memories from previous assignments, write the following exercise: "WRONGEST PERSON/INTRUDER" *A dialogue scene between* **two** *characters. Should build and employ many of elements already introduced (especially "Preparation for a Date"). Preparation, planting and pay-off, etc. (For some reason, writers tend to forget the simplest elements, like sound and light to help the audience expect a romantic or violent scene...) Designed to reveal character through conflict, to build suspense through cross-cutting and a ticking clock, and to practice dialogue -- including attitude, vernacular/voice, scene/plot advertising, exposition. Length: 3 - 5 pages.*

        Character A prepares some location for character B's arrival, but character C shows up instead! This should be, for what we know of character A and his/her plans, the absolute worst person to appear. Character A must get rid of character C before he/she crosses paths with character B! But, character A cannot come out and say exactly why character C must leave. ("Listen mom, you gotta leave because I was about to smoke crack with my favorite girl..." that cannot happen.) For this to work, the audience must know what is being planned and the stakes involved. Also, character C must be entirely motivated to stay. (Mom is sick and took the day off!, for example.)

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The scene ends immediately when Character B arrives, whether Character A is successful in getting rid of character C, or not.

WEEK FOUR – ADVANCED STORY TECHNIQUES

In Class: A deeper dive into story

And: How Short Films work: How a Short is the same as - and different from - a Feature.

Screen Short film and discuss

Discuss: Review/critique "The Worst Person in the World"

Assignments for next week:

1. Keep up with dream journal.
2. The goal of this scene is to explore characters – their past and present relationships. This is a good scene to introduce the concept of exposition through conflict.

Length: 3 - 5 pages.

     One character wants another character to do something. The seducer should know which "buttons" to push. The goal should be appealing to the person being seduced, but that person should have legitimate, character revealing opposition. This need not be sexual or romantic. The seduction/persuasion should escalate. The scene ends when the seducee agrees or doesn't.

WEEK FIVE – HOW REALISM WORKS

In Class: Assign "New Worlds" (see below) and discuss what makes a story "realistic" and the different types of realism. What makes a story seem authentic?

"True/False" in-class assignment. **(**Write two little stories, one to two paragraphs each. One is absolutely true. One is absolutely false. Professor will read it out-loud at random and the class try to determine which scene is true and which one is false, and why.

To Discuss: Review/critique "Seduction/Persuasion."

Assignments for next week:

1. Final dream journal.

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2. "New Worlds" — Write a 2-4 page screenplay with two or more people who do/belong to a specific job/sport/hobby/social group **you know nothing about**.

   You'll be graded on the realism of the job/hobby/world details and lifestyle that are expressed in *dialogue* and to a much lesser extent, description. (i.e. you can't just write a really good description of the things you see and call it a day. This is a DIALOGUE exercise!) It's about the lingo, nomenclature, values and rhythms of these characters. Will we believe you know how two people in a submarine talk and about what? Or a dry cleaner? Or a dentist office? Or two darts champions? We must understand what's going on in the scene and why. The priority is to write believable characters, not jam the story full of jargon.

    No 'CSI'-Style Dialogue where one character explains their job to someone doing the same job.

   NB: Be extremely careful when including "outsiders" and/or neophytes. When an "expert "talks to a "non-expert" (or an "insider" to an "outsider") they - by the very nature of these roles - have to speak in a way that's accessible and general. The assignment is to do the opposite of that.

WEEK SEVEN – TOPIC TBD

In Class: Instructor discretion.

To Discuss: Discuss loglines in a class roundtable. Pitch CTPR 310 ideas and get a feel for the ones that are working the most for the class.

Assignment for Next Week: Revise loglines.

WEEK EIGHT – HOW OUTLINING WORKS PLUS 310 LOGLINES

In Class: How Outlining works: How and why to write a Treatment and Outline.

To Discuss: Listen to and discuss 310 "pitches" (<u>revised </u>loglines) with 310 Faculty.

<center>****310 Instructors Visit Classes****</center>

Assignment for Next Week: Treatment/Outline hybrid (treatment with act breaks and midpoint) for one (two max if absolutely essential) 310 stories.

WEEK NINE -- HOW TO WRITE A BEATSHEET: THE 310 BEATSHEET

In Class: What exactly is "A Beat" (how a story beat is different from directing/editing beats) and Wow to Write a Beatsheet.

To Discuss: Critique and Feedback for 310 Treatment/Outlines.

Assignment for Next Week: 310 Beatsheets for the one chosen 310.

WEEK TEN – BEATSHEET FEEDBACK

To Discuss: Critique and Feedback for 310 Beatsheets.

Assignment for Next Week: Write the 310 First Draft (Group A and B)

At this point in the semester, Instructors may want to A/B the class so that only 6 scripts are being written, covered for notes, and discussed each week.

(this can also begin the previous week (9) so that the Beatsheets are done over two classes as well)

WEEK ELEVEN – TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF THE REWRITE

In Class: How Rewriting works: Tools and Techniques of the Rewrite

Also: How to use Revision Mode in Final Drafts and other programs.

To Discuss: Critique and Feedback for 310 First Drafts (Group A)

Assignment for Next Week: Rewrite: the 310 Second Draft (Group A)

WEEK TWELVE – MODULAR LECTURE PLUS CRITIQUE

In Class: Writing Habits and Workflow Habits and Hacks (or Instructor discretion.)

To Discuss: Critique and Feedback for 310 First Drafts (Group B)

Assignment for Next Week: Rewrite: the 310 Second Draft (Group B)

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WEEK THIRTEEN – CRITIQUE

In Class: Instructor Discretion

To Discuss: Critique and Feedback for 310 Second Drafts (Group A)

WEEK FOURTEEN – CRITIQUE

In Class: Instructor Discretion

To Discuss: Critique and Feedback for 310 Second Drafts (Group B)

Assignment for Next Week: All Students should be addressing final notes and preparing a final draft if applicable.

WEEK FIFTEEN – FINAL 310 CRITIQUES AND FINAL EXAM ASSIGNMENTS

In Class: Instructor Discretion

To Discuss: Critique and Feedback for any 310 'Final' Drafts

"Final Critique Project"

Length: Total length, including critiques of all 12 scripts should not exceed 6 pages.

Assignment: Students should read each of the 508 final drafts and prepare a brief (approx. ¼ to ½ page each) critique of each script (including their own), highlighting what works and what needs improvement and why. Does the story work? Are the characters compelling? etc.

READING:

You should read as many screenplays as possible to familiarize yourself with the styles and form of other professional writers. You will be assigned some scripts to read on your own time and be prepared to discuss them in class. Additionally the following books are highly suggested:

Bird by Bird, Ann LaMott

The Tools of Screenwriting by Howard & Mabley

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Your Screenplay Sucks, by William Akers

GRADING:

Weekly writing Assignments: 50%

Reading and Responding to Workshop Assignments, incl.Class Participation: 10%

Final 310 Scrip: 40%

Class participation includes full involvement in and contribution to all class discussions, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule above) the assignments of the other students and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

Class attendance is mandatory, and includes being on time to class (otherwise, the students who present their material first are short-changed).

Late assignments will result in a lower grade.

All work must be delivered in proper format and emailed to the instructor and all classmates by 5 pm on the day before class.

Per the 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%

A : Work of **excellent** quality. Outstanding application of the dramatic principles and fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines as specified in the syllabus.

B : Work of **good** quality. Above average fulfillments of course requirements and deadlines.

C : Work of **fair** quality. Minimum fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines for passing graduate credit.

C-: FAIL to meet minimum grade for credit. NON PASSING GRAD

[Please be aware that as a SCA Production major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit, please check with your home department.]

The School of Cinematic Arts Support Systems and Statements

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 persons 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 or anonymously submit a report on SCA Community: https://scacommunity.usc.edu/secure/diversityEquity/ You can also read more about how to report discrimination based on a protected class here: https://eeotix.usc.edu/get-help/what-are-my-choices-text/

SCA Office of Student Services
213-740-8358 or StudentAffairs@cinema.usc.edu

SCA Embedded Therapists
Students enrolled in an SCA major program can schedule an appointment with an embedded therapist for the School of Cinematic Arts through the student health portal MySHR.

SCA Community
For additional SCA resources please visit scacommunity.usc.edu

Creative Technology and Support
(213) 821-4571
creativetech@cinema.usc.edu
Location: SCA 128
Support Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:30 AM - 8:30 PM
https://knowledgebase.sca.usc.edu/
https://workstations.sca.usc.edu/

Physical Production Office
The Physical Production Office assists students and faculty with production-related matters including production numbers, locations, permits, insurance, gear and equipment vendors, safety issues, and crew and actor policies. More information can be found by visiting the online Production Procedures and Safety Handbook. The Physical Production Office is located at SCA 304 and is open every weekday from 9am-5pm (Fridays 9am-1pm). You can also reach the Office by calling 213-740-1298 or by email at spo@cinema.usc.edu.

Office of Industry Relations
School of Cinematic Arts - SCA 235
(213) 740-4432
ir@cinema.usc.edu

Cinematic Arts Library Research Guide
https://libguides.usc.edu/cinema

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:
The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, 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. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the

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Office of Academic Integrity 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.

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

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 accommodation is 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:

COVID-19 Resource Center - https://coronavirus.usc.edu/what-should-i-do/

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

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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.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

USC acknowledges that we are on the traditional land of the Tongva People. For thousands of years, the Tongva people lived on this land we occupy today and were considered the most powerful indigenous peoples to inhabit the Los Angeles basin. Along with the Tongva, we also recognize the Chumash, Tataviam, Serrano, Cahuilla, Juaneño, and Luiseño People, for the land that USC also occupies around Southern California. To learn about the Indigenous land on which your learning location resides, please visit Native-Land.ca to discover the Original People of your home.

PLEASE NOTE:
FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL
SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX