

# USC Cinematic Arts

## The John Wells Division of Writing for Screen & Television

### CTWR 421: Writing the Hour-Long Dramatic Series FALL 2024

<b>Instructor:</b>	Alexa Alemanni
<b>Class Schedule:</b>	Tuesdays, 1:00pm - 3:50pm
<b>Class Location:</b>	SCA 304
<b>Office Hours:</b>	By Appointment
<b>Contact Information:</b>	<a href="mailto:alemanni@usc.edu">alemanni@usc.edu</a>
<b>Brightspace Link:</b>	<a href="https://brightspace.usc.edu/d2l/home/125822">https://brightspace.usc.edu/d2l/home/125822</a>

#### ***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](http://Native-Land.ca) to discover the Original People of your home.

#### **Course Description:**

This course is conducted with elements of a writers' room, with the operating principle that we are interdependent and that twelve brains are better than one. Everyone will be involved in the conception and realization of everyone else's script.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

Our goal is for each student to write one polished hour-long spec script with a complete understanding of the process: How to mimic the world of the series. How to choose and pitch a spec story for that series. How to break and outline an hour-long episode. And finally, how to write the script.

#### **Optional / Supplemental Reading:**

***Writing the TV Drama Series*** by Pamela Douglas, 4th edition

#### **Script Format:**

All scenes will be written in standard script format using professional screenwriting software such as "Final Draft."

#### **Overview of Assignments & Grading Breakdown:**

The assignments in this course mimic steps in the process of writing an episode of scripted television. They include: written scenes, story summary/map and/or two-pager of your episode, an episodic outline, and a script of your selected show.

#### **Participation**

Credit for participation which makes up 10% of your grade is based on a combination of attendance and participation in class. This includes, but is not limited to, asking

questions, providing verbal constructive feedback to your fellow classmates on their work.

### **Grading Breakdown**

- 10% = Participation
- 10% = Practice scenes
- 20% = 2 Pager / story summary (for both shows)
- 25% = Outline
- 10% = Completion of weekly pages
- 25% = Final draft of 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.

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

All assignments will be submitted on an email chain AND on Brightspace. Follow the syllabus for specific deadlines.

### **Grading Timeline**

Students receive full credit for the following assignments if turned in on time: practice scenes, two-pager/story map, weekly pages. These grades will be recorded immediately. The outline is graded on timeliness and quality, and will be graded by the end of the midterm grading period, the final script is graded on timeliness and quality, this grade will be visible upon viewing your final grade.

### **Course Specific Policies**

You will be asked to watch as many episodes as possible of the two shows your class selects. If you have concerns about access to the streaming platforms, please reach out and we can make arrangements for you to view the shows.

### **Writing Division Attendance Policy**

Students are expected to be on time, prepared for each class, and meet professional standards.

CTWR 513 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. 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](mailto: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 24 hours prior to class start time if they need to miss class for any reason.

### **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](#).

### **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.

### **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.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, 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 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).

### **Course Evaluations**

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. The process and intent of the end-of-semester evaluation should be provided. In addition, a [mid-semester evaluation](#) is recommended practice for early course correction.

### **CLASS SCHEDULE:**

#### **Week 1: Aug 27**

#### **Workshop:**

- \* Introductions and syllabus.
- \* Review of principles of writing episodic TV drama – structure and act breaks.
- \* Watch Act 1 of *Bel-Air & The Americans* / Turn into story beats
- \* Strategize the best spec series, evaluate our list of options:

- \* *Wednesday (Netflix) The Irrational (NBC) Poker Face (Peacock) School Spirits (Paramount Plus) Mayfair Witches (AMC) The Diplomat (Netflix) Silo (Apple+) Gen V (Prime) Found (NBC) Elsbeth (CBS) Mr. & Mrs. Smith (Prime) The Buccaneers (Apple +) Palm Royale (Apple +) Dark Matter (Apple +) The Gentleman (Netflix) Shogun (Hulu) Fallout (Prime)*

**Assignment:**

- \* Watch: Either ***Found & Pose***
- \* Turn into story beats ***Found & Pose***

**Week 2: September 3**

**Workshop:**

- \* Discuss story beats for ***Found & Pose***
- \* **Vote** on which two shows from the list we will write.

**Assignment:**

- \* Story beats of the pilot for show #1.
- \* Practice scene for show #1.

**Week 3: September 10**

**Workshop:**

- \* Writers Room Week 1: Show 1 Theme & Character

**Assignment:**

- \* Prepare pitch for your episode – “A & B” stories only – and **prepare to pitch** either in story cards / or paragraph form (no more than 2)

**Week 4: September 17**

**Workshop**

- \* Hear all “A & B” story pitches for Show 1.
- \* Develop and work to finish story beats C & D storyline for Show 1.

**Assignment:**

- \* Write your 2-pager story summary for Show 1
- \* 2-pager due Saturday END OF DAY on email chain.

**Week 5: September 24**

**Workshop:**

- \* Two-pagers for Show 1

**Assignment:**

- \* Story beats of the pilot for Show 2
- \* Practice scene for Show 2

**Week 6: October 1**

**Workshop:**

- \* Writers Room Week 1: Show 2 Theme & Character

**Assignment:**

- \* Prepare pitches for your episode – “A & B” stories only – and **prepare to pitch** either in story cards / or paragraph form (no more than 2)

**Week 7: October 8****Workshop:**

- \* Hear all A & B story pitches for Show 2
- \* Develop and work to finish story beats C & D for show 2.

**Assignment:**

- \* Write your two-pager for Show 2
- \* Two-pager due Saturday END OF DAY on email chain.

**Week 8: October 15****Workshop:**

- \* Two-pagers for Show 2

**Assignment:**

- \* First Half of Outline for Show 1 / Show 2
- \* Outline due Saturday END OF DAY on email chain.

**Week 9: October 22****Workshop:**

- \* First Half of Outline for Show 1 / Show 2

**Assignment:**

- \* Edit outline (and turn in on blackboard)
- \* Write Second Half of Outline for Show 1 / Show 2
- \* Outline due Saturday END OF DAY on email chain.

**Week 10: October 29****Workshop:**

- \* Second Half of Outline

**Assignment:**

- \* Act 1 DUE Saturday END OF DAY on email chain.

**Week 11: Nov 5****Workshop:**

- \* Act 1 pages

**Assignment:**

- \* Act 2 DUE Saturday END OF DAY ON email chain

## **Week 12: Nov 12**

### **Workshop:**

\* Act 2 pages

### **Assignment:**

\* Act 3 DUE Saturday END OF DAY ON email chain

## **Week 13: Nov 19**

### **Workshop:**

\* Act 3 pages

### **Assignment:**

\* Act 4 DUE Saturday END OF DAY ON email chain

## **Week 14: Nov 26**

### **Workshop:**

\* Act 4 pages

### **Assignment:**

\* Act 5 DUE Saturday END OF DAY ON email chain

## **Week 15: Dec 3**

### **Workshop:**

\* Act 5 pages

### **Assignment:**

\* Revise revise revise

\* Final draft due to Blackboard by **Dec 10th end of day**

## **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](mailto: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://eotix.usc.edu/get-help/what-are-my-choices-text/>

## **SCA Office of Student Services**

213-740-8358 or [StudentAffairs@cinema.usc.edu](mailto: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](http://scacommunity.usc.edu)

### **Creative Technology and Support**

(213) 821-4571

[creativetech@cinema.usc.edu](mailto: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](mailto:spo@cinema.usc.edu).

### **Office of Industry Relations**

School of Cinematic Arts - SCA 235

(213) 740-4432

[ir@cinema.usc.edu](mailto: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 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](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto: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

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](mailto: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 SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**