

CTWR 513 (19224D)
Fundamentals of Screenwriting I
Writing The Short Script (2 units)
Fall 2024

Instructor: Ted Braun
Email: tebraun@usc.edu

Tuesday 10:00 am – 12:50 pm, SCA 362
Office Hours: by appointment, SCA 348

Purpose

This is an intensive introductory course in writing for the screen that rests upon a given: your desire to bring new stories into the world. The emphasis is on developing specific screenwriting skills, particularly the ability to write effective cinematic scenes. The aim is to enable you to draw a story from your imagination and express it in the form of a short screenplay. To do that you will learn fundamentals of dramatic screenwriting -tools screenwriters use to communicate with clarity and emotional force.

This course is taken in conjunction with Fundamentals of Screenwriting II, 514a, where the emphasis is on the workings of your imagination and the discovery of material: those stories, and ways of telling them, that are yours alone. 514a emphasizes imagination and originality. This course, 513, develops specific screenwriting skills and emphasizes technique and craft. Together the pair of courses provides you with a foundation for your future as a professional screenwriter.

Plan

The core of this course is a series of weekly assignments that develop your ability to externalize, dramatize, and shape a story. Assignments are read aloud and discussed in class. They culminate in a short screenplay, 10-15 pages, of your own choosing. The short script is an opportunity for you to combine the techniques you've learned; your goal is to write an unforgettable screenplay about an engaging character in an emotional cinematic way. It's expected this short script will be executed with professional polish and skill. The bar is high.

Weekly Assignments

There are three sorts of weekly assignments. The first ask you to write scenes that tell us something about a character or characters using what we can see and hear – not what they say. The assignments focus on:

Externalization

- The creation of atmosphere and mood
- Behavior that reveals character
- The things people surround themselves with that define who they are (costume, props, setting)
- Manipulation of these elements to create expressive effects - through planting and payoff, contrast, and the use of time

The next assignments ask you to write dramatic scenes and invite you to transform life, in all its richness, into something with cinematic shape and meaning – in a word, you will learn:

Dramatization

- The goal or intention of a character in a scene – their “picture of happiness”
- Conflict - between characters, within characters, and with the environment
- Ways in which the action of a scene changes the characters (polarity or arc)
- Emotional identification – how to draw the audience into an empathetic relationship with a character

The final assignments ask you to write story outlines for short films. These assignments focus on:

The telling of a story

- Ways in which information is revealed to the audience
- Relationships between what the audience knows, and the characters know
- Story patterns
- Types of tension
- The differences between suspense and surprise, dramatic irony, and mystery
- The division of a story into three parts or acts

You’ll be expected to rewrite your work regularly.

Assignments are due fourteen hours before class - one .pdf file emailed to the instructor by 8 pm the night before we meet. You should bring one printed copies to class.

Assignments should be professionally presented - properly formatted and free of typos, misspellings, errors in grammar and syntax. Late assignments are not accepted and receive a failing grade.

Your work in 513 during the middle of the semester and the final weeks of the course overlaps with that of 514a. At that point we’ll establish a new routine for delivering and distributing work. Consult the last page of this syllabus – where the assignments for both classes are shown - for a clearer picture of exactly what’s expected in the last few weeks of the term.

The syllabus is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion.

Schedule of Writing Assignments

Aug 27	Atmosphere (In Class)	Oct 29	Feature Idea (<i>Key Scenes</i>)
Sept 3	Preparation for a Date	Nov 5	NO CLASS (ind. meetings)
Sept 10	Roommates & Character/Env	Nov 12	Feature Script 1 st 30 p
Sept 17	Dramatic Scene	Nov 19	Feature 2 nd 30 p
Sept 24	Dramatic Scene	Nov 26	Feature 3 rd 30 p
Oct 1	Dramatic Scene	Dec 3	Feature 4 th 30 p (Fri)
Oct 8	Short Outline (MIDTERM)	Dec 11	HOLD FOR MAKEUP
Oct 15	SHORT OUTLINE		Do not make travel plans
Oct 22	SHORT SCREENPLAY		that conflict

Films

From time to time the viewing of films and/or reading of screenplays will be assigned to support discussion and provide an analytical and imaginative backdrop for your work.

Required Texts

The Tools of Screenwriting, Howard & Mabley
Fortunately, Remy Charlip
Your Screenplay Sucks, William M. Akers (His title. Not my sentiments.)
The Hollywood Standard, 3rd Edition, by Christopher Riley
King Lear, Shakespeare

Grading

Your grade will be based upon the fulfillment and quality of the weekly assignments (30%), the quality of two rewritten scenes at mid-term (20%), your participation in class (10%), and the quality of your final short screenplay (40%).

You can't participate in class if you're not in class. You're expected to be on time. Lateness and absences will affect your grade. (See attendance policy below.)

An "A" is for truly exceptional work; a "B" is for good work; and a "C" is for average work. Simply completing the assigned work is, in and of itself, no guarantee of a passing, let alone a high grade.

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%

Social Media & Recording

Class discussion should be considered private academic communications. We'll be sharing personal stories and intellectual property. If you tweet, have a blog, or engage in another form of ongoing posts, anything covered in this class - including lecture material and the assignments - is considered off limits. Recordings of class are not permitted without the instructor's permission and the consent of classmates. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction by the University.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy

This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is essential. Participation includes full involvement in, and contribution to, class discussion, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule) the assignments of your classmates and offering thoughtful, constructive comments. Your full presence is fundamental to the classroom experience, so...phones off, and off the table. Laptops closed. _____

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

Students are expected be on time, prepared for each class, and meet professional standards. CTWR 514a 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

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.

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 II, “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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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>

PLEASE NOTE:

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

FALL 2024
Weekly Assignments
513/514a
Ted Braun

513

Tue. 10 – 12:50 pm

August 27 Atmosphere (In Class)
September 3 Preparation for a Date
September 10 Roommates & Character/Env
September 17 Dramatic Scene
September 24 Dramatic Scene
October 1 Dramatic Scene
October 8 Short Outline (MIDTERM)
October 15 SHORT OUTLINE
October 22 SHORT SCREENPLAY
October 29 Feature Idea (*Key Scenes*)
November 5 NO CLASS (ind. meetings)
November 12 Feature Script 1st 30 p
November 19 Feature 2nd 30 p
November 26 Feature 3rd 30 p
December 3 Feature 4th 30 p (Fri)
December 11 HOLD FOR MAKEUP CLASS

514a

Fri. 10 – 12:50 pm

August 30 Memory
September 6 Experience 1 & 2
September 13 Observation
September 20 Fact/Fiction
September 27 Extreme Character
October 4 World (photos)
October 11 **NO CLASS**
October 18 Extreme Character/World (story)
October 25 Feature Idea (*Characters*)
November 1 Feature Idea (*Story*)
November 8 Feature Screenplay A 1st 30p
November 15 Feature A 2nd 30p
November 22 Feature A 3rd 30 p
November 29 **THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS**
December 6 Feature B Final 30