

**USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS**

CTWR 514a: SCREENWRITING FUNDAMENTALS

Section number 19234D 2 Units

Fall, 2024, Fridays 10:00am - 12:50pm SCA 342

DAVID HOWARD

[dhoward@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:dhoward@cinema.usc.edu)

Office hours: Tues 1pm - 4pm (set up by email)

Office: SCA 354 phone: 213-740-3303

**CLASS OBJECTIVE:**

This intensive writing class will introduce the fundamentals of screenwriting, focusing most directly on the nature and writing of dramatic scenes and the development of interesting and compelling characters. How to express a character - their intentions and objectives - through action within dramatic scenes will be the central objective of this course.

Class goals include helping each student:

- Acquire a personal, professional writing style in screenplay format
- Sharpen word choice skills for impact and clarity
- Understand character, the basis of compelling drama
- Write from a visual and aural perspective
- Develop a fundamental understanding of the dramatic scene
- Understand the *economy* of effective narrative screenwriting and put that understanding to regular use

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Every class session students will be given a writing assignment. Early in the semester you will read your work aloud and everyone will comment on each other's work. This process of creating work, presenting it to your audience (your classmates), learning to deal with and make decisions based on feedback and learning to give effective, helpful and productive feedback to others are the core hallmarks of this class. Later in the semester, pages will be delivered as PDFs for reading before class meetings.

This class is designed to be taken in conjunction with 514a. Though it meets on Tuesdays, and 514a on Fridays, some 513 material will be dealt with on Fridays and some 514a material will be covered on Tuesdays as the course evolves.

513 deals with scenes, scene exercises and short scripts. The 514a component deals with story development, outlining and writing a feature-length screenplay.

**Phones off. Laptops solely for class work.**

**RECOMMENDED READING:**

*The Tools of Screenwriting* by David Howard and Edward Mabley.  
Recent and current screenplays available from script library.

**SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS AND TOPICS**

(Schedule may be adjusted due to classroom progress)

Aug 30      Getting to school  
              Someone you feared

Sep 6        Memorable person/Memorable event

Sep 13      Almost true/Almost false  
              2 personal anecdotes

Sep 20      "Most" character  
              Character worthy of a story

Sep 27      World worth exploring

Oct 4        Short Script Patterns

**Oct 11      NO CLASS - FALL RECESS**

Oct 18      Feature idea 2 (character, story, world)

Oct 25      Revised outline

Nov 1        Feature next 12-15p

Nov 8        Feature next 12-15p

Nov 15      Feature next 12-15p

Nov 22      Feature next 12-15p

**Nov 29      NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING**

Dec 6        **FINAL PAGES** and/or **GAME PLAN**

Final pages for both 513 and 514a will be due at last class; first draft screenplay will combine the issues of 513 (scene and character) with the issues of 514a (story and character). During finals week a "game plan" for second draft will be due.

**Friday, December 13 HAND IN: GAME PLAN - NOTES & DECISIONS**

**EXPECTATION OF PROFESSIONALISM:**

Assigned material to be handed in 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.

**RECORDING DEVICES:**

You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA:**

The final grade will be based upon fulfillment of the weekly assignments along with on-going demonstration of the use of the tools discussed in class (30%), the final screenplay as demonstration of understanding the screenwriting craft (40%), two rewritten scenes at mid-term as demonstration of gaining command over scene writing skills (20%), and participation in the weekly give and take of classroom discussions (10%).

Assignments are presented in class unless by prior arrangement; as the first draft script is written, pages will be delivered to everyone in class and instructor via email as PDF attachments. Handed-in assignments will be expected to be properly formatted and free of typos, misspellings, errors in grammar and syntax.

**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.

### **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.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

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

## **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.