

School of Cinematic Arts
The John Wells Division of Writing for Screen and Television

CTWR 533: Rewriting the Feature Screenplay
Fall 2024

Instructor: Jody Wheeler
Class Schedule: Monday 10-12:50 pm
Class Location: SCA 363
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Information: josephw9@usc.edu

Course Objective:

To rewrite your good-but-not-as-great-as-you-want draft feature script into the Best Damn Feature Script Ever™. (No pressure.)

Course Overview:

Rewriting is both fun and hell. It's fun in that you have a hundred some pages of material from your draft in which to work with. It's hell because you have a hundred-some pages of material from your draft with which to work with. Figuring out where to go and what to re-write can be hell. Or fun. (Writing is never one thing.)

To cover both extremes, before we start revising Page One, we'll take several weeks to get clear on the essence of our story, the characters, themes, premises, and relationships that serve as the fuel to drive our narrative towards resolution. We'll utilize everyone in the class's collective genius to achieve this.

Once we've nailed that down — possibly super-glue it down. Gaffer tape works, too — we'll then dive in and revise act by act, tackling the scenes that make up the meat of our tale. We'll revise these with an eye fixed on the foundations we worked out the first few weeks of class. We'll then finish up by further massaging key scenes and plot points until we have them where we want them.

By the end of the semester, we'll have our scripts at that elusive but nevertheless real place where we can show our script to the wider world.

Course Reading / Media:

- Rewrite: A Step-By-Step Guide to Strengthen Structure, Characters, and Drama in Your Screenplay by Paul Chitlik
- The Hollywood Standard - Third Edition: The Complete and Authoritative Guide to Script Format and Style

Grading Criteria:

1. Participation 10%
2. Prep Work: 20%
3. Notes: 20%
4. Final revisions 50%

Your grade will be based on the fulfillment of the weekly assignments, the quality of your final screenplay, and your participation in class.

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. Please proof your assignment prior to submission. The final rewritten script must fully conform to professional standards, which is to say, on 8 1/2 x 11 white paper, 12-point Courier, with proper margins and formatting. If you do not have a dedicated screenwriting program, get one: the Write Brothers software is available for free; FinalDraft is available at a reduced rate (see the Division office); Highland 2 is quite intuitive and was pioneered by an SCA alum (John August); Celtx is freeware.

During the semester, we will exchange work via Brightspace. The default format for electronically transmitted work is PDF. Each file name must bear the name of the writer and the title of the work, and the work itself must include a title page identifying the author, the project, and **the specific assignment**.

Internet Policy:

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snap-chatted, or be placed anywhere else on the internet.

Recording Devices:

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

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

Laptops may be used for the purpose of taking notes during workshop. Cell phones should not be used in the classroom.

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 to be on time, prepared for each class, and meet professional standards. CTWR 533 only meets once a week, and timely attendance is mandatory. 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.

Class Schedule:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1 (8/26)

Introductions. Review foundational script elements: spine, characters (protagonists / antagonists / supporting), themes, and premise. Discuss what goes into rewriting. Tell us about your current script *and the story you want to tell*.

For Next Time:

Read Chitlik Chapters 1-6

Write the Seven Point Spine of your script, biographies of the protagonist, antagonists, and significant supporting characters. Also, write / describe the themes and premise in your script — or what you want to be in your script!

Material is to be posted on Blackboard **Brightspace!** by Saturday 9/7, 11:59 PM so everyone can review before class.

Week 3 (9/9)

Discuss the Seven Point Spine of your script, biographies of the protagonist, antagonists, significant supporting characters, themes and premise.

For Next Week:

Write out the beat sheet for your script.

Week 4 (9/16)

Discuss the beat sheet for your script

For Next Week:

Read Chitlik 7-8

<p>Week 2 (9/02) Labor Day No Class!</p>

Upload your scripts to Brightspace. **Read** your classmates' scripts. **Write** notes reflecting on the characters, themes, and execution of the scripts We'll be covering Group A work on 9/23 and Group B on 9/30.

Week 5 (9/23)

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Week 6 (9/30)

Discuss notes for Group A & B scripts.

Discuss The Rewrite Plan for group scripts.

For Next Time:

Revise Act One.

Post Act One rewrite to Brightspace by *Saturday, 11:59 pm* of the week you are presenting.

Week 7 (10/7)

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Week 8 (10/14)

Discuss Group A / B Act One rewrites

Read a scene or two from each other's Act 1 (based on time)

For Next Time:

Revise Act Two(a).

Post Act Two(a) to Brightspace by *Saturday, 11:59 pm* of the week you are presenting.

Week 9 (10/21)—

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Week 10 (10/28)

Discuss Group A / B **Act Two(a)** rewrites

Read a scene or two from each other's Act Two (a) (based on time)

For Next Time

Revise Act Two(b).

Post Act Two(b) to Brightspace by *Saturday, 11:59 pm* of the week you are presenting.

Week 11 (11/4)

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Week 13 (11/18)

<p>Week 12 (11/11) Veterans Day No Class!</p>
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Discuss Group A / B **Act Two(b)** rewrites

Read a scene or two from each other's Act Two (b) (based on time)

For Week 12 & 13

Revise Act Three

Post Act Three to Brightspace by *Saturday, 11:59pm* of the week you are presenting.

Week 14 (11/25)

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Week 15 (12/2)

Discuss Group A / B **Act Three** rewrites

Read a scene or two from each other's Act Three (based on time)

Also for **Week 15**, we'll discuss whatever pages you bring to class or issues you still have with your scripts. We'll also sum up everything we've learned over the course. I'll encourage you to read Chitlik 9 and 10 for more information on polishing your scripts.

If time, we might streak the campus, force Starbucks and Coffee Bean into a Dance Off, or hang glide from Waite Phillips Hall. (TBD).

Final Scripts are due by Sunday (12/8) 11:59pm

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 11, "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.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling. Free and confidential mental health treatment for

students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710

Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed. <https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org. Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp. Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086 equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu. Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421 studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support. Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776. dsp.usc.edu Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101 diversity.usc.edu 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 dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu. 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) 442-120 – 24/7 on call dps.usc.edu. Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC). ombuds.usc.edu
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.*

Diversity and Inclusion

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 person 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. You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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