USC Cinematic Arts

The John Wells Division of Writing for Screen & Television

CTWR 519a: Thesis in Television Drama
FALL 2024

Instructor:	Alexa Alemanni
Class Schedule:	Thursdays, 1:00pm - 3:50pm
Class Location:	SCA 361
Office Hours:	By Appointment
Contact Information:	alemanni@usc.edu
Brightspace Link:	https://brightspace.usc.edu/d2l/home/125829

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.

Course Description:

This is the first half of a year-long class in creating an original television drama series. This semester, students will write and revise the script for an original hour-long drama pilot. Additionally, they will write "pitch pages" for their series, as this document is now a standard component expected of writers for pitching and selling pilots in the current marketplace. Class time will follow a workshop format. Mimicking the development of a television series, students will experience what it is like to develop a pitch, break story, write to a deadline, give notes and receive them in a positive and constructive manner and deliver a finished script.

Learning Objectives:

The Television Pilot script is the blueprint for the series. It is a microcosm of the series. Using this concept as a springboard, students will formulate verbal pitch and pitch pages, outline, then write an original character-driven hour-long drama pilot that will platform their show for series.

Students are expected to write their individual assignments while reading their fellow writers'/students' work, giving and receiving feedback (aka "notes"), and revising their own work, simultaneously.

The end goal for this first semester is for students/writers to have a polished draft of a pilot script.

Optional / Supplemental Reading:
Writing the TV Drama Series by Pamela Douglas, 4th edition

Multiple scripts will be provided for students to read through out the semester. Some will be suggested, others strongly encouraged, just always remember the golden rule: the more you read and the more you write the better you get.

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

Overview of Assignments & Grading Breakdown:

Unless otherwise instructed, all written assignments are due to the instructor and your classmates via email by12noon on the Monday before our next class.

Please write non-script assignments in Microsoft Word/Pages (and then saved as a PDF) and Script assignments in Final Draft (and then saved in PDF).

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% = Pitch Pages
       10% = 2 Pager / story summary
       20% = Outline
       20% = First draft
       30% = 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: pitch pages, two pager / story map. 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 first & 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 read scripts every week, obviously course loads may prohibit this at times, but just remember, the more you read and write the better you get.

Notes will be given in person, in a room format, so we can build upon each others thoughts, please make sure to have read each other's work.

Writing Division Attendance Policy

Students are expected 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

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:

Pre-Class Work
* Prepare premise / characters (only 2) from a comparable tonal show, please use the format / length sent to you in advance.
* Begin to read our three shared language scripts: *Shogun, Found, Fallout*

Week 1: Aug 29

Workshop:
* Introductions and review of syllabus
* Pitches of existing shows - discussion about clarity and specificity of engine and show and conflict.
* First round pitches of ideas.
* Notes: how to give / receive and the difference between take and hear.

Assignment:
* Prepare your own Premise / Why Me / World section of your pitch pages for class (if you are still choosing between two ideas, you can do this for both) use templates and examples provided for appropriate length etc. (this is a verbal pitch it does not need to be turned in, in advance)
* If you haven't already: read EITHER *Shogun / Found* (or both!)

Week 2: September 5

Workshop:
* *Shogun* script breakdown / *Found* script breakdown
* Workshop Premise / Why Me / World for each student

Assignment:
* Prepare Character Pitches (using templates provided)

Week 3: September 12

Workshop:
* Character Pitches
* Circle back to premises / make trees and hone in on engine

Assignment:
* Prepare season Pitches / Revise all Previous Sections. Please indicate changes as discussed in class. Please use templates and examples provided for appropriate length etc.

Week 4: September 19

Workshop
* Season Pitches / Revised previous sections
* Discussion on story beats / story map / etc. look at examples of what works best.

Assignment:
* A & B & C (& D if available) as either story beats / cards

Week 5: September 26

Workshop:
* Storylines
* Discuss the value of two pagers - not losing sight of the story, telling a good story.
* *(From this week forward, if we have time there will be a script that was assigned the week before to discuss)*

Assignment:
* Two pager or story map (please use proper formatting and match examples provided)

Week 6: October 3

Workshop:
* Two pager or story map
* Discuss outlines / structure / format

Assignment:
* Outline

Week 7: October 10 * NO CLASS * OCTOBER BREAK (PRIVATES ARRANGED)

* Since there will not be class, each student will get a private 30 minute zoom class scheduled Monday - Wednesday to get notes on their outline. ** This is your responsibility to sign up for the provided available time slots **

Week 8: October 17

Workshop:
* Revised Outline

Assignment:
* Write Act 1

Week 9: October 24

Workshop:
* Act 1

Assignment:
* Write Act 2/3 or Act 2 (depending on your structure choice 5 act or 4 act)

Week 10: October 31

Workshop:
* Act 2/3 or Act 2

Assignment:
* Write Act 4 or Act 3

Week 11: Nov 7

Workshop:
* Act 4 or Act 3 pages

Assignment:
* Act 5 or Act 4 DUE Saturday END OF DAY ON email chain

Week 12: Nov 14

Workshop:
* Act 5

Assignment:
* Revised pages

Week 13: Nov 21

Workshop:
* Revised pages

Assignment:
* Revised pages

Week 14: Nov 26 (NO CLASS THANKSGIVING)

Week 15: Dec 5

Workshop:
* Revised pages

Assignment:
* Continue to polish script

Week 16: STUDY WEEK Dec 9 - 13

** Appointments available for additional help all week **

Assignment:
* Thesis Draft due December 18th no later than 12pm PST in PDF form to Katie Sternberg, Thesis Instructor & Thesis Committee Members etc. Dec 18th.

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 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*
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.

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