

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 355: Acting for Sitcoms

Fall 2024

4 Units

Tuesdays & Thursdays // 12:00 pm -1:50 pm

Location: DAB 10

Instructor: Jill Alexander (she/her)

Email: jealexan@usc.edu

Office Hours: By appointment in person or on Zoom

Course Description

This course will prepare students to work in scripted comedy.

Students will:

- Learn the how to audition for and work in today's scripted comedies
- Explore the sub-genres of multi-cam, single-cam, and dramedy
- Prepare partner reads and solo auditions
- Collect and prepare suitable audition materials
- Nail down where their unique character lives in the world of scripted comedy
- Commit 100% to each exercise with an attitude of openness
- Support their fellow classmates with positivity and encouragement

Learning Objectives

- Identify the conventions and tone of each sub-genre of sitcom
- Break down comedy scripts to effectively prepare for table reads, partner reads, and taped auditions
- Approach sitcom work with creativity, intelligence, and respect
- Identify who you are as character
- Commit to bringing a specific point of view to your work
- Communicate feedback to others and yourself in a positive and encouraging manner

Prerequisite(s): THTR 252b

Course Notes

This class very much functions as a laboratory, with much of the work being done in-class or prepared outside of class and then presented in class. Attendance and punctuality are key.

Because of the collaborative nature of the work, you will need to make time to meet up and rehearse with your fellow actors outside of class.

Both in-class and outside rehearsal require notes to be taken — please be prepared. Always have a paper notebook and something to write with.

Communication

Please email me at jealexan@usc.edu any time with questions or concerns. E-mails will generally be returned within 48 hours on weekdays. I can also meet with you via my Zoom personal meeting room or at an on-campus location as our schedules allow.

You'll elect a class communication leader who will set up a way for you all to easily communicate (the platform is up to you – GroupMe, Facebook, etc.)

Accommodations

If you have current learning accommodations that are recognized by USC (LOA) please provide me with a copy you have an LOA, please make an appointment with me to discuss how we can address your accommodations in relation to the shape of the course.

If you do not currently have an LOA but acquire one during the semester, please provide me with your LOA as soon as possible.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Brightspace will be updated regularly with announcements, readings, etc. Please check it often. For support with Brightspace contact brightspace@usc.edu or 213-740-5555.

You will occasionally need to print scripts — please be prepared with printing capability. Printing costs should be thought of as part of textbook costs – printed scripts are an essential tool for an actor.

You'll need Internet access and may need to access shows and materials that require a subscription or membership. These costs should also be thought of as textbook costs – watching sitcoms is an essential part of knowing conventions of the genre.

Required Reading

I will share whole scripts via PDF when needed.

Required Viewing

As mentioned above, you may need to access episodes of particular shows.

Optional Viewing

I will also provide access to at least two different live sitcom tapings that will occur off-campus (on a studio lot). If you attend one of these tapings and share your reaction to your experience with the class you will get extra credit.

Supplementary Reading

Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott

Directing Actors by Judith Weston

Letters to a Young Artist by Anna Deavere Smith

Sanford Meisner on Acting by Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell

Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre by Keith Johnstone

Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out by Mick Napier

Save the Cat! by Blake Snyder

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Below is a general overview of the assignments. A detailed assignment description will be posted on Brightspace with ample time for you to prepare and complete your work.

Your grade will be assessed in the following areas:

Studio Work — Studio work includes all presented or performed assignments.

Grades are not dictated by talent. You'll be graded by your preparation and commitment to the process— familiarity with material, printed scripts when required, memorization when required, thoughtful and appropriate wardrobe choices when required, bringing your absolute best creativity and intelligence to the assignments, taking re-directs with willingness to try.

Discussion — You must participate in discussions about viewings, rehearsals, readings, scene-work, and auditions. Feedback to your classmates (and about your own work) should be framed in a positive and encouraging manner. Some assignments require a written response to a prompt. Late submissions will be docked.

Preparation — Scene selection appropriate to the assignment and the actor(s) turned in on time in the manner requested. Late submissions will be docked as this work impacts your classmates.

Writing — You will write analytical responses to prompts that address the material we view and work on.

Grading Breakdown

Assignments	Points
In-class activities (presence, focus, attitude, willingness, support)	28
Service Review Exercise	1
You as Character Breakdown Exercise (including edit)	3
Multi-Cam Scene Selection and Performances	12
Single Camera Written Analysis	2
Single Camera Scene Selection and Performances	12
Dramedy Streaming Analysis	2
Dramedy Scene Selection and Performances	10
Dream Casting Scene Selection and Performances	7
Cold Reads	5
Final - Scene Selection and Performance	12
Final - Written Response	6
TOTAL	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

Letter grade	Corresponding numerical point range
A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

Written assignments should be posted on Brightspace as a PDF attachment before the specified date and time and should be formatted for clarity and readability. Late assignments will not be awarded full points. Do not send links to Google Docs.

You'll have to spend some time finding scenes (I'll provide starter resources for you to do so) and/or transcribing them.

Performance Assignments are presented in class. Preparation is key.

Grading Timeline

Grades will generally be posted to Brightspace within a week. If you fail to turn in an assignment, it will show on Brightspace — I cannot follow up with you to ask about missing assignments.

Course Specific Policies

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Campus Section 11.12(B): Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. 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. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

This includes your syllabus and course handouts as well as details about the work we do in class.

Respect each other's privacy.

Attendance

Enthusiastic participation and engagement are key to your success in this class. Your attendance is crucial to the work.

You must be present and ready to work at the start of each class.

Do not be late. If you are more than 5 minutes late to class you will be marked tardy. If you are tardy three or more times your grade may be docked.

Do not be absent. Points will be deducted for missed Studio work and class discussions. In the event of an absence, you are responsible for following up with your classmates to gather any missed material or feedback.

ILLNESS POLICY -

If you are running a fever of 100 or more or have run a fever of 100 or more within the last 24 hours do not come to class. In order for the absence to be excused, you must notify me by e-mail ahead of class and you must adhere to university protocols i.e. contact the campus nurse. (Students should call USC Student Health at 213-740-9355 or send a message through [mySHR](#) to the Advice Nurse. An advice nurse is available by phone 24/7.)

If you are sick with Covid you must follow [campus protocol](#); this includes informing your close contacts (which includes your classmates and myself.) In order for a Covid absence to be excused, you must notify me by e-mail ahead of class and you must adhere to university protocols regarding testing and masking.

In short, illnesses are not excused unless you e-mail me in advance that you are missing class because you are sick.

If you wish to be excused for a religious observation, you must give me advance notice.

There are no excused absences or tardies for work, conferences, school productions or rehearsals, or other classes you are enrolled in.

Classroom norms

Devices — Cell phones and other electronic devices should be left on silent with your belongings. This is to encourage your focus, mindfulness, and to show respect to the class. In short, no cellphone use in class.

Attire — You're going to need to be able to move freely and comfortably. Shoes must be closed-toed — no flip-flops and no bare feet. If your hair gets in your face, secure it back. I may ask you to remove a hat or distracting jewelry during studio work.

Eating — Food and drink is not permitted during any SDA class.

Break — This class is less than 2 hours and I will use the full time and do not have a set break though there will be times when we take one. Think of this class as a movie. Use the restroom ahead of time.

It is disruptive to come in and out of a performance class. If you must leave the room, do it surreptitiously. Never enter or exit the room when someone is performing or working. Only enter or exit the room between performances or work.

Strike — You are expected to help restore the classroom to neutral at the end of each class.

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.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

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.

THERE IS TO BE NO USE OF A.I. IN THIS CLASS. PERIOD.

This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, 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 text, code, or other content 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 relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. ([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. I will set aside time on our last class for you to complete your course evaluation.

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Please note-- due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure may change to accommodate the ensemble and the time that each exercise requires. Please remain flexible.

Week to Week Breakdown - THTR 355 - Jill Alexander (Fall 2024)

	STUDIO EXERCISE	STUDIO EXERCISE POINTS AVAILABLE	HOMEWORK	HOMEWORK POINTS AVAILABLE
Week 1				
August 27 (Tuesday)	Introduction and review of syllabus. Class introduction.			
August 29 (Thursday)	Viewing and discussion of sitcoms.		Prepare to share a SERVICE REVIEW	1
Week 2				
September 3 (Tuesday)	SERVICE REVIEW EXERCISE. (A) Introduce "you as character" breakdown assignment.		Write your "you as character" breakdown	2
September 5 (Thursday)	SERVICE REVIEW EXERCISE (B)		Select / Prepare MULTI-CAM partner reads	1
Week 3				
September 10 (Tuesday)	Present BREAKDOWNS		Edit character breakdown	1
September 12 (Thursday)	Multi-cam partner reads (A)	5	Select / Prepare MULTI-CAM audition scenes.	1
Week 4				
September 17 (Tuesday)	Multi-cam partner reads (B)			
September 19 (Thursday)	Multi-cam auditions (A)	5		
Week 5				
September 24 (Tuesday)	Multi-cam auditions (B)		Single Camera analysis	2
September 26 (Thursday)	Multi-cam auditions (C)		Prepare SINGLE CAM partner reads	1
Week 6				
October 1 (Tuesday)	SINGLE CAM PARTNER READS (A)	5	Prepare single-cam auditions	1
October 3 (Thursday)	SINGLE CAM PARTNER READS (B)			
Week 7				
MIDTERMS (10/7-11/8 grading period)				
October 8 (Tuesday)	MID-TERMS Single-cam auditions (A)	5		
October 10 (Thursday)	NO CLASS - FALL RECESS			
Week 8				
October 15 (Tuesday)	MID-TERMS Single-cam auditions (B)		Dramedy/Streaming analysis	2
October 17 (Thursday)	MID-TERMS Single-cam auditions (C)		Prepare Dramedy/Streaming Scenes	1
Week 9				
October 22 (Tuesday)	COLD READS	5		
October 24 (Thursday)	Dramedy/Streaming scenes (A)	5	Prepare DRAMEDY auditions (self-tapes)	4
Week 10				
October 29 (Tuesday)	Dramedy/Streaming scenes (B)		DREAM CAST a classmate. Prepare sides for them.	2
October 31 (Thursday) HALLOWEEN	Watch dramedy auditions (self tapes)			

	STUDIO EXERCISE	STUDIO EXERCISE POINTS AVAILABLE	HOMEWORK	HOMEWORK POINTS AVAILABLE
Week 11				
November 5 (Tuesday) ELECTION DAY	DREAM CASTING AUDITIONS (A)	5		
November 7 (Thursday)	DREAM CASTING AUDITIONS (B)			
Week 12				
November 12 (Tuesday)	DREAM CASTING AUDITIONS (C)			
November 28 (Thursday)	NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING			
Week 13				
November 19 (Tuesday)	GUEST PANEL		Select & Prepare final material	2
November 21 (Thursday)	GUEST PANEL			
Week 14				
November 26 (Tuesday)	FINAL - PARTNER READ (A)	10		
November 28 (Thursday)	FINAL - PARTNER READ (B)			
Week 15				
December 3 (Tuesday)	FINAL - PARTNER READ (C)			
December 5 (Thursday)	FINAL - PARTNER READ (D)			
December 17 (Tuesday)	FINAL RESPONSE DUE	6	Written assignment with a prompt related to everything you learned in class	

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theatre Consent Culture Statement

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

SDA Student Support & Reporting Form

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

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 accommodations are 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.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

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 consists 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) 740-2500
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.