



CTIN 480: Directing for Games and Interactive Media
Units: 2
Spring 2025

Meeting Time: Tuesdays 10-12:50 PM
Location: SCB 101

Professor: Tracy Fullerton
Bio: <http://www.tracyfullerton.com/bio>

Professor Office Hours: By appointment – scheduling info will be provided in class

Student Assistant: Bryan Sng
Student Assistant Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

This course introduces students to the role of the director across a variety of media with the goal of applying best practices to the direction of games and interactive media. The material is focused on games and interactive media but will also draw from a cross-disciplinary study of directorial techniques and practices from theater, film, performance art, architecture, music, and fine arts.

Students will develop the skills of directorial perspective, selection and preparation of material, story and scene breakdown, thematic intent, project planning, team building and communication, situational decision-making, and response to change.

Over the course of the semester, students will flesh out a proposed project through the class exercises, bringing a stronger directorial vision to the idea in preparation to pitch it for full production in a later class or independently. The final assignments will be a polished vision presentation for the project, accompanied by a director's notebook of planning exercises, reflections, and creative references collected and organized over the course of the semester.

This is a studio class, and a large part of the class content will focus on in-class discussion, critique, workshopping, and problem-solving for individual projects. As such, it is imperative that students treat the development of their projects professionally and bring requested milestones to class on time, ready to present. Students will be expected to participate actively in all discussions, critique sessions and exercises, giving and receiving feedback of the highest quality.

Throughout this class, students are encouraged to take risks and to look beyond prior art, in-class examples and common wisdom to explore new and different directorial strategies.

Prerequisite(s)

Class is by invitation only based on interviews with the instructor. It is open to graduates and undergraduates of all programs, with an emphasis on students preparing innovative advanced or thesis projects.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

There are no technology requirements for this class, however, several technical proficiencies may prove beneficial. Many students will use image creation or layout software (like Affinity Photo and Affinity Designer) to create artwork for their planning exercises. Students may also organize their ideas using common office tools such as Google Docs, word processors, spreadsheets, flow-charting software, or

project management tools like Asana or Trello. Please communicate with the instructor if you have any questions about the technical requirements for your assignments.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

This course has three required texts, which are available from online booksellers or from the USC Bookstore:

Directing Video Games by Brian Allgeier

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B071Y7DNCZ>

The Director's Six Senses by Simone Bartesaghi

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01CHB75VQ>

The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler (25th Anniversary Edition)

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1615933158/>

In addition, there will be several short selections from the following texts provided in class. Students may purchase these optional texts if they would like to read longer sections:

Save the Cat by Blake Snyder

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1932907009>

The Visual Story by Bruce Block

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0240807790>

The Director's Idea by Ken Dancyger

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0240806816>

Directors Close Up 2 by Jeremy Kagan

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0810883910>

A Director Prepares by Anne Bogart

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0415238323>

Writing Interactive Music for Video Games by Michael Sweet

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0321961587>

Directing Actors by Judith Weston

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0941188248>

Creativity, Inc. by Ed Catmull

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0593070100>

Pixar Storytelling by Dean Movshovitz

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06XHBRG2L>

Course Website

A copy of this syllabus is available at the course website – login info will be given out in class.

Overview of Assignments

Vision Exercises

- Logline and experience goals, due weeks 2, 6, and 15
- Prior art exploration, due week 3
- Experience arc in beat sheet then macro formats, due weeks 5 and 15
- Scene script draft, due week 7
- Visual exploration, due week 10
- Audio exploration, due week 10
- Scene script final, due week 11
- Location exploration, due week 12
- Vision pitch presentation draft, due week 14

Final Project - Due at Final Exam

- Vision pitch presentation
- Vision pitch document
- Director's notebook

Grading Breakdown

Participation	5
Logline and experience goals	5
Prior art exploration	5
Experience arc (beat sheet and macro)	10
Scene script	10
Visual exploration	10
Audio exploration	10
Location exploration	10
Vision presentation & document	20
Director's notebook	15
Total:	100

Assignment Submission Policy

All written and digital assignments should be uploaded to the class Google Drive by the start of class on the day that they are due. (Link to the drive will be provided in class and on the Discord.) Presentations will be due in class, with supporting materials submitted via email.

Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructors before the assignment's due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a deadline extension to be granted. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructors or student assistant before final grades are due. Incompletes are only available after the week twelve withdrawal deadline.

For assignments turned in after the assignment deadline without prior permission from the instructor, a penalty will be imposed equal to 10% of the total available points for the assignment, for each day or part of a day that the assignment is late, up to a maximum of seven days.

Attendance Policy

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late, or leaving early, will be marked as having an absence from class unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructor. Absences will affect your ability to participate fully in the class and will also affect the ability of the class to function as a group, so please treat attendance in class as a priority commitment.

Unauthorized Social Media Use During Class

Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging, and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructors. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class.

A Safer Space

In this class, we make a commitment to foster a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that we will use preferred pronouns and respect self-identifications. While debate and discussion are welcome, please remain aware of the implications of your words and the images that you include in your work. If the instructor or another student points out that something you have said or shared with the group might be offensive, avoid being defensive; this is a valuable opportunity for us to grow and learn together.

Because this class involves presentation and discussion of creative projects that will contain a range of materials, some of which may present difficulties for others in the class, students and groups are encouraged to use content or trigger warnings as part of their presentation as appropriate.

If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are also welcomed to speak with the graduate advisor for the division, who can either discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

Title IX at USC

Harassment, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking are not tolerated by the university. All faculty and most staff are considered Responsible Employees by the university and must forward all information they receive about these types of situations to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for assisting students with supportive accommodations, including academic accommodations, as well as investigating these incidents if the reporting student wants an investigation.

The Title IX office is also responsible for coordinating supportive measures for transgender and nonbinary students such as faculty notifications, and more. If you need supportive accommodations, you may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly (titleix@usc.edu or 213-821-8298) without sharing any personal information with me. If you would like to speak with a confidential counselor, Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) provides 24/7 confidential support for students (213-740-9355 (WELL); press 0 after hours).

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.

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.

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](#).

Use of AI

In this course, **you may use** artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs to help you with the creation of visual and audio assets for your vision assignments. If you do so, you must credit the AI program that you used in your project documentation. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

You may not use AI tools to generate text responses for your written assignments, since writing and critical thinking skills are an important part of the learning outcomes for this class. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace.

Please review the assignment details for each assignment carefully for more details on how and when to use AI Generators for your submissions.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit the 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).

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.

Course content by class meeting

Week 1: Overview of the class – Introduction to each other and projects, discussion of course goals and themes. Material selection – what makes a good piece to work on throughout this class? Sharing of prospective material, prior work, and related experience.

Reading for Week 2:

- Directing Video Games – Section I: The Director’s Role
- The Writer’s Journey – Book One, pages 1-42

Assignments:

- Start a director’s notebook for your project – **due finals week**
- First draft logline and experience goals for your project – **due weeks 2, 6, and 15**

Week 2: The Director’s Role – Exploring how directors work, approaches across a variety of storytelling media, looking at interviews and sequences from game, film, and theater directors.

Reading for Week 3:

- The Writer’s Journey – Book One, pages 43-96
- Director’s Six Senses – Chapters 5-6 (Taste & Vision)

Assignments:

- Due: First draft logline and experience goals
- Prior art explorations – **due week 3**

Week 3: Structuring your Vision – Understanding the structure of your idea, the deeper themes, the archetypal roles of the characters, opportunities for meaningful interaction, and the hero’s journey. Understanding experience arcs and beat sheets.

Reading for Week 4:

- Directing Video Games – Section III: Structural Elements
- The Writer’s Journey – Book Two, pages 97-182
- Save the Cat: Beat it Out – Chapter 4: Let’s Beat it out!

Assignments:

- Due: Prior art explorations
- First draft experience arc (beat sheet format) -- **due week 5**

Week 4: The Emotional Journey – Digging into the emotional arc of your piece, illuminating the theme through arc, breaking down the beats of a scene and writing VO dialogue.

Reading for Week 5:

- The Writer’s Journey – Book Two, pages 183-264
- The Director’s Idea – Appendix: Finding the Director’s Idea
- Pixar Storytelling – Chapter 1: Choosing an Idea

Week 5: Crafting the arc – Exploring your theme, the ordeal and growth for your characters and players. In-class work on beats of the experience.

Reading for Week 6:

- The Writer’s Journey – Epilogue, pages 265-354
- Pixar Storytelling – Chapter 5: A Word on Structure

Assignments:

- Due: First draft experience arc ([beat sheet format](#))
- Scene script for VO performance – **draft due week 7, final due week 11**

Week 6: Directing for Interactivity, designing mechanics that support the emotional arc, and defining pillars that support the arc.

Viewing for Week 6:

- Watch Michel Koch, Raoul Barbet, GDC Vault, “Life is Strange: Using Interactive Storytelling and Game Design to Tackle Real-World Problems”
<https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1023468/-Life-is-Strange-Case>
- Watch Jenova Chen, GDC Vault, Designing Journey
<https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1017700/Designing>

Assignments:

- Due: Second draft logline and experience goals
- Experience arc in [macro format](#) (**due with final director’s notebook**)

Week 7: Crafting the scene – In-class scene readings and critique.

Reading for Week 7:

- Directing Actors – Section VII: Script Analysis, Preparing for the First Read

Assignments:

- Due: draft scene script for in-class readings
- Final draft scene script for VO performance – **due week 11**

Week 8: Director’s Toolbox – Visual Storytelling – Exploring the power of visual design in storytelling – cameras, lighting, space and color. Developing a sense for visual storytelling.

Reading for Week 8:

- The Director’s Six Senses – Sight: Visual Storytelling
- The Visual Story – Chapters 1: The Visual Components, 2: Contrast and Affinity, and 9: Visual Structure

Assignments:

- Start a collection of still images that tell stories and affect you emotionally – **due with the final director’s notebook**
- Create a set of visual explorations that represent the key moments in your emotional arc – **due week 10 with audio explorations**

Week 9: Director’s Toolbox –The Power of Audio – Exploring the power of sound design and music in the emotional arc of your project.

Reading and Viewing for Week 9:

- Directing Video Games: Section IV – Creative Toolbox
- Writing Interactive Music for Video Games – Chapter 1: The Language of Music Storytelling in Games
- Watch Making Waves: The Art of Cinematic Sound, directed by Midge Costin -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xscpk8r1-8c>

Assignments:

- Create audio explorations along with your visual explorations – **due week 10 with visual explorations**

Spring Break: no class meeting.

Week 10: Director's Toolbox – Story Spaces – Exploring story through space and location. Presentation of visual and audio explorations.

Reading for Week 10:

- The Director's Six Senses – Touch: Production Design
- Director's Close Up 2 – Chapter 5: Production Design

Assignments:

- Due: Visual and audio explorations
- Location "scout" for your project – **due week 12**

Week 11: Casting and Scene Workshops – In-class preparation for the voice-over workshop, casting your performers. Final scene scripts due.

Reading for Week 11:

- The Director's Six Senses – Smell: Directing Actors
- Watch Amy Hennig, GDC Vault Behind the Scenes: Uncharted 2's Unique Cinematic Production Process <https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1012327/Behind-the-Scenes-Uncharted-2>
- Casting advice from Sarah Elmaleh: <https://tracyfullerton.squarespace.com/s/Guide-to-Casting-Characters.pdf>

Assignments:

- Due: Final scene script for VO performance

Week 12: The Director as Leader – Finding your leadership style, motivating, and inspiring a team, making decisions in a collaborative environment, dealing with conflict. Team building role-play. Presentation of location scout explorations.

Reading for Week 12:

- Directing Video Games – Section V: Leadership
- Creativity Inc. – Chapter 5: Honesty and Candor, Chapter 6: Fear and Failure
- A Director Prepares – Chapter 2: Violence

Assignments:

- Due: Location "scout" explorations
- Draft vision pitch – **due weeks 14, 15**

Week 13: Directing Performance – Guest lecture and workshop on directing actors for voice-over.

Guests:

- Sarah Elmaleh (Voice actress - Gone Home, Where the Water Tastes Like Wine, Anthem)
- Crispin Freeman (Voice actor – Overwatch, Batman: Arkham Origins)

Reading for Week 13:

- Directing Actors – Section I: Result Direction and Quick Fixes, Adjectives, Verbs, Short List of Action Verbs

Week 14: Crafting the Vision – Deepening your vision, the power of the first few minutes, planting ideas that build an experience towards the end. Pitching exercises.

Reading for Week 14:

- The Director's Six Senses – Conclusion, Love at First Sight, the Importance of Opening Scenes
- Directing Video Games – Section II: Crafting the Vision

Assignments:

- Due: Draft of Vision Pitch

Week 15: Representing the Idea -- Being the voice of a project – internally and in the public eye. Finding people to share your vision, giving credit, speaking publicly. Pitching exercises continued.

Reading for Week 15:

- The Director's Six Senses – Chapter 8 (Dead Poets Society Case Study)
- Directing Video Games: Section VI – Production
- Creativity Inc. – Starting Points: Thoughts for Managing a Creative Culture

Assignments:

- Final vision pitch – **due at Final exam**
- Due: Final draft logline and experience goals (as part of final vision pitch)

Final Exam: In-class final vision pitches, delivery of vision documents and final director's notebooks.

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 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 SPACE IN THE SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX