USCCinematic Arts

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.

CTWR 206b: Writing the Screenplay (Section 19156)
Units: 2
Spring 2025—Friday—1:00-3:50pm

Location: SCA 342

Link to Course Brightspace: https://brightspace.usc.edu/d2l/home/124128

Instructor: Jeremy Novick
Office: SCA Adjunct Office, Zoom Office Hours
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Info: jnovick@usc.edu

Course Description

Our goal is to learn the skills and techniques utilized by professional screenwriters to ideate, outline, and draft feature-length screenplays in a workshop setting. The first semester of this two-semester course culminated in students writing and presenting a full outline and the first act of their feature screenplays, with an emphasis on understanding the writer's personal relationship with their story. In this second semester, students will draft the second and third acts of their screenplays, with an eye towards the script's ultimate relationship with its audience. The final assignment is a strategic polish.

Learning Objectives

In this second semester, an emphasis is placed on how to work through the myriad roadblocks and challenges that come with writing a feature – especially the infamous "no-mans-land" of Act Two – and *finishing* a draft, imperfect as it may be. Once we've learned how not to abandon a project in challenging times, we can then move on to learning out to rewrite and improve it.

Recommended Preparation

Students should continue their work outside the classroom studying and analyzing the medium. Watch films that feel germane to your project; watch films that may not be similar but that interest you. Read as many screenplays as you can get your hands on. See how other writers have effectively communicated the ideas and images in their minds, how styles have changed, and how the artistry of a spec script impacts the emotional impact of the read.

Suggested Course Reading

The following titles are suggested reading by the instructor. While these books are not required

for the course, they are invaluable tools that students will be able to refer to throughout the course and long into their careers:

The Tools of Screenwriting, by David Howard and Edward Mabley
Screenwriting is Rewriting by Jack Epps, Jr.
Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters by Michael Tierno
Screenplays to be assigned by the instructor on a case-by-case basis.

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

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy
Laptops are to be used solely for scene work being discussed in class, and only with the permission of the instructor. Cell phones will be turned off. **Please note: You should always have a notebook/pen available.**

Grading Criteria
Students will turn in their work by 1pm on the Sunday before class, by a method to be determined by the instructor. All work will be sent to the instructor, as well as all classmates, so that feedback can be given. This deadline is extremely important. As a workshop-style course, it is vital that we read each other's material and come prepared for class, and we must be respectful of each other's time in doing that work. If you repeatedly fail to meet weekly deadlines without communication, it will affect grading.

Grading Breakdown
10% = Participation
10% = Sequence Three
10% = Sequence Four
10% = Sequence Five
10% = Sequence Six
10% = Sequence Seven
10% = Sequence Eight
10% = Rewrite Plan
20% = Final Revised 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%

Assignment Submission Policy
Students will turn in their work by midnight on the Wednesday before class each week, by a method to be determined by the instructor, typically in a secure shared Google Drive folder. All work will be sent to the instructor, as well as all classmates, so that feedback can be given. This deadline is extremely important. As a workshop-style course, it is vital that we read each other's

material and come prepared for class, and we must be respectful of each other's time in doing that work. If you repeatedly fail to meet weekly deadlines without communication, it will affect grading.

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. We are all taking the time to read your work; you should, too.

On the subject of reading work, this is a workshop class at its heart. As such, it is imperative that we all read everyone's work prior to class time and are prepared with thoughtful, constructive, and respectful notes. Failure to come prepared to class will be reflected in grading. The workload here is significant, but it is worth it. You will get out of this class what you put into it.

Grading Timeline
Students will receive verbal feedback in class from each other and from the instructor and will receive written notes via email within 24-48 hours of class.

Internet Policy
Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere on the internet.

Course Specific Policies
Laptops are to be used solely for scene work being discussed in class, and only with the permission of the instructor. Cell phones will be turned off. **Please note: You should always have a notebook/pen available.**

Writing Division Attendance Policy
Students are expected be on time, prepared for each class, and meet professional standards. CTWR 206 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 equate 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 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.

Classroom Norms
All students are required to sign the 206 Code of Conduct Contract, which outlines in more detail the expectations of behavior in class, but a few guidelines are listed below:
- Always come to class prepared and ready to discuss your classmates' work. We all work hard on our writing, and we each deserve the same effort and attention from each other.
- Listen actively and attentively in class, and without interrupting, even when you disagree with what is being said.
- Treat others with respect. Writing can be an emotional endeavor, where we pull from our own, sometimes painful, personal experiences. It is vital that we foster a culture where students feel free to share themselves without fear of judgment or retaliation.
- Be aware that tone of voice and body language can be powerful communicators. Crossed arms, eye rolls, loud sighs, etc., can provoke or intimidate others, while facing the speaker, remaining quiet, nodding, smiling, etc., can encourage and show you are listening respectfully.
- When giving notes or feedback, remember that the goal is to help someone else make their story the best version of <u>their</u> story it can be. Try not to point out problems without a proposed solution, or simply tear down someone else's idea. And whenever possible, try not to change another student's work with ideas solely about how <u>you</u> would write it; we should endeavor to provide feedback that fosters everyone's unique, individual voice.
- Do not isolate or exclude others from discussion. We are all equals in this workshop.

Zoom Etiquette
If we need to meet for class over Zoom, or if a student must attend class via Zoom due to illness or other extenuating circumstances, there are a few rules to etiquette to follow:
- Do not give out the Zoom link to anyone who is not in our class.
- Keep yourself muted unless it is your turn to speak.
- Unless otherwise noted or called on, use the hand raise feature and wait for your turn to speak.

Do not send private messages in the chat feature, and do not use the group chat feature to say anything disruptive or unrelated to our classroom discussion.

Academic Integrity
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" https://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, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an "F" grade on the assignment, exam, and/or in the course.

Artificial Intelligence
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 & Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

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

Mid-term and end-of-term course evaluations are a vital part of improving the efficacy of this course for future students, and it is mandated by the University. When evaluations are sent out, the instructor will leave the room to allow students to privately fill them out. Please be honest in your evaluation, as it not only improves the curriculum, but it can also improve the instructor's skills.

Class Schedule

All dates, assignments, and subjects may change at the discretion of the professor.

January 17, Week 1: Give, Don't Take
- Welcome back discussion, review syllabus and goals for the semester, brief lecture on what our stories are here to do.
- **Assignment: Complete the "Wilderness Map" Self-Assessment worksheet (10%)**

January 24, Week 2: A Map Through the Wilderness
- Review Wilderness Map self-assessments.
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Three (10%)**

January 31, Week 3: Sequence Three
- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Four (10%)**

February 7, Week 4: Professional Development / Sequence Four
- Professional Development Session with the entire 206 cohort

- Review pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Five (10%)**

February 14, Week 5: Guest Speaker
- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Five (10%)**

February 21, Week 6: Sequence Five
- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Six (10%)**

February 28, Week 7: Sequence Six
- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Seven (10%)**

March 7, Week 8: Sequence Seven
- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Start Writing Sequence Eight (10%)**

March 14, Week 9: The Business of Screenwriting
- TBD Guest Speaker Brad Rosenfeld – Literary Agent, founding partner Culture Creative Entertainment
- **Assignment: Complete First Draft**

March 21, Week 10: Jeremy's Nine-Step Guide on How to Rewrite Everything
- Review Pages
- Lecture on rewriting
- **Assignment: Work on rewrite plan (10%)**

March 28, Week 11: The Rewrite Plan
- Review Rewrite Plans
- **Assignment: Begin rewrites**

April 4, Week 12: Second Draft Review
- Review Pages
- TBD Guest Speaker Michael Wright – Former head of Dreamworks, TNT, and current President of MGM+
- **Assignment: Continue Rewrites**

April 11, Week 13: Second Draft Review / Professional Development
- Review Pages
- Professional Development Session with entire 206 cohort.
- **Assignment: Continue Rewrites**

April 18, Week 14: Second Draft Review
- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Continue Rewrites**

April 25, Week 15: Second Draft Review
- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Continue Rewrites**

May 2, Week 16: Second Draft Review
- Review Pages
- **Assignment: Continue Rewrites**

Finals Week: Final script due during Finals Week (10%)

<u>Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems</u>

<u>Academic Conduct:</u>
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" https://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, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

<u>Support Systems:</u>
Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

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

Sexual Assault Resource Center
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: http://sarc.usc.edu/

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. https://equity.usc.edu/

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/

The Office of Disability Services and Programs
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. http://dsp.usc.edu

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

Diversity at USC
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. https://diversity.usc.edu/

USC Emergency Information
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible,
http://emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC)
for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.
Provides overall safety to USC community. http://dps.usc.edu

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