USC Cinematic Arts

CTWR 403: Writing the Narrative Podcast Series
Units: 2
Section: 19163
Spring 2025—Mondays—7:00-10:00pm

Location: SCB 304

Link to Course Brightspace: https://brightspace.usc.edu/d2l/home/124126

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

Course Description
Over the last several decades, the art of storytelling has expanded and been re-shaped to fit a growing number of content platforms, to the benefit of a growing and more sophisticated audience. Ironically, one of the most popular emerging content sources is the direct descendant of Radio, a seminal source of mass media storytelling.

The podcast has emerged as a go-to, easy-access platform for engaging narrative entertainment – be it personal commentary, journalistic feature story, adaptation, or original narrative. In terms of dramatic or comedic narrative, the podcast is true to its radio roots as "theatre of the mind". Therefore, the challenge for the writer is to express the world through imaginative description and aural background, as well as dialogue that clearly reflects the nature and dynamics of the characters. It is the mission of this class to lay the groundwork for students to develop and write pilot episodes from original or adapted material.

The class will be run as a writing workshop that includes lecture(s) on adaptive storytelling and the narrative arc of a podcast series, as well as SCA and Industry guests who have written, produced or greenlit specific Podcast projects. Each student will write a Pilot Script and Series Bible to be delivered as their final project, as well as a brief "adaptive document" highlighting the potential for the project's adaptation into features, TV, interactive media, etc.

"Writing the Narrative Podcast Series" is a class designed to explore the design and functional storytelling elements of the Podcast as writers create and develop their own Podcast series

Learning Objectives
"Writing the Narrative Podcast Series" is a class designed to explore the design and functional storytelling elements of the Podcast as writers create and develop their own fiction Podcast series.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

All scenes will be written in standard script format using professional screenwriting software such as "Final Draft." **If you don't have access to screenwriting software, please see the instructor immediately, and we will work on an alternative solution together.**

Recommended Course Listening

(Note: These series are all available for free on every major podcast platform. Feel free to listen to any and all scripted fiction series that interest you. The more you listen, the more you will learn the medium.)

HOMECOMING	EDITH!
THE SANDMAN	LIMETOWN
NEXT STOP	ALICE ISN'T DEAD
IMPACT WINTER	WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE
THE BURNED PHOTO	DUST
WE FIX SPACE JUNK	THE AMELIA PROJECT
36 QUESTIONS	WOODEN OVERCOATS

Participation

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 Breakdown

Work should be turned in by 1pm on the Sunday before class each week, typically in our class's secure shared Google Drive.

Participation:	10%
Pitches:	10%
Pilot Outline:	10%
Pilot First Draft:	15%
Series Bible:	15%
Adaptive Document:	10%
Final Materials:	30%

	100%

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

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 1pm on the Sunday 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, spelling, and format mistakes. **Spellcheck and proofread** your assignment prior to submission. We are all taking the time to read your work; you should, too.

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.

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.**

Attendance
Students are expected be on time, prepared for each class, and meet professional standards. CTWR 403 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.

Classroom norms
To foster a safe, effective, and creative environment in our workshop, here are a few brief guidelines to be aware of:

- 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 in our workshop 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

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 contrasts with 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](#).

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 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

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.

Course Schedule
All dates, assignments, and subjects may change at the discretion of the instructor.

January 13, Week One: Theatre of the Mind
- Introduction, course objectives. Writing for the eye vs. the ear. Doubling down on Character. Breakdown of a successful narrative fiction podcast.
- We'll listen to an audio drama as well to get a feel for the medium.
- **Assignment #1 – Pitches: Prepare 3 brief pitches for a potential podcast series. You should be ready to talk about your premise, your world, your characters & conflict, and what makes it an audio drama (10%).**

January 20, Week Two: No class (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)

January 27, Week Three: Breaking New Ground
- Pitch your stories and select which one you'll be writing (**10% of Final Grade**).
- TBD Guest Speaker. The utilization of sound and atmosphere. How much can Sound tell the story? Discussion on creating a character breakdown and discovering the controlling theme of the series.
- **Assignment #2 – Breakdowns:** Write a 2–3-page breakdown of your main characters, the central conflict(s), and the underlying theme(s) of your show.

Feburary 3, Week Four: Simple Stories, Complex Characters
- Workshop series breakdowns and discuss how your characters define your story.
- **Assignment #3 – Synopses: Prepare a 1–2-page synopsis of your pilot episode, including A-Story, as well as any B or C-Stories the episode will include.**

February 10, Week Five: A Gripping Pilot
- Workshop pilot synopses
- TBD Guest Speaker
- **Assignment #4 – Outlines: Prepare an outline for your pilot episode (10%).**

(Note: Starting at this point, in-class workshopping will be divided into A & B groups. Each week, we will discuss one group's work in class and send notes via email to the other group. Continue to turn in your assigned pages by the deadline as normal each week, regardless of what group you are in.)

February 17, Week Six: No Class (President's Day)

February 24, Week Seven: Starting Strong
- Workshop outlines (Group A in class / Group B via email).
- Discussion about cold opens, teasers, and character introductions. How to capture the audience's attention right away.

March 3, Week Eight: Mystery and Cliffhangers, "Turning the Page"
- Workshop outlines (Group B in class / Group A via email).
- Discussion about cliffhangers, narrative drive, and keeping the pages turning. The goal here is for both groups' outlines to be approved and sent to script.
- **Assignment #5 – Pilot Scripts: Start writing your pilot episode (15%).**

March 10, Week Nine: "Show, Don't Tell (But Don't Show, Either)"
- Workshop script pages (Group A in class / Group B via email).

- Discussion of dialogue, action, and description in a camera-less medium. The goal here is for both groups' outlines to be approved and sent to script.

March 17, Week Ten: No Class (Spring Recess)

March 24, Week Eleven: Hitting Subscribe
- Workshop script pages (Group B in class / Group A via email).
- Discussion about connecting the pilot story to the next episode, creating series questions and arcs.

March 31, Week Twelve: Refining the Series Themes and Character Arcs
- Workshop script pages (Group A in class / Group B via email).
- Discussion about our North Star. Are we staying true to the ideas and themes that made us excited about the story in the first place?

April 7, Week Thirteen: Building a Series
- Workshop script pages (Group B in class / Group A via email).
- Discussion about what a series bible is in podcasting, where our characters – and our series – are headed and how to break the rest of a season, while staying committed to our characters, arcs, themes, and North Stars.
- **Assignment #6 – Bibles: Start writing your series bibles (15%).**

April 14, Week Fourteen: Why Is This Podcast Different From All Others?
- Workshop series bibles (Group A in class / Group B via email).
- Discussion about how, in future drafts, we can add more to our stories to make it a unique listening experience.

April 21, Week Fifteen: Adaptation
- Workshop series bibles (Group B in class / Group A via email).
- Discussion of how podcasts are adapted into derivative material (features, television, etc.).
- **Assignment #7 – Adaptive Documents: Prepare a 1-page adaptive document outlining the potential of their series for adaptation (10%).**
  - How does your story lend itself not just to the audio drama medium, but to film and television as well? What elements might have to change, and what would an adaptation look like? What makes your story important right now? Who is the audience, and why does it need to be told?

April 28, Week Sixteen: Roundtable
- Workshop adaptive documents (whole class).
- Discuss the rewriting process.
- Podcast panel -- Writers, Producers and Executives will come in discuss the current and future audio drama marketplace.

Finals Week
- **Final Assignment: Delivery of completed pilot script, series bible and adaptive document due by midnight on Monday, December 16 (30%).**

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 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