

# USC Cinematic Arts

## The John Wells Division of Writing for Screen and Television

### ***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](https://native-land.ca) to discover the Original People of your home.

### **CTWR 453: Advanced Feature Rewriting**

**Section:** 19320 (4 units)

**Term:** Spring 2025

**Schedule:** Monday 10:00 am – 12:50 pm

**Location:** SCA 361

**Instructor:** Valerie Mayhew

**Email:** vmayhew@usc.edu

**Link to Course Brightspace:** <https://brightspace.usc.edu/d2l/home/177114>

**Office Hours:** By appointment via Zoom or in person

**“When I’m writing a first draft, I’m constantly reminding myself that I’m simply shoveling sand into a box so that later I can build castles.”**

**-- Jordan Peele**

### **Course Description**

In this workshop course, each student will rewrite their previous draft of a full-length screenplay. Using the format of a Writer’s Room, the students will analyze and discuss not just their own screenplays, but their fellow screenwriter’s work. Because rewriting one’s own script is one of the most difficult and important skills a professional screenwriter must have, working together as a team to lend fresh perspective and insight become critical to facing this challenge. The students will learn to let go of things that no longer serve their scripts and embrace new ideas. Because of this, it is imperative that each student comes with an open mind and a willingness to grow.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will

- Be practiced in advanced formatting and story structure, as demonstrated by their Final Script.
- Exhibit proficiency in dialogue, atmosphere, character arcs, turning a scene, subtext, exploration of theme, and other professional screenwriting skills, as assessed by the instructor.

Mayhew CTWR 435 Syllabus, Spring 2025

- Demonstrate the utmost importance of visual storytelling, by use of location, time of day, production design, and action as shown in their Final Script.
- Be able to communicate to other screenwriters using the language of Critique, as assessed by the instructor during class discussions and written note assignments.

### Course Notes

All lecture PowerPoints and written assignment instructions will be posted on Brightspace within 24 hours.

### Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Final Draft software

### Course Reading

“Screenwriting is Rewriting” by Jack Epps

“Making a Good Script Great” by Linda Seger

### Grading Breakdown

Table 1 Grading Breakdown

Assignments	% of Grade
Critique Sheets	5
Master Notes List	5
Rewrite Plan	10
Revised Outline	20
Completed Final Script	50
Participation	10

### Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

#### Letter Grade & Percentage Range

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%		

### Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments must be submitted to the class Brightspace by start of the next class, unless otherwise specified.

### Grading Timeline

Feedback will be given in real time in class for most assignments. Most assignments are graded upon completion, with full credit being given for correct, on-time submissions.

### Course Specific Policies

Mayhew CTWR 435 Syllabus, Spring 2025

Late work may or may not be accepted at instructor's discretion. Since every assignment in this course builds on the one before it, missing or late work interrupts the schedule and prevents script progress.

### **Writing Division Attendance Policy**

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

CTWR 435 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 through the semester. On the third absence, students will have their final grade lowered by 10% and an additional 10% for each absence thereafter. Please note: two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

IMPORTANT: 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](mailto: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 requires 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. While Faculty are no longer required to provide an option for students to Zoom into class, they may choose to use Zoom at their discretion.

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 instructor 24 hours prior to class start time if they need to miss class for any reason.*

### **Academic Integrity**

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Mayhew CTWR 435 Syllabus, Spring 2025

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](#).

### **Course Policy on AI**

Since creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

### **Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies**

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

### **Course Evaluations**

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. All students are strongly encouraged to participate and class time will be allotted to do so.

## **Course Schedule and Assignments**

### **Week 1 – January 13<sup>th</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Building Castles from Your Sand

Your journey to your First Draft. Getting Castle-building tools. Defensive Ears are Deaf: Critique versus criticism.

**Assignment Due:** Uploading your First Draft into Brightspace

**Reading Assigned:** Your fellow screenwriters' First Drafts

**Assignment Given:** A one-page Critique for each of your fellow screenwriters' First Drafts based on criteria covered in class, submitted onto the Brightspace Discussion page AND Brightspace Assignment folder

### **Week 2 – January 20<sup>th</sup> NO CLASS FOR MLK DAY**

**Week 3 – January 27<sup>th</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Let's Start Digging

Discussion and feedback of GROUP A

**Assignment Due:** One-page Critiques

**Assignment Given:** Master Note List

**Week 4 – February 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Crabs in my Castle

Discussion and feedback of GROUP B

**Assignment Given:** Rewrite Plan using Master Note List

**Week 5 – February 10<sup>th</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Going over Rewrite Plan and Priorities

**Assignment Due:** Rewrite Plan

**Assignment Given:** Revised Outline

**Week 6 – February 17<sup>th</sup> NO CLASS FOR PRESIDENT'S DAY**

**Week 7 – February 24<sup>th</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Group A Outlines

**Assignment Due:** Outlines

**Assignment Given:** Group A to Rewrite Act One

**Week 8 – March 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Group B Outlines

**Assignment Given:** Group B to Rewrite Act One

**Week 9 – March 10<sup>th</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Revised Act One

**Assignment Given:** All to Rewrite Act Two

**Week 10 – March 17<sup>th</sup> NO CLASS FOR SPRING BREAK**

**Week 11 – March 24<sup>th</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Revised Act Two Group A

**Assignment Given:** TBA based on Student Progress

**Week 12 – March 31<sup>st</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Revised Act Two Group B

**Assignment Given:** Rewrite Act Three

**Week 13 – April 7<sup>th</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Revised Act Three Group A

**Assignment Given:** Group A to implement polish notes

**Week 14 – April 14<sup>th</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Revised Act Three Group B

**Assignment Given:** Group B to implement polish notes

Mayhew CTWR 435 Syllabus, Spring 2025

**Week 15 – April 21<sup>st</sup>**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Polishes for All

**Week 16 – April 28<sup>th</sup> LAST CLASS**

**In Class Time:** Reviewing Polishes for All

**Finals Week - TBD**

Finished FINAL DRAFT due

## **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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://scacommunity.usc.edu)

### **Creative Technology and Support**

(213) 821-4571

[creativetech@cinema.usc.edu](mailto: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](mailto:spo@cinema.usc.edu).

### **Office of Industry Relations**

School of Cinematic Arts - SCA 235

(213) 740-4432

[ir@cinema.usc.edu](mailto: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

Mayhew CTWR 435 Syllabus, Spring 2025

the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

#### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodation is not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto: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](mailto: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