USC Cinematic Arts

CTWR 514B: Basic Dramatic Screenwriting (Section 19235d)
4 Units
Spring 2025
Tuesday—4-6:50 P.M.

Location: SCA 361

Link to Course Brightspace:

Instructor: Robert Ramsey
Office Hours: Noon-4 PM Tuesdays and by appointment
Cell: 323-394-9471
Email: robertra@usc.edu

Course Description
Students will apply the principles of three-act, eight-sequence story structure as they ideate, outline, draft and revise the first draft of a feature film screenplay.

Learning Objectives
The objective of this course is to build on the skills you acquired in Screenwriting Fundamentals and Intermediate Screenwriting by completing a feature outline and a feature screenplay with some revisions. Whereas last semester you utilized your intuitive skills to write your first feature, this semester you will develop a more conscious, professional approach to screenwriting.

This does not mean formula. Since you will be immersed in the techniques of story structure in 516, the danger is to fall into a "paint by numbers" way of writing your scripts. Don't. While the skills you will acquire in 516 (Feature Script Analysis) are essential to your development as a film or television writer, it is crucial that you continue to utilize your memories and experiences to bring life and meaning to your characters and stories, whatever the genre. It is both your imagination and your technique that will separate you from the pack as a screenwriter.

The class is a seminar (our writers' room), and you will be expected to read and give feedback on the material of your classmates. The collaborative process is central to writing for film and television and is an integral part of the 514B experience. Participation represents 10 percent of your grade.

Your final portfolio will b a Full Step Outline (10-15 pages), and the first draft of a Feature Screenplay with a revision (90-120 pages).

Suggested Readings
The Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley.

Screenwriting is Rewriting by Jack Epps, Jr.

Grading Breakdown

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
Full Treatment	30	30
Final Ten Pages of Script	10	10
First Draft (5 points per sequence)	40	40
Revisions on First Draft	10	10
Participation	10	10
TOTAL	100	100

Grading Scale

[The following is an example of what a grading scale might look like. Check with your department or school for the recommended 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%	F	59% to 0%

Assignment Submission Policy

Please email assignments to professor in PDF format with YOUR NAME in document title. Assignments are due at time of class and will be presented by author or table read by group.

Attendance

Timely attendance is mandatory and failure to attend all class sections from beginning to end may affect grades.

- Exemptions 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.

Students must contact the professor 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.

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 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
Students will be asked to complete Course Learning Evaluations during the first fifteen minutes of the final class session. Your feedback is important to the department and the university.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 14)
Discussion: Introduction to course. Review of Syllabus.

Class Work: Discuss student ideas.

Assignment: Choose your idea, prepare a presentation of story from start to finish (two pages).

Week 2 (Jan. 21)

Discussion: Protagonists and Character Arc. A, B and C Plots. Allies and Adversaries. Reveals and Reversals.

Class Work: Students present SHORT TREATMENTS.

Assignment: Expand treatments to include character bios and sequence by sequence lines of tension (5-6 pages).

Week 3 (Jan. 28)

Discussion: Story stakes and time frames.

Class Work: Students present EXPANDED TREATMENTS.

Assignment: Continue to build treatment into an act-by-act, sequence-by-sequence FULL BEAT SHEET (10-15 pages).

Week 4 (Feb. 4)

Discussion: Plot is what happens, Story is how it affects the Protagonist.

Class Work: Students present FULL BEAT SHEET.

Assignment: Draft the FINAL TEN PAGES of your screenplay.

Week 5 (Feb. 11)

Class Work: Table read Final Ten Pages. Break into Groups A&B.

Assignment: Begin drafting First Act.

Week 6 (Feb. 18)

Class Work: Group A presents SEQUENCES ONE/TWO.

Week 7 (Feb. 25)

Class Work: Group B presents SEQUENCES ONE/TWO

Week 8 (March 4)

Class Work: Group A presents SEQUENCES THREE/FOUR.

Week 9 (March 11)

Class Work: Group B presents SEQUENCES THREE/FOUR.

Week 10 (No Class! Spring Break!)

Week 11 (March 25)

Class Work: Group A presents SEQUENCES FIVE/SIX.

Week 12 (April 1)

Class Work: Group B present SEQUENCES FIVE/SIX.

Week 13 (April 8)

Class Work: Group A present SEQUENCE SEVEN/EIGHT.

Week 14 (April 15)

DISCUSSION: The strategic approach to revisions.

Class Work: Group B presents SEQUENCE SEVEN/EIGHT.

Week 15 (April 22)

Class Work: All student present Revision Plans.

Week 16 (April 29)

Class Work: All students present a REVISED SCENE/SEQUENCE.

Finals Week: <u>Revised First Drafts Due MAY 9 at 6 p.m.!</u>

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 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. 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.

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.

> **Commented [SJ5]:** add land ack.

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