School of Cinematic Arts
The John Wells Division of
Writing for Screen and Television

REWRITING THE ORIGINAL DRAMATIC SERIES PILOT
CTWR 449 Section 19332
SPRING 2025

Instructor: Brandon Willer
Class Schedule: Tuesday, 7-10pm
Class Location: SCA 362
Office Hours: By appointment only
Contact Information: Brandon Willer: Willerbrandon@gmail.com, bwiller@usc.edu

Course Objective:
This class endeavors to assist you in rewriting an original one-hour drama pilot, and a corresponding series pitch document.

Course Overview:
Welcome to Rewriting the Original Dramatic Series Pilot! This semester, we'll focus on crafting a rewritten draft of your pilot and developing an accompanying pitch that can serve as a springboard for your entry into the entertainment industry. Together, as a group, we will workshop all materials and collaboratively pitch solutions as story issues arise.

This collaborative approach is particularly important. As a professional writer on staff, your job isn't just to identify problems - it's to pitch solutions. It's about generating story ideas, not just pointing out what isn't working. Collaboration is key, and this course is designed to prepare you for that aspect of professional life by holding everyone to a similar standard. My goal is to foster an upbeat, supportive environment where ideas can thrive, and stories can take shape.

We're in this together, and I want you to have a fulfilling individual experience while rewriting a strong piece of material that will serve you well after graduation.

Requirements:
Students will craft a broad range of materials in the semester: a rewritten one-hour drama pilot, and accompanying series pitch.

Course Reading:
There is no required reading. However, professors retain the right to request the review of certain scripts or viewing of specific films/episodes/clips as the semester unfolds and the content of in-class scripts are decided.

Turning in Material:
Please deliver all written materials to the class by **10AM on Saturday**, unless otherwise stipulated. Please make sure files are delivered to professor and rest of the class as PDF. *Please deliver all outlines and scripts with scenes numbered.*

Grading Criteria:

The expectations are simple: be on time, alert, and contributive. You're not here to undercut anyone else's ideas, or to skate by. In professional settings, writers are expected to pitch solutions – not problems. The same is expected in this class. You will carry yourselves as professionals and deliver your work on time.

Participation: 10%
Beat Sheet & Outline: 10%
Mini Pitch: 20%
Final Written Pitch: 20%
Final Screenplay: 40%

                                         100%

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%

Expectation of Professionalism:
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. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Internet Policy:
Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be posted anywhere else on the internet. We will have a zero-tolerance policy for anything along these lines.

The Online Classroom:
While this is an in-person course, there may be occasions where we host class over Zoom. This may occur in service of the guests that I plan to bring in, and/or other unforeseen circumstances. In the event that a class is held online: Class dynamics are substantially compromised without the ability to see the people in class; therefore, the default is that students have their cameras on during synchronous online sessions.

Those facing challenging situations, such as internet connectivity, illness, or home environments that make this difficult or impossible shall contact us to work out accommodations. We encourage you to use virtual backgrounds, and earphones or headsets, should your home environment benefit from these privacies. Keep yourself muted unless called on. When your camera is on, please dress as you would in the classroom, and behave as you would in a professional environment.

Recording Devices:
You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

We will allow the use of laptops in class for note taking, table reads, etc. Beyond that, there is to be no additional online or cell phone activity during thesis. When you're in the room, you're focused on the discussion at hand. Please silence cell phones.

Office Hours & Proactive Communication:
Because of the way this course is structured you will regularly go two weeks before receiving feedback. If you are having issues, <u>please don't wait that long to reach out</u>.

Your instructor is always available to Zoom, chat on the phone, or review material over email outside of class. Just ask. Please be proactive about this. If you'd like to see something in class done differently – or creatively you're struggling with a step in the process – let your instructor know.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:
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 or SA 24 hours prior to class start time if they need to miss class for any reason.

A.I. Policy
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.

Class Schedule:
Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor. As we get further into the semester, we will be doing A and B groups. This means that sometimes you'll have weekly assignments, and other times you'll have 2-week assignments. There will be times when you deliver material to the full class, and other times it just goes to your instructor. This will always be clarified in our weekly emails.

Week 1: Welcome to rewrite! For tonight, we'll review our new syllabus, check-in on your projects, and identify your respective rewrite game plans.

Assignment: Identify your current pilot's problem areas and story needs. Read and note everyone's pilots and familiarize yourself with everyone's series' world. As you dig in on your pilot, familiarize yourself with the genre, tropes within it, and the current marketplace.

Week 2: Tonight, we will be providing feedback and notes on everyone's current pilots.

Assignment: Flesh out new pilot direction into 3-5-minute pitch. Think an elevator pitch for general meetings. These should include the central conceit of your series, tone, who your main characters / relationships are (only two characters), your connection to the world, and HOW this series compliment/contrast in today's market. You will pitch these ideas out to the class next week.

Week 3: Tonight, we will be delivering our mini pitches. Please practice ahead and be prepared to verbally convey the elevator pitch of your series.

Assignment: Expand the elevator pitch. This includes stepping out your secondary characters, a brief pilot summary, and where the series goes into sections.

Week 4: Tonight, we will be delivering the next portion of your verbal pitch (the secondary characters, pilot, and series), and discuss how to use your pilot pitch section as framework to craft a pilot story area document.

A Look Ahead: Now that you have a majority of the pitch on its feet, keep all your notes and revisions as we will be revisiting the pitch at the end of the semester. Now we are going to pivot to breaking story – specifically your pilot story.

Assignment: Now it is time to shift to your pilot script. Please craft and 1-2 page pilot story area document, detailing the logline, A-B-C stories, and character journeys.

Week 5: Story Area Week. We will review everyone's story areas and provide feedback.

A Group Assignment: Take notes from story area and craft beat sheet.

B Group Assignment: Take notes from story area and craft beat sheet.

Week 6: Beat Sheet Week. We will review everyone's beat sheets and provide feedback.

A Group Assignment: Take notes from beat sheet and craft full outline

B Group Assignment: Begin crafting full outline.

Week 7: Outline Week for A Group. This will be our big outline week where we'll deep dive and give notes / pitches / scene work ideas to everyone on their outlines.
A Group Assignment: Begin writing for 20 pages of script.

B Group Assignment: Deliver full outline.

Week 8: Outline Week for B group. This will be our big outline week where we'll deep dive and give notes / pitches / scene work ideas to everyone on their outlines.

> **A Group Assignment**: Deliver first 20 pages of script.

> **B Group Assignment:** Begin first 20 pages of your script.

Week 9: Table Reads Begin! On deck tonight, the first 20 pages from A Group! We will table read a chunk of pages from each script and provide notes on all pages as a group.

> **A Group Assignment**: Begin the next 20 pages of your script.

> **B Group Assignment**: Continue the first 20 pages of your script.

Week 10: No Class, Spring Break.

> **A Group Assignment**: Continue the next 20 pages of your script.

> **B Group Assignment**: Deliver the first 20 pages of your script.

Week 11: On deck tonight, the first 20 pages from B Group! We will table read a chunk of pages from each script and provide notes on all pages as a group

> **A Group Assignment**: Deliver the next 20 pages of your script.

> **B Group Assignment**: Continue the first 20 pages of your script.

Week 12: On deck tonight, the next 20 pages from A Group! We will table read a chunk of pages from each script and provide notes on all pages as a group.

> **A Group Assignment**: Finish the next 20 pages of your script.

> **B Group Assignment**: Deliver the first 20 pages of your script.

Week 13: We will table read and workshop the next 20 pages from B Group**.**

> **A Group Assignment**: Deliver the next 20 pages of your script.

> **B Group Assignment**: Finish the next 20 pages of your script.

Week 14: We will table read and workshop the last 20 pages from A Group

> **A Group Assignment**: Finish writing the next 20 pages of your script.

> **B Group Assignment**: Begin the first 20 pages of your script.

Week 15: The season finale of our class! We'll discuss the year as a whole, and we will table read and workshop the final 20 pages from B Group.

> **Final Assignments:** Deliver your revised pilot script and finish your series pitches! These should be about 12-15 minutes in length when conveyed verbally. They should

include your personal connection to material, series overview (tone, theme, logline, setting, week-to-week), central characters, central relationship, secondary characters, pilot journey, and long-term vision.

<u>Finals: Deliver revised final draft of pitch and revised pilot script.</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

<u>Creative Technology and Support</u>
(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 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.

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.

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