

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

John Wells School of Writing

CTWR 422: Creating the Dramatic Television Series

Units: 2

Spring 2024—Wednesday—10-12:50pm

Location: SCB 304

Instructor: Joshua Senter

Office Hours: By appointment

Contact Info: Cell: 626.676.6494, Email: joshuasenter@me.com

Course Description

This course is conducted just like the development of a real-world original TV series in which the class takes on the roles of writers, executives, and producers. Everyone will be involved in the conception and realization of everyone else's original TV series with emphasis on pitching our written work to one another and pitching ways to one another to improve that work. Participation is key! You will get out of this course as much as you are willing to put into it. Notes must be taken and implemented on every element of the TV series outline we discuss. A final revised TV series outline will be turned in at the end of class.

Learning Objectives

Our goal is to create an outline for the pilot of a new dramatic TV series by taking a deep dive into its concept, characters, and plot.

Course Notes

Please check Blackboard for further information on assignments.

Participation

This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is important. Participation includes full involvement in, and contribution to, class discussion, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule) the assignments of your colleagues and offering thoughtful, constructive comments.

Class attendance is mandatory and students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Tardiness is unprofessional and disrespectful to the class. Two late arrivals equal one full absence. Two unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered by a half grade point (Ex. A to A-) Any further unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered another two thirds of a point (ex: B to a C+) for each absence

Excused absences can include, but are not limited to: illness, both physical and mental; death of a loved one; personal emergency; sporting events (for Student-Athletes) or other university-sponsored activities; religious holidays, and so on.

If you find you must miss class due to personal emergency or personal crisis, please contact your professor as soon as possible so they can assist you in finding the appropriate University care and guidance. Your health and well-being are of utmost importance to the Wells Writing Division and to your faculty.

Grading Breakdown

If you cannot make class, you are expected to have someone else turn in your homework for you on that day, or make private arrangements with me. **Late work will not be accepted for any reason.**

Table 1 Grading Breakdown

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
Quality of verbal notes		20
Pitching your ideas		20
FIRST DRAFT of outline		20
QUIZ		10
FINISHED OUTLINE		30
TOTAL		100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

Table 2 Course Grading Scale

Letter grade	Corresponding numerical point range
A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

ALL MATERIAL is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format, **PDF doc. with Helvetica Neue 12 pt. type, single spaced. If there is more than one page, ALL PAGES MUST BE NUMBERED AND INCLUDE THE STUDENT'S NAME AND THE TV SERIES TITLE IN THE FOOTER!** Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Always "Spellcheck" and proofread your assignment prior to submission.

Grading Timeline

Halfway through semester, each student will receive an assessment of what their current grade would be based on their performance thus far and where they can improve to receive a better grade if possible before the final.

Course Specific Policies

Laptops are to be used solely for when you need to take notes on a lecture or if you are pitching. When giving notes on other students work, please make sure to have a notepad to write them on as computers will not be allowed. **If you use your phone in class, you will be asked to leave class and will be given an "F" for that day.**

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](#).

Policy for the use of AI Generators

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.

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

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).

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1 (January 15) – "CONCEPT"

Introductions and the reading of the syllabus.

Introduction to writing episodic TV drama. I will pitch two TV series: *The Fifth Letter* and *The Cancel Club*. Discussion on the importance of CONCEPT/LOGLINE and how the PERSONAL MOTIVATION that lies behind every concept is what makes a series not just important to you but ultimately to a buyer and an audience.

HOMEWORK: Write three original LOGLINES for original TV series ideas (three to four sentences each) to be pitched in class the following week.

Week 2 (January 22) – “LOGLINE”

Everyone must pitch their three LOGLINES to the class. We will discuss each LOGLINE and each student must decide on one LOGLINE to flesh out as a full-fledged TV SERIES PILOT OUTLINE.

Screen: *Tell Me Lies* (pilot)

HOMEWORK: Pick out two of your favorite MAIN CHARACTERS from a TV series to discuss the following week in class.

Week 3 (January 29) – “CHARACTER”

Discussion on what makes great characters in television.

Screen: *The Sopranos* (pilot)

Each student will share their two favorite TV series characters and explain why those characters are important to the concept and story of the TV series on which they are featured.

I will share CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS from two of my own TV series pitches. Discussion on the importance of having at least six main characters in any dramatic series and how those characters' interactions are the blueprint for ALL STORY.

HOMEWORK: Breakdown THREE of the MAIN CHARACTERS from the logline/TV series you are developing. Each character breakdown should be one paragraph at least six to twelve sentences long.

Week 4 (February 5) – “CHARACTER CONT'D”

Each student will pitch their THREE MAIN CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS to the class. The class will discuss ways of improving those character descriptions to get to the heart of what each student wants their TV series to be about and to help hone what they are attempting to say as a writer through their characters.

HOMEWORK: Breakdown the FINAL THREE MAIN CHARACTERS from the TV series you are developing.

Week 5 (February 12) – “CHARACTER CONT’D”

Each student will pitch their FINAL THREE MAIN CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS. The class will discuss ways of improving those character descriptions to get to the heart of what each student wants their TV series to be about and to help hone what they are attempting to say as a writer through their characters.

HOMEWORK: Read three different TEASERS for the TV series pilot of *The Fifth Letter* to discuss the following week.

Week 6 (February 19) – “TEASERS”

Discussion of the three different TEASERS for the opening of the TV series pilot, *The Fifth Letter*. We will watch the TEASERS of three produced TV pilots (TBD) and discuss what makes those TEASERS work to perfectly tee up the worlds, characters, and concepts of their respective series.

HOMEWORK: Write THREE DIFFERENT (one to two paragraph) TEASERS for your own TV series outline.

Week 7 (February 26) – “TEASERS CONT’D”

Each student will pitch their THREE TEASERS aloud to the class. We will select ONE TEASER from each student to improve upon and flesh out further.

HOMEWORK: Read *The Fifth Letter* pilot outline.

Week 8 (March 5) – “A STORY”

Discussion of *The Fifth Letter* pilot outline.

Screen: *Desperate Housewives* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good A STORY. Delineate what the A STORY should be for each student’s TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (four to five paragraphs) of the A STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

Week 9 (March 12) – “B STORY”

Screen: *Six Feet Under* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good B STORY. Discussion on what the B STORY should be for each student's TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three to four paragraphs) of the B STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

(SPRING BREAK)

Week 10 (March 19) – “C STORY”

Screen: *Succession* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes a good C STORY. Discussion on what the C STORY should be for each student's TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three paragraphs) of the C STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

Week 11 (March 26) – “D STORY”

Screen: *The West Wing* (pilot)

Discussion on what makes good D STORIES. Discussion on what the D STORIES should be for each student's TV series pilot outline.

HOMEWORK: Write out a rough draft (at least three paragraphs) of the D STORY for your TV series pilot outline.

Week 12 (April 2) – “SEASON 1”

Discussion on world building and how to break an entire first season of a TV series both for cable, network, and streaming.

HOMEWORK: Write at least two paragraphs describing SEASON ONE of your TV series for your outline.

Week 13 (April 9) – “SEASON 2 & 3”

Discussion on how to break the second and third seasons for a TV series both for cable, network, and streaming.

HOMEWORK: Write two paragraphs describing SEASON TWO AND THREE of your TV series for your outline.

Week 14 (April 16) – “PITCHING”

Discussion on best practices for pitching your TV series to producers and executives.
Answer session for any outstanding questions the class may have.

HOMEWORK: Use class notes previously given to revise each element we have created over the course of class to form a COMPLETE ORIGINAL TV SERIES OUTLINE that includes a LOGLINE, CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS, TEASER, A, B, C, & D STORIES, and SEASON ARCS.

Week 15 (April 23) – LAST DAY OF CLASS

FINAL COMPLETED OUTLINES DUE by May 14

Statement on Academic Support Systems

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 accommodations are 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:

[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.