

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Course ID and Title: THTR 305a-63022-

Directing

Units: 4

Term—Day—Time: SPRING 2025 MON/WED 2-3:50

Location: PED 206

Instructor: Ken Sawyer

Office Hours: By Appointment

Contact Info: Email kdsawyer@usc.edu

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Website: www.kensawyerdirector.com

Course Description

Examination of basic directorial principles. Pre-production analysis and rehearsal procedures; relationship of the director to the writer, the design team, the producing team, and the actor. This course will actively examine the fundamental principles of directing for the stage. Topics covered in this course will include script analysis, practical approaches to staging, directorial presentation skills, techniques for communicating with actors and designers, rehearsal techniques, and the creation of the director's prompt book.

Learning Objectives

- 1) Acquire a basic understanding of the skills and procedures required of a stage director to effectively prepare and rehearse for a theatrical production
- 2) Incorporate and apply detailed analysis and preparation into an effective rehearsal process, in support and guidance of the actors' work, and in conjunction with the overall vision of a scene from a play.
- 3) Cultivate the leadership skills necessary in leading a group of actors and design team through an effective rehearsal process.
- 4) Gain practical experience in the role of director through:
 - a. Classroom exercises
 - b. In- class rehearsals
 - c. Director prompt book preparation
 - d. Exploration, application and utilization of methods explored in class prompt book guidelines and reading assignments
 - e. Presentation of scene-work directed by the student

Course Notes

All students in this class are required to act in other student-director scenes. Time and availability outside of class for director preparation and rehearsals as both director and as actor for other scenes is extensive, expected and required in order to succeed in this course. There will be a considerable amount of time spent WATCHING others work and requires your feedback for your own points – this is where you can learn a LOT – but it requires self motivation and focus - you will not be on your feet working every class. Like in the professional world outside of school only you can manage your desire, interest and commitment.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

IT Services (213) 740 – 5555 or email consult@usc.edu

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Weekly reading will be:

- Distributed to insert in your director's notebook
- Placed in **Brightspace** to read
- Everyone is required to get the book **Notes on Directing; 130 Lessons in Leadership from the Director's Chair** by Frank Hauser and Russell Reich (New Edition)
 - [Amazon Purchase Link](#)

Description and Assessment of Assignments

All of the following assignments below must be completed thoroughly and in a timely fashion per established schedule. Assignments and in-class work and presentations will be assessed accordingly and in direct relation to the grading rubrics per project and the rules and expectations presented in the full body of this syllabus. Grading Rubrics are posted on **Brightspace**.

All reading assignments lead into class discussion on the reading – engaging in, contributing to, and participating in the discussion will be both an assessment of your reading comprehension (completion of the assigned reading) and an assessment of a portion of the gradable component of participation.

Another aspect of assessment will be based on the demonstration of the student in directly applying the concepts and practices of the reading and the prompt book in their in - class work, rehearsals and scene presentations. Incorporating / applying that which is taught to OTHERS while observing others work into your own in class scene rehearsals and presentations is also expected.

Assignments and work will include:

- Participate in the “discovery project” to the fullest in the randomly assigned roles
- Conceive and direct a 2-3 minute scene based on a visual image selected by the student.
- Direct a 5-8 minute scene from one of the five plays provided by the instructor
- Conduct an in-class rehearsal and do a final presentation for all scenes.
- Conduct oral directorial pitch for the image scene.
- Conduct a minimum of two rehearsals per week outside of class time for all scenes.
- Submit the following written documentation for the scenes :
 - a. Director prompt book, with completed sections per PDF guidelines
 - b. Written director's assessment for scenes to be included in your Director's Notebook
- Show readiness and fully engaged participation in all class discussions and text readings as well as complete all assigned readings.
- Provide fully engaged participation for all exploratory and analytical work.
- Act in fellow director's scenes – required.
 - NOTE:. I suggest organizing a “trio” for cast/ director that rotates in one rehearsal session to cover all three director projects when possible. Equal time must be given to each director in a rehearsal group session in the outside rehearsals. Set a timer.
- Props and Costumes must be provided by the actors and directors for in class rehearsals and scene presentations – no “miming” objects please.
- A daily artistic question will be asked during roll call. You are required to be present and participate in answering and/or discussing the topic at hand. If you are not present when your name is called and the question is asked...points will be deducted from your overall grade per each absence/tardiness.

Assessment of “Participation”

- Students are required to be present and be on time for all classes and scheduled sessions unless they are genuinely too ill to attend or affected by unavoidable personal or external circumstances. If the student has more than 2 absences during the course they will not be able to fulfill their ability to fully participate in class. Additionally, students must keep the teacher informed of any absence

or late arrival **IN ADVANCE**. Failure to do so also constitutes a lack of participation and points will be deducted.

- Appropriate rehearsal clothing and props for **ALL EXERCISES AND IN CLASS REHEARSALS**.
- Openness to new methods of working and eagerness to attempt them.
- Constructive feedback on classmates' presentations.
- Energized support of all classmates' work.
- Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of professor and fellow students on one's own work.
- Meeting all assignment deadlines.
- Availability to fellow classmates to rehearse outside class.

Grading Breakdown

- **SCENE WORK** For each directed scene assignment, the student is expected to perform well in each of four categories:
 - Follow directions of the assignment.
 - Lead a rehearsal that demonstrates skills being taught in class
 - Demonstrate that the scene is well prepared, and exciting to watch, and in service of a clear and vivid story
 - Display a creative physical use of the space and the actors through staging and ground plan choices, guiding of performances, and creative and economical design choices
- **DIRECTOR PITCH** Each directorial presentation must be no longer than 5 minutes and incorporate visual aids. Details will be discussed in class.
- **WRITTEN WORK THAT ACCOMPANIES SCENE WORK** The student is expected to perform well in each of the following categories:
 - Your prompt book must be neat, following the directions that are given, thoroughly documented, and show creative insights into text analysis and realization of directorial ideas on paper.
 - A written self-assessment must include detailed working objectives and a clear description of the extent to which you achieved them.

| Assignment Points | Points | % of Grade |
|---|--------|------------|
| Director Pitch - Image Scene | 5 | 5 |
| Scene work in- class rehearsal (2 @ 10 pts each) | 20 | 20 |
| Scene Presentation "Image Scene" (Mid Term) | 20 | 20 |
| Scene Presentation Scripted Scene (Final) | 20 | 20 |
| Prompt Book/Self Assessment (2 @ 10 pts each) | 20 | 20 |
| Daily artistic question | .5 | 15 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

NOTE: A complete and detailed director's notebook with Daily Artistic Questions, notes on fellow classmates scenes, and reading projects CAN act as 15 points of extra credit when turned in at the end of the semester.

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following 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 assignment rubrics will be available on **Brightspace** and when possible emailed to entire class.

Grading Timeline

Reflected in schedule on following pages. All assigned due dates must be met on time with proper preparation. No late assignments will be accepted. Students absent from the presentation date without an official excused absence will receive a 0 for that portion of the assignment. All directors are required to have a back-up exercise or rehearsal plan to work on with the actor (s) if an actor is missing from in-class rehearsal portion of the project.

Course Specific Policies

I expect students who want to be in the classroom want to perform well. "Performing well" means focused participation in the classroom even as a "spectator". The methods being explored in the reading, prompt book and in-class rehearsals are expected to be applied. I also expect students to communicate if they have questions about instructions or vocabulary. As the course moves quickly, you may have to attend an office hour in order to get your questions answered. But ask them.

Per schedule and rules previously stated. Per class schedule / at the time of presentation of various graded assignments. If a student is concerned about their grade or progress in class, they should make an appointment to discuss this with the professor. Midterm grades will reflect only a "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" score.

Attendance

No absences or tardies are allowed, however I will allow each student two "mental health" days. These days may be scheduled in advance or may be taken with 24 hour notice. However due to the nature of the class you must make sure that any colleagues impacted by your absence are notified and that alternate arrangements are made so that the available partners can continue their assignments in your absence.

Note: If a deadline is missed because of a classmate/ project partner's unavailability, the available partner/s will not be penalized. If problems arise, a discussion with the professor with all involved must be arranged BEFORE the day of the scheduled scene or everyone will be held equally accountable.

Classroom norms

Being absent for an in-class *or from a scheduled out of class rehearsal is not acceptable.* Be early and ready to work for all rehearsals. Be responsible for creating a good working environment. Be respectful of others. **Set up agreed rehearsal times and honor them.** Any physical demands (intimate, violent) must be simulated and properly discussed and rehearsed so as not to endanger yourself, your actors & scene partners, or classmates. This includes the use of or throwing of properties. Weapons of any sort (real knives, guns etc...) are not to be used in scene work, ever. If your scene requires a weapon of any sort, discuss it with the professor. These policies apply to all in-class rehearsals and out of class rehearsals.

Additional Policies

- Respect the course and your colleagues. Everything you do in class is reflected in your grade, especially your participation and collaboration with your colleagues. Please respect the studio space, your colleagues, and the working environment
- You are not permitted to use any technology unless approved for class related assignments. Expect to be asked to put them away if asked to.
- Printed copies of all scenes, monologues and play scripts must be brought to every class meeting.
- Assembled prompt book in 3-ring binder must be utilized even if 'in-process' for all in-class rehearsals –
- In class active student analysis and commentary when requested.

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.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

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.

AI Generators

I expect you to use AI (e.g., ChatGPT and image generation tools) in this class. Learning to use AI is an emerging skill, and I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to provide guidance with these tools during office hours or after class. Keep in mind the following:

- AI tools are permitted to help you brainstorm topics or revise work you have already written.
- If you provide minimum-effort prompts, you will get low-quality results. You will need to refine your prompts to get good outcomes. This will take work.
- Proceed with caution when using AI tools and do not assume the information provided is accurate or trustworthy. If it gives you a number or fact, assume it is incorrect unless you either know the correct answer or can verify its accuracy with another source. You will be responsible for any errors or omissions provided by the tool. It works best for topics you understand.
- AI is a tool, but one that you need to acknowledge using. Please include a paragraph at the end of any assignment that uses AI explaining how (and why) you used AI and indicate/specify the prompts you used to obtain the results and what prompts you used to get the results. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies.

- Be thoughtful about when AI is useful. Consider its appropriateness for each assignment or circumstance. The use of AI tools requires attribution. You are expected to clearly attribute any material generated by the tool used.]

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 relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor’s permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. ([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. The process and intent of the end-of-semester evaluation should be provided. In addition, a mid-semester evaluation is recommended practice for early course correction. [Contact CET](#) for support in creating a mid-semester evaluation.]

Course Schedule

IMPORTANT: In addition to in-class contact hours, all courses must also meet a minimum standard for out-of-class time, which accounts for time students spend on homework, readings, writing, and other academic activities. For each unit of in-class contact time, the university expects two hours of out of class student work per week over a semester.

| | | |
|--------|--------------|---|
| Week 1 | 1/13 1/15 | Introduction. Course outline and expectations. Assignments given for “The Discovery Project” “The Discovery Project” Design team assembled and casting |
| Week 2 | 1/20 1/22 | MLK DAY (No Class) “The Discovery Project” First Reads |
| Week 3 | 1/27 1/29 | “The Discovery Projects” Blocking “The Discovery Projects” Presentations |
| Week 4 | 2/3 2/5 | Director’s Round Table Preparing the director’s Image scenes, prompt book, and pitches |
| Week 5 | 2/10 2/12 | Director pitches Director pitches |
| Week 6 | 2/17 2/19 | President’s Day (No Class) Observed rehearsals for Image Scenes |
| Week 7 | 2/24 2/26 | Observed rehearsals for Image Scenes Observed rehearsals for Image Scenes |
| Week 8 | 3/3 3/5 | Observed rehearsals for Image Scenes Observed rehearsals for Image Scenes |

| | | |
|---------|--------------|--|
| Week 9 | 3/10 3/12 | Image Scene Presentations Image Scene Presentations/ Director's Prompt Book Due |
| Week 10 | 3/17 3/19 | SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK |
| Week 11 | 3/24 3/26 | Scripted Scenes choice and casting due Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes |
| Week 12 | 3/31 4/2 | Observed Rehearsals for Scripted Scenes Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes |
| Week 13 | 4/7 4/9 | Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes |
| Week 14 | 4/14 4/16 | Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes |
| Week 15 | 4/21 4/23 | Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes |
| Week 16 | 4/28 4/30 | Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes Observed rehearsals for Scripted Scenes |
| Week 17 | 5/5 5/7 | STUDY DAY TBA |

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theatre Consent Culture Statement

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

SDA Student Support & Reporting Form

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission

filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

Statement on University Academic and 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.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate-](#) and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

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 consists 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) 740-2500

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.