

USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
CTPR 506 - VISUAL EXPRESSION
SYLLABUS

Semester: Fall 2025

Professor: Bruce A. Block BAB@usc.edu

SA: TBA

2 UNITS

OFFICE HOURS: Monday mornings by appointment only; in person or on Zoom.

Auditing CTPR 506 is not permitted. This course does not use pass/no pass grading.

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

Just as a writer is concerned with story structure or a musician with musical structure, a picture maker must be concerned with visual structure. Visual structure is the only language available to picture makers yet it is often misused or simply ignored. The key to using visual structure is an understanding of the basic visual components and how visual structure relates to narrative/story structure. The basic visual components are: space, line, shape, color, tone, movement, and rhythm. It is through the control of these basic visual components that the picture maker stirs an audience's emotions, creates a visual style, gives unity to their work and links story structure to visual structure. The principles discussed in this class can be used to create and control pictures for any format including theatrical motion pictures, television/streaming shows, commercials, internet sites, and digital games, using live-action, traditional or CG animation. This class relates all of the visual concepts to practical production and bridges the gap between theory and practice.

The Structure of the Class:

1. Define each basic visual component.
2. Show how to recognize these components.
3. Demonstrate how these components communicate to an audience.
4. Apply the components to a text/script.
5. Discuss how the component is used technically and aesthetically in actual production.
6. Show examples from films.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

The class is extremely rigorous. Lectures are complex and require extensive note taking. Recording and photography are not permitted during class. There are weekly assignments plus two final assignments that are due near the end of the semester:

Final Assignment 1. Each student, working individually, creates a photographic notebook of 50 still photos illustrating the concepts discussed in class. Many of these photos are due during the semester as works-in-progress. Incorrect photos must be redone. All still photographic assignments must be created without the use of computers, AI or digital software.

Final Assignment 2. Collaborating in groups, students create a short film demonstrating their understanding of the principles of visual structure in relation to a story.

Notebook and film grades are based on originality, directorial clarity and realization of each visual concept. Final course grade is based on the photo notebook grade (50%), film grade (40%) and class participation and collaboration (10%). There is no mid-term grade. Late photo notebooks or films will not be accepted. The class does not allow make-up exams, extra credit papers or projects, or photo notebook/film re-dos. Due dates for the photo notebook and film assignments are announced in class.

and posted online on Brightspace. The use of AI or computers to aid in or create any imagery is prohibited. Students who use computers, AI, plagiarize, or share photos for their assignments will receive a failing grade.

Attendance at all 506 screenings, including the student films, is mandatory. Students are expected to be on time for class and to remain in class until class ends. Excessive tardiness (3 occurrences) will be counted as an absence. Two absences will result in a student's grade being lowered by one full letter (IE: A becomes B). A third absence will result in a student's grade being lowered by one additional full letter (IE: B becomes C). A student's grade will be lowered by one full letter for each additional absence.

READING & REFERENCES

The text for the class is *The Visual Story* by Bruce Block. The book is available at the USC Student bookstore, from online vendors and at local bookstores. The class lectures are divided into topics that coincide with the chapters in the book.

LECTURES & SCHEDULE

Class lectures are dense and rigorous. Students are required to take notes, which includes drawings and diagrams. Recording and photography are not permitted during class. The listing below of specific material for each lecture is approximate since discussion lengths will vary.

LECTURE 1: Orientation and overview of the basic visual components. Basic class terms are defined. Space is introduced with an overview followed by the organization of space into four basic categories.

LECTURE 2: Definition of space continues.

LECTURE 3: Discussion of space completes. The final assignments for the class (individual student photo notebook and group film) are discussed in detail.

LECTURE 4: Visual structure. The relationships between visual and narrative structure, structural analysis and visual economy are discussed.

LECTURE 5: Visual structure continues. Graphing, structure and visual change are discussed.

LECTURE 6: Line and shape. Linear motif, basic shapes, perception of line are discussed.

LECTURE 7: Color. Color structure and systems are discussed to simplify an extremely misunderstood visual component.

LECTURE 8: Color continues. Color interaction and control is discussed.

LECTURE 9: Tone & Light. Tone is discussed as it relates to directorial emphasis and the gray scale.

LECTURE 10: Movement. Movement is defined in relation to the screen, the camera, an object & background.

LECTURE 11: Rhythm. Visual rhythm is discussed in stationary and moving objects, and editing.

LECTURE 12: Screening & discussion of a feature length film.

LECTURE 13: Screen students' final films and discuss.

LECTURE 14: Screen students' final films and discuss. Photographic notebooks are due at the end of the semester. Specific dates will be announced in class.

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.

This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, all photo assignments should be prepared by the student working individually. Students may not have another person or entity complete any portion of the photo assignments. Film assignments should be produced in student groups. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated text, code, images or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Collaboration. In this class, you are expected to submit photographic work that demonstrates your individual mastery of the course concepts.

Group work. Unless specifically designated as a 'group project,' all assignments are expected to be completed individually.

Computer programs. Plagiarism includes the submission of code written by, or otherwise obtained from someone else.

If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an “F” grade on the assignment, exam, 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). All video and audio recording during class is prohibited.

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).

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.

CARE-SC: Confidential Advocacy, Resources, and Education Support Center - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7/365 on call.

Confidential advocates, prevention educators, and professional counseling teams work to promote a universal culture of consent, and prevent and respond to gender- and power-based harm. Services available to all USC students at no cost.

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.

USC Emergency Information

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

For 24 hour emergency assistance or to report a crime: UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323)-442-1000.
For 24 hour non-emergency assistance or information: UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: 323-442-1200.

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.

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy:

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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.

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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.

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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.

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PLEASE NOTE:

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