

**FTV 37: Writing for Television: Big Ideas for
the Small Screen**

UCLA FILM AND TELEVISION SUMMER INSTITUTE

Example Syllabus. *The syllabi posted are general syllabi for students and alumni who wish to find out the topics generally covered in these courses*

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS: Students will learn the process of how to create an original pilot for a television series. Through lecture, discussion, and screenings, students will examine produced pilots and scripts, and the structure and formats of successful pilots with the aim of understanding how they work. Structure and formats will vary depending on platforms, so we will cover network, basic cable, premium cable, and streaming shows. Students will also learn the process of how a writers' room works, and apply what they have learned toward an original TV show idea, in order to:

- Choose a TV series with a story that can last for many seasons
- Develop and deepen characters
- Service your voice, tone, and style
- Service the franchise of your original series
- Fit into the network's "wheelhouse" and meet their expectations
- Create a Beat Sheet (1-2 pages) and Outline (2-4 pages) for act one of your original pilot episode
- Create a Series Document (2-3 pages), covering the world of the show and continuing story
- Write and revise the Teaser (3-5 pages) of the pilot episode
- Give and receive constructive feedback on your work and the work of your peers

Assignments must be posted to the Class Canvas page at least one hour prior to class. Late assignments will lose 15% of their grade per day.

REQUIRED PILOT SCRIPTS:

- Breaking Bad* pilot by Vince Gilligan
- Mrs. America* pilot by Dahvi Wahler
- Grey's Anatomy* pilot by Shonda Rhimes
- Abbott Elementary* pilot by Quinta Brunson
- The Good Wife* pilot by Robert and Michelle King
- What We Do in the Shadows* pilot by Taika Waititi and Jemaine Clement
- Wednesday* pilot by Al Gough and Miles Millar

Required scripts subject to change. Plus, read every pilot you can, especially in the genre, style, and tone of your script. You may access more scripts here: <https://sites.google.com/site/tvwriting/>.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Writing the TV Drama Series* by Pamela Douglas
- The TV Showrunner's Roadmap* by Neil Landau
- TV Outside the Box* by Neil Landau
- Writing the Pilot* by William Rabkin
- The Art of Character* by David Corbett
- Screenwriting is Rewriting* by Jack Epps Jr.
- The TV Writer's Workbook* by Ellen Sandler
- Writing Screenplays That Sell* by Michael Hauge

ATTENDANCE: Due to the intensive nature of the program, a maximum of one program absence is permitted.

In addition to your regular course attendance, your attendance at three Professional Development Workshops will be recorded as part of your participation and attendance grade in this course. All seminars will be held on campus in the James Bridges Theatre.

For information about UCLA's campus libraries and computers, visit the website below:

<https://www.library.ucla.edu/use/computers-computingservices/computers-library>.

For more information about the UCLA library laptop lending program, visit the website below:

<https://www.library.ucla.edu/clicc/clicc-equipment-lending>.

For more information about Student Technology Center in UCLA housing, visit this website:

<https://portal.housing.ucla.edu/student-technology-center>.

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1

Class 1:

LECTURE 1: Introduction to the course and syllabus.

Discussion: Review structure; premise, theme, conflict, characters; the difference between writing screenplays and episodic TV; episodic pilot vs. premise pilot vs. hybrid; servicing the “franchise” and story arcs; how to prepare a cohesive, viable pitch and logline.

Reading: *Breaking Bad* pilot.

Assignment: Prepare a brief (3-5 minute) pitch and logline for your pilot, covering the world of your show and the main characters.

Class 2:

LECTURE 2: Writing compelling characters: goals, flaws, quirks. Character arcs, active protagonists, and antagonists.

Discussion: Go over pitches and receive feedback.

Reading: *Mrs. America* pilot.

Assignment: Write character bios for two of your main characters (one page total). Write a short scene in teleplay format with your two characters (1-2 pages).

Class 3:

LECTURE 3: A, B, and C storylines. Review of story structure. How to properly format a screenplay.

Discussion: Review character bios and short scenes.

Reading: *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Abbott Elementary* pilots.

Assignment: Come up with 2 sets of A/B storylines for your pilot. Prepare to present and discuss them in class.

WEEK TWO

Class 4:

LECTURE 4: How to write a Beat Sheet.

Discussion: Discuss A/B storylines and choose which you will use.

Reading: *The Good Wife* and *What We Do in the Shadows* beatsheets.

Assignment: Write a Beat Sheet for Act One of your pilot (1-2 pages).

Class 5:

LECTURE 5: How to expand the Beat Sheet into an Outline. The studio and network notes process. Unifying theme and compelling act breaks.

Discussion: Feedback on Beat Sheets.

Reading: *The Good Wife* and *What We Do in the Shadows* outlines.

Assignment: Write an Outline (2-4 pages) for Act One. (NOTE: Your outline should include the major beats for the rest of your pilot.)

Class 6:

LECTURE 6: How to write an effective Teaser. Writing great dialogue. Scene structure. Writing memorable scenes.

Discussion: Feedback on Outlines.

Reading: *The Good Wife* and *What We Do in the Shadows* pilots. Read and watch teasers from shows in the genre/tone of your script for inspiration.

Assignment: Write the first draft of your Teaser (3-5 pages).

WEEK THREE

Class 7:

Discussion: Table read of Teaser pages. Receive notes.

Assignment: Revise teaser based on notes from class. Begin writing your Series Document.

Class 8:

LECTURE 8: How to draft a Series Document with season-long arcs for each principal character, as well as central questions and mysteries, series mythology, and end game.

Discussion: Table read of revised script pages.

Reading: Series documents from Grey's Anatomy, Mrs. America, True Detective, Game of Thrones, and Fargo.

Assignment: Continue working on your Series Document (2-3 pages). Prepare a short pitch for your show. Final draft of Series Document is due last class.

*****NOTE: Final Teasers are due by 5PM after Class 8. Please see the Discussion page for instructions on how to format your PDF.**

Class 9:

LECTURE 9: Writers room. Rewriting strategies. Discussion about the draft to be distributed to the director, actors, and department heads. Staffing season. Finding opportunities as a television writer.

Reading: *Wednesday* pilot.

*****NOTE: Final Series Documents are due.**

STATEMENT OF GRADING:

Grading breakdown:

Attendance/Class Participation:	20%
Reading/Homework Assignments:	10%
Act One Beat Sheet:	15%
Act One Outline:	15%
Teaser script pages:	20%
Series Document:	20%

90% and above =	A+/-
80% and above =	B+/-
70% and above =	C+/-
60% and above =	D+/-
59% and below =	F

GRADE DEFINITIONS:

A = Superior Achievement

B = Satisfactorily demonstrates potential for professional achievement

C = Passed but work does not indicate potential for professional achievement

F = Failure

S = Satisfactory (achievement at grade B level or better)

U = Unsatisfactory

I = Incomplete

IP = In Progress (for multiple-quarter course)

DR = Deferred Report

For all students, the grades A, B, C, and D may be modified by a plus (+) or minus (-) suffix, to raise or lower the student's grade point average. The one exception is the A+ grade, which will not raise a student's grade point average because it carries the same number of grade points as the A grade. An F grade yields no unit or course credit.

ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION:

Two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. Please carefully proofread your work and turn in assignments on time. Please arrive at class on time.

All ideas discussed in class are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with others outside of class.

All teasers read at the teaser reading must abide by a PG-13 rating.

This means students must refrain from including the following:

- Drug use or situations pertaining to drugs
- Excessive violence (i.e. romanticized violence, exaggerated descriptions of violence, or promotion of violence)
 - ****NOTE: there is an exception for Action, Thrillers, and Horror; however, we ask that students do not overly describe these types of situations.*
- Descriptions of sex scenes
- Use of F*ck and similar swear words
- Use of racial slurs
- Glorifying situations of Rape, Harassment, or Discrimination

Keep in mind that your teasers are a reflection of the program, and people of all ages will be invited to the final table reads. Teasers that violate these content guidelines will be edited or pulled from the final table reads.

ACCESSIBILITY: Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term, as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information, visit www.cae.ucla.edu.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND STUDENT CONDUCT: With its status as a world-class research institution, it is critical that the University uphold the highest standards of integrity both inside and outside the classroom. As a student and member of the UCLA community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors. Accordingly, when accusations of academic dishonesty occur, The Office of the Dean of Students is charged with investigating and adjudicating suspected violations. Academic dishonesty, includes, but is not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, multiple submissions or facilitating academic misconduct. Plagiarism is a serious offense. It is the presentation of another author's words or ideas as if they were your own. If you have any questions about documentation, quotations, and related matters, please do not hesitate to ask your instructor before submitting your work.

Please also refer to the UCLA Rules of Student Conduct at the following website: <http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Student-Conduct>.

STATEMENT OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

University of California Diversity Statement

Adopted by the Assembly of the Academic Senate May 10, 2006
Endorsed by the President of the University of California June 30, 2006

The diversity of the people of California has been the source of innovative ideas and creative accomplishments throughout the state's history into the present. Diversity - a defining feature of California's past, present, and future - refers to the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language,

abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and geographic region, and more.

Because the core mission of the University of California is to serve the interests of the State of California, it must seek to achieve diversity among its student bodies and among its employees. The State of California has a compelling interest in making sure that people from all backgrounds perceive that access to the University is possible for talented students, staff, and faculty from all groups. The knowledge that the University of California is open to qualified students from all groups, and thus serves all parts of the community equitably, helps sustain the social fabric of the State.

Diversity should also be integral to the University's achievement of excellence. Diversity can enhance the ability of the University to accomplish its academic mission. Diversity aims to broaden and deepen both the educational experience and the scholarly environment, as students and faculty learn to interact effectively with each other, preparing them to participate in an increasingly complex and pluralistic society. Ideas, and practices based on those ideas, can be made richer by the process of being born and nurtured in a diverse community. The pluralistic university can model a process of proposing and testing ideas through respectful, civil communication. Educational excellence that truly incorporates diversity thus can promote mutual respect and make possible the full, effective use of the talents and abilities of all to foster innovation and train future leadership.

Therefore, the University of California renews its commitment to the full realization of its historic promise to recognize and nurture merit, talent, and achievement by supporting diversity and equal opportunity in its education, services, and administration, as well as research and creative activity. The University particularly acknowledges the acute need to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of talented students, faculty, and staff from historically excluded populations who are currently underrepresented.

OTHER CLASS POLICIES

You may not use electronic devices unless we are reading someone's pages and you need to use your device to read. Devices must be put away during discussion.

Your conduct outside of class and in the dormitories may impact your participation grade for the UCLA Film and Television Summer Institute.

As UCLA students, you are expected to adhere to the UCLA Student Code of Conduct, the UCLA Summer Sessions Participation Agreement, and the UCLA Film and Television Summer Institute Code of Conduct. Failure to be punctual or adhere to any of the policies in those agreements including treating staff, TAs, faculty, and fellow students with the utmost respect, may negatively affect your participation grade as determined by Residential Program Staff, Production Coordinators, Teaching Assistants, and/or Faculty.

This course aims towards creating a positive creative community. A huge part of being in a workshop is learning how to provide useful supportive feedback for your peers without simply poking holes in their stories. **Disrespect to your classmates will not be tolerated.**