

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

**THTR 336 Introduction to Sound Design**  
**Spring 2025—M, W—3:30 to 4:50**  
**Location:** MCC- 110

**Instructor: Philip Allen**

**Office:** MCC 110 or BIT M4 or Zoom

**Office Hours:** By Appointment

**Final Exam:** May 9, 2pm MCC 110

**Contact Info:** Phil Allen: [philipga@usc.edu](mailto:philipga@usc.edu);

## Course Description

Students will explore the art and techniques of theatrical sound design. We will work in detail with the use of music and ambient sound in theatrical presentations. Course work will also cover dramatic structure and sound design, including design elements as metaphor. Lab work will focus on three-dimensional presentation of sound elements in the performance venue.

## Overview

The course will cover sound as a design element in modern theatre. We will look back at the early uses of sound in theatre shows and move to a detailed exploration of sound in contemporary productions. Focus will begin on sound in drama, then shift to the use of sound in musical theatre. Assignments will allow students to complete two fully realized design pieces in the lab space.

## Learning Objectives

After this course, the student should be able to do the following:

1. *Understand critical study of text as related to design elements.*
2. *Create and defend a metaphorical design concept.*
3. *Work in a three-dimensional lab environment to create design elements.*
4. *Understand how to work with design elements in real time with live actors.*

**Prerequisite(s):** THTR 130/131

## Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

TEXT: Theatre Sound; John A. Leonard

<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=theatre+sound+arts+routledge>

**MATERIALS:** students are required to bring a USB memory stick with at least 8GB of memory space to all class meetings!! Students will also need a pencil or pen and paper at each class meeting for note taking.

## Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

**FOR SDA Assignments:** Grades will be assigned according to the above criteria. Students can check their progress at any time by scheduling an appointment with the instructors during office hours.

**Grading Scale for SDA:** **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

## Grading Breakdown

Grading will be based on projects assigned in class. There will be at least five projects including the final; and there may be as many as six. All projects will count for an equal percentage of the final grade.

All projects will be completed on SDA design lab sound workstations unless otherwise noted at the time of the assignment.

## Assignment List with Point Values (45 Points Total) :

1. What Does That Sound Like? - 10
2. 3-D Location Recording - 10
3. Timeline Assignment -10
4. Story Without Words - 15

## Lab Work Requirement (10 Points):

In addition to the assignments above, students are required to complete **6 hours** of audio lab work under the direction of the SDA Sound Supervisor or your instructor. **4 hours** must be complete before **Week 9**; the final **2 hours** must be complete before **week 15**. Lab work will constitute an additional **15 points** of your final grade. You will need to create a log of your lab times and get a signature from the Sound Supervisor when you work lab hours. Your signed log should be scanned and uploaded to your Google Folder by the end of the week they are due.

## Lecture Journal Requirement (45 Points):

In addition to the assignments above, students are required to complete a journal of lecture notes from all in class lectures and presentations. This should be a typed and edited version of your handwritten notes; it must be legible and easy to follow, and it must be submitted electronically as a PDF File. **Journal Entries should be titled by Week # and Class meeting date and day: "Week 1, Tuesday 1/10"**. In addition, you should write a summary and analysis of each reading assignment, which should be included with your journal. (Note - Your class notes should NOT be a copy of the lecture slides from class. Lecture slides are discussion topics only – your notes should include the pertinent information you acquired from each discussion topic.) There will be three submission dates:

**Submission 1 – No later than 5pm Friday at the end of Week 5**

**Submission 2 – No later than 5pm Friday at the end of Week 10**

**Submission 3 – No later than 5pm Friday at the end of Week 15**

***The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING as published elsewhere in this handbook are:***

- *Each course shall contain at least three assignments, projects, exams, papers or exercises which shall be evaluated during the semester and which shall provide an analytical record of each student's progress in the course.*
- *Attendance shall be weighted at no more than 15% as per University Guidelines. Studio Courses must delineate how participation will be graded (in class exercises, scene study, etc.)*
- *There shall be no unexcused absences.*
- *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*

## Assignment Submission Policy

**The due dates for all assignments will be given in class. Failure to complete an assignment by the due date will result in lowered grading for that work.**

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week 1	Introduction to course - Sound Design in Theatre Sound Design and Art and Math
Week 2	Sound Design Process and Approach <b>READING: CHAPTER 1: HISTORY OF SOUND</b>
Week 3	History of Sound in Theatre Sound Design, Ownership, Copyright, and You <b>READING: CHAPTER 2: THEATRE TYPES</b>
Week 4	Sound Design in Practice – Art vs. Craft Recording Signal Flow – After it is Electricity. <b>READING: CHAPTER 3: THE THEATRE SOUND SYSTEM</b> <b>READING: CHAPTER 4: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS</b>
Week 5	History of Classical Music History of Jazz
Week 6	History of Rock Music 1 History of Rock Music 2, Multitrack Recording History
Week 7	Sound Design and Critical Studies Metaphor in Design
Week 8	Three-Dimensional Sound Playback Signal Processors Speakers & Amplifiers <b>READING: CHAPTER 6: SOUND EFFECTS</b>
Week 9	Sound Design in Musical Theatre How do musicals work?
Week 10	Venue Acoustics and Sound Design Balancing Live and Amplified Sound in Performance
Week 11	Sound Reinforcement Signal Flow Sound Mixing for Musicals – Lab <b>READING: CHAPTER 5: ADVANCED SYSTEM DESIGN</b>
Week 12	Anatomy of a Musical Sound Design
Week 13	Musical Theatre Microphone Technique: Radio Mics Musical Theatre Microphone Technique: Orchestra Mics
Week 14	The Psychology of Sound (why they don't hear what we think they hear...)
Week 15	The Art of Design (on a Budget...) 1 The Art of Design (on a Budget...) 2

## Additional Policies

- **ATTENDANCE and Participation:** Attendance and participation in class is mandatory because design is primarily experiential process. According to School of Theatre guidelines, **no\_unexcused absences** are allowed. An excused absence is due to serious illness, grave emergency or significant acting work with appropriate SOT leave of absence. Please inform the instructor of your absence. You are responsible for all work missed. An extended absence, even if excused, could seriously affect your work and grade in class. Please consult with instructor if such a situation arises.
- **TARDIES:** will not be accepted into class.

**Important Dates:**

1. **1-31:** Last day to add or to drop this class without a grade of “W” or to select the “P/NP” option.
2. **4-11:** Last day to withdraw with a grade of “W”

**Read the Fine Print**

1. The above schedule and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.
2. It is the responsibility of each student to know and follow all the written guidance given by the instructor in this syllabus.

**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).

**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.]

**NOTE:** *All undergraduate classes must meet for the Final Examination as established by the University. You may not hold your final examination on the last day of classes.*

**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.

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, 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. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity 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](#).

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.

### 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](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

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### **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater 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.

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### **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>

### **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](mailto: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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