

Course outline: Colour Grading and Finishing

This Postgraduate Diploma in Colour Grading and Finishing is a one-year course which develops specialist skills and knowledge.

The course consists of six core areas of Colour Grading and Finishing:

- Basics of colour correction, calibration and colour theory
- Advanced colour theory with real time grading tuition sessions
- Advanced workshop grading, using Resolve and Baselight platforms
- Finishing, delivery file formats and DCP creation.
- The film grading, finishing and delivery workflow
- Professional practice and collaboration

During their time at the National Film and Television School, students will work on a range of industry-standard fiction, animation and television projects.

Overview

The course comprises six assessed modules, along with other exercises and workshops:

- Module 1 – Fundamentals of Colour Correction and Grading
- Module 2 – Advanced Colour Theory
- Module 3 – Advanced Colour Grading
- Module 4 – Advanced Finishing
- Module 5 – Graduation Films
- Module 6 – Professional Practice as a Grader and Finishing Artist

Module 1: Fundamentals of Colour Correction and Grading

Colour correction and colour grading are closely related, but different postproduction processes. This module will introduce you first to colour correction – a process designed to harmonise the image, to clean it up, and ensure that tones are accurate – and then to colour grading – a more ‘creative’ process of styling the image.

There will be exercises in the basics of primary colour correction, white balance, and the theory behind Lift/Gamma/Gain controls. You will learn how to use DaVinci Resolve through introductory workshop exercises.

You will be given a piece of film of no longer than five minutes in order to demonstrate your skills in correction and grading. You will work on this individually and your finished work, along with that of your peers, will be projected in a screening space and discussed critically. You will be asked to explain your process and your creative decision-making.

Within this module there will be visits to working post production sites and film laboratories, such as ‘Flying Spot’ archive and restoration – one of the few remaining working telecine facilities, and ‘Cinelab’ – one of the premier film laboratories that processes and scans 8, 16, & 35 mm film.

Module 2: Advanced Colour Theory

This theory module is designed to ensure that you have all of the conceptual knowledge necessary in order to support your practice as a Colour Grader and Finisher.

Through a series of seminars, masterclasses from professionals, research, self-directed study, and quizzes you will learn about technical and aesthetic principles and concepts which will improve your understanding and ability.

The module will culminate in a one-to-one assessment with a tutor in a grading suite. You will be asked theoretical questions, presented with scenarios to analyse, practical issues to address, and technical problems to solve.

Module 3: Advanced Colour Grading

This module represents an increase in complexity from Module 1 in which you learned colour correction and grading fundamentals using DaVinci Resolve. In this module you will develop your understanding of how to create and apply looks using industry-standard software, Baselight, which uses layers rather than Resolve's node-based approach. Working in a dedicated grading suite you will increase your creative ability to manipulate and enhance the image.

As in Module 1 you will be given a pre-existing piece of footage to work on. This will be longer (5-10 minutes) and represent a greater challenge and also greater opportunities to develop your skills. The work will take place over two weeks during which results will be continually assessed.

At the end of the module you will show your work in one of the screening spaces to peers and tutors, giving a brief presentation on your intentions and process, and answering any questions afterwards.

You will also have the opportunity to grade one of the 'Digi Fiction' films by the Directing Fiction students, and your work on this will be assessed too.

Module 4: Advanced Finishing

The process of Finishing (also known as online editing) is the last, crucial part of the pipeline. As a Colour Grader and Finisher you will need to be able to provide the final polish on every film that you deal with.

This process is not merely about 'conforming' a lower quality edit into a high-resolution final export, but it also entails producing captions and titles, doing some minor VFX work, and producing a Digital Cinema Package (DCP). Finishing is the final pass where all the elements of a film come together. Sound and Audio files are combined, graphic elements are added such as subtitles, end titles and front credits are added. Finishing of reframing and basic clean up are done before final client sign off.

Module 5: Graduation Films

The Graduation Films module is the final one on the course, although the phased schedule means that it will overlap with other modules. It is 'synoptic', which means that you will be implementing everything you have learned on the course in a single project. It is expected that you will be involved in your assigned Graduation Film(s) from the outset, ensuring that you are part of the creative conversation with, for example, producers, directors, cinematographers and VFX artists.

You will work on the project from end to end and be responsible for all creative decisions in Colour Grading, as well as ensuring that the project is Finished according to schedule and protocol in time for the Graduation Showcase in February.

Module 6: Professional Practice as a Grader and Finishing Artist

Professional Practice as a Colour Grader and Finishing Artist is not simply about knowing and practising your craft, it's also about social skills, networking, managing your suite, planning for your future, extracurricular opportunities – such as grading other films produced in the School, building a showreel, and promoting yourself. This module ensures that you maintain a focus on these qualities throughout the course by reflecting on your development as a professional practitioner and continually assessing the skills required for running a grading suite, from calibration, technical proficiency, room etiquette and client management skills. It will ensure that you understand your practice in a broader context and that you reflect on all of your formative experiences, including feedback from tutors and creative partners, maintaining a focus on your continuing professional growth. It is taught through lectures and tutorials, and assessed through a reflective journal or blog.

Workshops

Springboard Cross Specialisation Introductory Week-Long Workshop

A cross-school and interdisciplinary introduction to film and television, looking at cinematic language and televisual language through the prism of storytelling. It investigates how the main crafts of cinema and television, screenwriting, cinematography, visualisation, editing, sound and music relate to the way filmmaking puts across narrative ideas.

Professional Brief Workshops

A working colourist sets the brief on a short film, which might be advertising, corporate or drama. Students will have time to work at their own pace with a deadline presentation where all the final grades are presented together for discussion in one of the screening spaces.

Colour Theory Workshops

These workshops in colour calibration are led by a colour scientist. Using light probes and calibration software, students have a practical session on the need for calibration as well as a class on colour space and fundamentals of grading.

Resolve Workshop A

This focuses on the principles of importing, linking and conforming from an AAF to make a project timeline. This will include fundamentals from NFTS staff on logging into and using the edit share volumes, and include the basics of colour correction.

Resolve Workshop B

Beyond workshop one where we explore the fundamentals of the colour page and using the primary panels to learn the basics of colour correction of an image using primary controls in lift/gamma/gain. Understanding scopes and levels. Introducing the concept of colour enhancement.

Resolve Workshop C

This encapsulates all the functions of One and Two with full understanding of delivery using Edit page involving finishing whether its captioning, online techniques for full delivery of a rendered file into the correct target delivery specification

Resolve Workshop D

PG Diploma in Colour Grading Commencing
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This expands into dedicated workshop sessions on the FUSION compositing page for enhanced techniques furthering their expertise in Finishing.

‘Bake Off’ Workshops

This involves time-limited grading sessions from pre-made programmes from a range of genres – non-scripted, drama or documentary. The object is to grade to a set time limit with a brief given on the day. This is to sharpen the colourists’ skills to a set deadline and work fast for a deadline. All the work will be assessed by each student at the end of the session.

Baselight Workshop A

Understanding the basic architecture of the Baselight system, how to conform, make a timeline basic grade and export a render.

Baselight Workshop B

Use the Baselight toolset to grade at a proficient level with Primary correction, shapes and keys. Reframe and de-noise shots when necessary.

Colour Masterclass – one-to-one

Each student will have a half-day session with a working colourist in London to experience and to see the coal face of a working high-end facility. It’s a great opportunity to ask questions and to witness the real world. Previous sessions have been at Molinaire with a professional colourist.

Restoration Workshop

This explores the restoration market-place where materials are enhanced for Remastering. It includes a visit to ‘The Flying Spot’ facility where students can see film being re-scanned and enhanced from several archive film formats. The Nucoda system will also be used to demonstrate digital clean up and the possibilities of re-purposing archive film and television.

Avid Workshop

Understanding of and familiarisation with the Avid system, from conforming, basic editing and output Avid. Understanding Avid workflow especially when used in tandem with Baselight for AAF workflows.

Re-visit Workshops

These are ad-hoc sessions throughout module Three where the students can practise grading and finishing a previous NFTS project. Genres such as Documentary Fiction and Animation will be used as a rehearsal for the term’s upcoming graduate films.