Course outline: Unscripted Development

Module 1: The Unscripted TV Landscape / Meet the Commissioners

Understanding the market for unscripted programmes is fundamental to their successful development and production of factual programmes. In this module we're going to review the unscripted output of some of the biggest commissioners of unscripted programmes in the UK and US with a cast of commissioners to discover what 'makes' a factual programme on Prime Video, Sky, Netflix, BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 etc. How are they different?

We'll discuss current trends in unscripted programming both in the UK and internationally with reference to notable series; see how recent innovations in unscripted programming have been informed by other genres, advances in technology and the rise of the streamers, and weigh the importance of unscripted programmes in the inter-channel battle for audiences.

At the end of this module, students should be able to deconstruct the key signatures of unscripted programmes on each of the featured channels – an insight that will prove key when they come to explore the development of programme ideas for these channels in the next module.

Module 2: Developing Unscripted Programmes – Programme Proposals

Where do ideas come from, and how best to develop them and present them to commissioners? In this module we're going to review the process of developing, researching, writing, and pitching unscripted programmes. We'll explore different ways of generating and formatting programme ideas through a series of brainstorming workshops; learn how to research and write programme proposals and pitch decks; discuss the importance of talent and explore how to successfully pitch ideas to commissioners. We'll also explore working to briefs. At the end of this module, students will have devised their own idea for an unscripted programme, created a programme proposal / pitch deck and pitched it to a panel.

Module 3: Developing Unscripted Programmes – Casting Tapes and Sizzles

Sizzles are short, impactful promos are usually created using 'found' footage and are a key part of the initial pitching process. In this module the students will produce a sizzle for the idea they created in the previous module with senior creatives sharing sample sizzles they have created to sell their ideas. Here we'll also discuss Casting, Working with Archive and Writing Commentary. We'll also discuss the importance of

a "run-through". This module also features a two-day Camera Course. We'll also explore how AI is starting to be used in the development process.

Module 4: Production

In this module we imagine our show has been commissioned and begin to plot the transition from page to screen. We'll deconstruct budgets and production schedules and review the varied other paperwork that documents the production of an unscripted programme (call sheets, risk assessments, access and location agreements, talent contracts, release forms etc, broadcaster greenlights). We'll also consider the practical challenges of directing and producing different kinds of unscripted programmes, including observational documentary, factual formats, reality etc. with reference to producers and directors working with these forms. This module will provide students with valuable insights into the practical aspects of unscripted production.

Module 5: Selling Unscripted Today and Tomorrow / Meet the Commissioners

This module provides students with valuable insights into the commercial aspects of unscripted programme production. How do television companies exploit their programmes post-transmission? As we'll see, the producer's relationship with his/her programme is only just beginning - television is a global business and a producer's entrepreneurship and commercial nous is as important as their creativity. This module also reflects on the new and emerging platforms / markets for unscripted content and includes further development work in preparation for the Graduation project in Module 6. Many programmes are now co-pros – how does this work and how do you piece together the money?

Module 6: Graduation Project

This final module sees students create their own programme proposal and sizzle for Prime Video and then pitch it to a senior Amazon Studios commissioner. To prepare, students will receive a briefing from an Amazon executive and hear from producers who have successfully pitched and produced shows for the streamer. What insights do they have into the tastes and sensibilities of the Amazon commissioning team that our students should be aware of? Group tutorials provide an opportunity for students to hone their ideas, presentations and pitching skills before their final graduation pitch to an Amazon Studios commissioner.