

Course outline: Factual Development and Production

Module 1: The Factual Commissioners

Understanding the different needs of factual commissioners is fundamental to the successful development and production of factual programmes. In this module we're going to review the factual output of some of the biggest commissioners of factual programmes to discover what 'makes' a factual programme on the BBC, ITV, Netflix, Channel 4, Channel 5 etc. *How are they different?* We'll discuss current trends in factual programming in the UK and US with reference to notable series; see how recent innovations in factual programming have been informed by other genres, advances in technology and the rise of the SVODs; weigh the importance of factual programmes in the inter-channel battle for audiences.

This module will feature contributions from commissioners who can account for the sensibilities of their channels/audiences. We'll also look at the online opportunities for factual content; see how producers have successfully embraced its potential and discuss the creative and commercial challenges it poses for traditional producers/broadcasters. At the end of this module, students should be able to deconstruct the key signatures of factual programmes on each of the featured channels – an insight that will prove crucial when they come to explore the development of programme ideas for these channels in the next module...

Module 2: Developing Factual Programmes - 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 factual programmes to broadcasters. 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; discuss the contribution onscreen talent can make to the development process and explore how to successfully pitch your ideas to commissioners. At the end of this module, students will have devised their own idea for a factual programme, created a programme proposal and pitched it to TV executive.

Module 3: Developing Factual Programmes - Sizzles

Sizzles are a key part of the pitching process to broadcasters. These short, impactful promos are often created using 'found' footage. In this module the students will produce a sizzle for the proposal they created in the previous module with

experienced Heads of Development/Development Producers sharing examples sizzles they have created and deployed to sell their ideas. Here we'll also look at working with archive footage and writing commentary. This module also features a two-day camera course.

Module 4: Pre-Production/Production

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

Module 5: Post-Production, Delivery and Distribution

This module provides students with valuable insights into the commercial aspects of factual programme production and the legal and editorial obligations of the producer. We also look at how to work with a distributor to exploit your programme post-transmission. As we'll see, the producer's relationship with his/her programme is only just beginning - television is a global business and producer's entrepreneurship and commercial nous is as important as the producer's creativity. This Module also includes a casting assignment, in preparation for the Graduation project in Module 6.

Module 6: Pitching Factual Programmes to Discovery (Graduation Project):

This final module sees students create their own programme proposal for one of the Discovery channels and then pitch it to a senior Discovery commissioner. To prepare, students will receive a briefing from a senior Discovery executive and hear from producers who have successfully pitched and produced shows for the network. What insights do they have into the tastes and sensibilities of the Discovery 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 pitch. One student pitched show will be 'optioned', securing £5,000 of development funding to be conducted under the supervision of a Discovery executive producer.