

Course outline: Directing and Producing Science and Natural History

The MA in Directing and Producing Science and Natural History is a specialisation within the broader **MA in Film and Television**.

The course takes students on a two-year journey of discovery; starting with the history of natural history and science programmes, through the many stages of production from brainstorming an original idea; to the finished film. As we progress, the necessary skills for each stage will be taught, with a strong emphasis on 'learning through doing'. At each phase, students should add to their film-making abilities, through teaching and practice, so that they will be confident, competent directors and producers after 24 months.

The course provides theoretical and practical support for students developing their professional practice. Their learning will be enhanced by screenings of a range of historical and contemporary science and wildlife documentaries. Theoretical analyses of these documentaries will take place alongside the intensive practical training, bolstering the students' abilities. The students will be encouraged to deconstruct the films, both their structure and style. There will be discussions about the nature of storytelling in film making, leading the students to formulate their own views and opinions on the subject.

Students will gain hands-on experience of the different skills required to make a film, including specialist ones that are key to the science and wildlife genres. Students will make films in both their first and second years.

Alongside lectures, seminars and tutorials, the course offers in-depth masterclasses and work experience to allow students to get 'their hands dirty', and to focus on industry practices in the genres.

UNIT 1 (80 Credits)

Part A: Science Documentary, producing a science story

(Year 1 - January to April)

The unit provides an introduction to making science documentaries. Students will work collaboratively to produce a short science interview.

The main topics include:

1. From idea to finished film, the production pipeline
2. Research skills
3. Recce skills

4. Film grammar, editing language
5. What lenses, which angles, to use and why?
6. Camera operation and directing
7. Lighting
8. Sound recording
9. Story telling
10. Writing a treatment
11. Conducting and interview
12. Directing an interview
13. Editing
14. Commentary writing
15. Post production skills, grading track laying and dubbing

Each topic will be introduced by a media practitioner and/or an academic.

Students will work in teams to make a short (less than 5 minute) film on a science subject, such that it could either be a stand-alone film or an inset item for a magazine programme such as the 'One Show'. The films will be submitted in April (assessed). Students will provide a self-reflection on their experiences and learning.

This module is compulsory for students on the Science and Natural History pathway. It is also open to students from Directing Documentary, Cinematography and Editing.

Part B: Wildlife Documentary, producing a wildlife behaviour sequence
(Year 1 - April to July)

This unit has 2 strands. It looks at the special skills required for wildlife documentary, and it takes students through the important process of pre-production for their 10-minute first year films. As with other parts of the course, students will be expected to carry out independent learning and hands-on practice to attain a level of skill required to produce a wildlife sequence. Part B also takes in the pre-production for Part C's short form film.

Strand 1

1. Wildlife storylines
2. Long lens camera skills
3. Macro photography skills
4. Time lapse skills
5. Sound natural atmosphere recording
6. Use of sound and music within wildlife films
7. Writing a treatment
8. Editing
9. Commentary writing
10. Post production skills, grading, track laying and dubbing

In addition to regular lectures and seminars by NFTS tutors, the teaching programme includes a range of talks by current practitioners and industry executives.

Students will produce long lens, macro and time-lapse camerawork plus a short long lens wildlife sequence and write a reflection on their learning outcomes (400 words). Assessed.

Strand 2

Preproduction and planning for science and wildlife documentary: informed by the study in Parts A and B, there will be seminars and tutorials on making a short form science or natural history documentary of 10 minutes' duration. In particular, there will be a focus on pitching an idea, writing proposals and shooting scripts, foreign filming, planning, budgeting, permits and visas, health and safety, risk assessments, customs and immigration, use of fixers.

Part C: Short Form documentary production

(Year 1 - August to December)

This unit is broken into 2 strands with students participating in both:

1. **Production:** Students will make a short (10 minute) wildlife or science documentary film. A presenter may be used to help convey a complex scientific subject. This project will be shot by the student using equipment provided by the school. It will be edited and finished by the student on equipment provided by the school.
2. **Planning and approval of 2nd year film:** In December students should discuss with their tutors their intended 2nd year film, and using skills acquired in Terms 1) and 2) provide evidence that it is realistic and feasible. This is preparatory work for the Greenlight meeting (year 2, term 1)

UNIT 2 (40 Credits)

Dissertation

As part of the dissertation module a number of tutorials will be arranged to enable students to explore a strand related to their specialist interest in greater detail.

The dissertation may take the form of an extended piece of film criticism or an original exploration of aspects of film culture, genre or form.

The length of the dissertation will be between 7,000 and 10,000 words, or 5000 if accompanied by visual material.

A 500-word proposal will be submitted in June of Year One.

A detailed proposal and suggested structure (2000 words) will be submitted in the first week of November of Year One. Students must complete their proposal in order to progress to the second year.

Students will be supervised by the Natural History Head of Department, with research support and/or advice from other Heads of Department. In view of the potentially wide-ranging nature of dissertation topics, support could be solicited from many areas of the School, subject to resources and time.

UNIT 3 (120 Credits)

In Year Two, students are supported in making their final films. This work is supported by regular tutorials with the Head of Department, Mentors and visiting tutors as appropriate.

Graduation Project (*Year 2 – January to December*)

The Graduation Project will be a film or films made to full professional standards, able to be transmitted without additional external input. It will develop work begun in the third term of the first year. Students can specialise in science or natural history or opt to span both genres in their Graduation Project.

Three suggested choices:

1. Those specialising in science will produce and direct a 20-minute film, filming with scientists, using graphics to convey complex information in an entertaining and visually arresting manner, plus support and ancillary material.
2. Those opting for wildlife subjects will produce and direct a 20 minute 'blue chip' natural history film
3. A 20-minute cross-genre film that breaks out of the limits of most current commercial documentary.

In the first term of Year Two, projects will be presented to the Head of Department for approval. The projects will be assessed both for creative application of knowledge, robustness of the idea, understanding of technical and other practical requirements, and the student's ability to deliver.

Part of the Graduation Project will be its successful documentation and dissemination, and on completion, an event will be held where projects will be presented to a peer and invited industry audience.

Compulsory for students on the Science and Natural History pathway, this module will involve important contributions from students from Composing for Film & Television, Sound Design for Film & Television and Digital post-production.

Meet the Industry

Masterclasses by industry leaders in natural history and science film-making will take place to inform students of the opportunities open to them after graduation.