

Introduction to the MA Screenwriting at Screen Academy Scotland, Edinburgh Napier University

The MA Screenwriting at Edinburgh Napier University was launched in 2006 and has adapted and developed since then to a point where we feel confident that it is one of the strongest screenwriting Masters courses on offer in the UK.

While the course is primarily for aspiring screenwriters, it is also aimed at those interested in script editing, script development and creative producing.

As part of Edinburgh Napier University, we teach in a modular system and you can find a breakdown of the course structure below.

In summary, the MA Screenwriting:

- Takes a **general approach** across film, television and other media
- Develops the core **craft skills** for screenwriting
- Advances understanding of **script editing** and **story development skills**
- Places its teaching and student work firmly in an **Industry Context**
- Introduces students to staff and **industry guests** working as writers, producers, directors and in script development at a high, professional level.

As Programme Leader, I am very aware that there are a number of screenwriting courses out there – at all sorts of levels and for all kinds of people. We aim to take on around 15-20 students each year (from around 70 applications) and look for a good mix in terms of age, gender, nationality and experience.

In recent years, we have welcomed students from Austria, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Lebanon, Latvia, Mexico, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the USA as well as Scottish, Irish and UK students.

The course maintains a healthy gender balance, with a wide age range from 21 to the over-50's. Students applying directly from undergraduate study should consider whether they might want to gain more life and work experience before applying.

The MA Screenwriting lasts for one year starting in September. Students may also choose to study part-time over two years. The full-time course is taught two days a week (Thursdays and Fridays). Part-time students attend on Thursdays in Year One, Fridays in Year Two. Most of the teaching takes place between September-December and January-May. The summer is relatively free for you to write your Major Project screenplay – there is no need to remain in Edinburgh as tutorials can be arranged via Skype, Zoom or email.

Screen Academy Scotland is one of only three ScreenSkills Film Academies in the UK, along with the National Film and Television School and London Film School. The MA Screenwriting is accredited by ScreenSkills (the UK government body responsible for training in the film, TV and audio-visual sector) until 2023. In addition, the programme has been awarded the Creative Skillset/ScreenSkills 'Tick' as a mark of quality, with an annual review to check standards.

As you will see, our screenwriting programme takes a broad approach rather than narrowing down on one particular type of screenwriting. Over 12 months (or 24 if taking the course part-time), you will develop a broad portfolio of scripts – from short 1', 3' and 10' film scripts to a 30' television script; you will also develop a project for interactive or new media OR you may choose the graphic fiction module. Finally, in the summer term, you will write either a feature film screenplay or an equally substantial pilot script for television.

On top of this you will also write script reports, market analyses, case studies, academic essays, reflective journals plus, we hope, as many other projects as you can squeeze in. Plan for a busy year!

In the past few years, we have seen the numbers of applications rise and there is genuine competition for places. Our students have won or placed well in prestigious script competitions. Some have got agents and are now working professionally. Others have moved into project development or other story-related roles and are working for companies across the UK and internationally. Many international students return home after graduation, taking skills and experience back with them.

There are a number of opportunities for project-led collaborations with producing, directing, cinematography, editing and sound design students on Edinburgh Napier University's established MA Film programme. These have resulted in a range of short films and the formation of longer-term professional relationships. MA Screenwriting students are not given a guarantee that their work will be made – however, we do our best to create a creative, supportive (and competitive) environment in which the best scripts will be written, developed and turned into production exercises and short films.

Buzz and word of mouth around the course and Screen Academy Scotland is generally very positive with an increasing number and range of industry guests coming to teach and work with our students.

Finally, we are lucky to live and work in a vibrant, culture-rich city with a world-class film festival. Each year, Screen Academy Scotland students are able to attend the Edinburgh International Film Festival at a subsidised rate.

Our website promotes our activities, courses and students. Please take a look:

www.screenacademyscotland.ac.uk

Programme Structure

This is the tentative programme structure for 2021/22 (timings may change).
Classes are on Thursdays and Fridays. Part-time students attend Thursdays in Year One and Fridays in Year Two.

Trimester 1 (September-December)

Thursdays 10.00 - 13.00

SCA11101 Writing and Screen Project Development

Module Leader: Nigel R. Smith

Tutors: Nigel R. Smith and James Mavor

This is the 'need to know' module in terms of screenwriting craft - a series of seminars on structure, character, formatting, dialogue, genre, theme, tone and the other elements of screenwriting practice.

The assessments in this module are based on industrial practice:

- *Script Report* (an assessment of a feature film screenplay in active development)
- *Coverage* (an industry report on the screen adaptation and commercial potential of a book, theatre play or other property).

Thursdays 14.00-17.00

SCA11102 Script Workshop 1 (Short Film)

Module Leader: James Mavor

Tutors: JM and industry guests

In this class you'll work alongside fellow students from the MA Film programme. You will develop a portfolio of short film scripts and screenwriting exercises designed to help you work out what kind of writer you are and what you want to write about.

The assessments here are creative and self-reflective:

- *Portfolio* of short scripts and writing exercises
- *Creative and Critical Journal* giving evidence of your own creative development.

Student work written in this module has won the top prize in the prestigious and Hollywood-based PAGE International Screenwriting awards on four occasions - in 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2015. Hopefully, you can continue this fine tradition!

Fridays 10.00 - 13.00

SCA11100 Business of Screen Project Development

Module Leader: Nigel R. Smith

Tutors: Nigel R. Smith + industry guests.

This module contains the information you'll need to know as a working screenwriter, providing an overview of current film and television industry structure and delving into development practices in a variety of sectors (f/e drama, sitcom, entertainment, documentary). The module is taught as a combination of lectures and seminars and visits from industry professionals.

The assessments here are analytical and should be used to explore your own professional interests in depth:

- *Market Analysis* relevant to your own areas of interest (e.g. low budget horror films in the UK; the 'market' for new professionals – screenwriters, producers DoP's etc).
- *Script Development Plan* for your Major Project - an early opportunity to undertake research, planning and development for the screenplay you will write in Trimester 3. This option is recommended for MA Screenwriting students. Or a *Case Study* on a particular professional in your own area of interest.

Fridays 14.00 - 17:00

Events, master-classes, screenings, professional practice sessions + tutorials.

Trimester 2 (January – May)

Thursdays 10.00 - 13.00

Subject to staffing and resources, MA Screenwriting students have a choice of modules on Thursday mornings. The Graphic Fiction module forms part of the MA Creative Writing.

EITHER --

SCA11117 Interactive Media

Module Leader: Alistair Scott

Tutors: Brian Baglow and David Griggs

The world is changing and screenwriters must adapt. Very few writers will make their entire living from writing for TV, let alone film. This module is designed to encourage our MA screenwriters to think about developing work for screens other than in cinemas and on TV. You'll look at games, new media, online, 360-degree programming, web series and a whole host of new possibilities driven by developing technology.

The assessment here is:

- the development of a new media project of your choice
- supported by a blog or other online activity

OR --

CLP11109 Writing for Graphic Fiction

Module Leader: David Bishop

Tutors: David Bishop and guests

Graphic fiction is an emerging medium where the best work uses words and pictures to tell stories in unique ways. In this module you will develop core skills for writing comics and graphic novels, explore a variety of techniques and storytelling approaches. Visiting speakers will discuss their processes and career paths, illustrating the range of opportunities and individual styles that flourish in this highly visual medium. You will be encouraged to forge creative partnerships, further enhancing your collaborative skills.

Thursdays 14.00 - 17:00

Events, masterclasses, screenings, professional practice sessions + tutorials.

Fridays 10.00 - 13.00

SCA11104 Script to Screen

Module Leader: James Mavor

Tutors: James Mavor + guest lectures

This is the most academic module on the programme – a series of screenings and seminars on genre, adaptation, screenwriting tools and technique. The aim here is to encourage you to think about what you are writing, not just in a professional context but in a wider academic, theoretical and industrial one. Students from MSc Publishing are offered this module as an option.

There is a choice of assessment topics in this module:

- *Presentation* in class (and written-up notes) on adaptation or genre,
- in-depth *Case Study* on a particular screenwriting technique (e.g. Voice Over) or the work of an individual screenwriter.

Fridays 14.00 - 17.00

SCA11105 Script Workshop 2

Module Leader: James Mavor

Tutors: James Mavor + industry guests

Building on the work you've done in the short film module, this class develops screenwriting muscles through the writing and development of a thirty-minute script through several drafts. The emphasis here is on television and students are encouraged to think about the different challenges and opportunities in writing for TV rather than film. Much of the work here is in small groups with an individual industry tutor.

The assessment here is creative and self-reflective:

- *Portfolio* of work to include a polished second draft of a 30' script
- *Creative and Critical Journal* (CCJ)

Trimester 3 (May – August)

SCA11106 Major Project

Module Leader: James Mavor

Over the summer months you will write your Major Project and final CCJ. While the majority of students choose to write feature film scripts, you can also choose to write a script for television (single drama or series pilot) or to develop a new media/interactive project.

There are no formal classes over the summer but students may work closely with peers and have regular access to industry tutors either face to face or via email and skype.

Although it is not essential that you stay in Edinburgh during these months, you are strongly encouraged to attend the annual Edinburgh International Film Festival in June (though as I write, the festival may be moving to August). It's a great opportunity to test out everything you've learned in the past year, meet people, have fun and to see films.

Final work is delivered in mid-August. Graduation is usually in the last week of October, alongside the MA Film graduation screening.

Staffing, Tutors, Guests and Visiting Lecturers on MA Screenwriting

Programme Leader Nigel R. Smith (Producer, Screenwriter, Lecturer)

Nigel has worked as producer, series producer, executive producer, development executive, screenwriter, script editor and story analyst in both public and private sectors in and beyond the UK (BBC, Scottish Screen, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Majestic FilmVerleih), allowing him experience of a variety of screen narrative development practices across a range of film and television genres and perspective on the varied activities of project producers and screenwriters.

Nigel is currently Programme Leader of the MA Screenwriting and Deputy Programme Leader of Napier's Kino Eyes European Movie Masters. He also lectures on the MA Film and BA Television programmes, and delivers the Academy's Continuing Professional Development screenwriting initiatives (Introduction to Screenwriting and Feature Film Courses).

As Producer, his credits include the internationally distributed sci-fi adventure sitcom series 'Intergalactic Kitchen' (BBC1) and multi-award-winning short films 'Cry For Bobo' (BBC1 Tartan Short) and 'The Return Of Peg Leg Pete' (Fox Searchlight). His experiences successfully distributing a number of award-winning short films led to him being commissioned by Scottish Screen to write 'You've Got It Made', a handy short film distribution guide still available via a variety of online 'how-to' websites.

More recently, he has worked for German company Majestic FilmVerleih with Oscar-winning writer/director Florian Gallenberger on an English language polish of feature thriller screenplay 'Colonia Dignidad', and is currently leading the Writers' Room of 'The Deep', a high-budget Baltic Noir TV series co-production led by Estonia's AllFilm, with Germany's Kick Film and Sweden's Bright Pictures.

Tutor James Mavor

A working screenwriter, James combines teaching with his professional practice. His work for television includes *Doors Open* (2012), adapted from the best-selling 'art heist' novel by Ian Rankin. This screened on ITV, starring Stephen Fry and Douglas Henshall.

Other TV credits include original TV drama *Split Second* (1999), starring Clive Owen for BBC One, and *Reichenbach Falls* (2007), an adaptation of an Ian Rankin short story for BBC Four. He has also written for TV series such as *Doctor Finlay* (BAFTA Scotland Best Series), *Redcap*, *The Bill* and *Monarch of the Glen*. In 2011, James wrote and co-produced a short film *Disco* with staff and students from Screen Academy Scotland. This won a *BAFTA Scotland New Talent Award*. Current work includes *The Pros*, co-writing with John McKay a TV comedy drama series in development with BBC Scotland.

"It is important to me to keep active as a professional screenwriter - not just for my own sake, professionally - but to maintain active links with the film and TV industry which can, I hope, be of benefit to our students in terms of my own knowledge and contacts. Some recent benefits have been sessions with director John McKay and agent Jane Villiers, and collaborations at various levels with students on a short film Disco."

MA Screenwriting: Regular and Occasional Tutors

The MA Screenwriting is taught in a modular structure with certain core modules shared students on other Masters students. This list here comprises tutors who have taught and worked with students in the past year.

Colin MacDonald (Screenwriter)

Colin is a prolific writer for television and radio. TV credits include *The Dunroamin Rising*, *The Gift*, *The Wreck On The Highway*, *Sharpe's Honour* and episodes in the series *Blue Murder*, *Casualty* and *Para Handy*. Radio credits include *Killing The Butterfly*, *Hill of Rains*, *The Colour of Summer* and *King Of Hearts*. Colin works closely with a small group of our students giving valuable advice on a one-to-one basis. In recent years, Colin has also run a workshop for students on Writing for Radio.

Aileen Ritchie (screenwriter and director)

Aileen has a rich background in writing for theatre, film and television and as A graduate of the NFTS Film Writing course, Aileen has written several shorts including *Double Nougat* for BBC Scotland, starring Pauline Quirke. She directed the feature film *The Closer You Get* and is currently Artistic Director of Ignite Theatre Company in Glasgow. Aileen works as a tutor with particular strengths in character development and dialogue.

Colin McLaren (screenwriter)

Colin works across television and film. His feature film *Donkeys* won a Bafta Scotland award in 2010 and he is currently developing a wide range of work for film and television. His adaptation of *The Legend of Barney Thomson*, directed by and starring Robert Carlyle, opened the Edinburgh International Film Festival in 2015. Colin works with students on comedy and sitcoms.

Brian Baglow (Interactive Media)

Brian has been bothering the games industry for some time now. His current role as the head of Interactive Entertainment for Revolver PR is perfect, allowing him to stick his nose into everything vaguely games-related and be enthusiastic about everything.

Before this, Brian was the official of Media Monkey/Policy Advisor at Denki, founded and ran the independent communications agency Indoctrimat, has also worked as the Screenings Director of the Edinburgh Interactive Festival, is a visiting lecturer at Napier University's Screen Academy and the interactive/digital media member of the BAFTA Scotland committee.

Previous roles include: Global Communications Manager for I-Play (Digital Bridges), UK PR Manager for Take 2 Interactive, Global PR Manager for Rockstar Games and three years in Propaganda and Indoctrination at DMA Design Ltd.

David Griggs (Lecturer Interactive Media, Learning Technologist)

David has a background in Visual Anthropology, Documentary Production and Web Design. He has produced and directed documentaries in Lesotho, RSA and recently has consulted in Web based productions for Health Online Project and JISC as well as producing a short documentary for Learning and Teaching Scotland. Presently he is involved in the production of 'Word Made Flesh' a series of interviews directed by Devlin Crow for the MS Society. He was the researcher for Media Masters Online and continues his interests in online pedagogy in his role as Learning Technologist. For the last 2 years he has been lecturing on the subject of interactivity, focusing on Virtual Worlds, Alternate Reality Games, Pervasive Gaming and Web 2.0 tools.

Visiting Lecturers

Some of the industry professionals who have visited MA Screenwriting in recent years:

Dylan Moran	Writer and actor on comedy
Kate Davidson	Writer on industry structure and television drama series
Allanah Langstaff	Development Producer, on entertainment formats
Andrea Gibb	Screenwriter, on Elizabeth Is Missing
Tom Kalin	Columbia University, on what makes a good short film
Ian Rankin	Novelist, on adapting Hogg's <i>Justified Sinner</i> for film
John McKay	Director, on <i>Not Another Happy Ending</i>
Ross McKenzie	Producer, Devil May Care Entertainment
Daphne Pollon	USA, on comedy
Niki Rooney	Writer on YA
Wendy Griffin	Line Producer <i>Not Another Happy Ending</i>
Claire Mundell	Producer Synchronicity Films, <i>Not Another Happy Ending</i>
Brian McGill	Orebro University, Sweden on <i>Groundhog Day</i>
David Bishop	Writer, on BBC's <i>Doctors</i>
Jane Villiers	Sayle Screen Literary Agency, on what an agent does
Ruth Underwood	BBC Scotland Drama development, pitching workshop
Cassian Hall	One Eyed Dog Producer, pitching workshop
Murray Buchanan	Entertainment lawyer on copyright and development contracts
Jemma Rodgers	Producer Kudos + Black Eyed Boy, on development
John Archer	Producer Hopscotch Films, on pitching
Carolynne Sinclair-Kidd	Producer Hopscotch Films, on development of new talent
Nada Cirjanic	Sales Agent, Protagonist Pictures
Mark Cousins	Filmmaker and polymath
Morag McKinnon	Director, on <i>Donkeys</i>
Sara Harkins	CBBC Producer, on writing for children's television
Lizzie Gray	BBC Producer, on <i>Waterloo Road</i>
Cameron Fraser	Kolik Films, on writing for animation
Prof Robin MacPherson	Edinburgh Napier University, on writing for documentary
Margaret Matheson	Producer, on low budget feature <i>Shell</i>
Lila Rawlings	Film Four and Left Bank Pictures, pitching workshop
Neil Duncan	BBC Scotland Drama Producer, pitching workshop
Representatives	Writers Guild of Great Britain

Students have also attended events at the Glasgow Film Festival, Glasgow Short Film Festival, French Film Festival, Play Poland Film Festival, Middle Eastern Film Festival, Moving Image Scotland, Scottish Documentary Institute and Edinburgh International Film Festival.

What Our Students Say about us ...

Amy Rich (MA Screenwriting graduate 2010)

MA Screenwriting graduate Amy Rich won the Gold Prize in the Short Film category in the annual PAGE International Screenwriting awards in October 2010. Her script *How to Tell if Someone Likes You* was written and developed in the Short Film module. Impressively, this is the third year in four that one of our students has won this top prize in this category - David Bishop in 2007 with *Danny's Toys* and Michael Cumes in 2009 with *The Romance Class*. Amy has moved back to London and is now having meetings with agents.

4-11-2010 - BBC Scotland Movie Cafe

Janet Forsythe: *So this Napier course then, this is the third time someone from the Academy has won this award? So is it a terrific course then?*

Amy: *(laughs) I did really enjoy it. It was tough at the same time - being all the way up in Edinburgh away from my family. And getting a load of writers into the same room isn't always the easiest of situations. I mean we've all got quite singular ideas, I think. The tutors like James Mavor and Nigel Smith were really, really good and, there's no doubt about it, I've learned so much from that course - I mean, one of my options was to take a year out and just sit and take a part time job and do my writing on my own. But I would never have come this far, no way. It's down to the teaching on that course that I've learned to analyze films, understand the structure, and what audiences want from a film, basically*

...

Chris Lindsay (MA Screenwriting graduate 2011)

18-10-2010

Email from MA Screenwriting student Chris Lindsay

Hey folks,

*Just wanted to let you know - my project *Starfall* (that I pitched to John McKay in class a few weeks back) has been chosen as a runner up in the 2010 Red Planet Prize. It means I'm being invited to mentoring sessions with the execs of Red Planet and Kudos in the new year. Am over the moon (and just a little bit terrified).*

Thanks for all your help and support in getting my skills up to scratch! I'll make sure to mention to everyone that I'm a student on this course :)

Also I was wondering - as John McKay has worked so closely with Kudos and encouraged me with this project - if you had any way of getting me in touch with him? No worries if its not appropriate, but as I'm going to put his Kudos tips into action I'd love to drop him a line.

Chris

A nice email

24-5-2010

Charlotte Yelnik (MSc Publishing student taking Script to Screen module)

Hi James,

Thank you for the most interesting feedback - really like the idea of the existential thriller as a sub-genre! The module was great, actually I think it was my favourite module this year - not only because of the subject (which was a breath of fresh air) but also (mostly?) I really enjoyed the way you treated your students, listening to them, helping them, giving them personal and in-depth feedback (especially when they can make use of it, such as before the next essay is handed in...) ... I think I can talk for the three of us, "publishers": coming from our course, this was most appreciated...

Thanks again,

Charlotte

Personal Statement by Anna Kumacheva, St Petersburg for MA Screenwriting application 2015/16

Exploring the websites of dozens of British universities and carefully reading their programmes, I found the Edinburgh Napier University that allows a really deep knowledge in the field of scriptwriting. When I found out that students of Screen Academy Scotland are taught by practising screenwriters, directors, production designers of my favourite British films (Dylan Moran, John McKay, Claire Mundell, Andrea Gibb, Mark Leese) I made up my mind that Edinburgh Napier is the university I would like to apply to. I also watched videos and read stories from the MA Screenwriting course alumni and was really inspired by them.

Garrick Scholarship Statement from Alejandra Meneses Audeves, 2016/17 graduate

Studying Screenwriting has been a goal I aspired to and worked towards for years, and to now be living it now is more than a dream come true. The programme has been all I wanted and more so far. I have been enveloped in a creative and collaborative atmosphere unlike I had ever seen or been part of, with brilliant classmates and professors who push us to question and better ourselves constantly.

The program is very close to the industry, and there is a constant influx of interesting guests who are ready and willing to share their knowledge and experiences with us, something I value more than anything in this course. A lot of other programmes lack this very close connection to the outside world, the reality of the craft, and are trapped in a bubble. This programme is constantly reminding us that there is an industry and a market out there, one that we need to consider when developing ideas. Such guests as Murray Buchanan, who went through a contract with us thoroughly, and John McKay, who shared his experience in pitching and development meetings were integral parts of our learning about the industry, and something that makes Napier stand out as a Screenwriting programme.

Not only that, but the programme has delivered all it promised in terms of a workshop environment and collaborative work, and then some. This way of working has not only enriched my ideas (and I hope those of my classmates) but also helped formed a close-knit community for us, where we are all willing to share with each other without apprehension, in a truly friendly environment when competition happens only with oneself. Collaboration in the workshop groups in which we work, but also collaborative exercises with other screenwriting and film students as well as our own MA Film Students. On the first trimester, I had the opportunity to write one of their collaborative exercises – based on a brief provided by instructors – and see it produced. Watching my script be brought to life has been one of the most academically and personally fulfilling experiences.

That is unique, and a far cry from many of the artistic communities I have been a part of or witness to. I believe this is in large part due, also, to the way the programme is run by James Mavor, Nigel Smith and Kay Sheridan, all of whom work hard to make this a creative, collaborative and hard work environment that allows us to be free, experiment and even fail, but never neglects to prepare us for the realities of the industry.

I have grown more, done more writing in the past four months of this programme than I have in the last 10 years.