

Course outline: Directing Fiction

The MFA in Directing Fiction is a specialisation within the broader **MFA in Film, Television and Games**.

This is a practical, hands-on course for students with some experience of directing who bring a passion for telling stories for film and television.

During their time at the National Film and Television School, students will direct at least three short films working with collaborators from other departments within the NFTS.

The course will focus on developing advanced skills and competencies in the core areas of Directing Fiction for Film and Television, including:

- directing stories using expressive editing, sound, image alongside spoken dialogue
- working with actors and shaping performance
- developing story and script in both own writing and in working with a writer
- interpreting text and learning to direct from a script you have not written
- expressing creative ideas with clarity and confidence
- effective creative leadership to enable the best work from collaborators
- guiding a creative team to deliver to a coherent artistic vision
- discovering and honing an individual voice as director

Through a series of workshops and masterclasses directors will also gain understanding of the professional industry contexts they will move into after the MFA.

Year One

Modules in the first 6 months see the students working closely with Tutors as they build on and develop existing core skills and prepare for more independent working through the Autumn of Year One and Year Two.

Joint Narrative Workshop

A four-day workshop for writers, producers and fiction directors. During this workshop directors will explore aspects of storytelling and find common language around story

development. Additionally, this workshop offers an opportunity for directors to get to know more about colleagues who will be key collaborators across the course.

“Springboard” Cross Specialisation Introductory Workshop

This week brings together new students from across the school for an introduction to the moving image, looking at cinematic and televisual language through the prism of storytelling. This workshop investigates how the main crafts of cinema and television - screenwriting, cinematography, staging, design, editing, sound and music - each relate to the way filmmaking conveys narrative ideas.

Visual Narrative Workshop

A course specifically for directors that introduces the elements of screen language. Through a series of short shooting exercises, we examine how the director's choices inform and shape the narrative. The exercises create both a more precise use of image as well as developing a further potential visual vocabulary available to each student.

Performance Workshop

This workshop for directors acts as an introduction to performance and connects it to the interpretation of a script through a series of workshops, seminars and tutorials. It offers an understanding of how to work with an actor to create and shape a performance.

Interpreting The Scene Module

In this module, directors work with students from Cinematography, Assistant Directing, Editing, Composing, Sound Design and Sound Recording departments to fully realise a scene from a set text. This exercise allows directors to concentrate on script interpretation and finding the language to bring the story to the screen in a clear way. Directors are supported to find the heart of the story and lead a team through the process of collaborating around this.

3DDDs workshop

Working with cinematographers and designers, directing students will devise a scene that has no sound or dialogue. Together they will build a set in a single day and shoot the next day working with two assigned professional actors. The workshop helps develop an understanding of the contribution of performance, lighting and design to the creation of atmosphere and drama of a space.

Performance workshop 2

This workshop allows directors to combine what they have learned about interpretation of text together with their increasing knowledge of performance. This takes the form of an intensive workshop to further focus on shaping performance with actors, both professional and untrained/new.

Without Words Module

This is an opportunity to make a short film with limitations on actors, time, budget, location and film stock. You will write your own script working smartly within these limitations with the aim of challenging yourself and collaborators to get the most from the resources available. This module covers the whole filmmaking process - from inception of idea to locked picture cut, through sound design and score. Directors will develop their confidence in offering creative leadership to a wider range of departments before moving

into the first-year film.

First Year Film Module

In this key module in the first year directors will for the first time be working with a full creative team and working from an original script written by a first-year screenwriter. Building on one of the writer's own ideas, producers and directors will work collaboratively with them through the development process.

Directors will be supported to learn good skills in working with writers and skills in directing from a script they have not written. As the production develops directors will have ongoing meetings with cinematography, production design and sound. The needs of the script will be discussed to determine whether the film will be shot on location or studio. The shoot itself will have the additional support of professional first Assistant Directors. Directors will have the opportunity to engage with a full postproduction process working with editors, sound designers and composers.

Digital Fiction Module Development

During the autumn term you begin development of scripts for the “Digital Fiction Module”

Year Two

Digital Fiction Module

In this module, students deliver a short film of approximately fifteen-minute-long film using digital technology and operating within tight production and financial parameters. Directors are encouraged to take risks, to draw on what they have learned in the first year, to challenge themselves to develop their confidence in expressive use of film language. Directors will again be encouraged to build their skills in collaborative leadership. In this module directing students will work with: Cinematographers, Sound Recordists, Production Managers, Assistant Directors, Editors, Composers, Sound Design, Production Design.

Grad Fiction Film Module

This is the chance for directors to bring together all of the skills that they have acquired to support a personal piece of work. The largest production that directors will make at the school, this final film sees them leading a team of fellow students to deliver work at a professional level.

Story development is the responsibility of directing and producing students, who may choose to work with a screenwriter from within the school. Together they lead the project through the complete production process; development, script approval, crewing, prep, shooting, and post. By the time they reach this module, directors will feel confident in exploring complex story ideas and using expressive audiovisual language which showcases the personal voice that they have been developing through workshops and earlier modules.

This module allows directors (and their collaborators) to create a showcase piece to take into the industry, while also demonstrating all the skills they have learned about leading a large creative team to deliver an ambitious production to a coherent vision. Directors will work with all the other MFA production and post-production departments on this film.

Meet the Industry

Delivered across several months, as a series of two and three-day workshops, MTI readies the directors for the industry. Directors will gain some understanding about the business of film and television, how to confidentially express and pitch story ideas, and they will also have a series of meetings with agents, producers, film and television executives and other leading industry figures to give a sense of possible avenues for their future career.

Dissertation

Students complete a dissertation during their course. There are two dissertation options: a written dissertation of between 7,000 and 10,000 words, or a video essay of between 15 and 20 minutes in duration.

The purpose of the dissertation is to allow students to undertake independent research, explore the nature of their discipline through working on a subject of their choice and increase their knowledge of the creative aspects of animation. It gives them the time and opportunity to think about and develop their ideas on the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of their work at the NFTS and to reflect critically on their own and others' practice.