



Screenwriting for Television

A team writing approach to creating a drama series

This course provides an opportunity for six writers to take part in a series of practical workshops to learn then apply the range of techniques used by writers, producers and script editors when developing successful television drama. At the same time, the practical objective is for each participant to write a 50-minute episode of a fully-formatted original drama series.

The course has two paramount priorities: to develop professionalism whilst also encouraging and liberating passion. If you are accepted onto the course, you will have to work within a clearly defined series format, observing shared rules about what can and cannot happen within that particular format. You will have to work to a strict brief and will have to meet the series deadlines, in the same way as you would for a professional commission. At the same time, your script should have a freshness, an energy and a clear flavour of your own original voice.

Throughout the course guest television drama executives, currently involved in developing new work, will read the work in progress and provide constructive feedback.

The course tutor is Philip Palmer, an experienced writer, script editor and screenwriting tutor. His television screenwriting credits include *'Heartbeat'*, *'The Many Lives of Albert Walker'*, *'Rebus'*, *'Back Home'* and *'The Bill'*. As a script consultant he has worked for a variety of companies including Enigma Productions, Columbia UK, Castle Rock, Zenith Productions, Granada Films, BSkyB and TVS. He currently teaches Screenwriting at the London Films School and the Northern Film School, and has previously taught screenwriting at the National Film School and Bournemouth University. His first novel was published earlier this year by Orbit, and his next two novels are due out next year.

Previous participants of the course have gone on to secure TV writing commissions. Here are some of their comments:

"This is without question the best course on screenwriting I have ever taken and I strongly recommend it to any writer wishing to focus on television drama."

"Phillip Palmer is an exceptional tutor who treats each writer as an individual, working hard to bring out their strengths and encourage their unique writing voice."

"The writing sample that I sent was the script I wrote on the TV Drama Series course at Lighthouse. So a big thank-you to Phil and everyone at Lighthouse."

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Course Schedule

All the sessions will take place at Lighthouse in Brighton.

Workshop Day One: 02.10.08

We will start by covering the fundamentals of writing for television series. Using practical examples we will discuss a range of issues including:

- Different series forms and models
- The distinction between series and serials
- What a bible is
- The importance of research
- Character biogs
- Storylining
- Scene by scene breakdowns
- Pacing for commercial breaks
- The importance of serial strands in series

As part of the selection procedure, you will have submitted a one-page pitch for an original drama series. This will explain the concept and the style/tone of your idea, describe the world of the series, and outline the major characters and major character arcs. In the afternoon the six different series ideas will be discussed and analysed.

Assignment: You must write a 10-page treatment of your original drama series. You will have to work to a tight deadline, submitting your treatment by **16.10.08**.

All the treatments will then be assessed and we will select **only one** series idea to be developed by all the participants throughout the course. You will be informed before the next session which series idea will be developed. This means that your series idea may not be selected as the one that will be developed during the course, and that if your idea is selected, each of the other five writers will be writing their own episode of your idea.

Workshop Day Two: 30.10.08

The group will reconvene to discuss the idea which has been 'commissioned' to go to series. The whole day will be given over to brainstorming the idea: the characters, the setting, potential storylines etc.

Assignment: To research the chosen idea then to write character backstories and episode story ideas for the series in development. All the participants will be able to exchange ideas in between sessions. If appropriate, the tutor and the group will undertake a research trip to an example location for the series.

Workshop Day Three: 17.11.08

You will report back on your research, discuss your story ideas and develop your character biographies. The whole group will agree which are the strongest ideas, characters etc. and you will work together to develop all six episode stories.

Assignment: You must write a 6-8 page first draft storyline for your episode and submit it for the deadline of **24.11.08**. You will be expected to read the storylines of the other writers before the following session in order to be able to contribute to a feedback discussion.

Workshop Day Four: 04.12.08

In the morning, the storylines for each episode will be discussed and refined.

Part of the brief is that the series developed should have stories which are largely self-contained e.g. *Spooks* rather than creating 'semi-soap' drama series which are mainly built up of serial, long running storylines, e.g. *Footballers' Wives*. But there should also be a few long running *serial strands* in this series, i.e. stories which span several or all the episodes. So once the self-contained stories have been sketched out, there will be a further session to plan the serial strands. One writer will be given the job of '*storyliner*' to map out the arcs of these serial strands

Assignment: To write a second draft storyline and contribute to the series Bible, incorporating character biogs, storylines and serial strands. The deadline for delivery will be **17.12.08**.

Workshop Day Five: 08.01.09

Feedback on the second draft storylines and the Bible from the tutor and one of the guest assessors.

Assignment: To write a beat sheet and a detailed scene-by-scene breakdown of an episode. Writers will be given examples of scene by scenes; these are tools which are used extensively in many series dramas, such as *Taggart* or *Silent Witness*.

You will be required to e-mail your beat sheets and scene by scenes to the tutor by **24.01.09** for feedback by e-mail prior to the following session.

You must also submit some written scenes by **30.01.09** to be distributed to actors for a scene reading session at the next workshop.

Workshop Days Six and Seven: 05.02.09 and 06.02.09

Now that the building blocks of the series have been put in place, we will run an intensive two-day residential workshop (accommodation will be provided), focusing on style and tone, and scene and dialogue writing. We will examine scenes and sequences of various series in the same genre as the one you are writing and discuss how to ensure a consistent style across the series. You will also receive intensive practical teaching specifically on the craft of scene writing by guest tutor Simon van der Borgh, as well as having your written scenes performed in rehearsed reading sessions with professional actors. In addition, an experienced guest writer (TBC) will join the group to talk about his/her experiences. For the last course, Mark Greig (*Life On Mars, Afterlife, Taggart*) spent a day with us providing an insight into the life of a professional television writer.

Assignment: You will now be required to write a 50-minute first draft script of your episode. The deadline for submitting these will be **05.03.09**.

Workshop Day Eight: 19.03.09

This day will comprise open script editing sessions on all the first draft episodes led by the tutor and the guest script consultants. You will receive detailed feedback on your work and will be expected to offer constructive feedback on each other's work.

Assignment: To write a second draft script. The delivery deadline will be **09.04.09**.

Workshop Day Nine: 23.04.09

Each writer will get a written critique on his or her episode from the tutor. The guest consultants will have each read two of the episodes and the bible and will attend this final day to give detailed feedback on the work. This final meeting will also be a chance to discuss the project and the process, and to debate any general points.

After this session you will be expected to deliver a 3rd draft for inclusion in a pack to send out to agents, producers and broadcasters.

Networking Event: 28.04.09

At the end of the course we will hold an early evening networking event in London to which we will invite agents and key television drama executives from broadcasters and from independent drama production companies. In addition we will invite participants from the previous four courses we have run. As a direct result of the course, several of them are now securing television writing commissions and we hope that you will find their experiences informative and inspirational.

GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

Please refer to the Course Schedule for details of the content, structure and dates of the course. It is important that you are available to attend the sessions in Brighton on the dates given and that you will be able to meet the deadlines between sessions.

COURSE FEES: Freelancers: £500 Non-Freelancers: £4,850

The course fees are subsidised for freelancers by the Skillset TV Freelance Fund. In order to qualify for the subsidised fees, you must fulfil **all three** of the following criteria:

1. Have had **either**:

- a UK broadcast (including radio), film, corporate, theatre or print writing credit
or
- a UK broadcast (including radio), film, corporate, theatre or print writing commission
or
- a script optioned by a UK broadcaster (including radio) or independent producer

2. Be actively seeking a commission from, or option by, a television broadcaster or independent television producer in the UK television industry

3. Qualify as a freelance in accordance with the Skillset guidelines. Assistance from Skillset is **only** available to:

- Those who are currently employed on a fixed term contract of not more than 364 days, **or**
- Those who are currently in employment but can evidence that they have been given a date for the termination of employment and will become freelancers, **or**
- Those who are currently unemployed but have previous professional working experience as a writer.

The following people are NOT eligible for Skillset support:

- Those who are on one or a series of renewable contracts as a writer with one employer in the industry lasting more than one year
- Those in full time education
- Non UK residents

If you do not fulfil the above criteria, you can still apply for the course but you must pay the full, non-freelance fee of £4,850.

If you do qualify as freelance you can also get support for your travel and accommodation expenses if you live more than fifty miles away from Brighton. At the end of the course, you will be able to claim up to £40 per night to the cost of accommodation and up to 50% of the cost of travel (2nd class rail fare, a set mileage allowance of 35p per mile or economy aeroplane fares where applicable). Taxi costs will only be reimbursed when no public transport alternative exists. Accommodation for the night of 5th February 2009 will be included for all participants who are not Brighton-based.

If you need any additional help with or clarification of these guidelines please contact Emma Basset at Lighthouse on 01273 647197.

THE APPLICATION PROCEDURE

To be considered for the course, you must submit the following **by post and by e-mail**:

- A one-page outline for an original series (not a serial) of six 50-minute episodes - this should explain the concept and the style/tone of the piece, describe the world of the series, and outline the major characters and major character arcs (this should not be a series you have already written). Please remember that a series is like Spooks or Clocking Off in which each episode has a distinct and complete story but the principal characters stay the same from week to week. Please remember that even if you are selected for the course, your series idea may not be selected as the series that will be developed during the course. If your idea is selected, the other five writers will be writing their own episodes of your idea.
- A 20-page writing sample, which ideally should be the first twenty pages of a script you have already written, but could be the first twenty pages of the first episode of the series idea you are submitting
- A full CV
- A completed application form
- A completed diversity monitoring form

If you qualify for the subsidised Freelance fee (see guidelines above), please also submit a **hard copy only** of each of the following:

- Supporting documentation to show your previous professional experience of writing for broadcast (including radio), film, corporate, theatre or print
- Evidence to show that you are actively seeking a commission from or option by a television broadcaster or independent television producer – for example a recent (within the last 12 months) letter of interest / acknowledgement / acceptance / rejection from a broadcaster or producer
- Evidence of your freelance status

The deadline for receipt of applications is 1pm Tuesday 9th September 2008.

The selection panel will assess the applications on the basis of the originality and production potential of the series ideas and the quality of the writing samples. Shortlisted candidates will be expected to attend an interview on Thursday 25th September 2008. If you are shortlisted for interview you will be informed by Monday 22nd September at the latest. If you have not heard from us by this time, you have not been shortlisted. We will e-mail you to confirm this. We regret that we will be unable to give detailed feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

Shortlisted candidates will be informed by telephone on Friday 26th September whether or not they have been selected for the course.

If you have any questions regarding any part of these guidelines or any aspect of the course, please call Emma Basset at Lighthouse on 01273 647197 or e-mail info@lighthouse.org.uk

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The logo for Skillset, featuring the word "skillset" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The "skill" part is in a bright blue color, and the "set" part is in a darker blue color.