



Course Description

Concepting Reality TV Course



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Concepting Reality TV

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Abstract

The Concepting Reality TV course aims at both students and professionals in film and TV, who want to learn the basics of creating formats for reality TV. Over 14 weeks, the students went through different phases of idea-tion, conception, pitching and documentation of TV formats. Professionals were mixed with students in small teams, usually taking the role of an experienced peer.

The course was held in summer 2015 in the Eliademy.com platform, through 8.6.–10.9.2015. The following description for the course was published in Eliademy:

Course Description

Ever felt a need of creating your own reality show concept? Do you think you could come up with something better than the shows that are on television? Now is your chance to do something about it!

Who is it for? For content creators and both aspiring and experienced writers, students of media, film & television

What will you do on the course? First, you will learn about the history and present of reality television through case examples and analysis. Then, you will create a reality show concept together with 1-2 other students.

Feedback methods: You will get feedback for your course tasks from your peers and from your tutor teacher(s), and you will read your peers' tasks and give them feedback in turn. Also, at the end session of the course, each student team will get feedback for their concept from an industry professional.





Depending on the quality of the concepts, one to three student teams get the opportunity to pitch their reality show idea to a seasoned professional producer in a live online meeting.

Requirements: Ability to read, write and speak reasonably good English. A television set, or other way of obtaining television content. A computer with reliable Internet connection and possibility to have an online video meeting.

What do you get from the course as a student:

- Where to get an idea for a reality show?
- Uses of a pitch bible
- The stages from an idea to a pitch bible
- When does a reality show become a format?
The difference between an idea and a format
- At the end presentation, you'll be able to pitch your idea to a tv producer and get feedback from them
- Taking transmedia elements into account

What will you have as a result after the course:

- A concept for a reality television series:
 - 1) A short pitch bible, as pdf slides or Prezi presentation
 - 2) A 3-minute video pitch

The course consists of seven lessons. As this is a mostly learning-by-doing and not a self-study course, each student should do the required tasks as punctually as possible. For their team meetings, the students teams can use online tools of their choice (such as Skype, shared documents in Google Drive, etc.).

The learning materials for each session were disseminated throughout the course with appropriate materials and guides for that session and the next. Each week tutors aimed to document and monitor progression of student teams and provide both technical and intellectual support.





Course overview

- 1) What are Reality TV shows?
- 2) Current trends in Reality Television
- 3) Methods for generating ideas
- 4) From idea to one-pager
- 5) Content of a pitch bible
- 6) Pitching a reality show concept
- 7) Presentation and feedback sessions of the teams

Collaboration Mode

Feedback sessions: Feedback sessions were held every second week in the Eliademy platform. Each team was required to submit their assignment(s) before the feedback session. During the feedback session, the tutors gave written feedback to each team, often resulting in longer chat discussions of the given themes. Each team was to give peer feedback to at least two other teams.

Carrying out the Assignments: Teams consisting of students and industry professionals worked together, with the aim of creating a professional quality reality TV show pitch and pitch bible document.

Synchronous Collaboration: Skype and Google Hangouts - to connect classrooms for mutual feedback and discussion

Asynchronous Collaboration: The video links and pdf materials were available for the students on the Eliademy platform page, there were also task-related discussion forums, as well as group-internal forums; Google Drive (pooling research, sharing learning materials); google docs (documenting the ideation process, collaborative development of concepts)

Live Q&A session with a professional producer

Professional feedback by industry professionals

Duration, Intensity & ECTS

The course was conceived to run for 14 weeks with a weekly workload of 6-8 hours for live sessions, watching video resources, reading and collaborative project work.

The participating universities awarded the course with 5 ECTS.





Platforms

The course was run on Eliademy. As this course was not implemented as a MOOC, you can contact the instructors for access if you wish to implement your own course:

<https://eliademy.com/app/a/courses/4e6a33af52>

Apart from Eliademy, Skype, Google Hangouts and Eliademy’s built-in video meeting service were used for live sessions during the course.

Methods

- Video Pitches as tangible project results and method of asynchronous presentation
- Multidisciplinary teams with both university students and professionals actively working in the field
- Blended learning with emphasis on the online feedback sessions held at regular intervals

Curriculum

The course by and large followed a bi-weekly rhythm to give enough room to creative team activities. Especially because of the non-trivial task of scheduling between distributed team members it was imported to not go a rhythm that is too fast-paced.

Week	Topic	Content / Task
01	Kick-Off	Each student enters Eliademy and introduces themselves; forming the multi-national student teams
03	Analysis of existing reality shows	Teams to meet and carry out first assignments: 1) List favourite/least favourite reality shows; 2) Compare & analyse patterns and structures of reality shows Online feedback session: tutors give feedback to each team, teams give feedback to other teams
05	Generating ideas	Teams meet and produce ideas for new reality show concepts; online feedback session with the tutors and other teams (all teams required to give feedback on others’ ideas)
07	Writing synopses	Each team writes a one-pager synopsis of three reality show ideas; online feedback session, after which each team decides which synopsis they will continue to develop
08	Extra session: live Q&A with a reality show producer	Live online video question & answer session with reality show producer Ilkka Hynninen, Aitomedia Oy Ltd
09	Starting the pitch bible	Teams start creating a pitch bible for their reality show idea; online feedback session for the works in progress





11	Finishing the pitch bible, starting the pitch video	Teams polish their pitch bibles and start making 3-minute pitch videos for the presentation session; online feedback session
13	Presentations	Teams submit their work: The final pitch bibles and links to the 3-minute pitching videos; Feedback session with the tutors and peers
14	Professional feedback	Teams get feedback from network professionals

Experience Report

Teachers' evaluation

At the beginning of the course, there were around 10 students enrolled from Nottingham University's Asia campus, but none of these students joined the study teams or indeed completed the course. The reason for this remained open; one possible reason could be time zone differences, as the online sessions tended to start and end at predefined times. The workload for the tutors consisted of designing the course (curriculum, course materials, interviews, communicating with the TV professionals beforehand, etc.) and of being there for the bi-weekly sessions and giving online feedback for the student teams. Also, tutors were needed with technical problems and for helping to solve some intra-group tensions.

Course Overview and Introduction

Learning Objectives (Competencies)

The course aimed to give the learner a competence in knowing what reality TV shows are, how they are structured and how to create a professional quality synopsis, pitch bible and short pitch for a reality show. All student teams completed the course and presented a valid reality TV show concept. The results varied in quality from satisfying to very good, although none of the formats got actually realized (which is the normal case with course results like this). From our assessment, the student all acquired the basic competency to develop reality TV formats.

Assessment and Measurement

Eliademy lacked the more refined tools of the Moodle platform (from which it is derived), which give the instructor an overview of how active a student has been on the course site. This made evaluating an individual student's course activity harder than with Moodle. Also, the platform could not handle grading group work. Though it is possible to accept





and grade individual assignments on the platform, groups would have to upload their results with each individual account. This is a reason why we did the grading independently from Eliademy. Forum activity was also not a useful indicator of participation, as it was for discussion with the instructors, but not for the individual teamwork, so it showed only a fraction of a student's engagement.

Instructional Materials

Material & Links

Materials consisted of verbose slide sets for self-learning, as well as recommended videos and literature links. A problem is that statistics on video use are not available when posting a link to an external video platform and it is not possible to upload third party resources to the Eliademy platform for copyright reasons. Students said they appreciated the videos, but there is no way to find out to which extend they were actually used in comparison to other resources. From our experiences, we reckon that the literature links were probably not very much followed in this practice-leaning course, as also most assignments were related to the process of format development.

Course Activities and Learner Interaction

Learners interacted with each other from Day 1. The course was designed in a way that encouraged the students work in and for their team, and it aimed at creating a feeling of a non-physical place where the teams would meet and interact with each other and the tutors. Discussions in the Eliademy forums had a comparatively slow pace, but usually with long questions and answers. The interaction of the professionals with their team members was sometimes irregular because of different time restrictions. Integrating professionals in a university course that spans a number of weeks is a challenge that could not be fully solved during this course.

Course Technology

The technology used was the Eliademy platform, which had slow user support at the time of the course. In the middle of the course, one of the teachers was suddenly not able to log on the Eliademy site with her full course instructor rights. The Eliademy user support person had his 2-week vacation at the time, which meant that there was a 2-week long pause in the course as well. This caused a lot of frustration both on the tutor's and the students' side. On the positive side, the consequent mail exchange lead to a deeper partnership with eliademy in the long run.





Learner Support

The teachers were there to support the learners, as the students could reach the teachers directly via their email. We yet tried to answer questions preferably on Eliademy, so that answers are visible to all students.

Study Materials

The students were provided with various study materials:

- A series of pdf texts on the subject, written by Carita Forsgren
- Literature links
- A series of short videos, edited from a longer interview of the Head of Formats for the Finnish Broadcasting Company, Pentti Väliahdet (Interviewed and filmed by Carita Forsgren)
- A transcript of an interview with Mape Morottaja, creator of the Finnish reality show Tuhkimotarinoita (Cinderella Stories) – interviewed and transcribed from Finnish to English by Carita Forsgren

All of these materials - or links to them – are available on the Eliademy course site.

Basic Links & Literature

- Bob Barber: Sell Your TV Show Ideas
- Melissa Caudle: The Reality of Reality TV - Reality Show Business Plans
- DeVold: Reality TV
- Holmes: Understanding Reality Television
- Huff: Reality Television
- Kavka: Reality TV
- Lees: Greenlit: Developing Factual/Reality TV Ideas from Concept to Pitch
- Alber Moran with Justin Malbon: Understanding the Global TV Format

Online Resources:

Joke & Biagio online resources on creating reality tv formats:

<http://producingunscripted.com/>

Joke & Biagios YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBRP7paWzzO7nTRmopXLvaw>

Writer/Producer Troy DeVold Shares the Secrets of Reality TV:

<https://youtu.be/fnjHEOYXsIE>

