SPARKS

Igniting ideas in film and media arts

Filmmaking Syllabus

Sparks Film School Filmmaking Syllabus
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Filmmaking Syllabus

The Sparks Filmmaking Syllabus inspires and rewards young filmmakers as they develop a wealth of filmmaking knowledge, as well as practical skills and creativity.

The Filmmaking Syllabus recognises the creative and technical learning that takes place as a Sparks Film School student of filmmaking. It assesses achievement and progression across a range of filmmaking skills and knowledge, awarding points to learners as they progress through their individual learning journey.

The Syllabus takes into account several different aspects of filmmaking, including directing, camera, editing and screen acting, with assessment criteria that spans several different filmmaking departments.

Included within the Filmmaking Syllabus are tasks that include different challenges across directing, screenwriting/storytelling, camera and photography, production design and art department, sound, editing and post-production, production crew roles and acting for camera.

Students can take both a generalist approach towards tasks/departments, or specialise in complimentary skillset areas to collect award points towards each level.

The Syllabus is structured using the Sparks Studio System (Studios 1-5) and uses the corresponding age range as eligibility criteria to each level.

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Assessment

Studios - Grades:

There is a Syllabus for each Sparks Studio.
Studio 1: Ages 5-7
Studio 2: Ages 7-9
Studio 3: Ages 9-11
Studio 4: Ages 11-14
Studio 5: Ages 14-18

Students should be enrolled into a current Sparks Studio. This can be as a member of term time classes, or as a participant in a series of short courses/workshops. Participation in special events is not included within the Syllabus Assessment Framework.

Students must be a member/participant of the corresponding Studio group, i.e. a Studio 1 Student can only be assessed for the Studio 1 Syllabus, etc.

Levels:

Within each Studio, there are different levels that equate to:
Bronze (Introductory)
Silver (Intermediate)
Gold (Advanced)
Honours - Studio 5 Only (Specialist)

To achieve each level, students must collect the required number of award points. Award points are attained through demonstration of separate assessment criteria, which is outlined in this Syllabus. Each criterion within the Syllabus is worth one award point.

Assessment is completed via portfolio evidence. Each level requires the inclusion of film productions or media projects, with a minimum of 1 project per level.

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Studio 1: Ages 5-7
Learning Outcomes & Assessment

This stage is all about building foundations in screen-based storytelling, as well as students growing in confidence and excitement about filmmaking.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of their journey as a Studio 1 student, filmmakers will be able to...

1. Understand and craft basic elements of narrative storytelling
2. Understand basic elements of film language, including an understanding of simple shot types
3. Express their own creative choices within the context of a film production
4. Operate filmmaking equipment in simple setups
5. Understand some elements of the creative process involved in making a film production
6. Understand the concept of film production crew roles to a basic level

Assessment:

Assessment is by portfolio evidence, requiring inclusion of a minimum of one film production/project per level and a supporting journal.
Bronze: 15 Award Points
Silver: 20 Award Points
Gold: 25 Award Points

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Studio 1: Assessment Criteria

Can correctly name the camera, tripod and clapperboard when prompted

Can film a shot/take using a camera and tripod, with support

Can verbally choose a shot type for a single frame using a storyboard

Can recognise 3 different shot types: a WS, MS and CU when shown

Can demonstrate framing a WS and CU through moving the camera into position

Can select a suitable position to place the camera for a single shot set up

Can operate the zoom function on a camera effectively

Can perform a scene to camera in an acting role

Can successfully improvise a line of dialogue in a scene

Can speak audibly and with clarity to camera

Can repeat a line of scripted dialogue from memory

Can demonstrate performance of a character through use of voice, facial expression or physical performance

Can demonstrate performing in a naturalistic acting style to camera

Can suggest a simple action for an actor to perform within in a shot

Can call Action and Cut for a single take when prompted

Can review a shot they have directed and reflect on their experience

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Studio 1: Assessment Criteria

Can verbally express their opinions on how a scene should look and feel

Can re-shoot a shot that has not gone to plan, implementing reasonable changes

Can call Action and Cut unprompted at the right times

Can communicate creative notes with other crew members

Can outline a simple story to the group

Can contribute story ideas in a group discussion

Can attribute at least two traits to a character as an actor or as a director

Can use the clapperboard effectively to mark a take, responding at the correct times

Can take on the role of camera operator effectively to film at least one scene using at least three different shot types

Can contribute to at least three crew roles as part of a production

Can name three different roles within a film crew when prompted

Can contribute to a list of items required for set dressing or costume

Can assist in making a prop from a variety of materials

Can design a costume for a character

Can choose an appropriate on-site location for a specific scene

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Studio 2: Ages 7-9

Learning Outcomes & Assessment

This stage is all about understanding the basics of film language and how a film production is made within a collaborative process.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of their journey as a Studio 2 student, filmmakers will be able to...

1. Understand different elements of storytelling on screen, including the application of different styles or conventions
2. Understand key concepts of film language and execute a range of simple filmmaking techniques in practice
3. Follow a Pre-Production; Production; Post-Production creative process
4. Understand simple concepts associated with each stage of the filmmaking process
5. Understand the responsibilities of various crew member roles, including director, camera crew and production crew
6. Operate filmmaking equipment successfully to achieve intended effects

Assessment:

Assessment is by portfolio evidence, requiring inclusion of a minimum of one film production/project per level and a supporting journal.

Bronze: 20 Award Points
Silver: 25 Award Points
Gold: 30 Award Points

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Studio 2: Assessment Criteria

Can create a story in response to a stimulus

Can recognise the key features/conventions of at least two different genres

Can effectively tell a story that features a beginning, middle and end

Can adjust the height of a tripod and adjust the angle of the camera unaided

Can record a stable shot through a single take without interruption

Can demonstrate how to shoot a wide shot and a closeup featuring at least one actor

Can recognise at least 5 simple shot types when prompted

Can demonstrate knowledge of at least 5 different shot types when prompted

Can execute a pan, tilt, or a track camera movement unaided

Can improvise dialogue in character throughout a scene

Can perform to the camera in a naturalistic scene as part of a pair or group, demonstrating effective reactions

Can portray a character through consistent use of acting technique throughout a scene

Can learn and accurately recall dialogue from a script for one scene

Can demonstrate consistent characterisation through use of voice, facial expressions and physical performance

Can use a range of expression within a performance to show a character's journey

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Studio 2: Assessment Criteria

Can implement direction or notes received from a director as a member of the crew

Can produce a storyboard for a complete scene, including a variety of shot types

Can follow a storyboard to film a complete scene

Can communicate creative notes to actors to enhance their performance to the camera

Can communicate effectively with camera crew to capture a series of shots as a director

Can create a story working with a partner or within a group

Can pitch a production idea to a group, clearly conveying the storyline

Can develop an idea for a story in response to a creative brief/theme

Can describe how their idea fulfils the creative brief/theme when prompted

Can devise and describe a silent scene that expresses character when prompted

Can describe the functions of at least three crew roles when prompted

Can work as part of a group to make a complete film production/project

Can demonstrate the setup of camera equipment, including a tripod or basic grip, correctly

Can successfully take on and perform the roles of Camera Operator, Clapper Operator, 1st AD and Director unaided

Can sequence a scene using at least six different shots

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Studio 2: Assessment Criteria

Can select a take to use from two or more choices

Can demonstrate effective use of transitions within a sequence

Can demonstrate an understanding of the function of editing

Can execute three simple editing tasks, such as adding clips to timeline, adding music to a timeline or adding an effect

Can add a transition and describe its narrative impact

Can use montage technique to construct meaning using three or more unrelated shots

Can design a costume for two or more contrasting characters

Can contribute towards a set design project

Can describe costume/set design choices

Can find and document two or more location options

Can identify the key features/conventions of two genres and discuss differences and similarities

Can talk about a film they have watched, and give a reason why they liked/disliked it

Can decode the sound from a film clip without visuals

Can show a basic understanding of a classical (three act) narrative structure

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Studio 3: Ages 9-11
Learning Outcomes & Assessment

This stage is all about developing an awareness of how film language can be used to create meaning and exploring different techniques to achieve creative purpose.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of their journey as a Studio 3 student, filmmakers will be able to...

1. Understand a broad range of filmmaking techniques and conventions in relation to film language and the construction of a film sequence
2. Understand different narrative patterns and how to effectively construct a screen-based story
3. Understand the responsibilities and functions of different crew roles, including how they interact and are interdependent on one another
4. Operate filmmaking equipment effectively to achieve a range of purposeful effects
5. Understand and execute some of the different artistic qualities involved in filmmaking
6. Understand the role that post-production techniques play in achieving a look and feel within a film sequence

Assessment:

Assessment is by portfolio evidence, requiring inclusion of a minimum of one film production per level and a supporting journal.
Bronze: 25 Award Points
Silver: 30 Award Points
Gold: 35 Award Points

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Studio 3: Assessment Criteria

Can use at least five different shot types appropriately in a sequence and explain why each shot has been chosen

Can choose an appropriate shot to convey status within a scene

Can use a storyboard to create a shooting script

Can direct a shot through the viewfinder/monitor unprompted

Can film a shot using green screen effectively

Can use light and shadow within a frame creatively

Can demonstrate effective use of three moving shot types as a camera operator

Can select a suitable shot type for a creative in-camera effect (eg dutch angle)

Can demonstrate effective characterisation in a sustained acting performance

Can choose an effective position for the camera showing an awareness of background elements and lighting conditions

Can show an emotional transformation within the presentation of a character

Can react appropriately to other actors within a scene

Can implement direction or notes received from a director as an actor

Can describe their character's emotional journey throughout the film's narrative when prompted

Can show thought and preparation has gone into developing their character and their performance

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Studio 3: Assessment Criteria

Can direct a full scene, maintaining a consistent directing style

Can demonstrate creative leadership as a member of the crew

Can successfully direct a camera operator to film implied action

Can use a shooting script to block and shoot a shot that has not drawn on a storyboard

Can give thoughtful and sensitive direction to an individual actor in relation to their performance

Can give thoughtful and sensitive direction to an ensemble cast

Can develop a story that has a clear three act structure

Can develop a story that uses a non-linear narrative structure

Can write a short script that introduces characters, including action and dialogue ("Scene 1")

Can adapt a scene or a story from an existing story or reference

Can describe the features of a non-linear narrative structure

Can demonstrate fulfilling the role of a 1st Assistant Director

Can plan and execute filming in a documentary style

Can plan and execute filming a pick up shot

Can show a basic understanding of a shooting schedule

Can demonstrate understanding of cutting the action when required

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Studio 3: Assessment Criteria

Can edit a full scene, including appropriate use of shot selection, transitions, non-diegetic sound and visual effects

Can edit footage that uses chroma key (green screen) effectively

Can demonstrate awareness of filters and visual effects appropriately

Can identify when it is necessary to film a pick up

Can demonstrate an understanding of precision editing on a timeline

Can show understanding of consistent design for props, costumes and setting within a production, following a particular style

Can design a suitable make up look for a character

Can find and plan suitable locations for a film's duration

Can identify the key features of five different genres when prompted

Can write a detailed review of a film they have watched

Can demonstrate an understanding of classical narrative structure, including the protagonist's arc

Can demonstrate an awareness of a film movement or artistic style

Can decode a still image or short clip based on their knowledge of mise-en-scene

Can recognise when cutaways have been used in a film sequence

Can identify differences and similarities between a source text and screen adaptations

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Studio 4: Ages 11-14

Learning Outcomes & Assessment

This stage is all about developing film-focused creative and technical skills, as well as finding individual voice and style as a young filmmaker.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of their journey as a Studio 4 student, filmmakers will be able to...

1. Express independent creative and technical choices as a filmmaker
2. Take on a leadership role within a film production, making individual impactful contributions
3. Understand and engage in every stage of the creative filmmaking process
4. Understand a range of stylistic filmmaking techniques, with an awareness of how to produce film in a range of diverse styles or artistic approaches
5. Understand and apply technical skills within several different filmmaking disciplines or departments
6. Operate filmmaking equipment, including grip and sound equipment, effectively to achieve a range of purposeful effects

Assessment:

Assessment is by portfolio evidence, requiring inclusion of a minimum of one film production/project per level and a supporting journal.

Bronze: 30 Award Points

Silver: 40 Award Points

Gold: 50 Award Points

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Studio 4: Assessment Criteria

Can demonstrate a practical understanding of the 180 degree rule

Can film a scene featuring shot-reverse shot technique

Can recognise the use of depth of field within a shot when prompted

Can demonstrate a practical understanding of the use of cutaways within a sequence

Can direct a scene featuring a range of shot types and maintain a consistent directing style throughout

Can demonstrate an understanding of the rule of thirds when composing a shot

Can adjust camera focus manually

Can create a shooting script

Can compare a source text with a screen adaptation and can recognise and discuss differences and similarities

Can change the focus within a shot for creative effect (pull or push focus)

Can successfully shoot a sequence that uses two different compositional styles or devices (e.g. frame within a frame and leading lines) and describe their choices

Can demonstrate understanding of how to correctly use technical camera settings effectively, e.g. white balance, aperture, frame rate

Can shoot a dynamic or complex shot correctly, e.g. trombone shot, invisible wipe, swish pan

Can demonstrate an understanding of negative space

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Studio 4: Assessment Criteria

Can describe their character's emotional journey as an actor, including how they respond to specific events

Can adapt an acting performance to suit a range of acting or narrative styles

Can describe or improvise their character's backstory as an actor

Can respond to and consistently hit on-set marks when acting throughout a scene

Can answer spontaneous questions in character as an actor

Can demonstrate an awareness of differences between stage acting and screen acting

Can direct a scene with two (or more) cameras in operation, maintaining a consistent directing style

Can communicate different shot set ups to a production crew/group

Can direct a shot that uses a specific depth of field

Can isolate key moments in a story in order to film a sizzle reel or trailer

Can demonstrate the ability to adapt ideas when things don't go to plan

Can give in-depth direction to the actors performing in a scene

Can successfully direct camera crew to execute a dolly zoom/trombone shot

Can demonstrate knowledge of mise-en-scene within a solo directed take

Can plan a story using a six sentence story structure and can discuss in-depth

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Studio 4: Assessment Criteria

Can independently develop a storyline and pitch it to a group

Can convey an idea to the group using a sizzle reel/trailer

Can independently write a short script in a chosen genre (max 10 mins, approx 10 pages)

Can create a pitch based on free writing

Can independently write a short script that features a clear protagonist and antagonist (max 10 mins, approx 10 pages)

Can take on and perform the role of sound operator

Can correctly log sound files to correlate with takes

Can set up and operate a gimbal correctly

Can describe the role and responsibilities of a producer and production manager

Can demonstrate an understanding of continuity and 'hot' sets

Can produce a shooting schedule and call sheets

Can edit a scene including dialogue that uses sequential OTS and shot-reverse-shot

Can edit an effective sequence using an advanced editing software (e.g. Final Cut Pro or Premiere Pro)

Can cut a sequence with edits in time to a piece of music

Can demonstrate an understanding of pace and rhythm within an edited sequence

Can effectively use a jump cut in an edited sequence

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Studio 4: Assessment Criteria

Can source or import a range of media for an editing project

Can detach audio and demonstrate how to synchronise recorded sound files

Can plan a comprehensive costume design portfolio for a single production featuring designs for at least three characters

Can dress a set to create contrasting settings

Can critically discuss a film they have watched in depth

Can demonstrate a detailed knowledge of four or more film genres, accurately describing similarities and differences

Can demonstrate basic understanding of the use of lighting and colour in film

Can demonstrate an understanding of the use of different filming styles (e.g. naturalistic, direct to camera/breaking the fourth wall, documentary, found footage, single camera or multi camera setups)

Can demonstrate an understanding of a range of cinema movements, e.g. impressionism.

Can create foley sound effects to accompany an existing film clip

Can teach teach someone a film skill

Can describe the lighting techniques that have been used in a reference film clip

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Studio 5: Ages 14-18
Learning Outcomes & Assessment

This stage is all about developing industry-relevant skills and advanced, detailed knowledge of professional film production techniques.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of their journey as a Studio 5 student, filmmakers will be able to...

1. Express and describe their own individual filmmaking style, with reference to examples of stylistic approaches or inspirations
2. Complete an individual film production project from start to finish
3. Understand some of the different career opportunities within film/media production
4. Operate a range of professional-standard filmmaking equipment effectively
5. Successfully apply advanced, industry-relevant creative and technical skills to their own work
6. Understand the role of a Producer, including the business and management aspects of film production

Assessment:

Assessment is by portfolio evidence, requiring inclusion of a minimum of one film production/project per level and a supporting journal.
Bronze: 35 Award Points
Silver: 45 Award Points
Gold: 55 Award Points
Honours: 65 Award Points

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Studio 5: Assessment Criteria

Can demonstrate a practical understanding of the 30 degree rule

Can block an entire scene for camera using a consistent crew

Can plan, shoot and edit a match cut sequence

Can film shots using both artificial and natural lighting to achieve a deliberate effect

Can demonstrate detailed knowledge of at least three camera techniques and can demonstrate correct use of them in context

Can demonstrate an ability to direct or shoot with a recognisable style through a sequence

Can demonstrate extensive knowledge of various shots and when to use them appropriately

Can demonstrate an awareness of how to film using a variety of lenses (at least 2) to achieve particular effects

Can set up and shoot using a three point lighting set up

Can effectively portray at least two contrasting characters in different styles of film, e.g. comedy and drama, as an actor

As an actor, can review and refine their performance in response to a screen test

Can demonstrate technical knowledge of acting for camera, including spatial awareness on-set and within a frame

Can run a screen test and act as a casting director in an audition process

Can produce a beat analysis for a character within a scene

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Studio 5: Assessment Criteria

Can demonstrate an understanding of what is required in a professional acting audition

Can demonstrate an understanding of further training and career opportunities for actors

Can demonstrate leadership of a film crew and creative leadership of an extended sequence as a producer, director or editor

Can demonstrate an understanding of how to break rules to create experimental work

Can direct an extended sequence or a short film production that shows a recognisable style, creative vision or conveys an artistic aim

Can take on the role of director for a full film production (duration 1-10 minutes) demonstrating a consistent style or approach

Can constructively critique a pitch and provide sensitive feedback

Can independently write a scene that features naturalistic, believable dialogue

Can develop a story idea from a visual stimulus

Can independently produce a short film script of approximately 10-30 minutes (10-30 pages)

Can independently produce a short screenplay (up to 30 minutes), which conveys their personal interests or point of view

Can provide script development suggestions to others

Can explain what film equipment is required for a location shoot and show that they are able to prepare equipment in advance

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Studio 5: Assessment Criteria

Can successfully produce a floor plan

Can successfully carry out a shoot on location

Can demonstrate the ability to solve problems and adapt their plans on a film set effectively

Can teach a short filmmaking session to others, featuring at least one technique

Can draft a production budget

Can correctly produce a production log on set

Can execute a floor plan for a rehearsal and a take

Can take on a given role for the duration of a film shoot

Can successfully manage a production budget

Can demonstrate understanding of continuity editing and produce an extended film sequence in this style

Can demonstrate a good understanding of how to use diegetic and non-diegetic sound in an edit

Can demonstrate an understanding of how to create pace, rhythm and atmosphere through editing techniques

Can edit a full film production of at least 5 minutes, including soundtrack, titles and credits

Can grade shots using colour work, including making changes with a single shot

Can combine and layer multiple audio tracks effectively on a timeline to add atmosphere or pace

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Studio 5: Assessment Criteria

Can create an effective edited sequence that shows a range of complex techniques

Can prepare a film pitch to meet a film festival brief

Can submit a film to a short film festival

Can present a film showreel or portfolio of work that includes references

Can talk about relevant work experience

Can edit a full film production of at least 10 minutes

Can show two contrasting edits that represent different styles

Can demonstrate an understanding of how to export films, including how to change settings for different purposes

Can demonstrate an awareness of chiaroscuro through lighting a shot

Can design and make/produce/source detailed props and costumes for a character, with accompanying research

Can effectively design and dress a set in response to a creative brief

Can demonstrate an awareness of a technical effect using makeup or costume items

Can execute full art direction for a film production, with a consistent style through costumes, props, make up, location, and set

Can describe the features of genre and period based production design, providing detail in similarities and differences

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Studio 5: Assessment Criteria

Can produce a film that references or is an homage to an existing film

Can demonstrate an understanding of cross-genre films

Can demonstrate an understanding of avant-garde and experimental cinema

Can recognise the use of a sound bridge in a film clip

Can plan and successfully shoot a long take, which includes multiple framing set ups

When questioned, can discuss the key features of their filmmaking as it relates to an understanding of their own filmmaking style

Can prepare pre-production documentation, including shooting schedule, floor plans and call-sheets

Can edit a sequence that includes a sound bridge

Can describe how to take care of their equipment whilst on location

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