

Film School: Is It Really Worth It?

I'm Oliver, a freelance screenwriter and copywriter with over eight years of experience in the film, television, and commercials industry.

I fell in love with film in my early teens. I'd often stay up late to watch one of the two DVDs my dad rented from Lee (a.k.a 'The Video Man') who without fail would turn up at our house at 6.30 pm every Tuesday. They'd discuss the previous week's offerings and exchange views for five or ten minutes in an informal, doorstep cinema club that continues to this day. Desperate to be part of that conversation, I wrote a string of terrible screenplays whilst at university. And a few more in the years after graduating. But once I had something that I was proud of I applied for the MA in Screenwriting at the prestigious National Film and Television School (NFTS).

Costs

I made it onto the waitlist and was offered a place when another writer dropped out, then set about trying to source the funds needed to pay for tuition. Back in 2015, this was an eye-watering £12,500 a year. Six years on, it's £14,800. London Film School costs even more and in the US it can set you back as much as \$50,000 a year. Fortunately, the NFTS prides itself on nurturing talent, rather than trust fund babies, and offered me a scholarship that cut those fees in half. How did I cover the rest? A Professional Career Development Loan, which like a Student Loan has a favourable rate of interest. Not that I cared. I was *in* and that was all that mattered.

Tuition

A few months later, I was sitting in a classroom with my nine classmates and our tutor - a working screenwriter with a list of credits on Hollywood films and UK television series. The first few months were gruelling as we were tasked with writing a new pitch for a film or television show every session only to have it picked apart by our peers and tutors. This criticism not only improved my writing and toughened me up, but also provided me with a group of peers who have supported and fed back on my writing in the years since. As well as the pitching sessions, we analysed screenplays, wrote on short films - both live-action and animation - and games. We then spent our final year writing two sample screenplays - a feature film and a television pilot - before being presented to agents and producers through a series of industry meetings and a showcase at the Soho Theatre in London.

Career Prospects

Off the back of those industry meetings, I secured representation with an agent at The Agency - one of the UK's leading talent agencies. In the years since, I've had projects

optioned by broadcasters, film and TV script commissions, and have amassed a five-figure income while working as a freelance copywriter/ghostwriter on the side. But it hasn't been easy and it's only really now that I have a level of financial security and am gaining a foothold in the industry. Some of my classmates have fared better, and some worse, which leads us back to the question...

Should you go to film school?

Like most questions in life, the frustrating answer is: it depends. First of all, I should point out that my film school experience is just one of many. And that while I can speak confidently about the NFTS, I can't about other schools. While the potential financial and opportunity cost of going to film school can't be overstated, I cannot begin to explain just how much my writing improved from when I entered the NFTS to when I left two years later. Some might say you would have got there eventually, but who's to say that I wouldn't have given up along the way as the pressures of adult life turned my dream into just that. **The truth is no film school can help you to become a better writer if you don't have the talent and commitment to improving your craft. But if you do, then a good film school will help you get there faster.**