

Editorial and production career map

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What is unscripted television?

The term ‘unscripted’ really means ‘without actors’. In truth, every TV programme has a narrative and a script. It’s perhaps easiest to think of unscripted TV as non-fiction television. It can be on any subject, from natural history, religion and music to dating, interior design and learning a skill. It’s programmed on primetime TV, daytime TV and children’s TV, as well as streaming platforms like Netflix and YouTube.

Unscripted TV genres

Entertainment

Fast-paced, visually exciting, heavily-produced and formatted programmes designed to entertain. Entertainment programmes are usually hosted by a known presenter. When they’re recorded in a purpose-built studio, they are sometimes referred to as ‘shiny floor’ because the vinyl floors reflect the studio lights. This genre includes game shows, festival coverage, panel shows, live music events, quiz shows, talent elimination formats and talk shows. Examples: *The X Factor*, *The Money Drop*, *Saturday Night Takeaway*

Factual

Television that documents actual events and real people. Some programmes are presented by known TV personalities, journalists or professional experts. This is a very broad category, ranging from current affairs like *Panorama* to cookery programmes like *Ainsley’s Caribbean Kitchen* and to children’s TV shows like *Nina and the Neurons*. It also covers documentaries, docudrama, observational and fixed rig documentary and survivalist.

Examples: *Planet Earth II*, *Stacey Dooley Investigates*, *Gogglebox*

Factual entertainment

Television that documents real events and people, but with a stronger entertainment element than serious factual programmes. Often hosted by TV personalities, factual entertainment programmes include magazine shows, reality, dating and makeover formats, celebrity and expert-

led experience like travelogues or learning a skill.

Examples: *Love Island*, *MasterChef*, *This Morning*

News

Presented by a trained journalist, who usually writes their own scripts. News from around the world is packaged into short bulletins throughout the day, with longer programmes at lunchtime and in the evening. Programmes are made up of live reports ‘in the field’, interviews with experts and pre-recorded reports.

Examples: *Channel 4 News*, *BBC News at Ten*, *Good Morning Britain*

Sport

Often technically complex (especially if broadcast live) coverage of sporting events, or analysis programmes discussing the sports action. Sport is heavy on action replays, graphics and unscripted chat.

Examples: *Match of the Day*, *The Big Fight Live*, *Cricket on 5*

The UK’s unscripted TV industry

The UK’s unscripted TV programmes are renowned all over the world. ITV’s *Britain’s Got Talent* has spin-offs in 68 counties and has been named the world’s most successful reality TV format ever. *Dancing with Stars*, based on the BBC’s *Strictly Come Dancing*, can now be seen in 42 different territories, while *Blue Planet II* has been sold to more than 30 countries.

Streaming companies like Netflix and Amazon Prime now commission their

own unscripted programmes. They have bases in the UK for their teams, following the success of acquired shows like *Queer Eye* (Netflix) and *The Grand Tour* (Amazon Prime). Unscripted programming is big business and offers the prospect of exciting and stimulating careers.

Who makes unscripted TV?

TV is made by production companies. Production companies are either attached to broadcasters – BBC Studios or ITV Studios, for example – or they are independent (known as indies). Production companies start the process of making unscripted TV by coming up with ideas for shows. Many have in-house development teams whose role is to do just that.

Development teams pitch their ideas to TV commissioners, who work for broadcasters. They produce a written programme proposal, known as a treatment, and create a short taster tape – ‘a sizzle’. If a commissioner likes an idea, they may provide a budget to develop it. The team works on the idea, often making a pilot, until the commissioner gives the show a ‘greenlight’ (or turns it down).

Once a show is greenlit, it can go into production. An agreement, called an editorial speculation (ed spec) is made between the production company and the broadcaster specifying the content, style, duration and delivery dates of the programme. It’s at this point that the production company puts together a production management team to do the organising, and a production, craft and technical team, to make the show.

Why choose a career in unscripted television?

Working in unscripted TV can give you real ‘money can’t buy’ experiences. You could be discovering the next superstar, meeting world leaders, observing pioneering surgery or having the best seats in the house at sporting events.

It’s a good idea to decide right at the start if it’s unscripted or scripted TV that

interests you. It’s not very common for people in editorial and production roles to switch from unscripted TV programmes, like documentaries, to scripted ones like drama – or vice versa. So think about which excites your more – drama or real life – before you begin.

Employment prospects

If you want to work in unscripted TV, it’s most likely that you will be working on a freelance basis for at least some of your career. Permanent staff roles are rare and tend to be for very senior professionals, or in other sectors like post-production and broadcast.

Production companies put together a team to make a programme – and then disband it once the programme, or series of programmes, is complete. Depending on the size of the production, you might work for a company for a day, a week, a few months or a few years. Expect to be in a job 70% of the time and looking for a job (or resting) the other 30%.

The joy of working on a project basis is that every job is different. Many people have long, rewarding and well-paid careers working in this way.

Routes in

There is no set route into a career in unscripted TV. Every professional you speak to will have a different story about how they got their first job. Here are some routes to pursue:

The vocational training route

Many broadcasters and independent production companies offer work experience, internships and training programmes. There’s a lot of competition for places on these schemes but they are worth trying because they can lead to long contracts at companies where you can learn on the job. Check out the websites and social media accounts of organisations like the BBC, Channel 4, ITV, Sky and Endemol Shine.

The apprenticeship route

An apprenticeship is a job combined with

training, so it’s a great opportunity to earn as you learn. The big broadcasters offer apprenticeships. Check their websites to see if they are offering them in your chosen role. Or consider taking an apprenticeship in a related industry so you can develop your skills and move into TV at a later point. There are apprenticeships available for broadcast production assistant, creative industries production manager, junior journalist and junior content producer. It’s also worth considering apprenticeships in subjects like accountancy, business administration and project management, as those skills are highly pertinent to roles in production management. For details of the apprenticeships that are available in your chosen role, go to [screenskills.com/careers-in-TV](https://www.screenskills.com/careers-in-TV) and click on the relevant icon.

The university route

It isn’t necessary to go to university to break into unscripted TV, but you might find it a good place in which to develop yourself and prepare for work. Why not take a degree in whatever subject interests you most? You’re likely to be able to use your passion in some area of unscripted TV once you’ve broken into the industry. Or go to [ScreenSkills’](https://www.screenskills.com/courses) Select list of recommended courses at [screenskills.com/courses](https://www.screenskills.com/courses) and select one in unscripted TV. We recognise courses where they have strong links to industry, so these courses could help you make contacts and get your first job.

The entry level job route

Try to get into an entry level job to get to know the industry and make your way up to your chosen role. You need to find out what’s shooting and start asking for roles. Subscribe to production companies’ social media accounts and browse for leads. Talent managers recruit people in editorial and production management roles. Find out who they are on company websites and contact them. Read the trade press. Register with industry agencies – but make sure you check the reviews first. Tell your networks when you’re available and upload your CV to company online databases.



Inclusivity
The television industry is committed to building an inclusive and culturally diverse workforce, welcoming talent regardless of age, disability, ethnic or socioeconomic background, gender, religion or sexual orientation.

Pay

Pay is usually negotiated on daily or weekly rates, depending on the role and production. Senior executives are usually permanently employed staff and salaries are often £65k and up. Entry level pay can start with the UK minimum wage. It’s a good idea to check out the rate cards published by Bectu, the media and entertainment union ([bectu.org.uk](https://www.bectu.org.uk)) to gauge what is reasonable in your role.

Hours of Work

Working in unscripted TV involves early starts and late finishes. Days are usually scheduled for eight, ten or 12 hours but there can be travel on top too. It’s rarely a Monday to Friday job, or even a five-day week job, so expect to work weekends regularly. If you need workplace stability and set hours, this is probably not the industry for you.

Networking

TV relies on personal introductions and recommendations. Increase your connections by going to industry events. [ScreenSkills.com/training](https://www.screenskills.com/training) is a good place to start. Do some skills training. Create your own content. Update your social platforms and let people know when you are available for hire.

What next?

Go to [ScreenSkills.com/careers-in-TV](https://www.screenskills.com/careers-in-TV) to find detailed information on each job role mentioned in this map. Or check out our other career maps. Go to [ScreenSkills.com/resources](https://www.screenskills.com/resources) to find our map on craft and technical roles in unscripted TV and our map of the film and TV drama industry.

Looking for further advice?

If you’re interested in a career in unscripted TV, check out these websites to find out more:

ScreenSkills, for information on careers and courses: [screenskills.com/careers-in-TV](https://www.screenskills.com/careers-in-TV)

Bafta Guru, career advice for games, film and television: [guru.bafta.org](https://www.guru.bafta.org)

BBC Academy, training and development for the BBC and wider industry: [bbc.co.uk/academy](https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy)

Royal Television Society, bursaries, jobs and training schemes in the TV industry: [rts.org.uk/education-training](https://www.rts.org.uk/education-training)

Bectu, the media and entertainment union: [bectu.org.uk](https://www.bectu.org.uk)

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Second edition (2018) written and produced by Jo Ind

First edition (2010) written and produced by Jude Winstanley

Design by Dave Gray ([iamdavegray.com](https://www.iamdavegray.com))

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Development

Development producer

Is a wizard at coming up with ideas for TV programmes and goes on to get them successfully commissioned. Development producers know broadcasters and their audiences and write crucial treatments. They are skilled at creating short-form videos (sizzle tapes) that sell the idea visually. Confident pitching to clients, they are persuasive with good judgement.

Development assistant producer

Generates programme ideas, researching all kinds of subjects, getting access to people, places and industries and responding to briefs. Development assistant producers have good technical knowledge and can operate basic cameras, lights, audio and editing packages to create casting tapes (they are still called ‘tapes’) and visual references.

Development researcher

Researches ideas for programmes. Development researchers check facts and condense information. They are good on the phone and on a computer. They work to briefs and write engaging copy. Development researchers are often relied upon to be the ‘voice of youth’ in the team.

Production management

Production executive

Works in medium-sized companies where there are a number of projects in production. Production executives oversee several projects at one time. They set up each new programme, preparing and finalising budgets. They prepare contracts between themselves and the broadcaster (editorial specifications) and with presenters and agents. They support and troubleshoot.

Line producer

Oversees one large production at a time. Line producers manage budgets, recruitment, insurance, health and safety and access to locations. They set up shoots and studios and source equipment and suppliers. Line producers are senior production managers. On very large shows, they might employ production managers to look after filming or post-production.

Production manager

Production manager

Manages the day-to-day running of a production. Production managers ensure all bills are paid, supervise call sheets and manage music and archive clearance. They oversee location searches, get permits and look after location, contributor and copyright releases. On large productions they work to a line producer, but on smaller productions they work directly to the production executive.

Script supervisor

Doesn’t write scripts. Script supervisors ensure all elements of the programme are included in the shoot. They prepare scripts, running orders, shot information and VT (videotape) clips. Sitting next to the director during shooting, they manage timings, perform countdowns and check all elements are standing by. They are good at counting backwards.

Production coordinator

Does a lot of admin support in the office, but also goes on to set and location. Production coordinators sort out travel and accommodation. They deal with work permits and visas. They create call sheets, check invoices and make sure the necessary rights to music have been obtained. They also monitor diversity.

Production assistant

Supports the production coordinator and production manager. Production assistants order stationery supplies, organise couriers, draw up timesheets and release forms, process invoices, research travel and take notes at meetings. If there’s no production coordinator, production assistants work directly to the production manager.

Talent management

Talent manager

Finds the right people to work in editorial and production management roles. Talent managers are often senior or series producers with experience in hiring teams for productions. They have many contacts built up over time but are also passionate about making new ones. In some companies, they negotiate rates and terms and issue contracts. They are also known as talent executives, depending on their level of experience in programme making and the size of the company.

Talent assistant

Helps the talent manager by processing emails, screening calls and arranging interviews. Talent assistants are often the gatekeepers to senior staff. They may also fulfil admin tasks and prepare contracts. They need to be good with databases and spreadsheets, communication and prioritising. They don’t need a great deal of production experience at this level.

Editorial

Series producer

Is responsible for the content of an entire series of programmes. Series producers ensure the programmes are being made according to the contract. They manage the team and make content decisions on key elements like music, graphics, title sequences, scripts and edits. On daily, magazine-style programmes, this role is known as series editor.

Producer

Manages the editorial details. This could be anything from writing ideas for games, finding celebrities to take part and setting up shooting locations and props to deciding what will make the final cut, managing shooting activity, writing scripts, selecting music and recruiting other freelancers.

Series director

Is responsible for an entire series of programmes. Series directors define the style of a series and share the artistic vision. On long running shows, they often pass the day-to-day work of directing each episode on to another director. They are ultimately responsible for the look of a series and have the last word.

Director

Visualises and defines the style and structure of a programme and then works out how to achieve it, whether for a multi-camera studio or a single-camera programme. Directors instruct presenters and crew including cameras, sound and lighting. They have exceptional artistic vision and strong leadership.

Producer director

Does the work of a producer in creating the content of a programme and managing a team, and the work of a director in directing the contributors and

technical crew. Sometimes, producer directors shoot as well. They tend to work on small, single camera-style programmes, but can work on big shows too.

Assistant producer

Despite the name, is not an assistant to a producer although they are briefed and managed by producers. Assistant producers (APs) have their own areas of responsibility. They take on many of the tasks of a producer, but don’t have the final say on big decisions. Shooting APs produce and direct their own packages. They can write scripts, shoot on a variety of cameras and edit their films as well.

Researcher

Spends a lot of time on the phone finding locations, props and people to be on camera. Researchers are briefed and managed by producers. They have lots of good ideas and organise travel and access to places. Researchers read, listen, fact-check and condense information into small chunks for producer, directors and production managers.

Producer specialisms

Celebrity producer

Knows of the most popular (or infamous) actors, singers, presenters, filmmakers, authors and artists – but also politicians, sports personalities, reality TV stars and activists. Celebrity producers are clued up on what activities these well-known figures do outside their usual jobs. They are also well-connected to agents. They select, pitch and secure individuals and negotiate contracts.

Archive producer

Sources and acquires content that’s already been made. This can include news footage, viral videos, commercials, overseas programmes, film and music clips and published text – anything to illustrate a point. Archive producers negotiate rates and terms to acquire clearance (permission) for use in the programme. It’s important to get the correct permissions or else the programme makers can be sued.

Casting producer

Finds the people to appear in a programme, whether that be members of the public or professional experts. Casting producers cast according to the editorial brief. They know a lot about where to find people with particular interests, abilities or

cultures and know if someone will be good on telly. They pitch their potential cast to the series and executive producers.

Digital producer

Is responsible for the digital media and the digital strategy to attract and engage audiences. Digital producers’ work can include developing stand-alone content, re-cutting popular sequences for shareable short-form videos, live tweeting and producing polls for the main show. They have technical skills and understand digital platforms and trends.

Edit producer

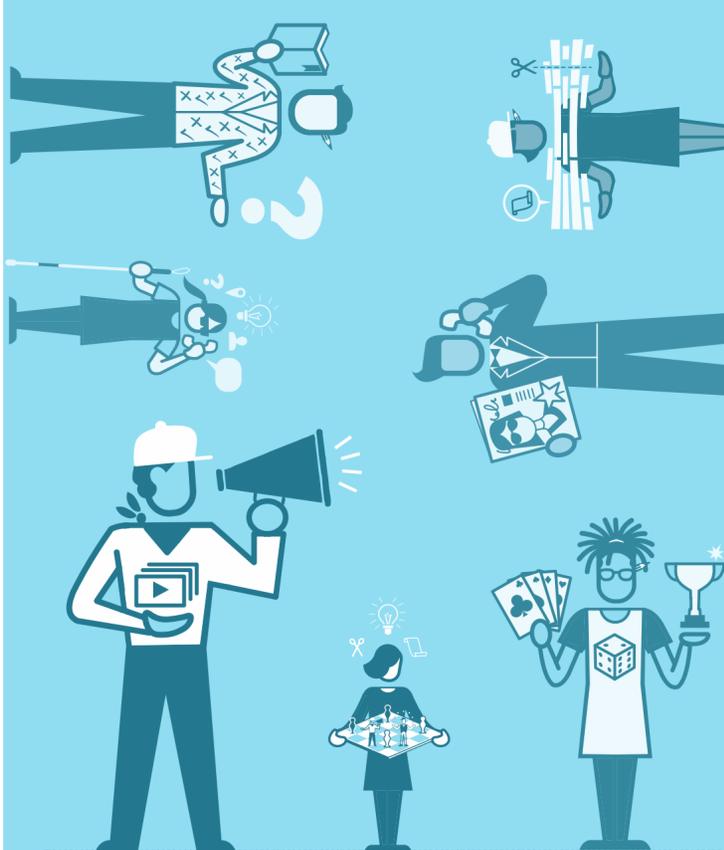
Works in post-production and specialises in cutting material often produced and directed by someone else. Edit producers are very experienced either as producers, directors or both. They work with the editor to create a programme from rushes (raw video material). They cut the programme to time, write the script and liaise with production managers regarding any use of archive or copyright material.

Question producer

Is responsible for writing and verifying questions for game and quiz show formats. They have an excellent command of language and can structure increasingly difficult question rounds. With a wide general knowledge, they know where to go to verify facts, verify answers given by players and tally the results.

Games producer

Comes up with ideas and creates activities for entertainment programmes. Games are used as a device leading to another outcome, such as elimination, immunity from eviction or prizes. Games producers often work closely with an art department to visualise the activity. They create and manage risk assessments, explain the game-play in the script and tally the results.



Careers in unscripted television Editorial and production