What is unscripted television?

The term ‘unscripted’ really means ‘without actors’. In truth, every TV programme has at least a few actors and it would be unwise 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. When you consider that most programmes are filmed in a studio or on a single set, it is surprising that the television genres such as 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 heavily formatted and driven by a concept. With a purpose-built studio, they are configured to be filmed in one take so that the audience can see the reactions of the participants. If the becomes boring, the floor director signals the crew to replay the action in slow motion before returning it to the studio audience. Despite their format, these programmes often have a lot of flexibility, particularly in the areas of technical and creative work.

Television that documents actual events

Saturday Night Takeaway

Programmes are usually hosted by a professional presenter who may also be involved in the writing or directing of some segments. The programmes are usually divided into sections that are likely to begin with a segment of unscripted chat followed by a game, a feature or a historical/celebrity quiz. These programmes are shot on location and in a studio with a live audience and the professional presenters work well, even when the dialogue is pre-taped off air. Due to the amount of flexible time available, it is important that the programme maker has enough help on the production team to manage the unscripted chat and the technical tasks, all the time listening to the sound. In unscripted TV, you will contribute more to the artistry of the shots.

Unscripted TV genres

Unscripted TV genres

Technique

Studio floor.

Professional lighting camera operators, lighting designers, sound engineers and camera operators all contribute to the technical tasks of unscripted TV. The programmes are usually made with a single camera, with the production team working on set with the camera to ensure the action is seen from the right angle and the audience is made aware of the programme’s budget.

Unscripted TV genres

Sound

Sound operators.

With digital photography. On some productions there are very few fixed cameras and the sound operators need to work with the technical team to ensure the action is heard from the right angle and the audience is made aware of the programme’s budget, particularly if the action is not visible on screen.

Unscripted TV genres

Camera

With digital photography. On some productions there are very few fixed cameras and the sound operators need to work with the technical team to ensure the action is heard from the right angle and the audience is made aware of the programme’s budget, particularly if the action is not visible on screen.

Technical decisions

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