

# NEXTGEN: HNC TELEVISION



## META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

Practitioners' reflections and advice  
on incorporating meta-skills.

# NEXTGEN: HNC TELEVISION — META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

We asked subject-specialist writers with experience of delivering meta-skills in NextGen: HN Qualifications to write a 'Meta-skills in practice' guide, giving us a sense of how they approach the integration of meta-skills within course delivery. In this way, practitioners could share real-life insights, practical advice and examples with course teams who are new to NextGen Qualifications and meta-skills.

Alec, a lecturer in Film and TV, explained in their words how the course team at their college contextualise, integrate, and assess engagement with meta-skills within NextGen: HNC Television.

## TOP TIPS

- Do as much group work as you can so that learners experience different social dynamics and you can see how they react. (Self-management and social intelligence.)
- Mix up the way you arrange teams in group work. Being random and strategic keeps each class fresh. Varying the size of teams helps with this as well, and small teams have less space to hide in! (Social intelligence and innovation.)
- Suggest they switch roles as much as possible to encourage peer support, help learning, and keep the students on their toes. (Self-management, social intelligence and innovation.)
- Remind the students about meta-skills throughout the year and give them regular feedback, so that they know where they are and you do too. (Self-management.)
- Pair up students who are struggling socially with class 'elders' or more socially comfortable students to help them feel included. (Self-management and social intelligence.)
- Encourage a multi-modal approach and use a VLE that can support it (like Teams). An empty page can be scary for some students – video has become the media of their generation. (Self-management and innovation.)

## META-SKILLS IN TELEVISION

Give us a general introduction to meta-skills within the context of your subject area.

A recent Screen Scotland survey sees the film and television industry adding £567.6m to Scotland's economy, and providing 10,280 jobs. When students see the evidence of all the high-profile shoots and new sound stages and studios being built in the country, it's a huge motivator. In my opinion, the timing of the NextGen pilot and the opportunity to develop meta-skills couldn't be better for young people wanting to work in the industry.

Fundamental to getting a job in any industry is not only the practical, technical, theoretical aspects of a role, but also the interpersonal and professional behaviours that help you to be seen as reliable, hardworking and trustworthy. These are the skills that help you build up a reputation, and ensure you are more likely to have opportunities to grow and be successful.

“...[meta-skills are] the interpersonal and professional behaviours that help you to be seen as reliable, hardworking, and trustworthy.”

Sure, there are a few jobs out there where you can get around this to some extent. But, in the area I teach — filmmaking and the creative industries — it's hard to have a decent career, network and pipeline of meaningful employment without having decent meta-skills.

In my experience, good communication, networking, and being open to collaboration are key in making a project work. Being on the same wavelength as the people you work with is a huge plus. Sharing the same creative vision, working hard and doing your best can drive a project, even if you don't like the person(s) you are working with.

## **INTRODUCING META-SKILLS**

How do you help learners to buy in to meta-skills and understand their relevance?

We start introducing the concept of meta-skills at induction. We talk about getting the students 'set ready': explaining what we expect from them in terms of attendance, engagement, behaviour and meeting deadlines. And we tell them what they can expect of us in terms of resources, assignments, feedback, teaching approaches and assessment. As part of this, we spend time outlining how meta-skills are embedded throughout their group work, individual work and assignments; how we grade them; and why they are important.

Early on, students complete a Myers-Briggs personality test and a VARK learning styles questionnaire. When they share the results with the class, it gives the teaching staff and the other students a good idea of potential class dynamics and the best teaching approaches.

## **DEVELOPING META-SKILLS**

Tell us about your experiences, hindsight and future plans. Where do meta-skills fit most naturally in your course delivery?

## **META-SKILLS AND GROUP DYNAMICS**

Understanding meta-skills and engaging in group work isn't easy for every student. We pair up students who are struggling at the beginning in the hope that they find a common interest, or group them in a way where they are more supported by natural leaders of the class. Smaller teams can help here too, as there is less space for students to 'hide' during a project.

It can take some students a long time to be comfortable in group work. Others can get

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too comfortable and try and take over projects. Balancing all the personalities is the main challenge. You want everyone to have fun, be comfortable, retain the information you give them, and to be engaged in the process. And you want them to learn how to act, work, and communicate effectively. Keeping the group

formation unpredictable, rotating roles, and not being afraid to mix it up — ultimately being adaptable, I think — helps disrupt cliques and puts everyone in the same boat in each class.

## **USING REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS**

During the first semester we highlight the importance of group work — that there really is ‘no ‘I’ in team’ on a crew, and that filmmaking is a team sport. Being able to work in sync with the others on your crew is key to getting the best out of what you have, collectively, to make a good film. It’s important that the students understand this, how it relates to the real working world, and that the best way for them to hone these skills is through practice. Although we focus on group work in the first semester, there are opportunities for individual successes in different roles on those projects.

Learning different roles on a crew and being able to navigate different social dynamics requires lots of practice with different scenarios. We use different ways of teaching that fit with the class preferences, including mixing visual examples, written/auditory instructions, and scenario-based learning. (All materials are stored on our VLE (Teams) for future reference).

Tasks can be lecturer-led (to show by example) and student-led (to learn through shared experience). For example, we might start with a presentation about how to use different camera lenses for different types of shots, then move on to an equipment tutorial on handling a camera. Depending on the situation, this would involve a range of meta skills including self-management (focus, time-management), social intelligence (working with other people) and innovation (problem solving and being adaptable).

## WHAT WENT WELL, WHAT DIDN'T AND WHAT CAN WE IMPROVE

The peer review is an important class activity. This is where we promote discussion with leading questions and commentary on the group work. We highlight good work and practice and identify issues and possible failures. And, hopefully, we end the class on a high, with students heading home with a sense of having completed something.

During these tasks, students use their meta-skills — probably without knowing it — calling on their listening skills, their ability to focus and pay attention, and demonstrating curiosity for the subject. They develop sense-making and discussion skills during the first and second task, while the last task challenges how they retain information. The project requires a creative response

through group work — involving working with others towards a common goal, peer learning, and problem solving; and reflection

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and critical thought. Both lecturer-led and student-led projects are important for meta-skills development. While the first is organised, driven by teaching from example, the latter leaves the students with a sense of creative freedom and gives them the chance to practice what they have learned.

Feedback — encouraging and motivating students before, during, and after the project(s) — is, for me, an important aspect of the process. I think students need to know how they are getting on and that you support them. Without encouragement or feedback they can become lost and demotivated.

## LEARNER EXPERIENCE

Once the students get the formula of the classes, they are more prepared for the group activities and potential group dynamics — which are not without drama! We basically throw different personalities together to see what works (or what doesn't work). These instances of drama and dysfunction are learning opportunities for the students to note, reflect on and work on, and are likely to incorporate many of the meta-skills that come under social intelligence.

The first assessed group activity of the HNC — the Film Noir Trailer — always involves

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conflict, usually over the creative vision of the project, commentary of others' work rate, or just a mix of personalities. As soon as you

say 'assignment' or 'test', stress that wasn't there in the weeks before affects how some students function in a group. This, in itself, is interesting to note and can be highlighted as an area that they should work on going forward.

Once the students go through this process, they have a better understanding of their overall skills, and those of their classmates. They should know who's excellent on camera, who's a decent sound op, who's reliable, and who they would like to work with but maybe haven't had the chance yet. It helps them find the right dynamic for their own project: the semester 2 short film.

## GENERATING ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

We've produced guidance around the assessment of meta-skills. There's quite a lot of flexibility around assessment evidence. Can you give us a sense of what you've been doing in this space?

At the beginning of the course, students complete an initial meta-skills self-assessment, and set goals. This gives them a base from which they can reflect on how much they develop throughout the year.

## REFLECTIVE PROCESS

The students start their reflections with an 'about me' post — their first entry into a reflective journal — in response to the findings of the personality tests we get them to do early on. We ask them to update their journal weekly (or at least fortnightly) over the length of the course. They can pick what format suits them best, giving them the chance to use a

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'whatever works for you' multi-modal approach. Most students include written additions, though video additions and voice notes have become more popular. Suggesting different approaches can help students to be more relaxed around the process of reflection, as it's not a natural process for most.

We want students to understand that when we talk about reflecting, we're not looking

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for a blow-by-blow account of what went down. Instead, we want them to think about their role in the activity, how well they did, what positives they have taken from it and — more importantly — what went wrong. It's really important that

students aren't afraid of failing. Getting things wrong at the beginning is one of the best ways to learn.

## **ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO REFLECT IN THEIR OWN WAY**

We use Teams as our VLE, with class notebook integrated. This lets the students update their reflective journals using their phones, making it as easy as possible for them to access and add to it. Getting the buy-in from the students in the first couple of weeks is hard. Many see it as unnecessary extra work.

We allocate a small amount of class time in the first couple of weeks for students to update their journal, in the hope of building up the habit to the point where they enjoy actively reflecting on their practice and see the importance of it. Knowing that this is something they get graded on can be a good motivation for some.

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## **STAFF MONITORING**

Separate to student journals, staff keep their own blog on a locked channel on Teams so that the students can't see it. We document the progress and group dynamics of each



task and how the class are picking up the practical, technical and theoretical aspects of the learning. In terms of meta-skills, we take note of leadership behaviour, poor behaviour, who is struggling, and who is excelling, general time keeping, idea generation, problem solving, and productivity — over the group projects and classes we have with them.

We round this whole process up at the three progress meetings over the span of the course, where we compare notes with the students. We indicate where we think they are in terms of grade (Distinction, Merit, Achieved, Non-achieved) and offer suggestions for improvement.

After the first couple of weeks with a cohort, I think you generally get a good idea of who

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is going to do well and who is going to struggle with the course. The great thing about holistic assessment, group work and evaluating meta-skills in general is that it gives the students plenty of opportunity to

improve, as long as you give them the right feedback and encouragement. So much of the course involves working with others; if they show they are committed and hard-working, it helps and encourages them with the practical and technical aspects of the course.

## **MAKING GRADING DECISIONS**

We have three main projects in our HNC:

- the Film Noir Trailer (group assessed, semester 1)
- the Horror Short (group assessed, semester 1)
- the Short Film Project (individually assessed with chosen crew made up with members of the class, semester 2)

The established framework of students' ongoing reflective journals, alongside the staff student performance blog with the group work peer reviews and meetings, the post-group work assessed project surveys, and the performance review individual meetings (three over the span of the course) give the teaching staff a pretty rounded overview of

who is doing well and who isn't. They can see who did what roles in the projects, and what classmates think of each other and themselves when it comes to the process.

## **REGULAR MEETINGS AND SCHEDULED CHECK-INS MAKE GRADING EASIER**

With all these factors together, a clear view of the class becomes apparent, and that makes grading decisions simpler. If a student has worked hard all year in each class, group project and individual task; was always on time; communicated well online, in person, and in a group, they should be rewarded for it. Conversely, if a student has barely got involved, was always late, communicated badly, and made only a minimum effort, then their meta-skills grade should reflect that too.

I tell my students that their meta-skills grade is important as it could be the factor that tips their overall grade up to a Distinction, that I want them to get to the point where I would trust them with a client or on a crew in the real world.

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We use an HNC grading rubric, where possible, for individual assignments. We calculate an average along with the meta-skills grade at the end of the year to get a final overall grade.

Because meta-skills are embedded into the whole course, we state our case for each student in final discussions with teaching staff. We decide what level they have achieved based on students' assignment grades covering technical, professional, and academic units and observations. This is an important part of the process, and there is a lot of evidence to back up decisions thanks to the process of reflection, observation and discussion. Surprises are unusual at these meetings and, to me, this process is fair and just. The students usually agree with whatever decision we make, as it has been part of the continued commentary we have with them over the year.