

Everything you need to know about applying to film school

Every year we work with fantastic film school students. Some students are interested in producing documentaries, others in telling dystopian fantasies, but the one thing they all have in common is they LOVE TO TELL STORIES, that is their common characteristic. Some write their stories, others film their stories, others want to set the scenes for their stories. There is no typical applicant. Some students use their films to educate their audiences, interviewing holocaust survivors, telling heartfelt tales of overcoming anorexia, or interviewing young transexuals in San Francisco. Others love to film extreme sports, films of kayakers going down waterfalls or skiers doing x-game tricks on the slopes. Then there are students who work for hours to edit their films, or find the exact right music or even write that music when they can't find it. All of these students work very hard to perfect their craft and tell unique stories. There are many roles to play in creating films and

many programs to consider when looking to study film in college.

Students we've worked with are attending UCLA - Theatre, Film and Television, USC - School of Cinematic Arts, NYU - Tisch, Chapman - Dodge, Emerson, UNCSA, SCAD and many others. Many of these programs have admissions rates in the single digits which means applying to them requires thoughtful essays and meaningful creative supplements. You can do it, but you have to start early.

How can I tell the difference between film programs?

Like other areas you might study, film programs also vary in focus. Some programs are more "Indie" or artistic, some are more entertainment based, and some are more documentary focused. The best way to learn about the program is to visit, the next best is to watch the student films and projects, that will tell you a lot about the type of films students make. Pay attention to awards students win and where they work.

What is the difference between a BFA and BA film program?

You will probably see that programs offer either a BFA or a BA (you can read about the difference [here](#)). Most film programs offer BFAs, most universities and even some liberal arts colleges, offer BAs. A BFA program will have more depth of classes, equipment, facilities, and networking. A BA program will allow a student to study other interests at the same time. Usually BFA programs require that you apply directly into the program, respond to numerous prompts to highlight your storytelling skills, submit a film (often responding to a specific prompt), and submit a creative resume. Unlike BFA programs, BA programs allow you to declare the major just as you would another major usually at the end of freshman or sophomore years. The right choice is the best choice for you.

What is Film Studies and how is it different from Filmmaking?

Often students confuse Film Studies with Filmmaking but they are very different. Film Studies is the analysis and study of the social practices of film, such as the culture, history, psychology, and theory. Students who major in Film Studies may pursue careers in film criticism or film education.

Filmmaking is the creation of films, it often includes screenwriting, photography, editing, lighting, sound, directing,

and producing. Filmmaking is the major most students think of when they want to study film. There are a few schools which even combine the two such as [Cinema Studies at NYU-Tisch](#) where you must chose a concentration, one of which is filmmaking, or Syracuse's Newhouse School of Communication where Television, Radio and Film majors must select a minor outside of Newhouse, you can read about our visit to Syracuse [here](#).

What is the challenge of applying to film school?

I asked a student applying to film school what her biggest challenge was and she said "strategizing." Let me explain. For each program she must submit three to five essays, a portfolio (which can be a five to ten minute reel or a selection of other visual and written work), a creative resume, and for some schools a 30-90 second "personal video." This holds not only for film makers but also students interested in production design, editing, directing, screenwriting, sound and lighting. How do you do this, all while not repeating your story, and continuing to peel back your onion to let admissions learn more about you? It's really tough, and it means you have to start early so you have the experiences schools are looking

for and the body of work to support your application. You're going to want to show leadership, collaboration and storytelling, and to show all of this you need creativity, risk taking, and breadth of ideas. It's an arduous process and takes dedication and perseverance.

How to be a successful film school applicant?

Film schools have notoriously low acceptance rates, the top schools accept far fewer than 10% of their applicants. You have to make your application stand out, and that takes very strong essays and polished creative supplements. The best way to write compelling essays is to be a good storyteller, not all stories have to be about monumental events, students have written about the value of their pen pals, the lessons they've learned from boxing, the camera strap left by their grandfather, and about family hikes in the rain. What these essays have done very well is paint a vivid scene and allow the reader to be in the story, much as you are when you watch a good film. The other critical component of your application are your creative supplements. You can submit both photography and films for these supplements as often students do both. For film most schools accept no more than 10 minutes, some as few as two minutes, so what you submit must be really well

scripted, filmed and edited. You don't need a fancy camera, many applicants film their submissions using their digital cameras (with a tripod or other stabilizer), but you do need to produce a very well edited final product.

If you're considering film school starting early in high school is a must. Many students attend film programs over the summer of both sophomore and junior years. Some students volunteer with local organizations or for their school sports teams to film events or create short informational or marketing films. These are all great ways to practice your filming and editing skills, learn how to tell a story in a short amount of time, take initiative, and work as part of a creative team. These are all skills schools look for in their top candidates.

Applying to film school is not for the faint of heart. Of course there are many lists of top film programs, here's one from [The Wrap](#), another from [Hollywood Reporter](#) and another from [Variety](#), students we've worked with have been accepted to all the top programs.

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