



STORYTELLING IN DOCUMENTARY

13TH • 20TH FEBRUARY 2026

INTERNATIONAL
EXCHANGES

IHECS
Journalism & Communication

In the heart of Europe, Brussels is a city of culture and creativity, making it the perfect backdrop for our **BIP** on **Storytelling in Documentary**.

With international and national students we will dive into the art of storytelling to uncover the universal principles, hidden techniques and bold innovations that make narratives truly unforgettable.



IHECS Blended Intensive Programme

During this week you will take part in practical workshops across diverse disciplines, exploring the universal principles of storytelling, the necessity of having something to say, the importance of conflict and the creative freedom of breaking the rules. Together, we will look at how stories work across genres and mediums, from films and TV to games, literature and animation, so you can recognise what engages audiences and keeps them hooked. This Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) is an initiative of IHECS International and the Language Departments.

TARGET STUDENTS

- Students in Communication or Social Sciences from European partner institutions (20 participants)
- IHECS: 20 Bachelors 3

IHECS PROGRAMME COORDINATORS

Olivier Magis, Yasmine Alfhiri, Rodrigo Fonseca Fernandes & Inès Frere

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

- FHWien der WKW
- CEU San Pablo University

PRACTICAL INFORMATION, ON-SITE WEEK, BRUSSELS

13TH • 20TH FEBRUARY

IHECS will cover all activities included in the programme (on working days only). All other expenses — such as accommodation, public transport, food, and drinks — are at the students' own cost but students will receive the *Erasmus+* grant from their home institution. Participants are responsible for booking their own accommodation.

We recommend the following hostels:

- Hotel Bruxelles Meininger City Center (Quai du Hainaut 33, 1080 Brussels, Belgium), <https://www.meiningerhotels.com/nl/hotels/brussel/hotel-brussel-centrum/>
- Auberge de Jeunesse Jacques Brel (Rue de la Sablonnière 33, 1000 Brussels), <https://lesaubergesdejeunesse.be/fr/bruxelles-jacques-brel>



PROFESSOR IN CHARGE: OLIVIER MAGIS

Olivier Magis is a Belgian filmmaker and screenwriter based in Brussels. He graduated from the filmmaking department of the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (I.A.D.) in Belgium.

He has directed award-winning creative documentaries and a short fiction film (May Day, co-directed with Fedrik De Beul), which was shortlisted for the 2019 Oscars (Best Live Action Short Film). His films have been screened at numerous international festivals (Sheffield Doc/Fest, FIDBA Buenos Aires, etc.) and broadcast on television (ARTE, France Télévisions, Canal+, RTBF, VRT Canvas, Deutsche Welle, TV5 Monde, YLE, etc.). They are also available on VOD platforms (MUBI, True Story, etc.).

In addition, he teaches stage direction and documentary film aesthetics at ESRA College in Brussels and conducts training courses on documentary filmmaking for teachers and cultural practitioners of the Wallonia–Brussels Federation.

Earlier in his career, he worked as a film director for museum exhibitions, as well as TV a director, an assistant director in film, theatre and circus, and as a film programmer.

COORDINATORS



Yasmine Alfiiri
Language
Professor



**Rodrigo Fonseca
Fernandes**
Language Professor



Inès Frere
International
project officer

**Felicidad
González Sanz**
Associate Professor

Sara Padín Castro
Assistant
Professor

OTHER ACTIVITIES

During this week, you will take part in activities that will allow you to discover Brussels while getting to know each other.

Between cultural visits, tastings and moments of conviviality, you will have the opportunity to immerse yourself in the heart of the EU capital while also learning about storytelling.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the origins of storytelling and its universal form.
- Recognise the principles of storytelling.
- Appreciate why some stories work and others do not, particularly in documentaries.
- Identify different forms of storytelling.
- Recognise how storytelling techniques function within different documentary styles.
- Learn how to effectively begin a real story.
- Learn how to keep the audience engaged until the end.
- Consider documentary film as an expression of a unique worldview, critical thinking and aesthetic intention.

CONTENT

This BIP is designed for students who want to understand why some documentaries engage audiences while others do not. It means learning what are the tricks of the trade, and how you can hone your storytelling skills so that your audience does not switch off.

We will explore the art of storytelling, including its universal form and why it matters; the necessity of having something to say; the rules of storytelling and how they can be broken; the art of the opening; choosing the most appropriate medium to express a story; plot, story design, scene design and act design; and the importance of conflict.

Storytelling will be explored mainly through documentary film examples. This BIP will present the principles for creating a compelling and sincere story with a unique point of view. By the end of the week, you will look at film in a whole new way.

Furthermore, we will establish links between writing and artistic forms that align with subject matter, themes and intentions. Ethical issues in documentary filmmaking will also be addressed (e.g. tensions between imagined storytelling and the feasibility of filming, or between industry demands and artistic freedom).

No technical skills are required for this course: knowledge of camera operation, editing or other technical aspects is not necessary. This course is purely editorial.

STATUS

Prerequisite: English B1 (CEFR)

Credits: 5 ETCS



ON-SITE WEEK, BRUSSELS 13TH · 20TH FEBRUARY 2026

(This schedule is provisional and subject to change)

FRIDAY 13th

Welcome day to discover Brussels and get to know each other through ice-breaking activities.

WEEKEND

Free weekend in Brussels. Suggestions for activities will be provided.

MONDAY 16th

Introduction to the teacher and the course.

This course aims to help you find your own voice in documentary filmmaking.

In the first part of the day, we will define what a documentary is and what it is not, and discuss journalism versus documentary. We will distinguish between these practices in terms of aesthetic issues and ethical challenges.

At the end of the introduction, and in preparation for the workshop, students will receive an assignment. This will allow them to reflect on a documentary subject that is meaningful to them and reflects their personal view of the world.

In the second part of the lesson, students will work in two groups with the teaching staff. Each group will engage in:

- a round-table discussion to present documentary ideas (based on the assignment). Students will then form subgroups (TBC) and decide which idea is the most suitable for group development throughout the week;
- a course exploring key narrative questions: What is a story? What does it need to work? What is a narrative? Who are the characters and what are they going to do? What obstacles do they face? Why should we care? What biases should be considered and avoided before writing?

After the lesson, students will work in their allocated groups to identify the key ingredients needed to create a convincing story with a clear point of view. This will take the form of a written outline.

TUESDAY 17th

In the first part of the lesson, one group will present the key storytelling ingredients they believe are essential for their documentary subject. A collective discussion will follow.

PROGRAMME

In the second part, we will explore the basic structure of a story: beginning, middle and end, often driven by rising tension and conflict leading to resolution. The Three-Act and Five-Act structures will be examined.

We will also discuss different documentary styles and the importance of choosing a form that is meaningful for the story. Questions will include: How should a story be filmed according to the filmmaker's intention? What distance should be maintained from subjects and characters? Does the filmmaker have a role within the film?

After the lesson, the groups will divide their stories into acts, specifying the content of each act. The potential form or style of the film will also be taken into consideration. This will be presented as a written outline.

WEDNESDAY 18th

In the first part, one group will explain how their subject is divided into acts and what each act contains, as well as propose ideas regarding form and style. The class will question the motivation and effectiveness of the group's choices.

In the second part, we will explore The Seven Basic Plots and examine why storytellers repeatedly return to these narrative structures.

After the lesson, students will identify which plot type best fits their documentary subject, presented in a written outline.

THURSDAY 19th

In the first part of the lesson, one group will present the plot type or types they believe best suit their documentary subject.

In the second part, we will explore the teaser, pre-title sequence and cold opening, focusing on why the beginning of a story is crucial, particularly in today's media landscape.

After the lesson, students will construct the opening of their documentary in the form of a script.

FRIDAY 20th

Groups will present their documentaries to the class, explaining what happens at each stage and justifying their creative choices. The class will vote for the best documentary.

DEBRIEFING SESSION - Online

Approximately one week after the end of the Blended Intensive Programme, an online debriefing session will be held. Students will be invited to reflect on their experience and provide feedback on their learning outcomes. The session will conclude with a summary from the programme's teaching staff.



We look forward to welcoming you to
our beautiful city and our institution!

If you have any question on the programme please contact

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