Screencast Ninja Academy – Detailed Syllabus

WEEK 0

Orientation. In this pre-launch session, you'll watch a special video that takes you through all the stuff you need to make your way effectively through the course. You'll also get instructions for signing up for the course's private Facebook group.

WEEK 1

Day 1 – Make it Brief!

Day 1 is all about that critical first step of assembling the project brief. You'll learn how to get at the heart of your video's purpose, identify your target audience, and figure out the best mechanism for ordering your content (HINT: this differs based on the *kind* of screencast you're creating).

Receive Assignment #1 – Create your project brief.

Day 2 – Basics of Screencast Collaboration

Today we'll be exploring ways of keeping your projects running smoothly. You'll receive tips on collaborating with decision-makers and subject-matter experts. We'll have a particular focus on *leading laterally*, which is all about getting screencast projects done when you're NOT the one in charge.

On this day, we also offer a special **Advice for Aspiring Screencast Consultants** lecture that covers the business side of screencasting for those who are thus inclined. I even make available a download of the stock work order agreement I use with my own clients.

Assignment #1 is (technically) due

(Free day Wednesday - NO HOTSEAT)

Day 3 – Penning the Narration Script

You'll learn all about taking that brief you created in the previous assignment, and adapting it into a hard-working narration script. We'll discuss scripting techniques as well as using the script to estimate the length of your final production.

In this lesson, we'll also answer the age-old conundrum of *whether to record your audio first, or video first,* and the reasons why.

Receive Assignment # 2: Narration Script

Day 4 – Storyboarding!

We'll show you how to take the narration script you created, and turn it into a fleshed-out storyboard. Storyboards aren't always necessary, especially for tutorials where the visuals are implicit from the narration. But for marketing spots and other visually diverse demos, they can give decision-makers a good blueprint as to what they can expect to see in the final video.

A big part of storyboarding lies in finding and curating good stock imagery, and today, you'll learn all about this as well.

Finally, to prepare you for the upcoming audio lessons, you'll be able to download our **Equipment Buyer's Guide** PDF.

Assignment #2 (technically) due

WEEK 2

Day 5 – Recording narration

In this lesson, you'll learn all about the subtle art of recording your narration. We'll begin with some general workflow stuff before moving on to the logistics of recording your dulcet tones with Adobe Audition. Want to use a different tool? No worries. This will give you a general foundation, and in the next lesson, I'll show you how to record audio with Camtasia, Screenflow, or the open-source Audacity.

Want to know how to get a quiet recording environment on the cheap, or what equipment you might need? Don't skip this one…

Receive Assignment #3: Record Your Narration

Day 6 – Audio Tools Roundup lecture & screencast

I'll be showing you how to record with Camtasia, Screenflow, or the open-source Audacity. While each tool has its strengths and drawbacks, and all of them are inferior to Adobe Audition, sometimes you just need something quick and dirty to get the job done. These have the added advantage of not costing you anything extra.

Assignment #3 (technically) due

Day 7 - Wednesday Hotseat for Assignments 2 & 3

Day 8 – Screen Recording

Here you'll learn how to record your footage with Camtasia or Screenflow. This will be split into two parts. You'll have a theory/workflow section that applies to everyone. Today also marks the first day when the practical lessons will be split up by application. Just click the video with your application's thumbnail (though you can obviously look at them all, if you want).

Receive Assignment #4: Record Screencast Footage

Day 9 – Customizing your Recording Environment

Day 9 consists of two practical lessons on augmenting your recording capabilities with some of the hidden Recorder-based preferences as well as bringing your footage into a project file to prepare for editing.

Assignment #4 (technically) due

WEEK 3

Day 10 – Viewing and Editing Your Stuff

Day 10 is all about the basics of editing. You'll be...

- Getting yourself better acquainted with the interface.

- Navigating your footage, including navigating the canvas and the timeline.

- Manipulating clips, including moving and deleting them.

- Trimming and Deleting unnecessary content, and executing other kinds of edits to bring your audio and video in sync.

Today's also the first day you'll have access to my own project that I'm creating (in its current state) so that you can follow along as I show how these editing techniques work in practice.

Receive Assignment #5: Edit Your Screencast Footage

Day 11 – Cutting out Stock Photography

This lesson won't apply to everyone, but it's an incredibly useful skill for a screencaster to have, especially if you plan on layering on lots of photographic assets in your projects.

I will be using Adobe Photoshop to show you how to take a stock photo and cut out its background. That way, you'll be able to place images wherever you want in your screencast, on top of whatever background you wish. This gets really cool when we start animating, and you can have people and objects flying in and out of your screencast backgrounds.

Assignment #5 (technically) due

Day 12 – Wednesday Hotseat for Assignments 4 & 5

Day 13 – Layering visual elements

In this lesson, we'll be taking our screencast footage and rounding it out with other visual clips, such as still images, shapes, and text. You'll learn about...

- Adding visual clips and editing their properties to get just the look you want.
- Annotations like keystroke callouts, highlights, and shapes, and the special properties that come along with them.
- Piling on even more properties using Visual Effects.

Receive Assignment #6: Add Visual Elements

Day 14 – App-specific Features

This lesson is something of a hodge-podge. All three applications differ somewhat in their specific features sets (even each of the two Camtasias offers something the other doesn't). Today, you'll learn about a special topic that is specific to the screencasting application you're using:

- *Camtasia Windows:* **The Library**
- *Camtasia Mac:* **Special Visual Effects**
- *Screenflow:* **Callouts**

Assignment #6 (technically) due

⏸ One-week hiatus for catching up on assignments

WEEK 4

Day 15 – Animating Your Visual Properties

Today we'll create motion graphics effects by adding animation keyframes to our videos. You'll learn...

- How to add zoom-n-points to make your content sharper and more legible.

- About animating visual content over time.

- Time-saving measures for animating multiple clips at once.

Receive Assignment #7: Animating Your Project

Day 16 – Special Animation Tools

In this lesson, we'll build upon the "animation foundation" we laid yesterday. This will involve a glance at the sexier animation presets that come in the form of *Behaviors* (in Camtasia) or *Video Motion* (in Screenflow).

These tools will let you add a whole barrel of bouncy, wiggly, pulsing fun to any visual asset, without the need to hand-animate it.

Assignment #7 (technicaly) due

Day 17 – Wednesday Hotseat for Assignments 6 & 7

Day 18 – Audio Editing

In this lesson, we'll be exploring how to edit the audio narration you created. You'll learn...

- How to silence unwanted clips, pops, or unwanted segments.

- How to level off inconsistent volume.

- How to add background music, and blend it seamlessly with your narration.

- How to apply audio effects to your sound clips.

Receive Assigment #8 - Edit Your Audio

Day 19 – Getting Royalty-Free Stock Music

In this (comparatively brief) lesson, I'll show you how to wield a third-party software called Sonicfire Pro to add reasonably priced background music to your projects. You'll learn...

- How to seek out music tracks by tempo, style, predominant instrument, or keyword.

- How to adjust the music's volume and its length to synchronize exactly with your video.

- How to apply mood changes and hits to further tie the music to your video's content.

Assignment #8 (technically) due

WEEK 5

Day 20 – Captions

In this lesson, you'll be learning...

- Why captioning your content is incredibly useful, even if ADA compliance isn't a priority for you.

- The difference between closed and open captioning.

- The various ways of getting caption text into your screencasting tool and synching it to your narration.

- About the different players and video hosting services that can display your captions.

Receive Assignment #9: Caption Your Project

Day 21 – Bringing in Information from Mobile Devices

In this lesson, you'll discover the built-in capabilities of your screencasting application to interface with your mobile device, possibly even recording footage from it. Today, you'll see...

- How to link any iOS or Android device to Camtasia, so that you can easily import photos and video.

- How to capture footage from your iPhone or iPad activity into Camtasia Mac or Screenflow.

- Using *Gesture Effects* in Camtasia Mac, or *Touch Callouts* in Screenflow, to simulate tap and swipe gestures in your screencast projects.

Assignment #9 (technically) due

Day 22 – Wednesday Hotseat for Assignments 8 & 9

Day 23 – Transitions and Cursor Effects

In this lesson, you'll discover the aesthetic sexiness that comes from transitions and cursor effects. You will be able to place spectacular cuts in between your clips as well as adjust the size, opacity, and visual clicks of your mouse cursor.

These are subtle touches, to be sure, but sometimes those subtle touches can make all the difference.

Receive Assignment #10 - Add Transitions and Cursor Effects

Day 24 – Interactivity

In this lesson, you'll learn how to test your viewers' knowledge as well as solicit feedback from them by way of the **Quizzing** feature. Note that this requires the level of interactivity that is available *exclusively* in Camtasia (either platform), so I'm afraid that Screenflow users are out of luck on this one.

Additionally, there are separate lessons for the other interactive elements supported by Camtasia's SmartPlayer format, specifically **Interactive Hotspots** and clickable **Tables of Contents**.

Assignment #10 (technically) due

WEEK 6

DAY 25 – Production

In this lesson, you'll learn how to take that project you've been working so hard on, and finally produce it into something you can share with the world.

Receive Assignment: Produce your FINAL PROJECT

DAY 26 – Survey of Hosting Solutions

Continuing on from our previous lesson on production, I'll show you the main things to consider when deciding on a home for that newly produced screencast. Rather than a broad survey of every imaginable solution, I've decided to focus on the three services that make up my own hosting workflow, specifically *Screencast.com*, *Wistia*, and *Amazon S3*.

You'll not only learn the ins and out of navigating these services, but I'll also clue you in as to the unique features that make each of these the ideal place for hosting different kinds of videos.

DAY 27 – LIVE WEBINAR: Ask me anything.

DAY 28 – Post-production panic! Resizing a completed project

After spending all your time creating a project in glorious 720p, you get a call from management:

"Looks great, but we decided we're putting it in a blog post, with a sidebar and lots of other content. You can shrink it down, right? We're looking a size of about 640 x 360. The quality will be just as good, won't it? Oh, and we'll need it by the end of the day. K thx bye."

Time to panic? Nope, not if you follow this handy lesson.

DAY 29 – Capturing mobile devices revisited

On our 29th and FINAL day of Screencast Ninja Academy, we're going to revisit the topic of capturing footage from mobile devices like tablets and smartphones, exploring a couple of third-party ($) solutions for capturing devices you wouldn't otherwise get.

Students have three additional weeks to wrap up assignments and turn them in to receive feedback.