



Creative Careers

Shyala Smith

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Shyala is a brand and content strategist at Raindance, the acclaimed London-based film school founded by the creator of the Raindance Film Festival and the British Independent Film Awards. Alongside her work in film education, she is also a screenwriter and children's author, with two published books to her name.

Raised and educated in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Shyala moved to the UK and is now based in London, where her work blends creativity, culture and storytelling.

I started my career early. At 18, after studying journalism in Sri Lanka, I spotted a vacancy for a copywriter.

I knew I wanted to be a writer but had no real understanding of what copywriting involved or that it would open up avenues to create compelling marketing copy for businesses and other organisations. I applied, driven by curiosity, and quickly discovered a world where words could shape ideas, brands and conversations.

That first step led me into advertising, and from there my career continued to expand and evolve. Today, I'm fulfilling long-held ambitions as an author and screenwriter, building on the same instinct that first drew me to writing all those years ago.

"Growing up in Sri Lanka, opportunities for writers were limited, yet I found my outlet with English Literature at school and by spending hours in drama with a local theatre group after school."

A creative journey

When I applied for the copywriter role, it felt like something within my control, a career where I could have an impact through creativity. From there, my path in advertising unfolded, eventually leading me to become a Creative Director.

This progression happened during a period of major change, as the industry shifted from traditional print media to digital. As a young professional, I felt ready to embrace that transition. I moved into a Head of Digital role and built nearly two decades of experience working across the digital marketing space.

But my journey didn't stop there. During the pandemic, I pivoted into education and decided it was the right time to pursue my other writing ambitions: children's books and screenwriting.

My first book sold just eight months after I finished writing it, a major milestone that fueled my passion even further. Creating stories for children brings me immense joy and fulfilment. Drawing on my own experience, I aim to fill the story gap that exists for South Asian families like mine, offering characters and worlds that reflect our lives and culture.

My short film - a story about a failing actress and mother confronting personal failure and her career in the age of AI - will be shot in the summer. The project has been years in the making, but now we have the right team in place.

Choosing curiosity

For me, creativity has always been fueled by curiosity. It's curiosity that takes you down unexpected paths, drives you to solve problems, and keeps you open to new possibilities.

Through this mindset, I've learned how to connect meaningfully with audiences, whether through human insight, data, algorithms, or a combination of all three. Diversity is essential in communication, especially in education. You need to understand how people are seen, and how they want to be seen.

“Working across Sri Lanka and the UK has given me a broader cultural perspective and a deeper understanding of storytelling. The styles, rhythms and expectations are very different, and learning to adapt across those contexts has strengthened my creative approach”

Creativity and AI

I understand why students today might feel pressured to focus on STEM subjects, especially as technologies like AI continue to advance. Parents often feel that pressure too. But I believe that as AI becomes more embedded in our lives, creativity will only grow in importance. We already see this in the film industry. Working alongside AI highlights that it still takes a creative mind to solve the problems technology generates.

At the same time, I'm optimistic that people will continue to seek out stage plays, original films, and imaginative books. Human connection matters, and there will always be a desire to experience what humans can create. That's where I believe the future of creativity is heading.

Sharing top tips

School taught me focus, a skill that has proven invaluable throughout my life. It helps me finish projects, write books, and stay grounded in my day job. Being dyslexic and neurodivergent shaped the choices I made along the way. There are ways of the world that I didn't fit in with, so I had to find creative ways to figure out my place instead.

Creative people can sometimes become absorbed in the art itself, but a creative career is also a business. It requires strategy, planning, and understanding how to approach a task - whether that's in marketing, publishing or another space entirely.

Critical thinking plays a key role in refining my work, and it's one of the most important life skills that creativity instils. I've also learned the value of breaking work into bite-sized tasks. Progress often comes from doing just a little at a time, and that mindset adds up to something significant.

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