Script Breakdown and Film Scheduling Online Course For Independent Filmmakers

How to Design a (Reliable) Shooting Schedule for Feature Films and Television Productions

April 10, 2009

Peter D. Marshall
http://www.actioncutprint.com
pdm@actioncutprint.com

Peter D. Marshall has worked (and survived) in the Film and Television Industry for over 35 years - as a Film Director, Television Producer, First Assistant Director and Series Creative Consultant.

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(1)
Dear Filmmaker,

I would like to thank you very much for purchasing “The Script Breakdown and Film Scheduling Online Course For Independent Filmmakers.”

In 1985, I got my first professional job as an Assistant Director when I was the 2nd AD on the 13 x half-hour Television series called “The Hitchhiker.” A year later, I became the First Assistant Director on a small Canadian TV series called “Hamilton’s Quest.” I’ve not looked back since!

About 15 years ago, I created a 2-day workshop called "How to Design an Accurate Film Shooting Schedule.” As the film and television industry changed and grew over the years, I modified the content of that workshop to keep up to date with all the new filmmaking techniques I was learning. That 2-day workshop has now become the model for this Online course.

I am very excited about the quality of the content I’m going to share with you throughout this 137-page course. Even though the title says “Script Breakdown and Film Scheduling,” this course is much more than that. When you are finished, you will have gained in-depth industry knowledge of the entire pre-production stage of making an independent film or TV series.

And one more thing - this course is not just for Assistant Directors. It was also written for Directors, Producers, Production Managers and any other filmmaker who wants to discover the proper steps involved in breaking down a script and creating a realistic film shooting schedule.

Peter D. Marshall
Vancouver, Canada
April 10, 2009

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Content Sections

1. Foreword by Producer David Roessell (pg. 4)
2. My 35 Years in “The Business” (pg. 7)
3. The 10 Commandments of Filmmaking (pg. 11)
4. Personal Observations (pg. 17)
5. The Differences Between Feature Films and TV (pg. 19)
6. The Duties & Responsibilities of the First AD (pg. 23)
7. The Duties and Responsibilities of the Director (pg. 25)
8. The Director as Storyteller (pg. 28)
9. The 3 Types of Director (pg. 28)
10. The Role of the Director During Pre-Production (pg. 29)
11. The Assistant Director / Director Relationship (pg. 32)
12. The Director and Assistant Director Meetings (pg. 33)
13. The Assistant Director’s Duties in Pre-Production (pg. 34)
14. Film and Television Pre-Production Activities (pg. 37)
15. What Happens When the Cast Arrives (pg. 51)
16. Shooting on Film or Digital? (pg. 55)
17. The Classic Three Act Script Structure (pg. 56)
18. The Physical Breakdown of Scripts, Scenes & Shots (pg. 58)
19. The Shooting Script (pg. 59)
20. The Breakdown of Scenes in a Shooting Script (pg. 60)
21. The Reductionism Breakdown Theory (pg. 61)
22. Pre-Production - A Process of Discovery (pg. 62)
23. The 3 Stages of Designing the Film Schedule (pg. 62)
24. The 8 Step Process of Script Breakdown (pg. 63)
25. Designing the Shooting Schedule (pg. 67)
26. Preparing the Production Board One Liner (pg. 67)
27. Production Board #1 - Scene Order (pg. 69)
28. Production Board #2 - Specific Groups (pg. 70)
29. Production Board #3 - First One Liner (pg. 72)
30. Film and Television Scheduling Tips (pg. 74)
31. Film and Television Scheduling Factors (pg. 82)
32. The Day-out-of-Days (pg. 99)
33. The Daily Call Sheet (pg. 99)
34. The 5 Groups of On-Camera Performers (pg. 101)
35. The 4 Types of Actors (pg. 103)
36. The Film and Television Shooting Crew (pg. 104)
37. Understanding Traditional Camera Techniques (pg. 111)
38. The Director’s Shot List (pg. 113)
39. Concepts of Blocking and Staging a Scene (pg. 114)
40. The 5 Stages of Blocking a Scene (pg. 117)
41. 6 Blocking Tips for Assistant Directors (pg. 118)
42. The 180 Degree Rule (pg. 119)
43. Understanding the Film Editing Process (pg. 119)
44. The “50-Step Film Set Check List” for AD’s (pg. 122)
45. How to Figure Out Scene and Shot Timings (pg. 129)
46. 25 Assistant Director Tips From the Trenches (pg. 131)
47. First Assistant Director Pre-Production Cheat Sheet (pg. 133)
48. Script Breakdown and Film Scheduling Services (pg. 136)
49. Acknowledgments (pg. 137)  © Peter D. Marshall (3)  www.actioncutprint.com
(1) Foreword by Producer David Roessell

When Peter asked me to write the foreword to his Script Breakdown and Film Scheduling course, it came as a surprise: not so much that Peter would ask the favor of me, but rather that anyone would think I had something to say on the subject.

But Peter's request made me think about the time I've spent working in the entertainment business and the undeniable and extensive experience that has resulted. I've been a producer for over 20 years and have participated in hundreds of hours of film and television productions.

I'm a "nuts and bolts" producer, usually hired by a studio, television network or Executive Producer to administrate and guide the day to day production of the project, from the initial budgeting through the final delivery.

The physical production of a film or television program is expensive and complicated. Every project requires the establishment of a temporary infrastructure to administrate the process and establish a plan by which the script will be realized into a finished entertainment.

At the commercial level, the production process typically involves hundreds of people with a diversity of specializations: producers, directors, writers, artists, technicians, actors, accountants, drivers, carpenters, lawyers, insurers...the list goes on and on.

Key to this process is the core production management team, usually consisting of a producer such as myself, a production manager, production coordinator, accountant, staff and, critically, the assistant directors.

The role of the assistant director is not generally well known or understood outside of the production environment. Typically, the Director is the most important creative individual on any project, working with the producers, writers, artists and crew to visualize the script and transform it into an entertainment. The assistant directors are the instrument by which the director's creative vision is quantified and interfaced with the rest of the staff and crew.
The First Assistant Director heads the AD Department, is the right hand of the Director and, more than any other single individual, sets the tone and pace of the production. As the Director's right hand, the First AD is responsible for scheduling the director's time during the preparatory period, breaking down the script into a shooting schedule, coordinating the efforts of all of the individual departments and running the set during principal photography.

It is the duality of the AD position that makes it so essential and so interesting. In addition to being the right hand of the director, from my perspective, the AD is also the right hand of the producer. It is the frisson that is created between the mutually exclusive creative demands of the Director and the practical and financial demands of the Producer that are the rock and a hard place between which the ADs often find themselves.

The best Assistant Directors serve "the production," realizing that the entire project cannot remain viable if only the creative vision of the director is served. Similarly, a project that is "on time and on budget," but is creatively lacking and doesn't entertain won't succeed. The best and most successful commercial films and television projects do both and the Assistant Director's contribution is often key.

I've been fortunate to work in locations all over the world and with a multitude of Assistant Directors of differing styles and nationalities. Peter Marshall is my favorite Assistant Director, anywhere. Some of my fondness is just personal...there are always dozens of people who are qualified for every position on a film crew...so one of the questions you ask yourself is, "who do you want to spend 18 hours a day with," and Peter's name is always first on my list.

Peter has a great talent for navigating the challenging waters of empowering the director while remaining sensitive to the fiscal realities of the producer. He has an extraordinary grasp of the challenging task of scheduling a production and does so with an eye not only to the demands of the director's vision, but with a nearly prescient ability to factor in all of the unpredictable variables that characterize a film production.

Peter is a renaissance man, bringing to any production not only the skill set of a seasoned professional, but also the life experience of a dimensional person, the enthusiasm of a film student and the good humor of an old friend.

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I remember the last day of filming on location in Rome, Italy on “The Lizzie McGuire Movie.”

Peter had brilliantly and daringly scheduled three weeks of exterior, daytime filming in the Italian Capitol without a single day of weather cover. After 2.8 weeks of sunshine, on the final day of filming the skies opened up and the entire crew spent most of the morning hunkered down in cafes downing espresso.

A rain tarp had blown free of the expensive prototype automobile that had been loaned to the production and it was filling up with water in the picturesque square. I ran out to wrestle with the flapping vinyl, cursing my choice to work in a creative profession, when who should join me but Peter Marshall.

Lending a hand in that moment was a simple gesture...but it said so much about Peter's professionalism, priorities and humanity. Every time I work with Peter, I'm reminded of these unique qualities and how they are a defining element of how he approaches his life and work as a filmmaker.

Every good wish,

David Roessell
Auckland, New Zealand
I have a passion for making movies.

I first started making films (on Super 8 no less) when I was 16 years old. I'd make movies of our high school parties, film my friends as they drove around in their cars and created pixelated animations with model race cars in my basement.

After graduating from Grade 12, I spent three years in film school in Toronto (1970 - 1973) and then hit the streets looking for THE job that would kick-start my filmmaking career.

My first professional film job (which meant I finally got paid!) was on a Carts commercial in 1974. I was the PA holding a brown paper bag just under the camera so when the director called "Cut!" the actor could spit out his candy into the bag I was holding.

Yes… those were the days!

During my 35-year career, I have worked as a PA, dolly grip, electrician, assistant cameraman, commercial production manager, first assistant director, TV series creative consultant, television producer and director.

I have had the opportunity to work on many different types of productions, from industrial films to documentaries; television commercials to music videos; Emmy Award nominated TV series to Hollywood feature films.

I have directed over 30 episodes of Television Drama and written, directed or produced over 50 hours of documentary and educational programs. (My documentaries and dramas have won, or been nominated for, 14 International film awards.)

As a First Assistant Director, I have been employed on 13 Hollywood Feature Films, 15 Television Movies, 6 Television Series, 4 TV Pilots (all of which went to series!) and over 20 Commercials.

I have worked for directors such as Zack Snyder, John Woo, Ed Wick, Phillip Noyce, John Balham, Roger Adam, Anne Wheeler, Bobby Roth and Kim Manners.
I have also worked with such amazing and talented actors as Michelle Pfeiffer, Kevin Spacey, Morgan Freeman, John Travolta, Mel Gibson, Kathy Bates, Adam Sandler and Peter O'Toole (Yes! I even got to work with "Lawrence of Arabia!")

I have spent my career in the "trenches" of the film and TV industry. I’ve had the chance to co-ordinate huge WW1 battle scenes, to plan complicated visual FX scenes, manage large groups of extras and direct intimate emotional scenes between two actors.

By having this unique opportunity to work as both a Television director and a Feature 1st Assistant Director, I have been able to get "up close and personal" with major Hollywood studios and producers, exciting and imaginative directors and Academy Award winning actors.

Starting as a 1st AD

The first major TV series I worked on as a 1st Assistant Director was a Steven J. Cannel production called “Stingray” in 1986. I had been the 1st AD on a small Canadian TV series called “Hamilton’s Quest” before that, but “Stingray” was my leap into the “big times.”

Needless to say, I was a little nervous going onto a big American TV series. I remember my first day on the set. We were outside, in the winter, beside a huge ship on one of the many docks in Vancouver.

Not only was I nervous, but I also had a cold. The end result was that I eventually lost my voice as the day progressed. So I asked the props department for a megaphone which I then used to relay my instructions.

Well, as you can appreciate, the crew took great exception to this “sound invasion”, and at every opportunity, they would hide the megaphone from me somewhere on the dock. Lesson learned!

After “Stingray” I worked on several more TV series with Cannell until I became one of the 1st AD’s on “Wiseguy.” I worked on this Emmy nominated TV series for two years and for the first time, it gave me an inside look at how the cast and crew on a TV series could become a family.

I remember we used to have “career days” which happened when were ahead of schedule and in the studio on a Friday. This was when most everyone on the crew (and some cast) would switch jobs for an entire scene.

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It was very interesting to see an actor pushing a dolly, a focus puller doing makeup and a 1st AD (me) mixing the sound! It gave us all a sense of camaraderie - and boy did we learn to respect other departments.

I also got my first big directing break on “Wiseguy” as well. This is something that happens occasionally on a TV series when other department heads get an opportunity to direct.

Writers, producers, DOP’s, actors, editors and 1st AD’s sometimes get a chance to direct at least one episode of a long running series. I ended up directing two episodes of “Wiseguy” and it helped open the doors for more directing assignments for me later on.

One day, after almost two years on the show, I got a phone call from the Production Manager who was working on a feature film called “The Fly 2.” He told me I was recommended by his Location Manager who used to work on “Wiseguy”.

The PM wanted to know if I was interested in coming in for an interview with the director. Of course, I jumped at the chance and ended up getting the job. So, in 1988, I left the TV series world (almost for good) and went to work on my first feature film!

The learning curve: there IS a difference between shooting feature films and shooting Television

In the script for “The Fly 2” we needed an interior office building where we could use the whole floor for a few days of filming. Several months before, I had worked on a TV episode in one building downtown. The floor had been repainted and several sets built. I mentioned that to the Location Manager. It was available. So off we went on our scout.

The director loved it immediately and I felt very proud of myself because this was one of my first scouts on my first feature film.

But my euphoria ended quickly.

The Production Designer went around the office pointing out all the faults in the design (such as the cheap wallpaper and the cheap paint job.) What he said next would remain with me for all my career. He said that “this location would work for television, but not on a 70 foot screen.” That was my first (of many) “Ah hah moments!” (Thanks Michael!)
I’ll discuss later in this course some of the differences between television and feature films, but I started my learning process on that subject on “The Fly 2,” and I thank the Production Designer for that.

**Ups and Downs**

Like anyone else in this business, I’ve had my share of unpleasant shows. I’ve worked with Directors who are abusive bullies, DOP’s who like to “have AD’s for breakfast” and Production Managers or Producers who will “tear out your soul” if the show is falling behind.

But I’ve also been blessed during my career to have worked on a great many wonderful productions which has enabled me to spend time with some very bright, talented and compassionate filmmakers.

“Happy Gilmore” for instance. I call this my “100% show” because every single member of the cast & crew showed up to do their jobs - and have fun..

The interesting thing about this movie, was that some days it was a little harder for me to do my job. Everybody was laughing and joking but someone (me of course) had to get everybody back to work. I like to have fun like everyone else, but alas, someone had to crack the whip!

All things considered, the majority of the people I have worked with in this business were (and are) wonderful. Making a movie is like belonging to a big family - but only for an intense and short period of time. And like any big family, some members just can’t get along with the others.

As a filmmaker, I’ve been fortunate to have traveled around the world and witness events that most people don’t get to see. If there is one wonderful result of my career, it is all the fabulous stories I can get to tell! And now I can tell stories and share my filmmaking experiences with you in this course.

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(3) The 10 Commandments of Filmmaking

How to Work (and Survive) in the Film and Television Industry.

My years in the film and TV business have taught me many things, but the main thing I have learned is to “remain human at all costs.” By this I mean to simply “treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.”

Making a film is a stressful job. You have to remember that there is a great deal of money and hundreds of careers on the line everytime the camera rolls. It isn’t just about you and how much you get paid.

When you enter this business, you step into the world of “entertainment.” Television and movies are just one part of this “make-believe” environment - dance, theatre and music are some other examples.

This is a business of artistic expression, massive egos and huge amounts of cash - a recipe for disaster if I ever saw one! It is also a business where you can lose your soul if you’re not careful.

Remember the often cited (and industry changeable) quote of Hunter S. Thompson: "The (television) business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side."

With that in mind, I’ve created the following list of “Ten Commandments of Filmmaking” which is my way of showing how anyone can (and should) work and survive in this business - without getting OR giving ulcers!

This list also gives you some insight into my own personal philosophy and work ethic which I also discuss throughout this course. So here now are my “Ten Commandments of Filmmaking”:

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1. It’s only a movie - no one should get hurt

2. Ask lots of questions and never assume anything

3. There are no rules in filmmaking - only sins!

4. Listen to the people who know more than you do

5. You have to EARN respect - not demand it

6. Don’t abuse your power - use Power Through not Power Over

7. Don’t be afraid to change your mind

8. A healthy Ego is necessary - self importance is unnecessary

9. Have a sense of humour – and learn to laugh at yourself

10. Take 10 at lunch – and change your socks and shoes

Okay, let’s go through each of these “rules” one-by-one.

C1. It’s only a movie - no one should get hurt

This one should be obvious. Making any kind of film or TV production can be risky because there are so many natural hazards on a film set: crew members can trip over cables, fall off platforms, equipment can tumble on them, they can burn and cut themselves and they can slip down stairs.

Then there are the added hazards that are specific to our industry: breathing atmosphere smoke for long periods, accidents involving insert cars or process trailers, accidents involving stunts and special effects and noise hazards such as loud explosions and gunfire.

All crew members should be aware of the safety issues of working on any set. If you have any concerns or suggestions, talk to your shop steward, union representative or the First Assistant Director who, on most productions around the world, is the Set Safety Supervisor.
C2. Ask lots of questions and never assume anything

Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Like the expression says, “The only dumb question is the one that was never asked.” As an AD you have to listen and you have to ask questions. If something doesn’t feel right, or it doesn’t ring true, or it doesn’t make sense, ask questions. Solve it now.

Assuming it will all work out or be “ready on the day” is wrong. If something in the script doesn’t make sense, or you feel something is not working, deal with it right away. Because if it doesn’t work in the script, it sure won’t work when you are on set. This attitude of “it will be alright when we shoot,” will come back and haunt you 9 times out of 10.

Never assume anything. Never!

Fix it, change it, eliminate it, solve it, get rid of it. Whatever IT is, do something about it before you go to camera.

C3. There are no rules in filmmaking - only sins!

This is probably my best piece of advice. It's not original - it's a quote from the legendary film director, Frank Capra: "There are no rules in filmmaking. Only sins! And the cardinal sin is dullness.”

I want you to always remember this quote, and as you get up each morning and walk onto that set, refer to it often!

C4. Listen to the people who know more than you do

When was a Second AD on the TV Series “Hitchhiker” in 1985, I had to run the set for the first AD while he did some scheduling. Well, after a bit I got a little flustered, as this was my first time running the entire set.

Suddenly I heard my name. When I turned around, the dolly grip was waving me over to him. As I came closer, he smiled and said, “Peter, it’s block, light, rehearse, tweak, shoot!” Words I will always remember. (Thanks Mike!)

The crew work on the set - all the time! That’s what they do. They see directors and First AD’s come and go. They know more than you do. Always will. Listen to them and you will become a better AD.
C5. You have to EARN respect - not demand it

The hierarchy of a movie is very much like the hierarchy of the Army: General’s at the top and Privates at the bottom. And just like the Army, there are certain people in the higher positions that you won’t like or you are unable to get along with.

Directors, 1st AD’s and DOP’s form the “Triumvirate” of any movie set. They are the people in charge. And many times you will be faced with the difficult task of working for months with one (or more) of these people who are egotistical, abusive, or sometimes, incompetent at their job.

In my experience (35 years on set & 58 years of life) I believe that the majority of cast or crew who act up on set are just insecure. And because they are in a position of authority working in a “creative environment,” they feel they are “allowed” to have temper tantrums and yell at people.

This will always happen - and sometimes it happens a lot. How I deal with this, and suggest you do the same, is to remember this military expression: ”You need to respect the Rank - but you don’t have to respect the person.”

C6. Don’t abuse your power - use Power Through not Power Over

I alluded to this in #5. As a First AD, you have a very powerful position in the film industry. The Director hires you for your organizational skills and your command of the set; the Producers look to you to make sure the movie comes in on time and on budget; the crew look to you for leadership.

The “rank” of 1st AD means you get to carry “a big stick”. But a lot of AD’s will abuse this power and yell and scream and make everyone’s life miserable. In other words, they will take advantage of their position and take power over people.

Here’s a good thought…let’s yell and scream at everyone and maybe they will work harder! NOT! I remember another dolly grip (gotta watch out for these guys!) who said to me early in my career, “If you don’t like this speed, you’re going to hate the next one.”

My philosophy is to take the other route. In other words, use "power through." What this means is to work with your crew and bring them all together as a team and work it out together. The crew know you are in charge. You don’t have to flaunt it.
C7. Don’t be afraid to change your mind

I read a self-help book once that also had a set of ten commandments and one of them was "It's okay to change your mind."

This makes a lot of sense, especially when you are a First AD because you are making decisions all the time. Some of your decisions may need to change after you get more information from other people. The problem happens if your ego gets in the way.

I did that once. I thought I had the right answer and I didn’t want to change the schedule even though the Director and PM thought we couldn’t make it.

Well..we didn’t and I cost the production money. All because I didn’t want to do the extra work and also because I didn’t want to change my decision for fear that others would feel I didn’t know what I was doing (which turned out to be correct in this instance anyway.) Lesson learned!

C8. A healthy Ego is necessary - self importance is unnecessary

There is an important distinction between Ego and Self-importance.

Ego can be defined as “your consciousness of your own identity.” You need an ego in this business because Ego is important for your survival. Ego helps you to believe in yourself, it helps you to get up in the morning knowing that you still have things to learn but you are good at your job and you will get through your day by being fair and respecting others.

On the other hand, self-importance (or what I call “misplaced ego”) is “an inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others.” I believe it is this trait (more than anything else) that makes working and surviving in the entertainment industry harder than it has to be.

Here’s my formula for knowing when you are working on a bad set: (Insecurity + self-importance = people we all hate to work with)
C9. Have a sense of humour – and learn to laugh at yourself

This rule should probably be #1 on this list.

In my experience, the best film sets are the ones that have a relaxed and professional atmosphere presided over by a creative director with no insecurity issues; an experienced 1st AD with no attitude problems; and a DOP who loves the collaboration process and realizes that “making a film is not all about the lighting!”

Making a movie is hard work, and the occasional break from the stress and intensity of it by a film crew having a laugh pays for itself many times over.

I have found that my sense of humour (and my large repertoire of bad jokes and puns!) have gotten me through some very difficult times. Also, I think it is important to feel that you can say to the crew, “I don’t care whether you laugh at me or about me, as long as you laugh!” Kind of refers back to #8 doesn’t it?

C10. Take 10 at lunch – and change your socks and shoes

As a First AD you stand on your feet all day. Taking a moment after lunch to change your socks and shoes is a blissful moment – it actually re-energizes you. There is probably some psychological or chemical reason for this that I don’t understand, but whatever it is, try it because it does work!

I like to take about 10 - 15 minutes on my own somewhere off set during lunch to have a quiet time. This is where I can “recharge my batteries.”

As an Assistant Director, you have to be on your game all day and make hundreds of decisions with the crew constantly asking you questions. Taking time some time for yourself is really, really important to keep your body relaxed and your mind sharp.

One extreme example of this was the time we were shooting “The Lizzie McGuire Movie” in Rome. The scene we were filming took place at the Trevi Fountain and it involved our main actors and over 100 extras.

But here’s the “best” part. In order to shoot at this location (one of the most famous in Rome) we could not disrupt or hold back the tourists, which meant we had to shoot this long scene with not only our crew, cast and extras, but with thousands of tourists crowding us on all sides.
Add into this mix the fact that we had not only Italian extras and an Italian crew with our Italian First AD translating everything, but we also had to deal with the fact that the Trevi Fountains were loud. VERY LOUD!

When we broke for lunch, my ears were ringing.

Fortunately, they have one hour lunches in Italy (not like the half-hour lunches in North America.) After I ate, I excused myself from the restaurant and found a deserted doorway where I could sit and escape the crazy film world for a much needed 10 minutes of solitude. That few minutes (and a chocolate gelato) got me through the rest of the day.

“Will This Industry Eat You Up?”
http://filmmakeriq.com/general/filmmaking-360/will-this-industry-eat-you-up.html

(4) Personal Observations

I've been working in the film and TV industry for over 35 years and during that time I've had many young filmmakers ask me these same five questions:

1. How do I get into the film and television business?

2. How do I get people to notice my “obvious talents”?

3. How do I become a 3AD, 2AD, 1AD, PM, Director?

4. What are the tricks to getting work and surviving in this business?

5. How do I become successful?

Well, as you have probably guessed by now from your own experiences, there is no right answer - no one answer – no special secret! Yes...we all need to find our own way in.

But to guide you along the right path, I've come up with ten "factors" that I believe you need to have, learn or nurture to help you pursue your dream of working (and making a living) in this business:
1. Experience (make videos; go to film school; work for free)

2. Luck (being at the right place at the right time)

3. Connections (who you know)

4. Passion (if you don’t have this, give up now)

5. Determination (believe in yourself)

6. Creativity (we are all born with a special gift. What’s yours?)

7. Business (learn the steps on how to run a business)

8. Marketing (learn how to market and promote yourself)

9. Politics (understand the “unspoken rules” of the film world)

10. Win the lottery (or have a rich relative)

So what does all of this have to do with being an Assistant Director?

Everything!

I believe that to be successful in this business means:

1. You have to have an understanding of the POLITICS OF FILM!

2. You have to have a knowledge of who the POWER PLAYERS ARE AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM!

3. You need to know as much as you can about EVERYONE ELSE'S JOB!

4. You need to have a KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR CRAFT!

5. You need to know what is expected of you when you begin pre-production and when you step on the set

6. But most of all, you have to have PASSION! (Because some days that may be the only thing that will keep you going.)

“The Business - Understanding Film”

http://www.skillset.org/film/business/

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As you read though this course, I would like you to remember that many of the techniques I talk about are based on my way of doing things - it is not the only way.

Keep in mind that as you advance in your filmmaking career, you will discover what works best for others - but then, and this is the important part, you must find out what works best for you.

(5) The Differences Between Feature Films and Television

As I mentioned earlier, there is a big difference between shooting a Television episode and shooting a feature film. What I am mostly referring to here, is the “industry politics.”

For the following exercise, I am assuming that both the TV program and the Feature Film are dramas and that the TV networks are commercial in nature.

1. Here are some differences:

In Television you have a Network (CBC / ABC / NBC / Fox).
In Film you have a Studio (Paramount / Universal / Lions Gate).

In Television you have a small screen.
In Film you have a large screen.

In Television you have commercials interrupt the program.
In Film you have a no interruption of the film.

In Television you have network license fees.
In Film you have studio or private financing.

What are some more differences that you can come with?

“Another Difference Between TV and Film”

“What Is The Difference Between TV And Film?”
http://www.blurtit.com/q593598.html
2. Now here are some similarities:

Both need time and money to produce

Both require scripts

Both require actors

Both require (what else…?)

3. But the #1 difference between TV and Feature films is this:

Television is a **Producer’s Medium.**

Feature Films are a **Director’s Medium.**

This fact alone will give you a distinct advantage when it comes to surviving in the film and TV industry.

Need some proof?

Here’s a short exercise I would like you to do.

Look at the following two lists. Write down the name of a director or a producer who you feel had the most influence on the creation of each project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List A</th>
<th>List B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Rain</td>
<td>Hill Street Blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raging Bull</td>
<td>Miami Vice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once Upon a Time in the West</td>
<td>Wiseguy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Godfather</td>
<td>Law and Order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The names may vary slightly, but List A are Feature Films and the names you probably came up with were the directors.

List B are Television Series and the names you probably came up with were the producers.
Here are the names I have used:

**List A**

Black Rain (Dir: Ridley Scott)
Raging Bull (Dir: Martin Scorcese)
Once Upon a Time in the West (Dir: Sergio Leone)
The Godfather (Dir: Francis Ford Coppola)

**List B**

Hill Street Blues (Prod: Steven Bocho)
Miami Vice (Prod: Michael Mann)
Wiseguy (Prod: Steven J. Cannel)
Law and Order  (Prod: Dick Wolf )

Feature films are called “the big picture” because (theoretically) you get more time and more money compared to Television.

**In Feature films you can have:**

1. 1 set-up/day to 30 set-ups/day (average is 10-15 set-ups/day)
2. 1/2 page/day to 5 pages/day (average is 2 - 3 pages/day)
3. Very few location moves/day
4. 30 to 100 day shooting schedules (average is 40 - 60)
5. First AD Prep from 4 weeks to 12 weeks (average is 6 to 8 weeks)

Television is called “the sausage factory” because…well, it just is!

**In Television you can have:**

1. 20 set-ups/day to 50 set-ups/day (average is 25 - 30 set-ups/day)
2. 6 pages/day to 12 pages/day (average is 8 pages/day)
3. 1 to 3 location moves/day (average is 1 - 2 moves /day)
4. Half-hour dramas: 3 - 5 day shooting days /episode (average is 5 days)
5. One-hour dramas: 6 - 10 day shooting days/episode (average is 8 days)

6. First Assistant Director Prep is the same as the shooting days

**NOTE:** Here’s a list of the most pages, set-ups and location moves I have ever had to complete in one day. (These figures are from three different Television shows I worked on.)

1. We shot 16 pages in one day

2. We shot 98 set-ups over 2 days

3. We had 3 location moves (that’s 4 shooting locations on one day!)

As filmmakers, most of us aspire to work on big budget Feature Films, but the reality is, depending on where you live, you will probably spend most of your time doing episodic Television or low-budget indie films.

But this is not a bad thing!

Television and low-budget films are usually where we first discover the politics of the business. It’s also where we learn to sharpen our skills, practice our craft and perfect our art.

Working on television series or low-budget films is also where we have a chance to rise up through the ranks and be noticed: the opportunity to be hired as the “First” in any department.

**Here’s a fact:** if you can work and survive in Episodic Television, you can work easier in any other format (features, TV movies, commercials). In my experience, I find that it is much “easier” to move from Television to features than move from features to Television.

Why?

Understanding the differences and similarities between both Television and Film is essential to a successful and productive career in the film business because of one word: **POLITICS!**

Why?
Production Managers and Producers will contact each other for references and recommendations before hiring crew members. And like any business, what other people say about you is more important than what you can ever say about yourself!

So you need to always be aware of what the consequences will be if you are going to “burn a bridge” with any producer, director or Production Manager. In other words, before you say or do something that you may regret, ask yourself this question: “What is the short term benefit of my action going to be and what will the result of this action have on any future work.”

Remember, getting a job in this business is not just about how many credits you have. It is also about:

1. Who you know.
2. Who you have previously worked with.
3. Who you have upset (PM’s, Producers, Directors)

And sometimes, getting a job in this business is just about timing and good luck - being at the right place at the right time when the phone rings!

“The Business Side of Film: From Start-up to Success”

“Movie Making Manual”

(6) The Duties & Responsibilities of the 1st Assistant Director

Here’s a good explanation of what an Assistant Director is from the DGA (Directors Guild of America) Assistant Director Training Program website:

“Assistant Directors are responsible for the assembly of all the elements needed for filming and for the daily operation of the shooting set. Their objective is to provide the Director with everything he or she needs to put his or her vision on film. Their duties are supervisory, organizational, administrative - and multifarious.
Working within the structure that is governed by budgets, union and
guild contracts, industry custom, and so on, they make schedules,
attend to the cast, direct extras, oversee the crew as each shot is
prepared, create detailed reports of each day's events, among may
other things, and are looked to by cast and crew to solve the many
problems that continually arise.

The First Assistant Director is the Director's right hand. The Second
Assistant Director is the First's right hand. The Trainee is a member of
that team and learns by active participation in the process.

Assistant Directors are not Directors in the making. Although some
Assistant Directors have become Directors, the managerial and
administrative road more often leads to becoming a Production
Manager and/or Producer.

In fact, being an Assistant Director is a career objective in itself; it is a
highly revered, lucrative position with excellent benefits that enjoys
considerable status in the industry.”

I thought I would also include a list of the duties and responsibilities of the
First Assistant Director from the DGC (Directors Guild of Canada) and the
DGA (Directors Guild of America.)

This will give you some insight into what is expected of a First AD on film
and television productions in the USA and Canada. These duties may vary
slightly in your country, but the basic responsibilities would be the same.

1. First AD Duties & Responsibilities: DGC (Directors Guild of Canada)

Is the First Assistant to the DIRECTOR. S/he operates in cooperation with
the DIRECTOR and the PM as the Producer's administrative consultant
applying his/her artistic, technical and professional expertise as the on set
expediter and is responsible for maintaining optimum coordination among
crew categories and performers in order to maintain the pace required by the
shooting schedule as set by the DIRECTOR.

The 1AD’s duties include but are not limited to the coordination of or
participation in the following:

(a) Preparing script breakdown and strip board, listing probable
requirements of performers and extras in each scene

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(b) Preparing the shooting schedule and keeping it within the time limitations imposed by the budget, cast availability and the requirement of complete coverage of the script.

(c) If delegated by the PM or in his/her absence, overseeing the search, survey and management of locations and ascertaining the specific requirements of those locations as they might affect the production. The 1AD must be sent to each location site sufficiently prior to the commencement of photography to adequately perform his/her duties.

(d) Checking weather reports

(e) Preparing "day out of day" schedules for performers and determine cast and crew calls

(f) Coordinating the preparation of the call sheet for the cast and crew

(g) Directing background action and supervise crowd control

(h) Supervising the functioning of the shooting set and crew

(i) Process minor contracts, extra releases, and on occasion obtaining execution of contracts by performers (this may also be delegated to the PM and 2AD)

(j) Coordinating the work of any additional Assistant Directors and/or PA’s

2. First AD Duties & Responsibilities: DGA (Directors Guild of America)


“Living with Lou” (Video) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMPpqHODG6A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMPpqHODG6A)

(7) The Duties and Responsibilities of the Director

Since it will be the director you will have the most dealings with during any production, I think it is appropriate here to discuss the responsibilities and duties of the film and Television director during pre-production.

“What is a Film Director?” [http://www.wildsound-filmmaking-feedback-events.com/what-is-a-film-director.html](http://www.wildsound-filmmaking-feedback-events.com/what-is-a-film-director.html)
1. What are the director’s responsibilities?

“Film directors are responsible for approving every camera angle, lens effect, lighting, and set design and also take part in the hiring of key crew members. They coordinate the actors' moves, determine camera angles, and are usually involved in the writing, financing, and editing of a film.

The director also plays a key role in post-production. He/she works with the editor to ensure that the emotions of the scene and the close ups, mid shots and wide shots appropriately reflect which character is driving the narrative.

The director also advises on the (color) grading of the final images, adding warmth or frigidity to the composition of the shots to reflect the emotional subtext of the character or environment. They also participate in the sound mix and musical composition of the film.”

Here is a useful description from the DGC (Director’s Guild of Canada) that will give you a better idea of what a film and television director’s contractual obligations are:

1. The Director is employed by the Producer to direct a motion picture and whatever is seen and heard in the finished product.

2. The terms "Director" and "directing", include all related functions and activities required for translating and transferring the script, premise, and idea to the audio-visual image.

3. The Director's total function is unique and requires his participation in all creative phases of the motion picture making process, including but not limited to all creative aspects, of sound and picture.

4. The Director, works directly with all creative elements of the motion picture and participates in molding and integrating them into one cohesive dramatic and aesthetic whole. No one shall direct except the Director employed on the motion picture.

5. Without limitation, among the duties which the Producer assigns to the Director are:

a. Surveying and approving all locations and their use as they pertain to the directorial ideas, and need.
b. Directorial planning, and breaking down of the shooting script.

c. Plotting camera angles, and compositions, within the frame.

d. Participation in determining the requirements, of the sets, costumes, make-up, props, etc., for their proper directorial perspective and mechanical functioning.

e. Participating in the final casting of all performers.

f. Rehearsing actors, extras, and any of the visual and audio devices, necessary for the completion of the production.

g. Directing the action of all performers, extras, etc.,

h. Directing the dialogue and pre-recording and post-recording of dialogue.

i. Directorial supervision of the duties of the entire crew during rehearsal and shooting periods.

j. Making such script changes as necessary, within his jurisdiction, for the proper audio-visual presentation of the motion picture.

k. The right to the "First Cut". The Director shall participate in considerations about utilization of trick shots, process plates, inserts, montages, miniatures, transparencies, background, stock material, optical devices, and glass and matte shots.

**To sum up…**

1. The Director is the creative force behind the camera: the VISION

2. The Director creates the visual style (or look) of the film

3. The Director is responsible for getting performances from the actors

*“The Film Director”*
http://www.filmmakers.com/stories/Director.htm

*“Elia Kazan Speech: On What Makes a Director”*
http://www.actioncutprint.com/kazan.html
(8) The Director as Storyteller

“A film director is responsible for overseeing every creative aspect of a film. They develop a vision for a film, decide how it should look, what tone it should have, and what an audience should gain from the cinematic experience. He or she is in short, the storyteller.”

There are many facets of a Director's prep on any film or Television show - from location scouts and creative meetings to casting and scheduling. But the first, and most important part of their job is to understand the script: what the story is about; the themes; the story points; the characters.

(9) The 3 Types of Director

I have divided film and television directors into three distinct types. There are overlaps here of course, but in general, these three types will help you decide on what kind of director you are working for.

1. The "Technical" Director

This director spends most of his time with the crew on the technical aspects of the shot and scene. He spends very little time with the actors (giving direction). He may not know how to successfully communicate with actors and just wants to "let actors do their thing."

2. The "Performance" Director

This director understands the actor and the "acting process" but he also spends time with the technical aspects of the shot and scene.

3. The "New" Director

This director is someone who knows "a little about something but not enough of the entire job of directing." These directors usually work in other areas of the business and get a chance to direct. (ex: producer, writer, 1AD, editor, actor, DOP)
(10) The Role of the Director During Pre-Production

1. Location Scouting

Location scouting is a vital process in the pre-production stage of filmmaking. Once directors have decided what kind of look they require for the film, a search is begun for suitable locations.

Who goes on location scouts: Director, Location Manager, 1st Assistant Director, Producer, Production Manager or Unit Production Manager, Production Designer or Art Director, Transportation Captain or a Driver

2. The Budget

During script development, filmmakers produce a rough budget to convince film producers and film studios to give them a green light for production. During pre-production, a more detailed film budget is produced. This document is used to secure financing.

A budget is typically divided into four sections: above the line (creative talent), below the line (direct production costs), post-production (editing, visual effects, etc), and other (insurance, completion bond, etc).

**NOTE:** The First AD should also understand the budget. You should know where you can make suggestions on what to take out and on what to add in. A good Producer friend of mine always thought of the budget as a pie - you can have a few big slices or many little slices, but there is only one pie.

For example, if the Director and the DOP went to him and asked for an extra crane day, he would say: “I have no problem if you want a crane on Day 5. Just tell me how many extras you want to take out of Day 3 to pay for the crane.” The pie (budget) won’t get any bigger!

3. Casting

When a director first starts prep, they read the script through several times to get a feel for what the story is about and who the characters are. They then have a meeting with the Producer(s) and the Casting Director to discuss their ideas of the characters.

This is an important meeting for the Director, because it is where they find out what the Producer(s) are thinking and if they are on the right track.
After the meeting, the Casting Director goes away and puts together a list of actors that fit the character traits and specific looks discussed in the meeting with the Producer(s).

The Casting Director then has her/his own casting session where they record a "short list" of actors for the director and the Producer(s) to view.

NOTE: Because a director never has enough time to work with the actors in a casting session, here are the three qualities they look for in an actor when they audition them:

1. Do they look the part?
2. Do they have range?
3. Can they take direction?

4. Meetings, Meetings and More Meetings

The director will have many meetings during pre-production. These meetings are scheduled by the AD Department and range from script meetings and concept meetings with the producers to individual department head meetings.

5. Script and Scene Analysis

Because a director is a storyteller, they need to understand every detail about the story they are telling. Understanding the story requires a lot of work on the director’s part because they need to take the script apart scene by scene to find out what it is about, what works and what doesn't.

A director’s first impressions are vital when they begin the script read through process. They need to keep in mind their emotional reaction to the story and what images the story stimulates in them. What they "feel" is really what counts, because it is their emotional response to something that defines it as a "Truth."

In order to understand the script, a director needs to be able to operate in the sub-world of the characters. Therefore, one of the main purposes of script analysis for a director is to find out who the characters are and what happens to them.

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6. Character Analysis

After reading the script and making notes about script structure and scene analysis, the director needs to figure out the development and objectives of the characters. They do this by understanding the characters background, objectives and dialogue.

7. Creating the Visual Concept of the Show

A director’s visual concept is how they create the image structure and style of the film - it’s the “visual stamp” or look they put on the picture. (Think Ridley Scott or Tim Burton.)

Some examples of visual style are:

1. Deciding on what the audience is going to see (and not see) by deciding where to place the camera.

2. What is the pacing and mood of the story (fast or slow, dark and moody or light and fun?)

3. What is the rhythm of the story - a scene - an act. (Every scene should have peaks and lows.)

4. What is the color of the story? Colors can be used to express feelings and emotions and represent certain qualities of a character that can affect the sets and the costumes.

8. Mise-en-scene and Subworld

The French term mise en scène comes from the stage and literally means, "putting on stage." When applied to the cinema, mise-en-scène refers to everything that appears before the camera - sets, props, actors, costumes and lighting. Mise-en-scène also includes the positioning and movement of actors on the set, which is called blocking.

The subworld of a film is all the feelings and sensations a director create to arouse certain emotions from the audience. To do this, the director directs the story “beneath” the main story by developing actions, events and incidents that portray the deeper meaning of the story and the subtext of characters.

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9. Shot lists and Storyboards

A shot list is a description of all the camera angles for a scene and can include shot size, camera movement, character movement, coverage and cutaways.

Like most things in the film business, there is no standard format to follow when preparing a shot list. It varies from director to director. Many directors do not make shot lists unlike many TV Commercial directors who need to work with shot lists AND storyboards.

Shot lists are very useful because they can help guide you through the blocking process. But the thing to remember is this - a shot list is like a road map: it gives you a path to your destination but you don't always have to follow it.

Storyboards are a series of images that are displayed in a sequence for the purpose of pre-visualizing certain scenes in a movie. Some directors will want to storyboard the entire movie, but most storyboards are used for complicated action scenes and visual effects sequences.

“Film Pre-Production”
http://www.infoarticle.com/film/Film-Preproduction.asp

(11) The Assistant Director / Director Relationship

As a First Assistant Director, your working relationship with the Director is going to be one of the most important relationships you will have with anyone in this business.

Again, keep in mind the “industry politics” of the situation: is this a movie you are working on or is it a TV Series? Directors interview and hire the First Assistant Director on a feature film while the Production Manager (or Producer) hire the First Assistant Director on a TV Series. Remember earlier when I explained the #1 difference between Television and Feature films:

1. Television is a Producer’s Medium
2. Feature Films are a Director’s Medium.

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Well now you need to look at this difference from the point of view of your relationship with the Director.

1. On a Feature Film, you work **FOR** the Director, **WITH** the Producers.

2. On a TV Series, you work **WITH** the Director, **FOR** the producers.

**Example 1:** I’m First AD on TV series. There are only 1 1/2 hours left in our day and the director has 5 shots left to complete the scene. I know that shooting all five set-ups will take us into overtime. The Production Manager (or Line Producer) shows up and he/she asks me to tell the Director that he has to cut some shots. Since I work **FOR** them, I go up to the Director and tell him politely that he has to cut his shots so we can make our day.

**Example 2:** I’m First AD on a Feature Film. There are only 1 1/2 hours left in our day and the director has 5 shots left to complete the scene. I know that shooting all five set-ups will take us into overtime. The Production Manager (or Line Producer) shows up and he/she asks me to tell the Director that he has to cut some shots. Since I work **FOR** the director, I politely tell them to go ask the Director to cut his shots so we can make our day!

**NOTE:** As a matter of fact, I think the First Assistant Director on a TV Series should be more appropriately called the First Assistant Producer!

**(12) The Director and Assistant Director Meetings**

There are several meetings you will have with the Director during the pre-production of any show. You usually go through the script scene-by-scene with the Director so they can give you their notes on how they plan to shoot each scene and what special equipment they need (ex: crane, steadicam, circle track, special lenses, insert car etc.)

And don’t forget, on a TV Series, the First AD knows the cast and crew so you will be very useful to any new director who comes onto the series for the first time to prep and shoot. You are there to help and guide the director.

Here are some of the other objectives you would like to achieve during those meetings:

1. You will need to establish your relationship with the Director early in prep; because it could change during the shoot.

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2. You will want to find out “who” they are, what have they done before, are they prepared, what is their attitude

3. You will want to find out what kind of director they are (technical / actor driven)

4. You will want to listen carefully to what they say and how they say it. This will give you some insight into the personality and experience of a director.

(13) The Assistant Director’s Duties in Pre-Production

The following list is an overview of the First Assistant Director’s basic responsibilities during the pre-production of any film or TV production.

Keep in mind that these duties will vary (some more, some less) depending on the scale of the production: (ex: big budget Feature, low budget Feature, TV Movie, TV Series etc.)

**NOTE**: I will discuss most of these duties in detail later in this course.

1. Breakdown the Script

The first job you perform when you get hired as a First Assistant Director is breaking down the script. What this means is that you mark, colour and add up all of the script elements that you will eventually input into the one-liner and the shooting schedule:

   a. Scene numbers
   b. Page count
   c. Characters
   d. Other elements (ex: extras, stunts, hair, make-up, wardrobe, props, FX)

2. Prepare the One-Liner

After you have marked your script, you then begin inputting all of these elements into your film scheduling program or your breakdown sheets.
3. Design the Shooting Schedule

After you have finished inputting all of the elements from the script, you start to assemble these elements into a preliminary shooting order. This process changes and evolves over the course of pre-production because you will be constantly receiving new information and script revisions.

4. Create a Day-Out-Of-Days (DOD)

Once the schedule is complete, you will distribute the Cast Day-Out-Of-Days which shows the work, travel and hold days for all actors during the length of the shoot.

5. Schedule all Meetings

The Assistant Directors are responsible for scheduling all meetings with the director during pre-production. I have an expression I use during prep:

1. Order from the Board (1st AD)

2. Content from the Schedule (2nd AD)

What this means is that during pre-production, I have the 2nd AD schedule all the meetings with the director and input the script elements (content) into the shooting schedule. This frees me up to focus on location scouts, the shooting order and my scene shooting timings.

6. Shot Lists and Storyboards

If you are lucky, you will work with a director who gives you a shot list. As I mentioned before, shot lists (like storyboards) should be just used as guides but they will certainly help you to better organize your schedule.

With a shot list, you can use the number of set-ups the Director wants per scene to help you time your shooting day, rather than just the page count. Storyboards are also a great way to prepare your scene and shooting times.

7. Prepare the Call Sheet with the 2AD

The 2nd AD is responsible for preparing the daily Call Sheet but they must have all the scene and timing information from you first so they know when to bring in the actors and other crew.
8. Shooting Times

This is a list of times where you want to be during each shooting day. You have to figure out how long each scene will take to shoot and then you mark the times when you want to begin a scene and when you want to finish the scene. This gives you a guide for where you want to be at any given moment in the shooting day.

9. Everyone Works for You!

When I say “everyone works for you,” I don’t mean literally. What I mean by this statement is that I get all the departments, including producers and writers, to liason through the Assistant Directors, first, regarding all changes and questions relating to the script and the director.

Some examples of this are:

a. During prep, I keep one script for my breakdown, and another one I call “Master Script Notes.” This is the script where I make notes for the writer regarding location changes, split scenes with new numbers, character name changes etc.

Don’t forget, during the pre-production of any movie, you will not have the script supervisor with you until maybe 2 weeks before you go to camera. So someone has to keep all the script changes and additional notes together.

Then every week or so, I contact the writer (after the director and producer approve all our changes) and send them this master script copy so they can make the necessary changes for the next draft of the script.

b. When I work with producers, I ask them early on in pre-production to not confirm any cast days without going through me first. This puts a lot of pressure on producers from agents and studios, but it is essential they don’t book actor dates too early to help you design a better shooting schedule.

Let me explain. One of the first urgencies of any show is to confirm and book cast as soon as possible. This is especially true when you are doing a TV series, where the prep time could be as little as 5 days before shooting.

Booking your cast quickly is understandable and necessary. Producers need to do this as soon as they can to secure all the actors the director wants and then make their deals.
The one problem with this phase of prep is that casting agents will want to book the dates of their clients as soon as possible and then lock them in so they can figure out what other shows they can book them on.

The danger here is not in booking (confirming) an actor too early - that is a good thing. Your problems can occur when the agents want to lock in the shooting days the actor will be working.

As you go through pre-production, your schedule will always be changing as you get more information about location availability and scene changes etc. Because you need to keep your board in flux for a while, if you lock in an actor’s days too early, you risk having problems scheduling around those dates.

“The Assistant Director”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assistant_director

(14) Film and Television Pre-Production Activities

The following list discusses the basic pre-production activities for any film or television production. Keep in mind that this list is structured primarily for a feature film.

1. Location Scouts

Looking for locations is usually the biggest part of pre-production on most shows - unless the show takes place all in the studio or you are going for that “green screen” look! Locations have to be locked-in as quickly as possible so that all departments can begin working on their budgets and schedules.

a. The location manager has a concept meeting with the producers and the director after reading the script

b. The location manager (and location scouts) find as many choices as possible for the Director

c. The location manger sorts through the first choices with the Production Designer to choose which locations to show the Director
2. What to look for on a Location Scout

On most scouts, these are the crew who usually attend: Director, Location Manager, 1st AD, Producer, PM or UPM, Production Designer, a Driver or the Transportation Coordinator. Here’s what you want to look for:

a. What are the actual location requirements? What time does the Unit need to be wrapped out? What time can we get into the location?

b. How accessible is the location for equipment? Where are the loading docks, elevators and stairs?

c. What are the noise factors? Is their traffic close by? What about construction, leaf blowers, chain saws and barking dogs?

d. What is the lighting set-up time? Will we need a Pre-rig? Do we need to place lights and cranes outside on the street or the lawn?

e. What are the Day For Night (DFN) possibilities of a location? Can we tent the windows? Are there lots of windows? (could be problematic.)

f. What other scenes can be shot in this location or near by? Try and group as many locations together as possible. Can you make a small three-walled set in one of your major locations?

g. Where is the Unit (circus) going to park? How close to the location can we get? What is the travel time to the location from the Unit?

h. Where can we park the work trucks? (Grip, electric, camera, sound, props etc) Can we keep them just around the corner? Do we have to unload all the equipment from the trucks and bring it into the location? Where can you stash the equipment so that it is out of the shots?

i. Where is crew parking? What is the shuttle time to the Unit and to the set?

j. Where will the lunch facilities be? How far will lunch be from set? Can the crew walk to lunch or do they have to take shuttle?

k. What are the Curfew times for the neighborhood? Can we get a curfew extension past 11:00pm? Can we shoot all night if we need to?


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3. First Scouts (Director First - Schedule Second)

As you begin scouting, you will feel as if you have all the time in the world to find your locations - even on an 8 day television series. So the “first scouts” are usually more relaxed - longer lunches, stopping for coffee, lots of stories and getting to know each other in the van.

As you go on these early scouts, everyone will be looking for locations that work for the Director first, and then it will be up to you to see if you can make it work for the schedule.

4. Last Scouts (Schedule First - Director Second)

As you go on these last scouts, you will be running out of time and the stress level will be higher. You will then be looking for locations that will work first the Schedule and then does it work for the Director.

NOTE: Of course, everything is relative. If you are doing a Television Series or a very low-budget film, it will definitly be in the above order. But if you are working on a big budget Feature with a well-known Director, you will still be looking for locations that the suit the director first.

At some point, if you are close to shooting and you still have no workable schedule, it will be up to the producers to step in. But, as long as the locations for the first part of the film have been locked, you can still go scouting for your other locations during your shooting period (usually before or after wrap or on weekends.)

Remember the POLITICS of this business and who you work FOR and WITH at all times.

NOTE: In this business, (unless you are making a big-budget picture,) deciding on what you “want” in a film and what you really “need” in the film usually comes down to finding the best trade-off or compromise that will work for all departments. (Remember the “Budget Pie!”)

5. Department Head Meetings with the Director

The AD Department is responsible for scheduling all meetings with the Director. An Assistant Director (1st AD or 2nd AD) will usually attend all of these meetings (except for #1, 2, 3.) Of course, depending on the complexity of the film (stunts, FX, animals), the Director could have more or even less meetings than I have listed below.

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NOTE: I have made a list of the crew members that usually show up for these meetings depending on what is happening in prep at the time.

NOTE: Because the DOP usually starts several weeks after prep begins, they will not be able to attend all of the early meetings, but I have included them on the lists as well.

1. Concept meeting – Director, Producers, Studio or Network Executives

2. Script meeting - Director, Producers and Writers (if available)

3. Casting meeting - Director, Producers and Casting Director

4. Location meeting - Director, Producers, Production Manager, Location Manager and Production Designer, DOP, 1st AD

5. Costumes meeting - Director, Costume Designer, Production Designer, Producers, Production Manager, DOP, 1st AD

6. Props meeting - Director, Props Master, Production Designer, Producers, Production Manager, DOP, 1st AD

7. Set Dec meeting - Director, Set Dresser, Production Designer, Producers, Production Manager, DOP, 1st AD

8. Stunts and Special FX meeting - Director, Stunt Coordinator, Special FX Coordinator, Producers, Production Manager, DOP, 1st AD

9. Extras casting meeting – Director, Extras Casting Director, Costume Designer, Producers, Production Manager, 1st AD, 2nd AD

10. Picture Car meeting – Director, Transportation Coordinator, Picture Car Wrangler, Producers, Production Manager, DOP, 1st AD

11. Animals meeting – Director, Animal Wrangler, Producers, Production Manager, DOP, 1st AD

12. Visual Effects meeting – Director, Visual FX Supervisor, Producers, Production Manager, Production Designer, DOP, 1st AD

13. On an episodic Television Series, the director will also want to visit the set and meet with the DOP, Hair and Make up, the Sound Mixer and the actors. He will also want to visit the standing sets.

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6. Director and 1st Assistant Director Meeting

(We discussed this earlier in Section #12)

7. The Assistant Directors and the Director’s Assistant Meeting

On most Feature Films, TV Movies and TV Pilots, the Director will have an assistant to help them with everything from getting lunch, formatting script notes to arranging their personal schedules for the duration of the movie. A well organized Director’s Assistant is invaluable to the Director - and they are also an important ally to the Assistant Directors as well.

Because the Director’s Assistant will spend more time with the Director than you will (during prep) you should have several meetings with them to coordinate the Director’s activities and to make sure all communication is working between them and the Assistant Directors.

8. The Extras Budget

The Extras budget is usually the only budget the AD department has to manage. You start by getting the Extras budget from the Production Manager which is usually listed in “man hours” for the show.

After you have a preliminary schedule, you begin your first pass on the extras count by deciding how many background performers you feel you need to have for each scene.

Since you do this budget very early in prep, this number probably won’t be based on a real location, but will come from your own experience and from reading the script. (re: How many people will it take to fill a nightclub when the script says “the club is busy and jammed with patrons and dancers.”)

You should budget high for all extras because every director will want as many extras as they can for a scene. As all film budgets do, the extras budget will eventually be cut down, but at least you have a good starting point.

9. Extra Casting Meeting

This meeting is very important for many departments because of the overlap that occurs with extras (Hair, Makeup, Costumes etc.) This is also the meeting where the Assistant Directors can have some creative input with the Director on the number and the look of the extras as well.

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Of course, your creative involvement here will always depend on your relationship with the Director at this point in prep. (Remember the Politics!)

The following departments should attend this meeting:

a. Director
b. Producer
c. Production Manager
d. 1st AD
e. 2nd AD
f. Extra Casting Director
g. Costume Designer
h. Props Master

When the meeting is finished, you distribute the Extra Breakdown list to:

a. Extras Casting
b. Props
c. Hair
d. Makeup
e. Locations
f. Costumes
g. Production Manager
h. Accounting

“So You Wanna Make a Low-Budget Movie?”
http://www.soyouwanna.com/site/syws/makemovie/makemovie.html#para1

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10. Stunts and Special Effects Meeting

It is always a good idea to schedule these two meetings together since there is so much overlap between these two departments.

Because these two departments have more safety concerns than other departments, it is a good idea to get to know the Stunt Co-ordinator and SPFX Co-ordinator as best you can during pre-production. The last thing you want to deal with on set are “cowboys” in either of these two areas.

Make sure you go over all details of every stunt or special effect in the film so you know the safety factors, rigging time, potential dangers, and other details that affect the time it will take to shoot.

11. Safety Meetings in Prep

On most productions now, the First Assistant Director is the Set Safety Supervisor (at least in North America), which means you have the final say on the set when a stunt or effect is ready to precede. As the Set Safety Supervisor, you also have to be present at any Safety Meetings that are held during pre-production.

Here’s a website that will give you lots of excellent information about health and safety issues in the Film Industry - Safety and Health in Arts, Production and Entertainment (SHAPE) http://www.shape.bc.ca


12. Visual Effects

Visual effects (CGI) are in! Almost every film or TV show has some kind of visual effect in them: everything from creating gunfire flashes to crowd duplication to complicated Green Screen shots.

If the production you are on has lots of visual effects, you will be scheduling many meetings over the course of your pre-production. Keep in mind that each shot costs thousands of dollars, so creative planning and scheduling is a matter of budgetary importance when dealing with visual effects.
You need to be in constant contact with the Visual FX company and the Visual FX Supervisor so you can get the most current paperwork as possible from them. Each visual effect shot usually has several elements to it (main unit, green screen, plate shots etc) and you need to break these out and organize them into the proper shooting order.

Shot lists, storyboards and computer generated “pre-viz” images play an important part of this process.

NOTE: If you aren’t that familiar with Visual Effects, you need to educate yourself now! Read all you can, take workshops and go visit FX houses and ask for a tour. As a First AD, you may not be involved in the creative process for developing these shots, but you must understand the process well enough so you know how much time it will take to shoot each shot on set.

13. Animals

I have worked with a variety of animals, birds and reptiles on film sets over the years: horses, mules, oxen, tigers, baboons, dogs, cats, alligators, geese, wolves, snakes, rats, 100,000 bees and yes…even a fly! And no matter what the trainers say, whatever you need the animal to do, it’s always a gamble as to whether they will perform the way you want them to the first time. And they will almost never perform the same way twice!

Working with animals is very demanding and they require a unique method of “creative scheduling.” Here are some tips for you:

1. Work closely with the trainers to find out everything you can about the animal you will be working with.

2. Go over the script with the director and the trainers to get a “realistic” estimate of the time it will take to do every movement required.

3. If you are working with exotic animals, (tigers, bears etc) find out the animal’s habitual feeding times and work times.

4. Ask the trainers how they plan to work the animal on the set and what special requirements they need (electrical fencing, corals, trailers near by etc.)

5. Take some time to watch the trainers rehearse the animals so you get an idea of what the animals can do, how long it takes and also how the trainers and animals work together on the set.

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STORY - Why the Tiger is my “Power Animal”: In the movie “Bird on a Wire,” we had some tigers that were to chase Goldie Hawn in the final sequence of the film. Having never worked with these animals before, I went down to the stage on the weekend (on my own time) and spent a few hours watching the trainers work with these magnificent animals.

I was sitting about 5 feet up sitting on a platform on set watching the trainers work with three tigers. Suddenly, one of the tigers turned from the trainer and ran towards me. The next thing I know, the tiger had stretched up and put it’s two huge paws on my knees and looked me straight in the eyes. This tiger was less than 12 inches from my face. I still remember the weight of his paws on my knees, its breath on my face and its eyes… staring right into mine and going straight down into my soul. The tiger then backed away and trotted back to his trainer as if nothing had happened. I will never forget that moment!

NOTE: If you’re shooting a Western or any production that involves horses, no matter what you think the movie is about, no matter who else is involved on the set, when you’re working around horses, it’s ALL about them.

I’ve had the opportunity to work on several westerns and these films create new rules for you as the First Assistant Director. The last big western I worked on was “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” for HBO in 2006.

It’s one thing to have a long, trailing line of horses, riders, wagon trains and extras walking slowly along the bald prairie. It’s a completely other thing to film a battle scene with dozens of horses, stunt people, explosions, gunfire, camera cranes, and extras running everywhere.

As always, safety is a major issue when working with large groups of horses, extras and actors. Horses are big and strong and like any animal, no matter how well trained or domesticated, they are also unpredictable. Remember to work closely with the Head Wrangler and listen to their advice. Always!

14. Children

Working and scheduling children (under the age of 16) is a difficult challenge for the First Assistant Director because children work less hours than the crew’s normal 12 hour day - and the younger they are, the less hours they can work. Add school time to that during school months (3 hours per day) and you end up having a child actor in your film who can spend maybe 4 - 6 hours in front of the camera.

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**NOTE**: I’m specifically talking about child Union actors here. It’s very important to understand all the rules and regulations of the Union contracts in your state or country. In the USA it is SAG; in Canada it is the ACTRA contract as well as the UBCP contract in Vancouver.

When working on a non-union production with child actors, my best advice is to follow Union rules…and your conscience!

Spend time getting to know the teachers, tutors, parents and guardians of the child actors. Always be honest with them. Let them know what is really going on regarding time etc.

**TIP**: Have the 2nd AD create an “Actor Cheat Sheet” which breaks down the shooting hours, breaks and school times on your show.

**STORY**: When we shot “The Lizzie McGuire Movie” in 2002, Hilary Duff was 15. As the star, she was in almost every scene and she had to go to school every day. We spent 3 weeks shooting in Rome and the rest in Vancouver. On top of all that, she also played two different characters - and a few times, both characters were in the same scene (motion control camera here we come!)

We estimated that Hilary was only in front of the camera for about 4 - 5 hours a day! This takes creative scheduling, lots of patience from the director and the cooperation of all the other actors and departments.

“SAG” (Screen Actors Guild)
http://www.sag.org

“ACTRA” (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists)
http://www.actra.ca

“UBCP” (Union of BC Performers)
http://www.ubcp.com/

“Actor Cheat Sheets”
15. Production Coordinator

The Production Coordinator is an excellent ally for you during prep. You want to make sure she knows what you are doing and where everyone is going at all times (scouts etc.)

The production office handles all the paperwork distribution, script revisions, travel memos, crew lists, lunches and just about everything else that makes a film production run smoothly and efficiently.

Because both the 1st AD and the Production Coordinator start early in prep, she will be helping you prepare and distribute the daily prep memo until the 2nd AD starts.

16. Production Manager

In most cases, it will be the Production Manager you will be making your deal with. You may negotiate your rate with a producer, but it will be the Production Manager who you negotiate with for all your other items such as computer rental, car rental, per diem, cell phone etc.

Make sure you keep the Production Manager updated on your one line schedule. Discuss all concerns with them regarding time and budget. Let the Production Manager know if you foresee any problems as early as you can like additional equipment, overtime and meal penalties.

If the Production Manager can’t go on a scout, report to them when you get back and let them know what happened.

17. Key Location Survey

The Key Location Survey is where the department heads and their assistants, plus the producers and director, get on a bus and go visit all the locations for the film. Depending on the budget of your film, and how many locations you have, this survey could take a half day or several days.

The Key Survey gives the shooting crew their last chance to go over all the technical requirements for filming at a particular location. These surveys are very important and you need to help schedule the appropriate time needed at all the locations with the Location Manager.
From the Director’s point of view, this survey is not about explaining every shot. It’s about discussing where the camera will be looking, what the lighting requirements are, what the art department specifics are, where the work trucks can park and other technical issues such as sound, stunt and special effects concerns etc.

Here’s a list of who usually goes on a key location survey: Director, 1st AD, 2nd AD, Production Manager, Location Manager, Assistant Location Manager, Producers, Production Designer, Art Director, Set Decorator, DOP, Grip, Gaffer, Grip Best Boy, Gaffer Best Boy, Grip Pre-Rigger, Electric Pre-Rigger, Transportation Coordinator, Transportation Captain, Construction Coordinator, Painter, Sound Mixer, Stunt Coordinator, Special FX Coordinator, Visual FX Supervisor, Animal Wrangler

18. Production Meeting

We all hate meetings but they are a necessary evil in any business. In the film and TV industry, the Production Meeting is the biggest and most important meeting because this is where we go through the script to review the director’s concepts and all the production arrangements.

NOTE: If this is a TV series or low-budget movie, this meeting is usually the last time a Director can ask for anything that will impact the budget.

Here’s what happens in a Production Meeting:

1. The First Assistant Director runs the meeting.

2. Everyone introduces themselves and mentions their department.

3. The Producer and the Director will usually have something to say.

4. The First Assistant Director reads through the script scene-by-scene. This is done with no dialogue and in scene order (not in schedule order!)

5. Every department gets to discuss with the Director their specific requirements for each scene. It is an open discussion about the show.

6. The 2nd AD should have a printed shooting schedule (in scene order) so they can add specific notes that come up during the meeting.
7. After the script has been read, you go over the one-line schedule to give everyone an idea of what the shooting days (and order) will be.

8. I also ask all departments to go over the schedule on their own, and if they see any places where scenes can be flipped around to make better use of time, I would like them to let me know. If I can flip the scenes, I will. (This is particularly important for Hair and Make-up times.)

**NOTE:** If certain departments need longer to discuss their specific scene requirements, schedule these as smaller meetings (Side Bar) after the Production Meeting for the individual departments and the Director.

**19. Second Unit**

Second Units are smaller film production units that work on specific scenes during the main unit shooting period.

They usually handle visual effects plate shots, stunt scenes (such as car chases with stunt doubles), aerial shots, establishing shots and insert shots. They can even be used to film entire dialogue scenes with actors if the main unit cannot handle it in their schedule.

Some TV Series have full-time Second Units that act as “clean-up crews.” They tend to shoot material from scenes the Main Unit couldn’t get, and re-shoot scenes from previous episodes.

**NOTE:** I like to refer to Main Unit as “shooting neck up” and Second Unit as “shooting neck down”.

**20. Video Playback and Computer Playback**

Video playback is used for scenes that require an image on a television monitor to be viewed by the camera on set. Computer playback is when the camera sees images on a computer screen on set.

To schedule these scenes properly, you have to note all the scenes that require playback and when they appear on your board. You then need to schedule enough time before these scenes will be shot for the TV playback images to be created and the computer images to be generated.
21. Stock Shots, Photographs, Inserts

These items have a tendency to be forgotten or not mentioned in detail during pre-production. Make sure you make a note of all of these items with the appropriate departments so nothing slips through the cracks.

22. Assistant Director, Transportation, Locations Meeting

These three departments are responsible for the logistics of any film production. It is very important that you get these three departments together (sometime after the Production Meeting) and go over a map of each location and discuss the following items:

1. Confirm where the unit is parking and where the work trucks will park.

2. Discuss company moves (shuttles, equipment trucks etc.)

3. Confirm where lunch will be and how long it will take to get there.

4. Discuss anything else that will affect moving to and from a location.

**STORY** – Here’s one example of why you must be diligent in your prep work, spend the proper time on location scouts and Tech Surveys and discuss everything during the Production Meeting.

It’s called CYA! (Cover Your Ass!)

I was the First Assistant Director on a very big 3 week commercial shoot. The director was a feature director. He was very creative but not that interested in the logistics and other non-creative details of making a film. This made my job even harder.

We were going to shoot at a soccer field. We only needed to shoot in two directions so on our Tech Scout we confirmed with the Director and the DOP where the work trucks would park. I even reconfirmed this in the Production Meeting.

On the day of shooting, I arrived at the soccer field and all the work trucks were parked were we had decided. But when the Director arrived, he decided to change his mind and shoot 180 degrees in the other direction.
There were a few moments of silence among the Producers, DOP and myself. We all knew we didn’t have time to move all these trucks. First of all, we didn’t have permits to park them anywhere else and secondly, we had a company move to another location after lunch.

So I held up my hands and framed the scene for him. I said (as tactfully and as calmly as I could) “So…you want to start on the Wardrobe truck and pan to the Grip truck?”

There was another moment of awkward silence. He finally understood. This was not a big feature. The trucks stayed (and we made our day.)

23. Key Grip, Gaffer and First Assistant Director Meeting

A meeting I like to have shortly after the Production Meeting is with the Key Grip and the Gaffer. In this meeting, we go over the shooting schedule day by day and scene by scene.

What we are looking for are ways we can improve the schedule by moving scenes around to help with logistics and lighting. Again, just like I did for Hair and Make-up, if I can change the scene order to save some shooting time, I will.

24. DOP and First Assistant Director Meeting

In this meeting, I go over the schedule scene-by-scene with the DOP to figure out how long we feel each scene will take to shoot. I make a note of these times and this becomes my guide on how to organize each day.

We also discuss re-arranging certain scenes to get a better work flow from the crew, how to better manage the days and other logistics.

**NOTE**: Since the DOP helps me decide on the shooting times for the show, the end result is that we usually have a better working relationship on the set.

(15) What Happens When the Cast Arrives

If your prep has gone according to plan, and you have completed your Tech Survey and Production Meeting, the main actors will usually arrive during the last week of pre-production. This is the time when the actors are required to go through a series of fittings, meetings, rehearsals and tests.

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1. Cast Wardrobe Fittings

The Costume department needs time to find the right wardrobe for the actors. You need to schedule in the appropriate amount of time for the actors to meet the designer as well as have several fittings. This gets more complicated if your film is a period piece or when the costume department has to “build” (design and make) the costumes.

**NOTE:** The Costume Designer will never find or make all the costumes for the entire show before you go to camera. Like all departments during this last week of prep, the Costume Designer will only fit the costumes based on your shooting schedule. So if the schedule changes, the AD’s need to inform all departments as soon as possible.

2. Props

Most actors need a variety of props during the shoot. This is the time where the prop department has gathered up the props for each actor so they can get approvals as well as measure the actor for proper sizes on rings etc.

3. Special Training/Rehearsals (military, dancing, sword fights)

Do the actors in your film need to know how to ballroom dance? Swordfight? Shoot weapons? Drive a certain vehicle? Be part of an special unit? (soldier, cop, firefighter) Speak with a dialect?

This is also the time when actors are given the opportunity for special training and rehearsals. A character in a film knows what they are doing in their chosen profession - the actor may not. It is imperative that they get as much training and rehearsals as possible (within budget of course) throughout the film.

**STORY:** I was the First Assistant Director on the Second Unit Battle Sequence for the movie “Legends of the Fall.” I was also tasked with the job (along with the Military Advisor) to set up and train the 1000 extras who would be in the WW1 battle scenes. We had less than 2 weeks to do all this.

We spent the first week working out all of the logistics; confirming these with Director Ed Zwick and his storyboards; planning the event down to the smallest detail with the Props and Costume departments who had to dress and arm all of the extras; and had many conversations with Special Effects who had 25 special effects people who were responsible for setting off all the explosions on the battlefield as the troops charged over it - at night!

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We then had the second week to set up and train the main battle group of about 200 extras who played the officers and NCOs (non-commissioned officers) of the 9 sections it would take to fill the battlefield.

On the day of the scene, (it was actually shot at night) we were only budgeted for 4 hours of rehearsal in the daylight with the entire 1000 extras! From the time the first extra got off the bus at base camp, to the last extra marching into their place in the trenches, it was 1 1/2 hours later.

When actor Adin Quinn blew his whistle and the camera pulled back on the crane to see 1000 Canadian “soldiers” climb out of the trenches and charge across a battlefield as hundreds of explosions rocked our insides and flares screamed over our heads, we knew we had helped to create a very memorable scene in this movie.

4. Camera, Hair and Make Up Tests

Camera tests are very important for the DOP and the Director. It gives them a sense of what the film will look like before they go to camera. Lenses, shutter speeds, filters and lighting designs are just some of the examples of what gets tested during this process.

Hair and Make-up tests on the actors are crucial at this time as well. The relationship between the actors and the DOP is a very important one because the actors want to know how they will look in front of the camera. Many a DOP has been fired after a few days of shooting because of this fact alone!

Also, special make-up effects need to be tested for colour and texture as well as the look of specific hair designs and wigs. And don’t forget - studio and network executives want to see what they’ll be getting for their money.

**TIP:** You should schedule enough time in the last week of prep for a variety of camera tests so you can solve any technical and creative issues early on. It gets very expensive after everyone see the dailies to realize that something is not working and you need to re-shoot the scene.
5. Cast Photos for Art Department and Props

Depending on the subject matter and time period of your film, the Art Department will need to get photos from the actors as well as shoot photos of the actors to help sell the environments in which they “live.” For example: when an actor walks into her “home” on the set, you want to see photos of her and her “family.”

And what about when a cop shows his Police ID photograph, or we see a mug shot of a ”bad guy?” These photographs have to be taken by the props department before the scene takes place. These have to be scheduled as well.

6. The Script Read-Through

The script read-through is when the director and cast discuss the script and their characters. This usually happens in a hotel room where the available cast, director, writers and the producers sit around a table and read the script.

This read-through is the first opportunity that everyone can get together to start the process of working on the script. If the whole cast cannot be present, two other actors (one male and one female) can be brought in to read the other parts. Or, depending on your budget, the producers will also read the other parts.

Other crew members that can be present are the 1st AD, DOP and the Script Supervisor. As the 1st AD, I always show up to read-throughs. Not only do you get a chance to meet the actors in an informal setting, but you also get a sense of how the cast will work together for the next few weeks or months.

7. Cast Rehearsal

Based on the budget of your film, who the Director is and who your main cast are, these rehearsals have to be scheduled as well.

After the read-through, the director will want to rehearse certain scenes based on the specific needs of the director and actors. This is so they can sort out character and story issues privately before standing on a set with 100 crew members watching.

Most of these rehearsals take place in hotel meeting rooms, but many times they can take place on the actual sets or real locations that are going to be used in the film. Again it is all based on time and money.

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NOTE: At some point, you are just going to run out of time during your last week of prep, so these cast rehearsals usually happen on the weekend before you start shooting.

(16) Shooting on Film or Digital?

We have now officially entered the digital age of filmmaking.

With movie theatres changing over to digital projection, TV Networks changing to the HD format, and the lower cost of shooting on digital, it all makes sense that many productions from now on will be shot in the digital format.

I have worked with the four basic formats for shooting feature films and television: 16mm, Super 16mm, 35mm and HD. What are the differences between them? What does it mean to you, the First Assistant Director?

With technology changing so fast, I can’t even try and answer these questions because about six months from now, my answers will be outdated. But the choice between using film or digital for a production is usually a creative choice versus a budget choice.

As a First AD, you need to get to know what the shooting format means to you - on your particular production. What formats have you used before and what are the differences now? Talk to the camera department and find out everything you can about the cameras and the system they are using.

The only thing I will say on this subject is this: film cameras (for the most part) are portable and durable. (We used to say that if you dropped an Arriflex on the sidewalk, the city would sue for damages!)

Digital cameras on the other hand, are based on electronics - and as we all know, anything that involves electronics has a tendency to be “tempermental” at the worst of times.

“Film Cinematography”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinematography#Role_of_the_cinematographer

“Digital Cinematography”
(17) The Classic Three Act Script Structure

In 2007, a Production Manager called me and asked me if I would interview as a 1st AD for a feature film. He told me the director wanted to bring in his own 1st AD, so these interviews were more about meeting the locals than hiring someone. Knowing that I probably wasn’t going to have a chance at the job, I said yes anyway. He emailed me the script.

Now I have read hundreds of scripts during my career, and after a while, you get a “gut feeling” about whether a script will make a good film or not.

Well, as I was reading this script, I sensed something different about it. The story grabbed my attention and wouldn’t let go. When I got to the end, I had a big grin on my face. I really enjoyed this funny and charming story.

What was the script? It was called “Juno” and we all know what happened a year later at the 2008 Academy Awards.

Why am I telling you this story? It’s because everything to do with the making a film starts with the script. And every department on a movie has to take this script, read it, understand it and break it down to find all the elements they need to look after during the production.

Therefore, before we get into the 1st AD breakdown of the script, I think it is a good idea to discuss the actual structure of a dramatic script.

Traditionally, the basic structure of any movie script is divided into three (unseen) acts. Here’s how it breaks down:

1. ACT ONE (Set Up) (Boy meets girl)
   a. Who is the main character?
   b. What is the premise or theme?
   c. What is the situation? (story)
   d. What are the main character’s needs and goals?
2. ACT TWO (Confrontation) (Boy loses girl & fights against impossible odds to get her back)

a. What is the dramatic action?

b. What are the obstacles?

c. What is the conflict?

3. ACT THREE (Resolution) (Boy gets girl) OR (Boy dies - “Titanic”)

a. How does the story end (what is the solution)?

b. What happens to the main character?

c. What happens to the other characters?

Here are three books I recommend to find out more about script writing and the mythic journey:

“Story” - Robert McGee
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0060391685/actioncutprint

“Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting” - Syd Field
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0440576474/actioncutprint

“The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers” - Chris Vogler
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0941188701/actioncutprint

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(18) The Physical Breakdown of Scripts, Scenes and Shots

I have created this “physical breakdown” of scripts, scenes and shots to use as a guide (re: average) on any productions you work on in the future.

1. Script Page Length

a) Half-Hour TV: 20 - 35 pages (average - 28 pages)
b) One Hour TV: 50 - 60 pages (average - 55 pages)
c) Two Hour TV Movie: 100 - 110 pages (average - 105 pages)
d) Feature: 90 - 130 pages (average - 110 pages)

2. Script Act Breaks (May include a Teaser and Tag)

a) Half-Hour TV: Two Acts
b) One Hour TV: Four Acts
c) Two Hour TV Movie: Seven Acts
d) Feature: Three Act Structure

3. The Sequence (A group of common scenes)

a) The Teaser
b) The Tag
c) The Chase Sequence (Ex: “Bullit’’)

4. The Scene

a) Sc.1: EXT. Wall Street, New York City - Night
b) Sc. 23: INT. John Doe’s Office – Day
5. The Shots

a) ECU - Extreme Close Up
b) TCU - Tight Close Up
c) CU - Close Up
d) MCU - Medium Close Up
e) MS - Medium Shot
f) FS - Full Shot
g) WS - Wide Shot
h) LS - Long Shot
i) ELS - Extreme Long Shot

6. The Takes

a) Take 1, 2, 3

(19) The Shooting Script

When a script is first written, it is unofficially called a “story script”. This script is usually without scene numbers and has more “exposition” and longer scenes that help the story flow evenly from one scene to the next.

This process helps the reader to better understand the narrative of the story - readers who are usually producers, executives, actors and bankers.

Once a film has its financing and goes into production, it’s time to create the “shooting script” which will make more sense to the production crew because it will now tell the story “as seen by the camera.”

This process of writing involves numbering (or renumbering) the script, splitting up scenes so they make more sense logistically and adding better descriptions of the actual locations you will be filming.
(20) The Breakdown of Scenes in a Shooting Script

When you start breaking down a script, you will begin to think of the script in a different way. You’ve already read it once all the way through to find out what the story is about and what happens to the characters.

Now you will read it again and again (and again!) because you need to analyze it in detail so you can break it into the smaller elements that will eventually become the content of the shooting schedule and the model for the call sheet.

Here are the four “types of scenes” you will need to think about as you break down the script:

1. **Key Scenes** (These scenes could be dialogue scenes or action scenes)

These scenes set the mood of the story and they usually require more time to shoot than “regular scenes.” For example, scenes in a script that introduce characters or contain story points.

2. **Dialogue Scenes**

These scenes usually move quicker than action scenes.

3. **Action Scenes / Special FX Scenes / Visual FX Scenes**

These scenes require more shooting time than dialogue scenes.

4. **Act Break Scenes** (Only in episodic television series)

These scenes are important because they are used to keep the audience “hooked” into coming back after the commercial.
(21) The Reductionism Breakdown Theory

Reductionism, as described by Wikipedia, is "an approach to understanding the nature of complex things by reducing them to the interactions of their parts, or to simpler or more fundamental thing."

In other words, the Reductionism Theory states that “most anything can be understood by taking its pieces apart, studying them and then putting them back together so you can see the larger picture.”

For our purposes as filmmakers, we use the Reductionism Breakdown Theory as the process of “reducing a script down to its smallest elements by going from large to small, from general to specific.”

**Formula:** Things You Don’t Know + Research = Things You Do Know

Here is a basic filmmaking example of the Reductionism Breakdown Theory from reading the script to the first shot on set:

1. Script
2. Act
3. Sequence
4. Scene
5. Shot
6. Take

**STORY:** I have a very good example the Reductionism Breakdown Theory when I got the job as First Assistant Director on “Bird on a Wire.” When I first read the script, I was overwhelmed by the logistics of this production. I honestly wondered how I could possibly prepare such a huge show with two major Hollywood stars, lots of action and many locations.

Well, two months of prep later, we were ready for our first day of shooting!

I was overwhelmed on my first readthrough of the script because I could only see the magnitude of this picture as a whole. Once I started to reduce it into more manageable elements, it became clearer on how to proceed. Time is your ally here.
NOTE: The Reductionism Theory is what we use everyday to help us figure out many things - not just in the “reel world” but in the “real world” as well! (Remember the first time you drove a car, used a computer, set up your TV)

(22) Pre-Production - A Process of Discovery

As a First AD, your job requires you to analyze scripts, put the right people together, gather and assimilate departmental information and then distribute that information to the crew in an efficient and timely manner.

This process requires you to have a systematic and detailed approach to your work. You may be sloppy and disorganized at home, but when you show up at the office during pre-production and you step onto the set during production, you are the crew’s leader - and you need to lead by example.

I call pre-production a “Process of Discovery” because it is during this time that all departments discover what they need to do in order to make this particular movie happen. All this takes time and the more time you have in prep, the more you will discover and sort out before you go to camera.

NOTE: If you are going to spend money anywhere on a film, make sure your crew get the prep they need. By cutting down on prep days to save money, you could end up paying more when you are shooting.

(23) The 3 Stages of Designing the Film Schedule

There are three stages of creating a film schedule and we are going to apply the Reductionism Breakdown Theory to all three of these stages:

1. Breaking down the script
2. Preparing the production boards
3. Designing the shooting schedule

Notice the words I’ve used to describe the actions you will take during this process: breaking, preparing, designing. These are all action words and they describe the order in which you accomplish almost anything creative.
Did I say “Creative?”

I call this critical process of the First AD’s work “designing” because it is a very creative process. Figuring out all the pieces that go together in this massive puzzle called a movie is very much like writing a script.

Scripts go through various drafts because they constantly change as you get more information and more input from different sources. The first draft of any script is never the one used to shoot with because the first draft is your “blueprint” and it’s where all the changes and revisions start.

Sometimes, if you look back at the first draft of a script and the final shooting script, you’d wonder if they were both telling the same story!

**NOTE:** As you go through the rest of this course, I’ll be using certain examples to help explain or demonstrate the subject I am talking about at the moment. With every example I use, I know you could find several reasons why not to use it.

Please understand that I am using these simple examples to help explain and clarify specific points. Every script is an original. Every film is unique. Every director thinks differently. Take the examples I use in this course as a guide for your own work - and always remember what Frank Capra said: “There are no rules in filmmaking. Only sins.”

**(24) The Eight Step Process of Script Breakdown**

One thing to keep in mind during this 8 stage process is that you should always start at the beginning of the script and work through each step to completion before moving on to the next step.

The reason for this is simple: as you read and re-read the script many times, not only will you get a sense of the flow and rhythm of the scenes, but you will usually discover something you never saw on the last reading.

Other than reading through the entire script first, you don’t have to follow the exact order as I have laid it out. The whole script will eventually be marked when you have finished, so the order is somewhat irrelevant. Just find whatever method you are most comfortable with and stick with it.
**NOTE:** I will be using the first act of a script called “Philosophers Court” written by two friends of mine, for all the script breakdown and scheduling examples I will be using in the rest of this course.

Please download and print this 22 page script so you can follow along.

1. **Reading the Script**

The first thing you do is find a quiet place and read the entire script through without marking it. Of course, if something comes up as you read and you want to make a note, do it.

It’s very important that you read the entire script from beginning to end first because before you start to break it down, you need to know what the story is about and what happens to the characters - and it could also be the only time you will enjoy it!

2. **Numbering the Script**

You then start again at the beginning of the script and number it all the way through. Now if the script has already been numbered, still go through this process because you may find scenes that need to be split up.

For example: take a scene that involves a character walking from the outside of a tall building, entering the elevator on the main floor and then magically appearing in the Penthouse Suite.

In the script, this scene could easily be described and numbered as one scene. (Don’t forget what I said earlier about the first scripts you read are story scripts.)

Since it is highly unlikely that the director will follow this character all through his journey to the top floor, you should break up the scene from the Exterior (or at least from entering the elevator on the ground floor) and create another scene when he comes out in the Penthouse Suite.

It is always best to revert to the First Assistant Director’s number system early in pre-production because once the script is “locked” (re: you can’t change the numbers) you will then be into scene omits and adding A’s and B’s to all the scene numbers you want to change.
Keep in mind that the writer will now have to revise the script to your numbering system because you are helping to turn the reading script into the shooting script.

3. Marking the Set Descriptions

Now go through the script again and mark the Set Descriptions (locations) with a yellow marker. Example: EXT: OFFCE BUILDING - DAY

**NOTE**: These are my colours. There is no particular reason to use one colour over another. You choose whatever colour you want to mark your script with - just keep it consistent.

4. Marking the Characters

Next, go through the script, and every time a character appears in a scene, mark their name with a pink marker.

If an animal plays a major role in a movie, I will give them a Cast number and mark them in pink as well.

5. Marking all Other Elements

Now go through the rest of the script scene-by-scene and mark all the other script elements you need to account for with a green marker. (ex: extras, props, stunts, special FX, visual FX, picture vehicles, animals, stock footage, video playback, photographs, hair, make-up, wardrobe, special equipment, music playback etc.)

**NOTE**: You can use one colour for marking these elements or you can use as many colours as you want for all the different elements. It’s up to you.

6. Page Count

Now get out your ruler and write down the Page Count for every scene in the script. The best rule of thumb for figuring out this count is the traditional method of 1 inch = 1/8 page.

7. Script Days

Script days are the number of “time transitions” or “movie days & nights” that appear in the story. (These are not the same as DAY or NIGHT on your Set Descriptions.)
I like to mark the Script Days last because it gives me time to read the script several times to get a sense of the “time transitions” between each scene.

Because you have to do this in your first week of prep, you will have to make a guess at many of these “Day/Night” breakdowns. It’s only when you go through the script with the director that you will get his thoughts on the movie’s time changes.

You also want to compare your Script Days with the Script Supervisor, Costume Designer, Hair and Make-up. The Script Days are very important for all these departments because it gives them a sense of how many changes they have to create per character. It also affects the budget as well.

8. Number the Cast List

You don’t put the cast (character) numbers on your script, but you need to record them and then input them into your schedule. This will then create the number system you will use for the Cast Day-out-of-Days (I will explain more later).

When you start to number the cast, you must first remember the POLITICS of this business. In other words, which actors get the numbers 1, 2, 3?

On most shows this will be pretty obvious. But “when in doubt - run and shout.” If you are not sure, ask the producer to number the first couple of cast for you. For example: in the movie “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid”, who would you mark as #1 and #2 on the Call Sheet?

Other than the first 2 or 3 spots, you can number the cast anyway you wish. I prefer to number the first 10 cast in “order of importance”, and then I mark the rest of the cast in “order of appearance” in the script. Which ever way you do it, just keep it consistent.

NOTE: During prep, make sure all script changes go through, you, the 1st AD before they are distributed. Because you make many notes on your script based on location scouts and department meetings with the director, your script should be considered the “prep script bible.” Also, as soon as the script supervisor starts, make sure she gets a copy of the latest revisions and a copy of all your notes.


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(25) Designing the Shooting Schedule

I’m going to go way out on a limb here and state that I strongly believe the First Assistant Director gets paid primarily for designing the schedule, rather than running the set. It’s actually not that hard to run a set once you have had some set experience and understand the 5 stages of blocking - which I will discuss later in this course.

As far as I am concerned, taking this gigantic “Rubik’s Cube” called a film script and deciding which scene to shoot first and how long each scene will take to shoot, IS an Art - and like any artistic endeavour, it will always be open to interpretation, discussion and criticism!

**TIP:** It’s not the page count per day that matters – it’s the set-ups per day! In general, it will take longer to shoot a 2 page action scene than a 6 page dialogue scene because the number of set ups involved are usually greater in the action scene.

(26) Preparing the Production Board One Liner

The next stage of the scheduling process is to take all the information you have marked down in your script and input that into whatever film scheduling software program or manual breakdown sheets you use.

This process will eventually create your production board or “shooting one-liner” which sets the schedule out on a “one line” format for quick reference.

The shooting one-liner should give the crew the following information:

1. The date of the latest script revision
2. The date of the latest one-liner
3. Sunset and Sunrise times
4. The name and location of the actual shooting locations
5. Estimated call times per day
6. The daily shooting order for all scenes

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7. The schedule order for all sets and locations
8. The length of the shooting period in days
9. The days when the Cast work
10. B-Camera and/or Second Unit scenes

**NOTE:** There are many film scheduling software programs on the market as well as a variety of manual methods of inputing your script into strip boards and breakdown pages. Depending on your budget and resources, you can use whatever scheduling method you wish - it is the end result that matters.

I will not be discussing the merits or faults of any film scheduling software here, because this course is not about the software you use. It’s about understanding the process of script breakdown and film scheduling - and that process is the same no matter what program or manual method you use.

All the breakdown pages, one-liners, shooting schedules and Day-out-of-Days you will see in this course were created on EP Scheduling software. That’s the program I use because it’s the industry standard in North America.

**STORY:** I first started as a 1st AD in this business in 1986. We didn’t have computers back then. To “input” our script information, we used a “production strip board” which were coloured strips that fit into a large, black folded panel board. You would write your scene information on individual strips and place them in the board to make your one liner.

To create the shooting schedule for distribution, we would write all the script information onto specially designed breakdown pages. We would then give those pages to the Production Coordinator who would type it into a shooting schedule form on her IMB Selectric typewriter.

If there was one item the production office had to have a good supply of back then, it was bottles of correction fluid called “Wite Out” - because there were always corrections to make!

**STORY:** Speaking of back in the 80’s - we didn’t have cell phones in those days either. So when you went on your location scouts, everyone had to have a roll of quarters with them so when you stopped, you could go to the pay phone and call the office for messages.
In Vancouver we had a saying: “In the old days, the teamsters (drivers) had to know where all the pay phone booths were. Today, they have to know where all the Starbucks are.”

“Production Strip Board”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Production_board

I also recommend two books on Film Scheduling by Ralph Singleton:

“Film Scheduling: Or, How Long Will It Take to Shoot Your Movie?”
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0943728398/actiocutprint

“Film Scheduling/Film Budgeting Workbook”
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/094372807X/actiocutprint

(27) Production Board #1 - Scene Order

The first thing you do now is to create strips in Scene Order by inputting each scene from the script into your computer program. You start with Scene 1 and add the following information onto each scene strip:

1. Scene number
2. INT or EXT
3. Set or location
4. Day or Night
5. Page count
6. Scene description
7. Script day
8. Cast numbers
You continue this process through the script until all the scenes have been inputted in scene order on your board. Don’t worry about adding more content right now (props, set dressing etc.), that will be done later. The main focus right now is to concentrate on the “shooting order” of the script, not the “content” of the script just yet.

Now let’s discuss the colour of your strips. The following strip colours are the ones I use. Other than switching the blue and the green, these colours are industry standard. I also give an explanation as to why I use them as well.

1. Yellow (for the sun) - EXT:DAY

2. White (for daylight through windows) - INT:DAY

3. Blue (for blue moonlight) - EXT:NIGHT

4. Green (for fluorescent tubes) - INT:NIGHT

5. Other colours can be used for:

   - Flashbacks / flash forwards
   - Company Moves
   - “Days Off” Dividers
   - Second Unit Scenes
   - Inserts
   - Stock Footage
   - Photographs to take
   - Video to record
   - Visual effects

“One Liner Example”  http://www.actioncutprint.com/sbfs/scene1order.pdf

(28) Production Board #2 - Specific Groups

The next stage of creating your board is the arrangement of the strips into specific groupings. (Remember the Reductionism Theory!)

The system I am showing you here is a step-by-step approach to grouping your strips. As you get more experience creating boards, you will be able to combine several of these tasks together to save time. But for now, I suggest you do it this way so you get to understand the system.
Also, by doing it this way, it’s very much like breaking down the script: by reading it through many times from the beginning and just selecting the items you need to locate each time, you’ll start to get a “feel” for the board.

**NOTE:** Remember when I said earlier that film scheduling is a “creative” process. Well this is the beginning of that process.

1. **Set Description (Locations and Sets)**

Start by grouping all the strips together by set description. (Don’t worry right now about grouping them into Day, Night, Interior or Exterior strips. That will happen next.)


2. **Interior and Exterior Scenes**

Now go back to the beginning of your board, and divide each location into EXT strips and INT strips.

“INT/EXT Example” [http://www.actioncutprint.com/sbfs/2board2.pdf](http://www.actioncutprint.com/sbfs/2board2.pdf)

3. **Day and Night Scenes**

Now go back to the beginning of your board and divide the EXT and INT strips into DAY and NIGHT strips.

4. **Stock Footage Scenes**

Look through all the strips, and if you have scenes that are marked as stock shots, place them at the end of the board.

5. **Second Unit Scenes**

Do you have any scenes that will be shot all second unit? If so, place them at the end of the board as well.
6. Computer Generated Scenes

Look through the strips and if you have any scenes that you know are completely CGI scenes, and place them at the end of the board.

**NOTE:** I’m not referring to scenes that combine live action with Visual Effects in them. These scenes will have to be split up later. I’m referring to scenes that you know will be completely computer generated, like spacecraft flying towards a planet or establishing a futuristic city etc.

7. Other Non-Filming Scenes

Look through your strips and pull out any scenes that you know you will not have to shoot (ex: Blackness ) and put them at the end of the board.

Remember, when you break down a script and make a board, you have to account for every single scene and every page count in the script, whether or not you (as main unit or second unit) actually film the scenes.

**(29) Production Board #3 - First One Liner**

You have now arrived at the time when you can begin to “create” your first one liner, which is the first step to designing a Shooting Schedule.

Creating an accurate shooting schedule takes time to master - there’s no magic pill. It takes years of working in pre-production and on the sets to fully understand the complexities of the filmmaking process. It also takes time to identify all the external and internal factors that will help you, or hinder you, in your quest to design a reliable shooting schedule.

1. The Number One Secret to Creating a Shooting Schedule

**QUESTION:** what is the number one objective you are trying to achieve when designing a shooting schedule?

**ANSWER:** to minimize the number of moves and camera set-ups!

I have just told you the **Number One Secret** to creating an accurate shooting schedule: minimize the number of moves and camera set-ups! This is your “AD Mantra!”
2. Order and Content

You extract Order from the production board (one-liner) and you extract Content from the breakdown pages (shooting schedule).

Order: remember how we broke down the script to make the first two production boards? You created a system where you took information from the script in a specific order, inputted that information on board #1 in a specific order and moved the strips around on board #2 in a specific order.

Content: this is what you will be extracting from the script and inputting into your breakdown pages. The end result will become the Shooting Schedule.

3. Remember the Reductionism Breakdown Theory

a. Reduce everything down to its smallest element
b. Go from things you know to things you don’t know
c. Large to small
d. General to specific

4. The final shooting order of a film schedule is based on:

a. Location availability
b. Actor availability
c. Lighting considerations
d. Set changes
e. Location moves
f. Stunts, Special FX, Visual FX
g. Crew and Cast Travel requirements
h. Weather considerations
i. Director’s scene order preferences
5. Get input from the Location Manager and the Production Designer

Your boards should be prepared with input from the Location Manager and the Production Designer. Get together with them as often as possible so they can help you fine tune the location shooting order.

**NOTE:** Each day during pre-production you will be constantly re-adjusting the board based on new information and revised script pages. Make sure all the departments are kept up to date on these schedule changes.

**STORY:** Of course, sometimes you can be too clever and make so many adjustments to your schedule that you will totally confuse your crew.

On my first feature film as an Assistant Director, we had so many location changes and new script revisions that I decided to be very efficient and issue a new one liner every day to keep the prep crew updated.

A few days later, there was a knock on my office door. It was the art department trainee and he was holding something in his hand. As he handed it to me, he said very sheepishly “This is from Michael” and then he promptly turned and walked away.

What he had given me (from the Production Designer) was a small plastic bag containing my latest one liner - ripped into many tiny pieces! I got it! I promptly stapled the small bag to the bulletin board in front of my desk, and for the rest of prep, I had a gentle reminder of what not to do!


(30) Film and Television Scheduling Tips

Every film or TV production is unique. Each one has its own challenges and differences. Not only will the budgets and total shooting days vary greatly, but things you learned on one movie may not apply to another movie.

But there are some basic concepts that are common to all productions. With that in mind, I created the following list of **Film Scheduling Tips** to start you thinking about all the particular elements unique to your production.
NOTE: Remember, your main objective in film scheduling is to minimize the number of moves and camera set-ups. You start thinking about how to accomplish this process by using the Reductionism Breakdown Theory.

1. **Do you have scenes to shoot at a distant location?**
   a. Are you shooting in another city 3 hours drive away?
   b. Are you shooting in another country?
   c. Should you shoot the distant location scenes first, then travel back?
   d. Should you shoot the local scenes first, then travel to the distant location?

2. **Where are all the local locations in relationship to each other?**
   a. What is the travel distance between them?
   b. What is the travel distance from the production office?
   c. Mark all the locations on a map to give you a visual reference.

3. **Where are all the Exterior sets (practical or built) per location?**
   a. Do you have a scene on the rooftop?
   b. Do you have a scene in the parking lot?
   c. Do you have a scene on the street corner?

4. **Where are all the Interior sets (practical or built) per location?**
   a. Do you have a scene in the Penthouse Suite?
   b. Do you have a scene in the basement?
   c. Do you have a scene involving the elevators?
   d. Are you in an empty wing of a real hospital?
   e. Are you in an actual section of a working prison?
5. What is the most efficient shooting order of these sets per location?
   a. Should you start in the hold of a ship and work out (to wrap cable)?
   b. Do you start on the rooftop and then move inside?
   c. Do you shoot the big extra scene first or smaller scenes first?
   d. Does an interior scene depend on available daylight through the windows?

6. How many scenes do you have to shoot in each practical or built set?
   a. How much time are you spending in each set?
   b. How much daylight is needed for an interior scene?

7. How many camera set-ups does the director have in each scene?
   a. The number of set-ups determines the length of time you’re on a scene

8. What is the first camera set-up you want to shoot in each set?
   a. Which direction is the Master shot? (out the windows, towards the door)

9. What is the last camera set-up you want to shoot on each set?
   a. How wide is the last shot in the scene? (what do you see in this shot?)
   b. Can the crew be wrapping out as you shoot this last shot?

10. What situations do you already know about your project?
    a. Do you have an actor who has to be finished on a certain date?
    b. Do you have a location that is only available on a particular day?
    c. Are you building sets which have to be shot at the end of the schedule?
    d. Does an actor have to grow his hair first for the last scenes and then have it cut for the first scenes?
    e. If you need an ocean beach for a scene, what time is low tide?

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11. **Shoot as much work as possible at each geographical location.**

   a. Can you shoot a short office scene in one of your existing locations?

   b. Can you do the night Int: Car travelling shot as a “poor man’s process” (PMP) outside in the parking lot at night?

   c. Can you shoot the short forest scene in the park across the street?

   d. Can you use the empty building around the corner for a location?

12. **Schedule an actor’s time to compress their number of shooting days.**

   a. This applies mostly to SAG actors and the drop-and-pick-up rules.

   b. Can you combine or cheat a location so the actor can be shot out earlier?

   c. Which is cheaper: having the actor waiting in a hotel room for 5 days or moving the company back & forth between two locations to shoot him out?

   d. Can some scenes in the script be re-written to accommodate the actor’s time?

13. **Can you shoot exits & entrances, arrivals & departures together?**

   a. If the camera is looking at a doorway, can you shoot an actor’s entrance and then shoot their exit?

   b. When you establish the front of a house, what are the other exterior scenes you can shoot at the same time?

14. **Can you group day interiors and night interiors together?**

   a. If you are shooting on a set, can you shoot both the day scenes and the night scenes right after each other without major lighting changes?

15. **Can you combine set-ups with wardrobe changes?**

   a. If you’re shooting in one room and you have two scenes with different wardrobe changes, is it more efficient to “block shoot” the scenes so you don’t have to send the actor’s back to change costumes as much?
16. Will you have any kind of irreversible damage to a set?

a. If you are shooting on a set, the last scenes you want to schedule are scenes that involve any kind of irreversible damage to the set.

b. Shoot the normal set first, then you can destroy it.

c. It’s a good idea, if possible, to have a few days in between where you can view dailies before destroying the set in case you need to pick up any shots in the normal set.

17. Think of any cheat shots you can do at a later time

a. If you are running out of time (or daylight) on a location, what shots you can “cheat” somewhere else?

b. These can be anything from close up inserts; to building a small clothes closet set; to a CU reaction of an actor against a “cheat” background.

c. Can you bring any of the set dressing to help with the “cheat” shots?

d. Can the art department create a cheat set to match the BG of original set?

18. Never build a new set if one can be re-dressed and used again.

a. Can the art department re-use an existing set?

b. Can this old set be re-dressed to look like another location?

19. Keep in mind the emotional content of scenes for the actors.

a. Certain scenes will have more emotional impact than other scenes (death scenes, love scenes, fight scenes.)

b. Ask the director what scenes he prefers to shoot first and last.

c. What about the actors? How will they react to the order of certain scenes?
20. The number of set-ups usually determines the shooting time.

a. Before you get a shot list from a director, you need to figure out the minimum number of set-ups you feel it will take to cover a scene.

b. An “average” non-action scene with 2 characters needs 3 - 5 shots.

c. When you get the director’s shot list, you can now use this list to tell you how may set-ups you will need to shoot in a day.

21. Always anticipate shooting more than the daily schedule.

a. If you have several days of shooting in one location, have some scenes ready that you can pull up from the next day (time permitting.)

b. Make sure all departments are aware and the actors are available.

22. Schedule location days early and stage days last.

a. The basic rule of thumb is to schedule locations early and stage sets last.

b. This gives more time for the building of sets and also gets you back “under cover” for the rest of the show.

c. Shooting on location first is best for other reasons as well: you tend to have more time issues and problems on actual locations. You can make up some of that lost time at the end of your schedule when you get onto the sets.

23. What about summer scenes when you have to make snow?

a. If you are shooting in the summer and you have an exterior location (ie: a house or neighborhood) that needs both a summer look and a winter look and you have to make the snow, which do you schedule first?

b. If you had no problems with any other factors (ie: no actor time issues or location issues etc.) you should shoot the snow scenes last.

c. Shoot out the summer scenes first, then move to another location for a week or so while the Special FX department makes the snow. You can then come back and shoot the winter scenes.
24. Alternate actual locations with stage work.

a. Due to factors beyond your control, you may need to travel in-and-out of the stage several times during your schedule.

b. Although this defeats the purpose of minimizing location moves, it may be necessary for different reasons such as location availability, actor finish dates or weather problems.

c. Every scheduling decision you make should be qualified by asking this question: “What is best for the production under these circumstances.”

25. Think about weather cover scenes.

a. If it’s within your budget, it’s a good idea to have some sets ready early in your schedule to serve as weather cover sets.

b. Weather is the most unpredictable part of this business. You don’t want to shoot a scene in sunshine one minute and pouring rain the next.

c. On most feature films, weather cover sets are mandatory, but on TV series or low-budget movies, this is not always the case.

d. As you work through your board, always be thinking, “What happens if it rains this day - what do we do then?”

26. Large extra scenes

a. Scenes with many extras take longer to organize and shoot than smaller scenes with a only a few actors and extras.

b. The key to planning big extra days is to figure out how long it will take to get ALL the extras ready for a wide shot.

c. You determine this by meeting with Hair, Make-up, Costumes and Props.

d. Once you have that time, you can then determine your shooting order.

e. Do you shoot smaller scenes first while the extras are getting ready?

f. Will it take the same amount of time to set up the cameras for your wide shot as the time it takes to get all the extras ready?
27. Action scenes

a. Action scenes come in all shapes and sizes and each one will have its own location requirements, time issues and safety concerns.

b. Is it a small fight scene between two actors in a room?

c. Is it a car chase through downtown city streets?

d. Is it a car chase along deserted country roads?

e. Is it a full scale battle scene with horses, arrows and spears?

f. Is there automatic gunfire, squib hits and explosions?

g. Does it involve actor action, stunt doubles and extras?

h. Does it take place on water? During a snow storm?

28. Do you have child actors under 16? Schedule carefully.

a. Scheduling the right call time for child actors is crucial, because once they show up, the clock starts ticking - and there’s no overtime with children.

b. Directors will not always be able to block with child actors because to save time, you want to have children set-ready as late as possible.

c. If a child actor is in the first scene of the day, determine how long it will take to block and light the scene (say a total of 1 hour.)

d. You then bring the child actor in 30 minutes after call for hair & makeup

e. The child actor should now be ready 1 hour after crew call

f. Child actors cannot go into “meal penalty” so you want to stagger their call times with the crew in case you need 15 minutes of meal penalty
29. “Spend a dime now and save a quarter later.”

a. This expression means you want to spend money on some “item” now that will ultimately save the production money later. Some examples are:

b. Hiring more experienced crew members.

c. Having the DOP start one week earlier in prep.

d. Paying for an additional two days of pre-production.

e. Using two standins rather than one standin.

f. Taking a one hour meal penalty to complete a scene.

g. Depending on what “item” you are requesting, you may have a hard time proving to a Producer and Production Manager that this decision will ultimately be better for the production - and the budget.

h. Of course, it always helps your cause to work with Producers and Production Managers that “get it.”

(31) Film and Television Scheduling Factors

Before you make the first one liner, it’s a good idea to create a list of scheduling factors you can refer to as you work through the script and the board. These “factors” are the facts and circumstances that apply only to the production you are working on right now.

The following list is a guide of some general scheduling “factors” you need to take into consideration when starting to design the board for your show.

1. Location Availability

a. The bank is not available until 6:00 pm.

b. Low tide is at 3:00 pm.

c. The school is only available on weekends.

d. The Church is not available on Sundays.
2. **Stage/Studio Availability**

a. The main set will not ready until Day 12.

b. A small swing-set will be ready on Day 3.

3. **Cast Availability**

a. The lead actor has to be at an award ceremony on the second weekend, which means he has to fly out on the Friday afternoon.

b. One actor can only work the first three weeks due to prior commitments.

c. In the contract, the lead actor cannot work after 6:00 pm on any Friday.

4. **Lighting Considerations (Day and Night Shooting)**

   In my experience, this is the “quickest to slowest” order of the time it takes to light a set. Use this as an “average” guide only, because lighting any set depends on many factors: how big is the night exterior; how small is the night interior; how experienced is your crew; what is the pre-rigging budget.

   a. Day Exteriors.

   b. Day Interiors.

   c. Night Exteriors.

   d. Night Interiors.

5. **Exterior Scenes**

   Just because you have an exterior scene to shoot, doesn’t mean it will go quicker than an interior scene. You must know all the details of the actual location to discover the complexities of shooting these exterior scenes.

   a. Does the scene take place on a busy downtown street corner?

   b. Does the scene take place on a deserted country road?
6. **Interior Scenes**

You must know the difficulties (equipment load in, physical space, lighting requirements) of each Interior scene to figure out the shooting time required.

a. Are you on the 14th floor of an office tower?

b. Are you on the ground level of house?

7. **Emotional Scenes for Actors**

As I discussed earlier, certain scenes will need more time to shoot because of the emotional impact it will have on the actors.

a. Ask the Director which scenes he wants to spend more time on.

b. Try and schedule these scenes in script order on the shooting day.

8. **Location Set Changes**

a. Are you going from summer to winter in one location?

b. Do you change from N2 to N25 on one shooting day?

9. **Director’s Preference**

a. In which order does the director want to shoot certain scenes?

b. Does he want to shoot complicated scenes first? (get them out of the way)

c. Does he want to shoot the easy scenes first? (slowly break the crew in)

10. **Shooting in Script Sequence**

A film is shot out of order for several reasons:

a. You want to finish all the scenes in one location before moving onto the next location

b. Sets need time to be designed and built.

c. Big action sequences need to be choreographed and rehearsed.

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d. Some actors will have availability issues.

e. Weather considerations.

f. On each shooting day, try and schedule the scenes in script order as much as possible. This helps to preserve continuity for not only the actors, but for all the other departments as well.

11. Child Actors Under 16 (Minors)

a. Children under 16 can only work a maximum of 8 hours per day. (Union)

b. Create a cheat sheet of Hair & Make-up times, travel & school times to figure out the exact length of time you can have each child actor on the set.

12. Location-to-Location Moves

Depending on your terminology, there are usually three kinds of “location moves” a film crew makes during a shooting day:

a. Cart move. (Moving across the street or down the block.)
   - The crew walks to the next location and pushes the equipment carts.

b. Technical move. (Moving 5 blocks away.)
   - Only the work trucks move. The circus stays.
   - The crew is shuttled in vans to the next location.

c. Full company move. (Moving across the city.)
   - All company vehicles move. (Work trucks, circus, catering.)
   - The crew drive their own vehicles to the next location.

13. Location Curfews

Almost anywhere you shoot in a populated area today, you will have to deal with local curfews. These are the “start and wrap” times that are regulated by local authorities on how early you can start shooting in the morning and what time you have to be wrapped at night.

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Depending on where you are shooting, the Location Manager may be able to negotiate curfew extensions to give you more shooting time on certain days. On your scouts, make sure you are aware of all curfew times for each location and ask the Location Manager if she can get a curfew extension.

It’s better to know early in prep that you have a curfew problem at one of your locations so that another similar location can be found.

Any major city or community that has a large film production community (Los Angeles, New York, Toronto, Vancouver, Paris, Berlin, Rome etc) will have local curfews. If a certain area of the city has been filmed in many times, the local residents may not grant curfew extensions - and some areas will even ban film companies from shooting there for months or even years.

Pay very close attention to the curfew times in your city or community. As an example, here are some official location curfew times in the major film making city of Vancouver. (Without getting curfew extensions.)

a. Monday to Thursday

- Cannot make noise, move trucks or start shooting before 7:00am.

- Cannot make noise or move trucks after 11:00pm.

b. Friday

- Cannot make noise, move trucks or start shooting before 7:00am.

- Cannot make noise or move trucks after 12:00pm.

c. Saturday

- Cannot make noise, move trucks or start shooting before 8:00am.

- Cannot make noise or move trucks after 12:00pm.

d. Sunday

- Cannot make noise, move trucks or start shooting before 8:00am

- Cannot make noise or move trucks after 11:00pm.
14. Tide Changes

If you have any scenes that involve oceans and beaches, you need to study up on how to calculate rising and falling tides.

a. If you go to a beach location when the tide is low and the director wants to have that same look when she comes back to shoot, you will need to know how to read tide charts to figure out the best time to schedule the scene.

b. To get the best idea of what the tide looks like for the days you have it scheduled, hire a PA to sit at the location during daylight hours and take a photo of your beach location every hour and record the times. You can then use your tide charts to get a good idea of what the tide will look like at any hour of your shooting day.

“World Tidal Site”
http://tbone.biol.sc.edu/tide/sites_allalpha.html

15. Sunrise and Sunset

a. You need to have a copy of your film location’s Sunrise and Sunset tables.

b. These times are critical for helping you make your daily call times, especially when deciding on the right time to move to a night exterior.

c. These times should be put on the One Liner.

“World Sunrise and Sunset Calendars”
http://www.sunrisesunset.com/

16. Changes in Time Periods

If your story goes through several different time periods, you need to pay attention on how you schedule these scenes because it affects all the departments. (Costume, hair, make-up, set dressing, art department.)

a. Do these time changes happen in one location?

b. Do these time changes happen in different locations?

c. Discuss these changes with each department to figure out the length of real time it will take to change the cast and set for each time period.
17. Time of Year

a. During what time of year (or season) are you shooting your film?

b. In which part of the world are you shooting?

c. In the Northern Hemisphere, it could get dark by 4:00pm in the winter. In the summer, it could still be light past 9:00pm.

18. Holidays

You need to know when any official holiday falls within your schedule. Work with the PM to see what days the Unions will allow you take off if the holiday falls within your shooting week.

“U.S. and Canadian Holidays 2009 - 2010”

19. Weather Conditions

No matter where you live in the world, you will want to know the weather conditions whenever you’re shooting exterior scenes. Filming outside in any country in the Northern Hemisphere is unpredictable and you need to be constantly updated on the daily and weekly weather forecasts at all times.

Generally speaking, the weather in Southern Hemisphere countries is “more predictable” but you still have rainy seasons and hurricanes to contend with.

“World Weather Information Services”
http://www.worldweather.org/

20. Weather Cover Scenes

Weather cover scenes are selected scenes you can shoot if it rains. Weather cover scenes are very important when scheduling feature films because Directors and DOP’s want a consistent weather look to each exterior scene.

a. Decide early in prep with the Director, Producer and Production Designer on what scenes you will keep as weather cover.
b. These scenes are usually built sets on the stage or at locations you have booked for an extended period of time.

c. These scenes should only have your main actors in them because they are usually contracted as “run-of-show” and they are available any time.

d. Weather cover scenes should involve no extras.

e. Producers usually decide the night before to go to weather cover.

f. Sometimes you have to move to weather cover during your shooting day

21. Crew Weekend Turnaround

Depending on which country you’re shooting in, or if you are working with a Union or Non-Union crew, you have to take into consideration weekend turnaround issues.

a. If you’re working with Unions, what are the weekend turnaround rules? How long can you shoot Friday night (wrap early Saturday morning) and still have an early call on Monday morning?

b. If you get behind in your shooting on Friday night, and you still need an early call on Monday, you may have to pay the shooting crew a penalty to get your early Monday call time. This is called “buying turnaround.”

22. Special Effects Make-up

Do you have actors that require Special FX Make-up? If you do, you need to find out how much time it will take for the prosthetic work on each actor.

a. You will only get real times after the Special FX Make-up artists have applied the prosthetic pieces on the actor several times. You can then get an “estimate” of how long it will take to get an actor ready for set. That information will tell you when to schedule their call times for each day.

b. Be careful of the 12 hour turnaround on SAG actors for make-up times. You also have to account for the make-up removal time as well before the actor is “off the clock” each night.
NOTE: in the DVD of “Dawn of the Dead” look at the Special Features to see behind the scenes at the making up of the zombies.

STORY: In the movie “The Fly “ we shot a scene in a motel set where Eric Stoltz was in his final transformation into the fly. Eric had to sit on the couch on the set as they applied the fly prosthetics onto him - for 8 hours!

So here’s the math on this scene: we had a 12 hour shooting day and Eric was in make-up for 8 hours. This is how we organized our day:

a. I had to wrap Eric early the night before so he and the Special FX makeup artists could start early the next morning.

b. Eric had to be made up on the actual set because the main prosthetic piece was too big and heavy to move after.

c. As Eric was being made up on the couch, we blocked the scene, lit the set, rehearsed the camera movements and got the focus marks for the first shot.

d. When the Director and DOP were happy, we left the motel set to shoot several smaller scenes on different set with other cast members.

e. When Eric was about 15 minutes away from being ready, we stopped shooting on the other set, brought the cameras back to the motel room set and within 15 minutes the crew was ready for the first shot.

f. We had 4 hours to shoot the scene and we got it. My compliments to Eric for sitting in one spot for over 12 hours!

23. Shooting Logistics

Every film production has its own special shooting requirements with the corresponding time issues. Here’s a sample list of some filming logistics you should know how to schedule for:

a. Shooting on water.

b. Shooting on ice.

c. Shooting in the mountains.

d. Shooting in snow.
e. Shooting in the desert.

f. Shooting in a real hospital operating room.

g. Shooting in a working mine.

h. Shooting large battle scenes.

i. Shooting on rooftops.

24. Special Effects (SPFX)

Mechanical Effects (or physical effects) include mechanized props, scenery, scale models and pyrotechnics.

Talk with the Special FX Coordinator about every effect you have in your film. You need to get a good “time line” on how long it will take to set up each effect as well as the reset time of each effect. Examples:

a. Explosions.

b. Squib hits

c. Making snow.

d. Making rain.

e. Wet downs.

f. Designing special equipment.

g. Making fog.

h. Wind machines.

i. Break-away doors and windows.

j. Break-away car windows.
25. Stunts (Actor Action, Stunt Doubles, Stunt Performers)

Every stunt in a movie has its own safety concerns and time issues you need to be familiar with. Talk with the Stunt Coordinator to get detailed breakdowns on each stunt in your film.

Just because you scheduled a similar stunt on another movie, remember that the logistics and timings are different now because the story, location and the Director have changed. You will also have a different group of people planning and performing the stunts as well.

Here’s a list of many of the stunts I have scheduled over the years:

a. High falls off buildings into air bags.

b. High fall off a waterfall on a descender rig.

c. Full body burns.

d. Wire pulls.

e. Air rams.

f. Driving a car into the water and sinking.

g. Sword fights.

h. Fist fights.

i. Knife fights.

j. Car chases.

k. Car and truck crashes.

l. Jumping off moving trains.

m. Every kind of gunfire you can think of.

n. Explosions and fire.

o. Squib hits.
p. Action with arrows, spears, hatchets, clubs.

q. Action with handguns, rifles, machine guns.

r. WW I battle scenes.

s. Battle of Little Big Horn.

t. Falling down stairs.

u. Crashing through windows.

v. Horse falls.

w. Helicopters, buses, trucks, trains, motorcycles, boats.

26. Special Hair, Make-up and Costume Requirements

Just like in real life, movie characters go through a lot of “wear and tear.” The Hair, Make-up and Costume departments do their own script breakdown and after meetings with the Director, and suggestions from the actors, they have a variety of “artistic” requirements that you need to be aware of as you design your schedule. For example:

a. An actor’s hair is wet in one scene and dry in the next scene.

b. An actor has a bruise on his cheek or a black eye.

c. An actor has blood on her jacket.

d. An actor’s clothes are soaked from the rain.

27. Special Visual Effects

If there is one department where an inexperienced 1st AD could create a “shooting schedule meltdown,” it would be with Special Visual FX.

So much of Visual FX work is about trying something new. This department is always being asked by Directors and Producers to “push the creative envelope” and create effects that audiences have never before seen.
It is also the department that can take up a big part of your budget -
depending on what kind of story you are telling.

The most important job for a First Assistant Director when it comes to
scheduling Visual FX, is to ask questions - lots of questions. Because
technology changes so fast, a visual effect or CGI component you scheduled
a year ago may have totally different time parameters now.

What makes the Visual FX stand out from the rest of the film departments
are all the “production layers” that are required to complete a scene. These
can be everything from incorporating live action footage with plate shots to
CGI.

Here is a list of some basic Special Visual Effects elements and terminology
you could be involved with for a film:

a. Green screen

b. Blue screen

c. Morphing

d. Miniature sets

e. Models

f. Animatronics

g. Matte paintings

h. Background plates

i. Rotoscoping

j. Digital animation

k. Particle effects

l. Digital sets and backgrounds

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28. Special Equipment (Camera, Grip, Electric, Transport)

On the set, you will be dealing with a variety of special equipment that was requested by the camera department, grips and electrics. Again, it is in your best interest to talk to each department head about the specifics of each piece of equipment that will be used on the film. Some examples are:

a. Insert car
b. Process trailer
c. Camera cranes
d. Motion control camera
e. Special lifts
f. Snorkle lens
g. Rain deflector

29. Transportation Requirements

The Transportation department looks after the rental, movement and placement of all vehicles that make up a film production. Here’s a list of vehicles on an average film production:

a. Camera truck
b. Electric truck
c. Grip truck
d. Special effects trailer
e. Props truck
f. Sound van
g. Wardrobe truck
h. Hair and make-up trailer
i. Honeywagon (Cast dressing rooms and AD room)
j. Catering truck
k. Craft service van
l. Passenger vans
m. Producer and Director trailers
n. Cast trailers
o. Portable school room

30. Picture Vehicles

Picture vehicles are anything the cast or extras use for transportation on camera. The transportation department is responsible for renting or buying these vehicles and, on occasions, in conjunction with the location department:

a. Cars
b. Buses
c. Trucks
d. Vans
e. Motorcycles
f. Trains
g. Planes
h. Ferries
i. Ships
If you are working on a western or a film that involves other animals used for transport, wranglers would usually be responsible:

a. Horses  
b. Horse and buggy  
c. Horse and wagon  
d. Wagon trains  
e. Oxen  
f. Camels

31. Travel Requirements

Where are the filming locations of your production? Do you have to travel to distant locations? Here are some factors you need to be aware of:

a. Travel distance and time to a location “in the zone.”

b. Travel distance and time to a location “out of the zone.”

c. Location access difficulties.

d. Foreign locations travel requirements. (Permits etc)

e. Foreign locations time zones.

32. Animals

I discussed working with animals earlier in this course. Take the time to find out from the trainers everything you can about the animal or bird you will be working with.

33. Inserts

I categorize inserts as “close-up shots of anything other than an actor’s face.” So if you run out of time on main unit, you can try and schedule these shots for a later time with a B-Camera splinter unit or a Second Unit.

**STORY**: Make sure you speak to the director first before you determine if a set-up is actually an insert shot! I was working with Director John Woo on a TV movie called “Once a Thief.” In the scene we were shooting, the Good Guy comes into the Bad Guy’s downtown office to confront him. The Bad Guy pushes a button under his desk to call in his bodyguards.
After we blocked the scene, I figured we could leave the shot of the button as an insert for later. But here’s how John shot it: he had the camera placed behind the desk. The button was in the foreground. We could see over the desk to the Good Guy. The Good Guy was standing in front of the window. Out the window we saw downtown Vancouver! That was no insert!

34. Foreign Locations

Shooting in a foreign location means you must learn a new set of rules. When we shot “The Lizzie McGuire Movie” in Rome, I sat down with the Italian Production Manager for a few hours and we went over all the Italian union rules and regulations, as well as all the location and curfew requirements for shooting in Rome.

Here’s the Cheat Sheet we created when we shot in Italy for “The Lizzie McGuire Movie.” This Cheat Sheet has both cast and crew union information on it. [Link to Cheat Sheet](http://www.actioncutprint.com/sbfs/ItalianCheatSheet.pdf)

**NOTE:** After working in Canada for most of my career and shooting in Italy and scouting Paris, I realized that we (in North America) have it all backwards. In Europe, film crews work less hours per day than us which means they can “work to live.” In North America, with our 12 - 14 hour normal working days, we have ended up in a factory type environment where we are “living to work.”

35. Split Days

I find the hardest days to schedule are “split days,” which is when you have to schedule day and night exterior work on the same shooting day. This means you need to know (as precisely as you can) the following:

a. The sunset time for that day.

b. What the weather will be like. (Sunny or overcast)

c. How long it will take to shoot your daylight scenes.

d. How much lighting time the DOP needs for the night exterior scene.

Split shooting days can turn into a disaster quite quickly if you can’t finish your daylight scenes on time. Make sure you work with your DOP on scheduling the shooting times for these days.

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(32) The Day-out-of-Days

The Cast Day-Out-of-Days displays the number of working days, rest days, hold days and travel days for each cast member. The Producers and the Production Manager will want to see the DOD as early as possible so they can begin to budget and book the cast. You will need to distribute copies of the Cast DOD to the following departments:

a. Producers
b. Production Manager
c. Production Co-Ordinator
d. Costumes
e. Casting
f. Transportation
g. Locations
h. Accountants


(33) The Daily Call Sheet

The Call Sheet is created by the Assistant Directors and is distributed to the cast and crew each night at wrap. The Call Sheet informs everyone of the call time for the next day, the scenes to be shot and the location address.

Call Sheets usually contain the following information:

a. Call time for next day.
b. The scenes to be shot.
c. Script page count.
d. The weather.

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e. Unit or company moves.

f. Address of the location.

g. Maps to the location.

h. Cast pick-up times.

i. Transportation arrangements.

j. Parking instructions.

k. Travel instructions.

l. Safety notes and memos.

m. Contact phone numbers for key crew.

n. Call times for all crew.

o. Script and scene requirements

p. Production office contact information.

**NOTE:** I have included here a copy of the original Call Sheet from the funeral scene in the movie “Ghandi.” I believe this scene still holds the record for the largest group of extras ever assembled in one movie.


(34) The 5 Groups of On-Camera Performers

“On-camera performers” are not just the actors on a set. I have included a list of other performers that you will deal with on most film productions.

**NOTE**: You will notice I have divided these performers into 5 groups. These “groups” are not based on any Union description - they are based solely only on my own experiences of how they function on a film set.

1. **Actors**

Here’s my list of the eight categories of actors you could work with. When I say “categories,” I am actually referring to how each group fits into the hierarchy and politics of this business.

Each of these categories of actors represents a group that has a different share of the power on any set - which means that certain actors in each group may require special treatment. When you look these categories over carefully, you will understand what I mean.

1. The legend (Jerry Lewis, Lauren Bacall, Tony Curtis)
2. The movie star (Tom Hanks, Robert DeNiro, Julia Roberts)
3. The television star (Eva Longoria, William Shatner, Wentworth Miller)
4. The cross-over star (TV to Film) (George Clooney, Will Smith)
5. The cross-over star (Film to TV) (Judy Davis, Glenn Close)
6. The guest star (Brad Pitt on “Friends”, Sally Field on “ER”)
7. The principal actor (larger speaking roles)
8. The day player (smaller speaking roles)
2. Stunts

Stunt people are also performers. Here are the 3 categories they fall under:

1. Stunt actor (plays a character - could have some dialogue)
2. Stunt performer (not a specific character - no dialogue)
3. Stunt double (doubles actors for harder and more dangerous stunts)

3. Extras

Extras are also known as Background Performers or Atmosphere. I have broken extras down into 3 categories:

1. Special skills extras - They have a special ability (skill) they have practiced and trained for. (Hockey players, scuba divers, ballroom dancers)
2. Uniformed extras - These extras “play” characters the audience knows something about. (Police, waiters, nurses, military, firefighters)
3. General extras - These are the majority of extras on any film set (Crowd on street, passengers on a plane, bar patrons, students in school hallway)

4. Actor Photo Doubles

Photo Doubles are hired to “portray” an actor in any scene where the actor’s face is not seen.

1. They are matched for body size, physical movement, hair and skill.
2. They are used mostly for second units and splinter units. (car drivebys etc)
3. If they are used by main unit, it’s because an actor is not available for over shoulder shots etc.
4. They are also used as body doubles for love scenes and nude scenes.

**STORY:** I was a body double for Chevy Chase! In the movie “*Man of the House*”, the director wanted an insert shot of Chevy’s character tying up some string on a tree branch. Chevy wasn’t working that day but since I was the same height and build as Chevy, I got dressed up in the wardrobe and my hands are now in the movie.
5. Stand-Ins

Although Stand-ins are not technically “performers”, I have included them on this list because of the important role they play on any film set.

Stand-ins (also known as Second Team) are not hired to work for the actors. They are hired to work for the Director of Photography, to “stand in place of the actors” while the DOP lights them.

Stand-ins are usually picked by the DOP in pre-production after all the cast is chosen. Sometimes actors will have their own stand-ins they prefer to use.

Stand-ins are a very important part of your crew. Good stand-ins are worth their weight in gold because they help make your re-lighting time less.

1. They are used by the DOP for lighting.
2. They are used by the camera crew for camera movement and focus.
3. Try and budget at least 3 stand-ins for each day.
4. Make sure they are always close and observe well

(35) The 4 Types of Actors

When I say "type" of actor, I’m not referring to an acting style, (method actor or technical actor) but rather to an actor's presence on the screen.

1. The Character Actor

This is a performer who strives to create an image of character that is part of his own psyche and part of the written image so that the audience responds to this new image of character forgetting, for a time, the actor himself.

Examples: Marlon Brandon, Merlyn Steep, Laurence Olivier, Dustin Hoffman

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2. The Personality Actor

This is a performer who has a unique physical presence or aura about them which the camera captures giving each performer an identity which is immediately responded to as a character by the audience.

Example: John Wayne, Marylyn Monroe, Humphrey Bogart, Pee Wee Herman.

3. The Physical Actor

This is a performer who embodies either a "type" that is presently in vogue as an "ideal look", or a performer who possesses a particular physicality that is in some way extraordinary.

Example: Marty Feldman, Arnold Swartzeneggar, Danny Devito, Bjork.

4. The Natural Actor

This is a performer who was "found in the street" and who has an individual identity combined with the right physical characteristics and is also, hopefully, capable of some emotion.

Example: Child actors and most characters in Fellini movies.

(36) The Film and Television Shooting Crew

Here’s a list of the main crew employed on most film and TV productions. Since there are many sources where you can acquire a detailed list of each crew member’s duties, I have just mentioned the basic job descriptions here.

NOTE: Depending on what country you live in and what Union you belong to, some of these crew titles and duties may be different.

1. First Assistant Director

a. Works with the Director in prep, designs the shooting order, runs the set.

b. The 1st AD knows the cast and crew (episodic) and helps the director.

c. The 1st AD is the Producer’s assistant on the set. (Episodic Television)
2. Second Assistant Director
   a. Prepares the Call Sheet.
   b. Arranges for actor pick up and drop off times.
   c. Makes sure all production elements are ready for each scene of the day.

3. Second Second Assistant Director
   a. Assists the Second AD when there is increased workload and helps direct the movements of large groups of extras.

4. Third Assistant Director
   a. Works at the trailers.
   b. Is responsible for getting the cast ready for set and wrapped on time.
   c. Fills out the Daily Production Report. (DPR)

5. Trainee Assistant Director
   a. Works with the 1st AD on set.
   b. Gets breakfast for actors in the morning and helps the other AD’s.

6. Location Manager
   a. Finds locations with the production designer.
   b. Makes the deals and secures the contracts.

7. Assistant Location Manager
   a. Is the location representative on the set.
   b. Deals with all location situations.
8. Location Production Assistants

a. Traffic control.

b. Pedestrian lock-up.

c. Cleaning up the sets.

d. Setting up lunch tents.

9. Director of Photography (DOP)

a. Responsible for the “visual camera look.” (Lighting, filters, lenses)

b. The technical crew (grips/electrics) works for him/her.

c. With the Production Designer, they create the visual style of the film.

d. You want to get them into the routine of giving you “10 min & 2 min” warnings when they will be ready with the lighting.

e. If an actor isn’t ready (still in MU etc.) let the DOP know so that he has more time for lighting.

f. The DOP is your most important ally on the set. You are both the “time keepers.” If you have a time problem, they can (hopefully) help you out.

g. Get to know their style so you can anticipate when they will be ready.

10. Camera Operator

a. Responsible for the physical operation of the camera

b. Can help you out with shots, extra placement etc.

11. First Assistant Camera

a. Also known as the focus puller

b. Loads the film into the camera

c. Measures the distance from the actor to the lens

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12. **Key Grip**

a. His crew sets up stands, flags, silks, camera dollies and cranes.

b. Discuss pre-rigs with him and what the next shot will be.

c. If they are good, they will always ask you for information.

13. **Best Boy Grip**

a. Second to the Key Grip.

b. Responsible for ordering all grip equipment.

c. Knows grip wrap times for turnaround the next day.

14. **Gaffer**

a. His crew deals with all electrical and lighting requirements on set.

b. Discuss pre-rigs with him and what the next shot will be.

c. If they are good, they will always ask you for information.

15. **Best Boy Electric**

a. Second to the Gaffer.

b. Responsible for ordering all electrical and lighting equipment.

c. Knows electric wrap times for turnaround the next day.

16. **Script Supervisor**

a. Responsible for the continuity on cast and extras.

b. Keeps track of what scenes have been shot and what scenes to complete.

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17. Production Designer

a. They are responsible for the “visual physical look” of the film. (All art department elements, design of the sets, colour choices etc.)

b. Works with the DOP to create the over-all visual style of the film.

c. Helps decide the locations with the Director.

18. Set Decorator

a. Responsible for dressing for the sets.

b. Works with the Production Designer.

19. On-Set Dresser

a. Everything related to the practical set. (Furniture, curtains, paintings etc.)

b. Duties include painting, draperies, arranging furniture

20. Props

a. Responsible for everything an actor uses (touches, picks up) in a scene.

b. Duties also include the maintenance and management of props

c. They must also know the safety issues and functions of all weapons.

21. Hair

a. Responsible for designing all hair styles and wigs.

b. They maintain the hair of all actors and extras during shooting

22. Make-Up

a. Responsible for general make-up, bruises and cuts.

b. They apply and maintain the makeup on all actors and extras.
23. Set Costumer/Truck Costumer (Wardrobe)
   a. Responsible for dressing all actors/extras and keeping them warm.
   b. The organizing, maintenance and management of all costumes.
   c. Helps the actors and extras change.

24. Sound Department (Sound Mixer and Boom Operator)
   a. The mixer records the natural sound in the scene.
   b. The boom operator gets the mic as close to the actors as possible.
   c. The cable puller helps to put wires on actors.

25. Special Effects
   a. Responsible for explosions, squibs, wind, rain, snow, rigging, safety
   b. Discuss the time to do all effects. (Wet down, steam FX, explosions etc.)

26. Stunts
   a. Prepare, organize and perform all stunts on a film.
   b. Also involved in helping actors during actor action scenes.

27. Visual Effects
   a. Responsible for the planning and execution of all visual effects on the set.
   b. Will know how long each Visual Effect will take to shoot.
   c. Helps to determine the scenes between Main Unit and Second Unit.

28. Craft Service / First Aid
   a. Supplies food and drinks for the crew. (Not lunch)
   b. Usually the set first aid person.
29. Shop Steward
a. Chosen by the crew to represent the Union members on the set.
b. Tell them as early as you can if you want grace at lunch.
c. If you’re going for a meal penalty, let them know.
d. If you have a problem with a crew member, talk to the steward first.

30. Insert Car or Process Trailer (Tow Shots)
   a. The driver is responsible for the safe operation of a towing vehicle.
   b. Needs to work with locations and police escorts.
   c. Car mounts. (side, front, back)
   d. Motorcycle mounts and special rigs.
   e. What kind of vehicle is being towed?
   f. Radios for everyone. (director and actors on a separate channel.)

31. Pilots for Helicopters, Aircraft and Boats
   a. They are responsible for the safe operation of their craft.
   b. Concerned with noise and safety issues for shooting crew
   c. Supplies information material about their craft.
   d. Many different problems working on water or in the air.

“So You Wanna Work in Movies?”
This webpage is a response to people who ask: “What do I do to get into Movies?” It was written by Oliver Stapleton BSC who was the DOP I worked with on “Look Who’s Talking Now.”

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Understanding Traditional Camera Techniques

As an Assistant Director, it’s very important to know and understand the various camera techniques and devices used in shooting a film.

You don't have to know how to work all the technical equipment on a film set, but good camera knowledge is crucial because it will help you to communicate more efficiently with the actors and the crew - especially with the Director, DOP and Camera Operator.

**NOTE:** Every Director and DOP will have a different version of the following examples, but if you use this list as a guide, you can't go wrong.

1. **Shot Size (Example: a person)**

   ECU - Extreme Close Up (focus on the eye)
   TCU - Tight Close Up (forehead to chin)
   CU - Close Up (top of head to just below the chin)
   MCU - Medium Close Up (below the throat to just above the head)
   MS - Medium Shot (the body from the waist up)
   FS - Full Shot (full figure of a person - head to toe)
   WS - Wide Shot (the figure is shown in relationship to their surroundings)
   LS - Long Shot (the subject is shown in a small scale)
   ELS - Extreme Long Shot (camera is a great distance from the subject)
   OSS - Over Shoulder Shot (over the shoulder of Person A to see Person B)
   POV - Point of View (this is a shot from another person's perspective)

“Shots and Camera Angles”

“Camera Angles and Subject-Camera Relationships”
[http://www.animatedbuzz.com/tutorials/camerangles.html](http://www.animatedbuzz.com/tutorials/camerangles.html)
2. Camera Lenses

a. Wide angle lenses are short focal lengths that make distances seem greater. They create deep focus: both the foreground and the background are sharp. (Think "Citizen Kane.")

b. Long or telephoto lenses are long focal lengths that compress distant objects and bring them closer. They create short focus: the foreground is in focus and the background is out of focus.

3. Depth of Field

a. The focal length of a lens affects the depth of field of a scene. (How much the background, middle ground and foreground are in focus.)

4. Camera Angles

a. Straight angle (eye level) - camera is placed at the level of human eyes. (Most common neutral angle.)

b. Low angle: camera looks up at a character or object. (Shows fear, respect, authority.)

c. High angle: camera looks down on a character or object. (Shows vulnerability, inferiority, and weakness.)

d. Tilted (Dutch): camera is tilted at an angle. (creates tension, altered states)

5. The Moving Camera

a. Pan shot (horizontal movement of a camera) (left to right/right to left)

b. Tilt shot (vertical movement of a camera) (up and down)

c. Crane shot (camera is on a large crane) (up-down/in-out//sweeping)

d. Tracking shot/dolly shot (camera is placed on a wheeled platform with rails.) Does change the visual perspective. (How objects appear to the eye.)

e. Zoom shot (using a zoom lens to move closer or further away from a subject. Does not change the visual perspective. (How objects appear to the eye.)
f. Hand held shot (the camera is held by the operator as he walks or runs with the action.)

g. Steadicam shot (camera is mounted on a stabilizing arm for smooth movement.)

h. Dolly in and zoom out (used to keep a foreground object stationary while the background moves away from the object.)

i. Dolly out and zoom in (used to keep a foreground object stationary while the background moves toward the object.)

“Film Techniques”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Film_techniques

“Traditional Film Camera Techniques”
http://snipurl.com/gjtei

(38) The Director’s Shot List

A shot list is the director’s description of all the camera angles they want to have in order to cover a scene. Shot lists usually include shot size, camera movement, character movement, coverage and cutaways.

Like most things in the film business, there is no standard format to follow with a shot list - they vary from director to director. Some film or TV directors don’t even make shot lists, unlike TV Commercial directors who need to work with shot lists and storyboards all the time.

Shot lists are very useful for an Assistant Director. They give you an idea of how many set-ups the Director has planned for each scene and they help guide you through the blocking process.

**NOTE**: A shot list is just like a road map: it gives the Director a path to his destination, but they won’t always follow it. Shot lists need to be used as guide and when something changes on set, a good Director will adapt to the given circumstances.
(39) Concepts of Blocking and Staging a Scene

I have included this section on Blocking and Staging as a way to help you understand more clearly what a director thinks about, and is responsible for, when they block a scene on the set.

As a First Assistant Director, you absolutely need to understand the process of blocking a scene with actors. There are four reasons for this:

1. As the scene is blocked, you will be listening to the Director and the DOP talk about the shots required to cover the scene. You will need to record these shots on paper so you can determine how much time it will take to shoot the scene, and the impact these shots will have on the rest of your day.

2. Knowing where the camera is going, and why the actors are moving, will help you to decide on which set-ups to shoot first, and in what order.

3. If you understand the blocking and staging process, you will also be able to make creative suggestions to the Director if she has to reduce her shots because you are behind schedule or going into overtime.

4. You may also run into a situation where you will be working with a Director who, for whatever reason, does not understand blocking and you will need to step in and block the scene (with the actors) for the director!

**STORY:** I’ve had to “help” directors block their scenes and work with the actors on several occasions. The first time was on an episode of a TV show when a first time Director “fell apart” on the set and couldn’t do anything.

Another time was on a feature when the Director just didn’t understand how to block scenes. He knew what he wanted from the actors, but he was lost when it came to moving the camera or where to place the actors.

1. The Director and Blocking

When a first time Director steps on a set, blocking a scene can be one of the most frustrating and terrifying parts of their job. If they don’t understand the concept of blocking and staging, and they don’t know how to speak the actor’s language, they could end up wasting valuable shooting time.

Blocking and staging a scene with actors and crew takes practice, and the more times a Director does it, the more comfortable they will become.
2. What is Blocking?

Blocking is simply “working out the details of an actor's moves in relation to the camera.” Think of blocking as the choreography of a dance or a ballet: all the elements on the set (actors, extras, vehicles, crew, equipment) should move in perfect harmony with each other.

3. Movement Between Characters

There are two kinds of movement between characters:

1. Toward or Away: when you change the space between characters, you indicate a change in the relationship.

2. Moving or Still: character movement, or non-movement, is also a way of expressing opposition and resistance to other characters.

4. Staging Space

There are two ways to stage space:

1. Staging across the frame.
   a. Left to right
   b. Right to left

2. In-depth staging.
   a. Foreground to background
   b. Background to foreground

5. Staging Groups and Individuals

There are two methods for staging groups and individuals:

1. Zone coverage: when you stage the coverage of groups in the same location (like battle scenes / sports events / crowds)

2. Man-to-man coverage: when you stage the coverage of individual characters according to their relationship to others
6. Four Staging Techniques

1. Static camera (the camera doesn't move)
   a. Subjects can be still
   b. Subjects can be moving

2. Moving camera (the camera moves)
   a. Subjects can be still
   b. Subjects can be moving

4. Static subjects (the subject doesn't move)
   a. Camera can be still
   b. Camera can be moving

5. Moving subjects (the subject does move)
   a. Camera can be still
   b. Camera can be moving

7. Four Reasons to Move the Camera

1. Move for emphasis (the camera moves into an actor)

2. Move to emphasize a subject in a group (pan or dolly)

3. Transfer attention from one subject to another (pan or focus)

4. To connect movement from one space to another (pan from door to desk)

8. Subjective and Objective Camera Angles

1. A subjective camera angle is a shot taken close to the 180 degree line.
   (You can see the face and eyes more clearly.)

2. An objective camera angle is a shot taken perpendicular to the 180 degree line.
   (It is wider - more profile to the actor.)
9. The Dramatic Circle of Action

The dramatic circle of action is determined by the size and shape of the space the action covers:

1. Any space is divided into three parts:
   a. Foreground
   b. Middle ground
   c. Background

2. You place the camera inside the action (action flows around the camera)

3. You place the camera outside the action (keep a distance from the action)

10. Camera Height

Camera height is used to show the physical relationships (or status) between people. In real life, there are two kinds of status relationships:

1. Equal to equal (good cop and bad guy / doctor and lawyer)

2. Superior to inferior (judge and defendant / teacher and student)

(40) The 5 Stages of Blocking a Scene

In any film, the five stages of blocking a scene are: Block, Light, Rehearse, Adjustments, Shoot. If anyone starts to vary from this formula, you could run into problems on the set and you will start to lose time in your day.

1. Block

   a. This is for movement only. (Not for performance.)

   b. Block the actors first before blocking the camera.

   c. Let the actors show their version of the blocking first.

   d. Once the Director and DOP are happy, mark the actors.

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2. Light
   a. The DOP and crew light the set and position the camera with second team.

3. Rehearse
   a. This is the actors first real rehearsal with the camera.
   b. Rehearsal is about the ballet between the camera, sound and actors.
   c. Rehearsal is still not about performance. It is about movement.

4. Adjustments (Finals)
   a. When all the technical adjustments are finalized just before you roll.
   b. Final hair, makeup and costume adjustments. (final touches)
   c. Final tweaks on the lights for the DOP.
   d. Final focus marks for the camera.
   e. Final adjustments for all other department.

5. Shoot
   a. The cameras roll for the first time
   b. The Director looks for both performance and technical aspects of the shot.

(41) 6 Blocking Tips for Assistant Directors

1. Where the camera is placed is determined primarily by what is important in the scene.

2. There is never one interpretation of how a scene should be blocked.

3. Blocking is like a puzzle: directors need to keep working at it until the whole scene works.
4. Actors move on a film set for basically three reasons:
   
a. To express their character.

b. To define their relationship with other characters.

c. To physically change the shot.

5. In television, speed is essential, so it’s important that Directors try and block some scenes so that the action takes place in one direction to avoid turning the camera around for reverses.

6. Try and avoid placing the camera in the same set-up twice.

“Blocking a Scene”
http://www.actioncutprint.com/filmmakingarticle-05.html

(42) The 180 Degree Rule

The "180 degree rule" states that if two characters are filmed in a scene, there is an invisible line between them. The camera should only be positioned within the 180 degrees on one side of that line.

"The Line" is also referred to as the imaginary line and the action axis. Coverage is shot from one side of this line to preserve consistent screen directions for all participants. Complex scenes involving multiple characters and physical groupings may have more than one axis. (Example: dinner scenes and fight scenes.)

"Crossing the line" will result in a jump cut. If you end up crossing the line, two characters’ that are talking to each other will look like they’re not talking to each other when the film is cut.

“The 180 Degree Rule”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/180_degree_rule

“180 Degree Axis Rule and Coverage”
http://www.solutioneers.net/cinema/axis.htm

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(43) Understanding the Film Editing Process

One of the technical functions of film production that made me a better Assistant Director was my understanding of film editing. Along with your knowledge of camera and blocking techniques, knowing the different ways a scene can be cut together will be an enormous help to you during shooting.

1. Six film editing guidelines

To help you further appreciate the editing process, I thought it would be a good idea to mention some important film editing guidelines that you should be aware of when shooting.

According to Walter Murch, (the Academy Award-winning film editor and sound mixer) when it comes to film editing, there are six main criteria for evaluating a cut or deciding where to cut. They are, in order of importance:

1. Emotion: Does the cut reflect what the editor believes the audience should be feeling at that moment?

2. Story: Does the cut advance the story?

3. Rhythm: Does the cut occur at a moment that is rhythmically interesting and 'right'?

4. Eye Trace: Does the cut pay respect to the location and movement of the audience's focus of interest within the frame?

5. Two-Dimensional Place of the Screen: Does the cut respect the 180 degree rule?

6. Three-Dimensional Space of Action: Is the cut true to the physical and spatial relationships within the narrative?

“Film Editing”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_editing - Methods_of_montage

“What is Montage?”

“What is Film Editing”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_editing

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2. 12 Film Editing Transitions

Transitions are the bridges between scenes. It’s a good idea to know these 12 basic editing transitions.

1. Cut (a straight transition to a new shot)

2. Wipe (a gradual transition to a new scene)

3. Dissolve (a gradual double exposure transition from one image to another)

4. Fade in/fade out (a gradual increase or decrease in picture brightness)

5. Focus in/focus out (a transition shot using focus)

6. Match cut (when two camera shots are linked visually - the foreground is the same but the background changes)

7. Freeze frame (a shot that gives the illusion of a still photograph)

8. Split screen (a visible division of the screen used to combine two or more actions filmed separately)

9. Slow motion (time has been slowed down)

10. Fast motion (time is speeded up)

11. Jump cuts (the middle section of a shot is removed to create a jump in time)

12. Cross-cutting (suggests that actions are occurring at the same time)

“Film Editing Basics”
http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/htmfiles/editing.htm

“Film Editing Glossary”
http://www.learner.org/interactives/cinema/editing2.html

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The “50-Step Film Set Check List” for Assistant Directors

I created the following “50-Step Film Set Check List” to demonstrate the duties and responsibilities of the First Assistant Director on any film set. Please keep in mind that every production has its own set of rules - and every First AD has a different way of working! Please use this check list as a guide to help you create your own system.

1. Show up 30 - 45 minutes before call time
   a. Have breakfast
   b. Talk with your AD’s about any changes or problems
   c. Get any new script revisions or other paperwork
   d. Get your script sides for the day
   e. Get your radio
   f. Get dressed (wet gear or winter gear)

2. Visit the set or the location before the Director arrives
   a. Make sure directions to the location or the set are well marked
   b. For interior locations, make sure the location department has adequate protection (carpets for the floor, cardboard sheets for the walls)
   c. If the grips and electrics had an early load-in of equipment, make sure their stash is not in the shot
   d. Confirm with the ALM that craft service is setting up in the right place and that there are no work trucks or other vehicles in the shot
   e. Take a walk around the set or location to get a feel for the place and to check for fire exits
3. If the Director and the DOP arrive on set before call:
   a. Be on set before they arrive already having done your walk
   b. Make notes of any changes that come out of their discussion
   c. Contact any department heads that are affected by these changes
   d. Keep track of the time and be ready to call in

4. Make sure the Trainee AD has delivered script sides to everyone

5. Call over the radio that you are now “on the clock” and explain the first thing you will be doing (ex: blocking Scene 10)

6. Make sure the set is ready for a blocking before calling the actors to set
   a. Are the Director and DOP happy with the set dressing?
   b. Is there any crew equipment is in the way?
   c. Does the Director or DOP want to see another part of the location first?

7. If you know the set is ready, call the 3rd AD and ask the actors to travel
   a. Confirm with the 3rd AD which scene you are blocking and which actors you require
   b. Know how long it will take the actors to travel to the set

8. Make sure the location department has enough PA’s to keep the set quiet during the blocking

9. General blocking: the crew all watch the director and actors go through the entire blocking process

10. Private blocking: when the Director, the DOP and the actors block the scene by themselves in private

11. Crew blocking: after the private blocking, the crew comes back to watch the blocking and to mark the actors
12. Make sure the Second Team (Stand-ins) are watching the blocking. Also make sure they have a copy of the complete script, not just the daily sides.

13. When the blocking has finished and the actors positions have been marked, the Director, DOP, First AD, Camera Operator and Script Supervisor get together to discuss:

a) How many set-ups does the Director have for the scene?

b) What is the best order to shoot them in?

c) What will the first set-up be?

14. As you discuss the proper order of shooting, remember your AD mantra: minimize the number of moves and camera set-ups!

15. The First AD then announces to the crew and the cast what the shots are for the scene. You then show everyone what the first set-up will be.

16. Once the blocking has been completed, the actors are sent back to Hair/Makeup.

17. The DOP now begins to light the set. I usually wait 5 - 10 minutes after the blocking before I ask the DOP how long it will take to light the set. This gives him a chance to talk with his crew and figure it out for himself.

18. Once you have the first lighting estimate from the DOP, announce that time over the radio to all departments. (The TAD should radio the estimates on all channels.)

19. If this is the first day of shooting, or it is a big set the crew hasn’t shot on yet, treat the DOP’s time estimate as just that - an “estimate.”

20. Set your watch for the time estimate. Divide the number in half and that will be the next time you ask the DOP for another estimate. (If he said one hour, then ask him for another estimate 30 minutes later.)
21. Don’t ask the DOP too many times for lighting estimates: they are well aware of the pressure they are under to get it done as fast as possible.

a. Give the DOP and his crew a few days at the start of the show to get their rhythm together.

b. If you are working with an experienced DOP, he will know how long it will take him to light - trust him.

22. The DOP and 1st AD on-set relationship is very important. After a few days, you will get to know the DOP’s style and if his estimates are accurate.

23. I always ask the DOP to give me a good (or heavy)10 minute warning. Then I know when to radio the 3rd AD to “warm up the actors.”

24. If the DOP tells you he is ready for rehearsal, but you’re still not ready (an actor is still in makeup etc.) tell the DOP he has more lighting time. They appreciate that and understand that you may need to get that time back in a later scene. (Mutual understanding of “give and take.”)

25. Once the DOP has finished lighting, that doesn’t always mean the set is ready for the actors. Other departments may need a few minutes on the set before the actors are called:

a. The camera crew will need some time to rehearse camera movements and get focus marks

b. The sound crew may need to get onto the set and hide some mics

c. The set dresser may have to move furniture back which was moved aside for ladders and other lighting/grip equipment

26. Once I get a two minute warning from the DOP, it’s time to travel the actors. Of course, when you call the actors depends on how far the shooting location is from the circus.

a. If you’re shooting are on the stage and the trailers are 1 minute away, you can travel the actors on the 2 minute warning.

b. If the trailers are 5 minutes away, you will need the travel the actors on the 10 minute warning

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27. Actors (especially big name actors) do not like to be kept waiting when they arrive on set. If they arrive and you still have 5 or 10 minutes of lighting left, the next time you call them, they could sit in their trailer for another 10 minutes before they are ready to travel.

28. When the actors arrive, it is now the Director’s time to have the set. Keep the crew quiet as the Director rehearses the scene with the actors. This first rehearsal is important because it is the first time the cast and crew will be fully involved. (Actors, camera, dolly grip, sound etc.)

29. There will be several more rehearsals before the Director, actors and camera crew are ready to shoot. When the rehearsals are finished, you call for “Finals.”

a. Camera, grips and electrics make changes to any technical elements

b. Hair, makeup and costumes make final adjustments on the actors and extras

c. If other departments are involved (stunts, FX) they make their final adjustments

30. When all departments are ready, you call “Roll Sound.” The scene is slated, the camera operator says “Frame” and the Director calls “Action.”

31. After the Director calls “Cut,” he may give a performance adjustment to the actors or discuss a technical issue with the DOP and Camera Operator. Some other departments may also want to make some small changes here. When the crew are all ready, you call “Roll Sound” again.

32. Once the Director, DOP and actors are happy with the shot, the camera gate is checked. If the camera is clean, you move onto the next shot - and the whole 5 stage process starts over again.

33. As you get closer to lunch, you need to determine if you can finish the shot you are working on, or do you have to “take a meal penalty.” Meal penalties (MP) occur when you have to go into the meal grace period to finish a shot or complete the scene.
34. Meal penalties cost the production money, but as a rule of thumb, it could take twice as long to come back after lunch and complete the shot you are now working on.

To help you judge your time, (relative to the particulars of each production) here are a few guidelines I use to help determine whether you should take a meal penalty or not:

a. If you can finish the shot you are working on within 30 minutes and then turn around, or set up on another actor after lunch, that is a good MP

b. If you can finish the scene with a 30 minute meal penalty and then move to another set or location after lunch, that is a good MP

c. Good meal penalties are used to finish a scene, turn around after lunch or avoid lengthy after lunch finals - especially on females.

d. It’s best to not take advantage of meal penalties too often. Not only will the PM start to complain about the added costs, the crew will also start to feel they are being taken advantage of.

35. There has been much discussion among Assistant Directors on whether to use a hand mic or a headset when shooting. In most cases, I feel this is an individual call for the 1st AD. I have personally always used a hand mic and I only use a headset if the location is noisy or during a very intimate scene.

36. Communication is vital for the crew and it is the job of the First AD to keep them updated on every little thing that happens on the set. As far as I am concerned, the more information you give out over the radio, the better:

a. What scene we are shooting (Sc. 33)

b. What the shot is (CU of John)

c. What the next shot is (CU of Mary)

d. What’s happening later (we are three shots away from moving)

37. The 1st AD and the DOP control the pace and speed of the crew.

38. The 1st AD, Director and DOP control the attitude on the set.
39. Serving Two Masters. The First Assistant Director’s job puts him between 2 masters: the Creative (Director, DOP, Actors) and the Budget (Producers, Production Manager, Accountants)

40. As the set safety supervisor, the First Assistant Director has a big responsibility when it comes to crew and actor safety. Most Directors and DOP’s (by the nature of their roles) like to push the creative envelope by designing dynamic and visually stimulating shots. It is up to the First AD to make a value call on the safety issues for each and every shot in a film.

I have stopped a stunt or special effect a few times on movies. This usually happens when a shot or “gag” is added at the last minute and I feel we’re not prepared enough. I also listen when crew members start to voice their concerns to me about safety issues. These are hard calls to make, but you make them because a lot of times, your “gut” tells you what to do.

**STORY:** I even told a well known feature director that I didn’t feel good about shooting an added set-up of an actor driving a vehicle behind our insert car. I told him I felt the actor was a “wild-card” and I didn’t trust him. It was also near the end of our daylight and the sun was going down. The Director agreed with me about the actor - he just thought he’d ask!

41. As a rule, I like to make a habit of moving equipment only once. Make sure you know all the details of the shot you are doing before making decisions on where to move equipment or furniture. You don’t want to waste production shooting time moving equipment back where it just was earlier if you don’t have to.

42. Occasionally, no matter how well prepared you are, or how prepped the crew is, something will just go for sh**t on a film set. When this happens, and everything is falling apart around you: REMAIN CALM. Slow down. Speak slowly. Even give the crew a break for 10 minutes to let everyone regroup. No one can make good decisions when they are in panic mode.

43. Try and eliminate the middle man (which is usually you) as much as possible. When a crew member needs to talk with the director, they usually come to the First AD first. Make sure you put them together so both the Director and you can hear the question. Basically, you want to put the right people together at the right time to solve the problem.

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44. Listen to key crew members during the day. They know their jobs better than you and they have usually been on sets more than you. If you treat the crew with respect, you will get it back.

45. At the end of every shooting day, you will be tired. When it comes to decisions about the next day’s call sheet or other schedule changes, listen to your 2nd AD and the Production Manager. They bring a fresh set of eyes to the situation and can see things from a clearer perspective.

46. At wrap, if you are shooting on the same set the next day, let the crew know what the first shot will be in the morning, or at least let them know the direction you will be shooting.

47. At wrap, also make sure you are aware of when the Director and DOP are coming in the next day so you know when you have to be on set.

48. The First Assistant Director makes decisions all day. Occasionally, you will be faced with making two decisions and neither of them will be good for production: they will either cost money or create lost shooting time. Here’s my advice: whatever decision you have to make on set, keep the camera rolling - even if it’s just an insert!

49. Try and stay at least three days ahead of yourself on the schedule. This means you have prepped two days ahead of your current shooting day. You know the call times for each day and you know the actors’ set ready times.

50. The First Assistant Director’s job is full of pressure and stress. How I cope is to divide the shooting day into two, 6 hour blocks. In other words, focus on getting the crew to lunch. Take a break. Then get to wrap.

(45) How to Figure Out Scene and Shot Timings

The question that gets asked the most about a First Assistant Director’s job is “How do you know how much time to give a scene or a shot?”

Well, the one word answer to this question is “Experience!”

Like anything else in life, the more time you spend at any activity, the more natural it becomes. How to break down a script, design a shooting schedule, and run a set are all part of the same equation: the more experience you have, the better you will be at your job. (That’s the theory anyway!)
The best way I can help you with this question is to tell you what I did when I was a 2nd AD: I made a time record of everything that happened on the set each day by taking my call sheet and marking down all the blocking times and the shooting times for each shot in every scene.

My first (and only) job as a 2nd AD was on 13 x half-hour episodes of the TV series “Hitchhiker.” Every day I would take my call sheet and mark down the following times for every single scene we shot that day:

1. The start time of the blocking
2. The end time of the blocking (which is the start time for lighting)
3. The end time of the lighting (which is the start time of rehearsal)
4. The end time of the rehearsal
5. How much time for finals
6. The starting time of each shot
7. The end time of each shot

When I got home at night, I would take the call sheet with my timings on it, plus the script sides and I stapled them together and put them in a file folder. At the end of the series, I had an enormous folder filled with timed out scenes of all descriptions. I then went through those files and sorted the scenes into specific groupings such as:

a. Scenes with two actors
b. Scenes with many actors
c. Large scenes with extras
d. Stunt action scenes
e. Insert car (process trailer) scenes
f. Scenes with gunfire and explosions
g. Scenes with visual effects (and so on…)

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Of course, as we all know, every production is different, but what all this paperwork did for me was give me the “average” timing for a certain type of scene. I learned a great deal from this exercise and it’s helped me to this day.

The good thing about this technique is that anyone can do it. It’s not restricted to the on-set crew. So if you’re the lonely location PA watching the crew cars in the parking lot, as long as you have a radio and you can hear the First AD, get a call sheet and some sides and record everything you can.

The rest is about experience and you only get that by doing it. Get yourself onto a film set. Make friends with crew members. Watch and take notes. It’s the additional work you do on your own that will give you more confidence and help you get noticed quicker. And ask yourself this question: How badly do you want to be a Director or a First Assistant Director?

(46) 25 Assistant Director Tips From the Trenches

The following list is a collection of “25 AD Tips” I have learned (sometimes the hard way) over the years. They are in no particular order.

1. A good Assistant Director listens more than talks.

2. There is a fine line between saving a dollar and getting the shot.

3. NEVER assume anything.

4. NEVER take anything for granted.

5. The only constant is change.

6. The 2nd AD should be able to run the set for you.

7. If you can, give all the AD’s a chance to run the set. One day, you may need them to do it for you.

8. Listen to everyone: then make your own decision.

9. Remember, the crew knows more than you do about their departments. Get to know them and get them on your side. They will help you.
10. Like it or not, actors require special treatment. Get to know them and understand the acting process. It will make your life on set easier.

11. Establish your authority on set early - but remember “Power Through.”

12. Get to know the Director well during pre-production.

13. The DOP can make you or break you. Get him on your side.

14. If you don’t know, ASK.

15. Communicate constantly.

16. Know as much as you can about ALL departments.

17. Be as fair as possible.

18. Remember who pays you!

19. You cannot please everyone, so don’t even try.

20. Make decisions based on what is good for the show.

21. Listen to your inner voice.

22. Treat everyone with the respect they deserve: crew and general public.

23. Be well prepared.

24. Rely on your AD Team because you cannot do everything.

25. Pass on your knowledge to others!

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(47) First Assistant Director Pre-Production Cheat Sheet

Print Out this cheat sheet to help keep you organized during pre-production.

1. TO GET

1. Sunrise & sunset tables
2. Tide charts
3. Daily precipitation records per month
4. Weather information (past / future)
5. Assistant Director resumes

2. SCRIPT BREAKDOWN

1. Breakdown and number script
2. Distribute numbered script (Director, Producer, Writer, Crew)
3. Number the cast list
4. Confirm script days (Director, Costumes, Continuity)
5. Prepare board # 1 (Scene Order)
6. Prepare board # 2 (Groups)
7. Prepare board # 3 (One Liner-1)
8. Distribute first one liner (Director, Producer, PM, Prod Designer, LM)

3. GENERAL PREP

1. Confirm locations with PM, LM, Prod. Designer
2. Schedule weekly Script Production Meetings
3. Assistant Director Interviews
4. (Memo) Confirm Cast List from script (Director, Casting)
5. (Memo) Confirm Script Days (Director, Continuity, Costumes)
6. Distribute cast list
7. Schedule script/one liner meeting (Producer, Director, PM, LM, Prod D)
8. Prepare daily prep schedule with PM, PC (until 2AD starts)
9. Casting info with Producer & PM (supply Cast DOD)
10. Script revisions
11. Film Schedule revisions
12. Prepare Weather Cover scenes (put on one-liner)
13. Print out DOD’s (Cast, Extras, Stunts, Vehicles) for Dept. budgets
14. Creative Concept meeting (Producer, Director, PM, Prod D)
15. Product Placement meeting (if necessary)

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16. Prepare Extras Breakdown  
17. Prepare Extras Budget (PM, Accountant)  
18. B-Cam, Steadicam, Crane, Special Equipment list (with Director)  
19. Cast list and crew list  
20. Schedule equipment (B-Cam days, steadicam days, crane days)  
21. Budget meeting with PM  
22. Director, AD meeting (script, schedule, special equipment)  
23. Prepare shooting times  
24. DOP, AD meeting (schedule, shooting times)  
25. Schedule Department Head meetings with Director  
   a. Extras Casting  
   b. Props  
   c. Wardrobe  
   d. Art Department  
   e. Set Decorator  
   f. Picture Cars  
   g. Stunts and Special FX  
   h. Visual FX  
   i. Animals  
   j. (Other)  
26. Costume breakdown  
27. MU, Hair breakdown  
28. Art Dept. breakdown  
29. Props breakdown  
30. Transportation breakdown  
31. Stunts, SPFX breakdowns  
32. Extras Casting Meeting (Stand-ins, Photo Doubles)  
33. Schedule Days (Second Unit, Insert Unit, B-Camera, Visual FX, Travel)  
34. (Memo) Extras breakdown & budget (PM, LM, Props. Costumes)  
35. Finalize weather cover scenes (Producer, Director, PM, LM, Prod D)  

4. PRODUCTION MEETINGS  

1. Prepare Key Survey One Liner  
2. Key Location Survey (1 - 3 days)  
3. Prepare Production Meeting One Liner  
4. Production Meeting (3 - 5 hours)  
5. Transportation, Location, AD meeting  
6. AD, Grip, Gaffer schedule meeting  
7. DOP, AD schedule meeting  
8. DOD (cast, extras, vehicles, stunts, camera, grip, SPFX)  
9. Confirm Tow Shots & police (AD, LM, Transport to visit locations)
5. FINAL PREP

1. Cast arrivals info (3rd AD)
2. Cast rehearsals (Director, Script Supervisor)
3. Hair, MU, Costume fittings
4. Cast (special lessons, medicals, visit stunt locations)
5. Camera Tests (MU, Hair, Costume)
6. Schedule photo shoots, video playback scenes
7. Prepare “Shooting One-Liner” (after all meetings & surveys)
8. (Memo) List of Possible Overtime Days
9. (Memo) Daily Shooting Times
10. (Memo) TV Coverage Scenes (if necessary)
11. (Memo) Good Weather Scenes
12. Visit locations with AD’s, Locations, Transportation
13. Distribute final script revisions
14. Distribute final one-liner
15. Distribute final shooting schedule
16. Distribute Cast DOD’s
17. Distribute other DOD’s (extras, stunts, pix cars, animals etc)
18. Prepare call times for Days, 1,2,3
19. Prepare Call Sheet info for Day 1 (for 2AD)
I hope you found all the information I have shared with you during this intensive course to be valuable and practical and that what you have learned will help you to better prepare yourself for a successful career as a Filmmaker and a First Assistant Director. Thank you again for purchasing this Ebook, and I look forward to contacting you again as I continue to update and refresh the content of this course.

Ohh…and one last thing!

If you’re a filmmaker who needs to get a shooting schedule created from your script, I would like to let you know about a special service I offer.

Before you can create an accurate budget for your film, you need to break the script down and prepare a shooting schedule. This "one liner" enables you to generate a cast Day-Out-Of-Days, find out how many locations you have and discover the total number of "real" shooting days.

A properly designed shooting schedule is fundamental to your budgeting process and without an experienced Assistant Director to prepare this board you will create an unrealistic budget, which could have a negative impact on your entire production.

I have worked in the Film and Television Industry for over 22 years as a First Assistant Director. If you are interested in using my skills as an Assistant Director to break down your script and prepare a realistic film schedule for your project, please check my website for further information: http://www.actioncutprint.com/scriptbreakdown.html

"The service that I received from Mr. Marshall was exceptional!!! As an independent producer, I am constantly waiting--it's the nature of the game. There was no waiting on Mr. Marshall. As soon as he began my script breakdown, he worked diligently to deliver his services quickly, as promised (not to mention he's great to deal with, lacking the all-too-typical "Hollywood arrogance"). I have already recommended Mr. Marshall's services to other filmmakers and will certainly use his breakdown services for my future projects.” Erik Yeager, Producer, Narrow Road Film Partner

My sincere regards,

Peter D. Marshall

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