

THE OFFICIAL 65 STEP FILM PRODUCTION CHECKLIST

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www.FilmmakingStuff.com



The following film production checklist will provide you with a general overview of the independent filmmaking process. It should be used as a guide for planning and preparing your film for pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution.

Since every film project is unique, this checklist is not a definite resource but rather a collection of advice, tactics, and information, updated with my experience raising money and producing multiple feature films.

While the steps will be different for every film, this checklist should help you with the process.

- Tom Malloy

- ☐ 01. Before you get started, make sure you read and study everything you can about the filmmaking process. An excellent place to start is the Filmmaking Stuff website.
- ☐ 02. A screenplay is the blueprint to your movie. Write or acquire a screenplay you want to produce. It's impossible to make a great film from a bad script. So make it great!
- ☐ 03. Complete an initial script breakdown. If you can afford it, hire a line producer who can create an initial schedule and budget. Once you know your budget, you'll discover how much money you'll need to raise. Knowing your budget is **ESSENTIAL** to making your film.
- ☐ 04. Based on your budget, write a preliminary business plan that details how you'll produce and distribute the film. You can get the Tom Malloy film business template at MoviePlanPro.com
- ☐ 05. Talk with an attorney and other producers to figure out your best film funding strategy. Will you leverage crowdfunding, tax incentives, or co-productions to fund your movie? Maybe a little bit of everything? At this stage, it also helps to read a book called Rich Dad Poor Dad.
- ☐ 06. Adhering to laws and regulations, create a game plan for raising the money to make your film. You will need to have the right mindset. Be persistent and enthusiastic.
- ☐ 07. The best place to find film investors is through your network. Who do you know who knows an HNI (High-Net-Worth individual?) Can you get a meeting? Many of these people hear pitches every day. Remember that every NO brings you one NO closer to YES.
- ☐ 08. Most prospective film investors will want to know how you intend to spend their money. They will want to understand the potential ROI. Filmmaking is a risky business, full of unknowns, and you should **ALWAYS** disclose this.
- ☐ 09. Research film distributors. Identify film distribution companies that work with your genre. Make a list of the top twenty. Distributors and sales agents are always looking for fully finished, **GREAT** films. So contact the person in charge of acquisitions and find out what they need.

- ☐ 10. After following these steps, were you able to get the money? If not, you will need to improve the project. Do you need to rework the screenplay to make it better? Or do you need to attach name actors? Is it possible that the "investors" you pitched are total phonies?
- ☐ 11. Get favors and freebies. Seriously, write out a list of everything you can get for free or at a discount. This list will include props, wardrobe, locations, transportation, and craft services!
- ☐ 12. Assuming you DID get the money, pick a date for production. And if you DID NOT get the money, go back and repeat step one. You must constantly work to improve your project.
- ☐ 13. Hire an entertainment attorney to help you create contracts and releases. If you're short on cash, do a web search for "lawyers for the arts" in your area. These folks will usually help with minor legal stuff. Some of them are aspiring film producers. Don't be afraid to negotiate.
- ☐ 14. Before you have the money, you may have to ask for discounted (or free) help. You should expect many "NOs!" before finding the people who are willing to help you. Just remember, if you don't ask, you don't get. And please don't be a wimp. People want to hear from you.
- ☐ 15. When it comes time to source your crew, make sure you reach out to people with production experience. Remember this quote: "If you think it's expensive to hire a pro, try hiring an amateur." Many professionals will be open to working out a deal with you.
- ☐ 16. Where possible, modify your screenplay to free up money for the cast and crew. For example, do you need the pro football stadium for the "first date" scene? Could you use a high school football field? These are things you need to consider.
- ☐ 17. Get to the point where you have a "locked script" without the need for further changes. Once your script is locked, your line producer will create a final breakdown and schedule.
- ☐ 18. With your schedule and breakdown, you will create your final budget. Once complete, your budget, your schedule, and your screenplay will all be interconnected.

- ☐ 19. Get your crew. Work with a seasoned Physical Producer AKA Line Producer AKA Unit Production Manager to help you get organized. These pros will adjust your film schedule.
- ☐ 20. If you're going to direct and produce, these pros will also help you hire the right crew. They will know a good payroll company. And many will understand how to leverage tax credits.
- ☐ 21. Money is tight. So if you cannot hire a location scout, you may have to scout locations yourself. You will knock on doors, introduce yourself, and talk about your project. The goal here is to appear reasonable and sane.
- ☐ 22. Whatever can go wrong with a location probably will. So you will need to have a 2nd and a 3rd location added to the mix. This way, you will always have a fall-back plan.
- ☐ 23. Assuming you're directing your film, you will want to find a director of photography who shares your sensibilities and has equal enthusiasm for your project.
- ☐ 24. Work with your DP to find an aesthetic for your movie. Finding the right look and tone for your film is essential, so don't rush it. You may have to shoot some test footage.
- ☐ 25. Marketing: Create a website specific to your movie. Make sure you have a way to get site visitors to "opt-in" to your email list. This list will become an audience you can verify and leverage later. Having direct access to your audience will give you power.
- ☐ 26. As you get into production, cut some footage into an initial teaser trailer. Then add your teaser trailer to your YouTube channel and also embed it on your website.
- ☐ 27. If your budget permits, hire talented "name" actors for your film. If your budget is limited, cast people with large social media followings who are eager to promote your movie.

- ☐ 28. Once you have hired the actors for your film, you will want to find a location for a table read. Read through the script. Listen for rough areas, and tweak the script. (Remember that anything you change in the screenplay also changes the budget and the schedule.)
- ☐ 29. DO NOT skimp on food. You will want someone in charge of Craft Services. They should be good at getting deals on food and catering. If you can not find anyone to do this for you, you'll have to do it yourself. When it comes to film production, food is currency.
- ☐ 30. Are all of your permits, releases, and agreements signed? You always want to minimize the chances of hiccups. Take a beat and make sure you have everything you need.
- ☐ 31. Insurance pays for stuff you can't easily cover with your own money. Do you have production insurance? Because there are so many different types of insurances, talk with some experienced insurance professionals to make sure you are covered.
- ☐ 32. Meet with your camera department and find out how much storage space you'll need. Create a plan for uploading your footage. You will also want to coordinate with your editor to ensure the footage you capture is within acceptable spec for eventual distribution.
- ☐ 33. Try to take as many naps as you can. Making a film is fun, but it is also stressful. So sleep. Eat. And take time to exercise. This is also an excellent time to avoid junk food and alcohol.
- ☐ 34. Once you have all the above stuff checked off the list, you will want to meet with your department heads and ensure everyone has what they need. Probably every department will request something more. So this is a great time to work on your diplomacy skills.
- ☐ 35. Be prepared to answer a lot of questions. People who care about their work will look to you for guidance and leadership. Work hard to listen more than you talk. And always be patient.
- ☐ 36. This goes without saying, but don't be a jerk. You want your cast and crew to be happy. Never forget you are making a movie. It is a dream for many people. So enjoy the adventure.

- ☐ 37. Did I mention you need plenty of sleep? I am serious here. Making a movie is going to demand a TON of energy. Take time to recharge. Find time to relax.
- ☐ 38. Commence production! Defer to your 1st AD and Line Producer to keep your days on time and under budget. Keep your cool, and always remember to have fun.
- ☐ 39. During production, try to get the local news to make mention of your film. Leverage this coverage to get people to your website and get them to opt-in to your email list.
- ☐ 40. After the WRAP, have a wrap party. Please DO NOT sleep with your cast and crew, get overly drunk, or make a fool of yourself! You are a professional. So act like one.
- ☐ 41. After you recover from your hangover (I just warned you), you will probably start editing the movie. I suggest sharing the edit suite with another set of eyes. Be friendly to your editor. Those professionals can offer valuable feedback. Listen to it!
- ☐ 42. Your first cut will be rough. And that is okay. Screen it with a group of people who have not worked on the film. Get feedback. Look for patterns. Did everyone have the same comment?
- ☐ 43. Take the feedback and refine your edit. Then take a week off. During this time, do not look at the movie or mess around with it. And if you can help it, try not to think about it or talk about it. This way, when you come back to the suite, refine and refine again.
- ☐ 44. Have another small screening with people who have not seen the movie. Take notes. Take those notes back to your edit suite. At this point, you'll realize that editing is the final rewrite.
- ☐ 45. Add some sound FX to your movie. Clean up actor dialogue and rough areas. Always remember that sound is more important than visual. Did you hear what I just said?

- ☐ 46. Screen the movie again. This time, have the screening with a new, smaller group of people. Once again, you're looking for patterns. Take notes. Go back to the edit suite and refine.
- ☐ 47. When you have a cut you're happy with, you can begin working on a plan to sell your movie. Sales and negotiation require you to adopt a different skill set. The skills that got your movie made are not the same skills that get your film sold.
- ☐ 48. Attend film markets! There is always another market around the corner. The main ones are Berlin, Cannes, and AFM. When you go to these markets, work to build relationships.
- ☐ 49. What are your goals for distribution? For some film producers, the goal is simple. They want to get the film seen around the world. Other film producers have a specific financial plan for the film. Knowing your goals will help you evaluate each offer.
- ☐ 50. Present your film to as many acquisitions executives that you can find, and ASK AROUND about the sales agent or distributor before you take the deal. Other filmmakers are accessible, and they will be quick to share their experiences.
- ☐ 51. Assuming you sign a deal with a reputable sales agent or distributor, you will work with them to create a plan for the film's release. Releasing a movie is a team effort.
- ☐ 52. You will want to become a media machine. At the very least, have a blog on your website, and make sure it details where people can find your film.
- ☐ 53. Play around with your keywords and SEO (Search Engine Optimization). If those terms are new to you, find someone in your network who understands the importance of the web.
- ☐ 54. Working in collaboration with your distributor, create video updates. Publish videos to your YouTube channel. Optimize for search. Embed the videos on your site. Then email your list!
- ☐ 55. Post your updates on Facebook and Twitter. If someone comments or shares your content, take the time to respond personally. Some of these fans will become your biggest promoters.

- ☐ 56. If your film features “name actors” or people with large social media followings, make sure they are working hard to promote the movie. This built-in promotion should be part of any deal you negotiate with talent. And if you made a great film, people will love to promote it.
- ☐ 57. Work with your distributor to strategize ways to reach beyond the core audience. Your plan may include adding more paid advertising or finding ways to promote your film for free.
- ☐ 58. Keep updating your website with links to every place people can find your film. If your film is screening in theaters or at live events, you will also want to update your site to reflect this.
- ☐ 59. At this stage of your film’s release, the purpose of your website is to get people to watch your movie trailer and click to wherever your movie is available. That said, you still want to get more email subscribers! By now, you should know that your email list IS your audience.
- ☐ 60. Do NOT rely solely on the distributor or sales agent to market your film long-term. These companies get your film into popular platforms. And you can help their deal-making efforts by working to keep the momentum around your movie strong.
- ☐ 61. Continue to mention the film at all events or public forums which you are attending. Anyone who expresses interest in your movie can become a fan of your work for life. So once again, you will want to get their name and email address so you can keep them in the loop.
- ☐ 62. Have adequate social share buttons on your website so people can quickly tell their friends about your movie. And once again, make it a goal to get new email subscribers. Then email your subscribers with updates about your film.
- ☐ 63. Stay in contact with your distributor or sales agent through the release of your film. Always ask them what YOU can do to make the experience a win-win. Assuming the experience is good, you can start talking about the possibility of working together on your next film.
- ☐ 64. As the months go on, start exploring options for your next project. Always maintain a long-term perspective. Given the resources you have right now, what is the movie you will make next year? As a habit, it is a great idea to write down at least TEN new ideas every day.
- ☐ 65. If you want to continually “level up” your filmmaking career, you must do two things every day. You need to push yourself to learn new skills and meet new people.

THE NEXT STEP

My name is Tom Malloy. I have raised over 25M to produce multiple feature films. And through the process, I have learned what works and what does not. If you are interested in learning more about my indie filmmaking process, you'll love The Filmmaker Action Pack.

In this eight-part video training series, you'll discover my process for producing a movie from start to finish. This training will give you the knowledge and confidence to take action. Click the button below:

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