

FILM CREW



The Film Crew ... a typical crew engaged in a feature production.

PRE-PRODUCTION

During a feature production, a number of key people are brought into the project. The key roles and responsibilities include the following.

The creative stage of pre-production begins with the **Screenwriter**. A Screenwriter creates a screenplay (a written version of a movie before it is filmed) either based on previously written material, such as a book or a play, or as an original work. A Screenwriter may write a screenplay on speculation, then try to sell it, or the Screenwriter may be hired by a Producer or studio to write a screenplay to given specifications. Screenplays are often rewritten, and it's not uncommon for more than one Screenwriter to work on a script.



A **Producer** is given control over the entire production of a motion picture and is ultimately held responsible for the success or failure of the motion picture project; this person is involved with the project from start to finish. The Producer's task is to organize and guide the project into a successful motion picture. The Producer would be the person who accepts the Academy Award for best picture, should the movie win one. The Producer organizes the development of the film, and is thus quite active in the pre-production phase. Once production (filming) begins, generally the role of the Producer is to supervise and give suggestions—suggestions that must be taken seriously by those creating the film. However, some Producers play a key role throughout the entire production process.

The **Director** interprets the script and unifies the components of the film into something that bears his or her signature. This individual is like an orchestra conductor. The Director must be able to lead and control people, have them do what he or she wants them to do, yet remain on good terms. While in production, the Director not only oversees actors, but also advises the Director of Photography, instructs the major technical people, administrates the flow of people, consults on budgets, and deals with outside pressures. The Director is ultimately responsible for what happens on the set.

The **Director of Photography** (also **DP**, **DOP**, or **Cinematographer**) is responsible for the quality of the photography and the cinematic look of the film. The Director of Photography transforms the Screenwriter's and Director's concepts into visual images. Using his or her knowledge of lighting, lenses, cameras, and film emulsions, the Director of Photography creates the appropriate mood, atmosphere, and visual style of each shot to evoke the emotions that the Director desires. Working closely with the Director, the Director of Photography determines the camera angles, shot composition, and camera movement for every shot. The Director of Photography then decides upon the lighting equipment and the type and number of cameras that will be required for shooting. The Director of Photography orders the lights and cameras to be set up in such a way to attain the desired effect.

The creative side of pre-production includes "conceptualization." During this on-going process, a **Concept Artist** designs, plans, and sketches what the film will look like. The Concept Artist prepares the storyboard—a series of sketches that are used to visually illustrate the script. The sketches depict the key shots in the scripted scenes, including the framing, camera angle, blocking, character movement, as well as basic props and sets. During conceptualization, the Concept Artist also envisions and designs sets, characters, and costumes. Concept Artists often produce many thumbnail (small) sketches of different versions of objects or characters that are to appear in the intended film. The Concept Artist works closely with the Director, Producer, Director of Photography, and the entire art department.

The **Executive Producer** secures financing for a film. This person usually oversees business aspects but often has little actual involvement with the day-to-day operations of the filmmaking.

While the creative crew works on conceptualization, the **Production Finance Person** breaks down expenses and records expenses for every item for the production to keep the production within budget. (On smaller productions, the Producer or Associate Producer often performs this work.)

Costs are divided into above-the-line and below-the-line. For high-budget features, the general rule is above-the-line costs equal 75% of the budget. They are negotiated before production and are considered fixed costs. Above-the-line costs include salaries for the top creative talents and any rights to a book, play, or article. These are considered "fixed costs" because once they are negotiated, they won't change during production.

Below-the-line costs can equate to 25% of the budget. They cover everyday expenses to keep the production moving. Below-the-line costs are everything else, including crew, food costs during the shoot, housing, transportation, cameras, film stock and processing, editing, special effects, costumes, lighting, sets, props, and miscellaneous expenses.

The **Production Designer** works closely with the Director to make sure that the Director's creative vision can be put on film. The Production Designer, who heads the Art Department, is an artist responsible for creating the overall visual appearance of the film—the proper feel, the appropriate costumes, the right setting.

The **Art Director** reports to the Production Designer, and ensures that the actual location or set looks the way the Production Designer visualized it. The Art Director oversees the artists and craftspeople who build the sets, and is also responsible for costumes, make-up, and props.

A set is any scenery or environment built indoors or outdoors for use in a motion picture. The **Set Designer**, often a draftsman with architectural training, sketches plans and lists specifications for building sets based on the verbal descriptions or rough sketches provided by the Art Director. Because of the high cost of constructing sets, the set designer plans to build only what the camera can see.

The **Set Decorator**, who often has interior design experience, finds the appropriate objects to place within a set to make it look real, according to need, whether it's a businessperson's office or a hermit's shack.

Lead Man (or **Assistant Set Decorator**), who reports to the Set Decorator, takes the lead in tracking down various artifacts needed to decorate the set.

The **Swing Gang**, which reports to the Lead Man, is sent out to bring all the objects needed for the production back to the set.

The **Set Dresser** physically places the objects and furnishings—furniture, rugs, lamps, draperies, paintings, books, etc.—on the movie set, making it ready for shooting. The Set Dresser takes orders from the Set Decorator.

The **Construction Coordinator**, who reports to the Art Director, supervises the construction of a film's set to the Set Designer's specifications. The actual construction of a set can take many weeks or months, depending on the size and complexity of the required set. One decision that needs to be made is whether to shoot on location or on a set. This decision is made by the producer and/or director on a sequence-by-sequence basis.

The **Carpenter** takes orders from the Construction Coordinator and constructs the set to given specifications.

The **Carpenter's Assistant** reports to the Carpenter and helps build the set.

While the set is under construction, the **Costume Designer** conceives and draws designs for the costumes to be worn by the actors in the movie. The costume designs must be approved by the Art Director, Director, and Producer before going to the Seamstress, the person who actually makes the costumes.



The **Seamstress** makes the costumes based on the approved costume designs.



The **Casting Director** (or **Casting Associate**) suggests and evaluates potential actors appropriate for the film, sets up meetings with the actor and the Producer and/or Director, and often helps negotiate the terms of a proposed contract between the actor's agent or attorney and the Producer. When the actor is hired, the casting director helps negotiate the terms of a proposed contract between the actor's agent and the Producer.

A **Location Manager** scouts out locations for shooting and arranges for permission to shoot in specific places.

A **Technical Advisor** (or **Consultant**) may be hired by the Director for his or her expertise in a particular field to make sure that the movie portrays the particular events or situation accurately. A historian might be hired to make sure that a Civil War film is accurate. A lawyer may be consulted for courtroom scenes. A native of Laos may be asked to verify native customs or costumes. Or a biologist might be hired to check the accuracy of facts about the lives of dolphins.

If special effects, stunts, or animals are used, the film may also require specialized roles:

A **Special Effects Coordinator** (or **Special Effects Supervisor**) makes sure the special effects crew properly sets up effects according the Director's wishes.

A **Special Make-Up Effects** artist has expertise in combining make-up with special effects, such as squibs—small explosive devices that, when detonated, simulate the effect of a bullet, puncture wound, or small explosion.

A **Stunt Coordinator** is responsible for choreographing stunts and making sure the stunt is relatively safe, but still realistic.

Animals are sometimes used in movies. These animal performers often come with a **Trainer** or **Wrangler** who has either taught the animal to perform certain acts or entices the animal to perform by offering morsels of food. Several look-alike animals are often used for the same role. Clever editing makes an animal's random movements seem like they have a purpose.

The **Line Producer** runs the day-to-day operations. This person makes the deals for locations and transportation, secures extras for scenes, orders equipment, gets accommodations for the cast and crew when they're on location, and is on the set every day to ensure the production runs smoothly. The Line Producer is generally employed from pre-production through post-production and reports to the Producer.

Pre-production prepares everything needed for shoot:

- **Creative preparation** that includes scriptwriting to designing special props.
- **Financial preparation** that includes budgeting the film and finding the money to pay for it.
- **Administrative preparation** that includes arranging for people to be paid to ordering film and getting permits to shoot on location.
- **Physical preparation** that includes building sets, making costumes and arranging props.

After pre-production, the film goes into production.

PRODUCTION

During production, the actual film is shot. Many additional people and talents are involved:

The **Director of Photography** (also **DP**, **DOP**, or **Cinematographer**), who was involved in pre-production, has a major role in production. The prime responsibility during this stage is to light the set. Depending on the style of the Director, the Director of Photography may be left to decide the “look” of the film for him or herself or, after meetings with the Director and usually the Art Department, he/she may be left to light the set as he/she sees fit. Alternatively, the Director may have very firm ideas as to how the film should look, and if so, the Director of Photography must fulfill these wishes.

The Director of Photography has to set an example for the rest of the unit. Time keeping, crew behavior, dress, and manners all come, at least in part, from the Director of Photography and so set the standard for the professional approach of the crew.

The Director of Photography is responsible for all matters pertaining to the photography of the film: lighting, exposure, composition, cleanliness, etc. The Director of Photography will often “nominate” the crew; that is, he/she makes a list of first and second choice people to be offered the job. If crew members are “nominated” by the Director of Photography, then the Director of Photography is responsible for them and will have to fire them if

they are not up to the required standard. The up side of this is that Director of Photography usually gets the crew he/she wants.

The **Assistant Director** (also **A.D.**, **First Assistant**, or **First A.D.**) controls the shooting schedule and is responsible for keeping the production on schedule. By assuming responsibility for the routine tasks, such as the call (summoning the actors, crew, and logistical support to the correct place at the right time), the Assistant Director allows the Director to focus on the creative aspects of the film. The Assistant Director maintains order on the set, which is hopefully achieved by yelling "Quiet on the set!" The Assistant Director even has assistants of his/her own.

The **Second Assistant** (also **Second Assistant Director** or **Second A.D.**), the assistant of the Assistant Director, oversees the movements of the cast and prepares the call sheets—a list of actors who will be required for each scene, and when these actors will be needed. The Second Assistant tends to be a liaison between the set and production office. There can also be a Third Assistant (also Third A.D. or Second Second Assistant), who also assists the Assistant Director.

The **Second-Unit Director** stages large-scale action sequences that often deal with complex special effects and the participation of many extras, stuntpersons, and animals.

What would a motion picture be without its Actors? **Actors** play the character roles in the film. Some are well-known stars; many are newcomers.

A **Stand-in** is an individual who is similar in body structure and looks to the star Actor in a film and who takes that Actor's place during a lengthy setup—the placing of cameras, lights, and microphones—so the Actor can get ready for the filming itself.

A **Stunt Person** (or **Stunt Performer**), a specialist actor, actually performs stunts, which are often risky pieces of physical action. Stunts range from fight scenes to a fall from a cliff to a head-on collision with an oncoming truck. Many stunts are actually less dangerous than they appear because of appropriate camera angles, lenses, and editing.

The **Make-up Supervisor** (or **Make-up Artist**) is an individual in charge of make-up applied directly on the skin of an Actor for cosmetic or artistic effect. The Actor is made up before filming, but sometimes the make-up wears off during filming and new make-up must be reapplied. The job of the Make-up Supervisor is to maintain the appearance of the Actor's make-up throughout the filming.



The **Hair Supervisor** (also **Hairstylist** or **Hairdresser**) is responsible for maintaining Actors' hairstyles during filming.

The **Camera Operator** (or **Cameraman**) rolls the camera and stops it on cue, as instructed by the Director of Photography. The Camera Operator's responsibility is to achieve smooth camera movement and produce satisfactory pictorial images. To do so, the Camera Operator not only has to make sure not to bump the camera into other equipment while shooting, but also must be aware of how far the camera can tilt when filming a shot and where the boom—the pole that holds the microphone above a scene—is located so that it doesn't get in the shot.



The **Assistant Cameraman** (also **Assistant Camera Operator**, **First Assistant Cameraman**) assists the Camera Operator. This person maintains and cares for the camera as well as prepares an accurate camera log (also called camera report or dope sheets)—a record sheet that gives details of the scenes that have been filmed. On many camera crews, the Assistant Cameraman may also perform the duties of a Focus Puller and/or a Clapper-Loader.

The **Clapper-Loader** (or **Second Assistant Cameraman**) loads the camera with a new roll of film as needed, and operates the clapper board (clapboard for short)—a small hand-held chalkboard filmed at the beginning of each take. The “clapper” part of the job is deceptively simple. It is vital that all the information is on the clapperboard and that it is easily read.

It is critical that the Clapper-Loader keeps the inside of the changing bag or, on a big picture, the darkroom should be immaculately clean to keep dust and hairs off the film. The inside of the changing bag or the darkroom should be cleaned several times a day.

Perhaps the most important responsibility of the Clapper-Loader is the paperwork. The lab report sheet must be both legible and accurate or it will be impossible to find the appropriate piece of negative when it's time for negative cutting.

On most motion pictures, the Production Office keeps a very close eye on the daily camera report sheets. This is because the shot footage must be logged to see if the production is on budget in this area and to see how much footage is being entered in the “waste” column. A reputation for good paperwork is the most common reason for a Production Office to approve the Director of Photography's nomination of a Clapper-Loader.

An **Additional Camera** (or **B Camera**) is an extra Camera Operator who is sometimes needed for filming complicated action sequences, stunts from a different angle, or additional scene coverage with a second camera.

The **Sound Designer** oversees all the audio elements of a motion picture; similar to what a Production Designer does for the visual elements.

The **Sound Recordist** operates the sound-recording equipment on a set. Until recently, a Nagra recorder with a 1/4-inch tape was standard equipment; today digital audiotape, or DAT, is used. DAT is easier to synchronize and edit, and requires no Dolby or other noise reduction.

The **Boom Operator** operates the boom—a long, adjustable bar used to position a microphone during filming. On the boom, the microphone can be positioned above the actor's head, picking up dialog while remaining out of the camera's field of view. The Boom Operator must correctly position the boom microphone to record all the actors, which means pointing the mike at the actor who is talking, anticipating when the next actor will speak, and swiveling the microphone over to him or her.



The **Third Man** (also **Cable Operator** or **Cable Person**) operates the second microphone, if one is needed in a scene where actors stand far apart. The Third Man also handles all the cables related to sound-recording equipment—laying the cables, taping them, and tending the cables to follow the camera. In addition, this individual is in charge of noise abatement—discovering the extraneous noises, such as a refrigerator motor, a creak in the floor, or rustling clothing, and eliminating or minimizing them.

The **Key Grip** reports to the Director of Photography, oversees work with all of the camera support equipment on the set. This person supervises the Grips, who can number from five to fifteen.

A **Grip** works on the set with all of the camera support equipment. Grips prepare camera mounts so a scene can be filmed from whatever vantage point the Director of Photography desires. This might require organizing and securing the equipment needed to film from a moving car. Or this might necessitate erecting scaffolding for a high point of view. Grips work closely with the Electricians and Lighting Crew who set up the lights.

The **Dolly Grip** works with the dolly—a small four-wheeled truck that rolls along carrying the camera, some of the camera crew, and occasionally even the Director. If necessary, Dolly Grips lay dolly tracks, railings that guide the dolly in tracking shots outdoors. During the actual shooting, Dolly Grips push the dolly into the proper position at the appropriate moments.



The **Focus Puller** adjusts the focus of the lens as the actor moves closer to or further from the camera, or when the camera moves during a dolly shot. Keeping the main action sharp is the prime responsibility of the Focus Puller.

Before shooting begins, the Focus Puller marks the actors' positions on the floor with tape, and measures the distance between the lens and significant points in a traveling shot in order to attain a smooth "follow focus" during the take—a continuous recorded performance of a scene. The Focus Puller is responsible for setting the "Stop" as directed by the Director of Photography.

In addition, the Focus Puller is concerned with the camera itself. It is the Focus Puller's task to build the camera each morning and to put it away after shooting is finished. The Focus Puller must keep the lenses scrupulously clean and carry out any front line maintenance on the camera and its associated kit.

The Focus Puller rarely leaves the camera. The Camera Operator must be free to go off with the Director and the Director of Photography to discuss the coming set-ups. The Clapper-Loader brings the Focus Puller the bits of kit needed to build the camera for the next shot. You could say that during the shooting day, the camera "belongs" to the Focus Puller.

At the end of every "printed" take, the Focus Puller is responsible for giving whoever is on continuity the details of the shot. This includes the focal length of the lens, the focus setting, and the stop.

On any professional film set, the camera crew must always arrive at least half an hour before the call on the call sheet. The camera must be built and ready on the tripod or dolly before the call time and should be positioned roughly where the first shot of the day is expected.

The **Script Supervisor** (or **Continuity Person**) writes down very specific notes of every scene during filming so that he/she can look back at the notes during a later scene to check that all of the details are correct. The Script Supervisor makes sure everything looks the same from one shot to the next. The Script Supervisor also keeps track of the number of pages and scenes covered in a day, the number of setups, the estimated screen time, and notes how the filmed scenes deviated from the script—for example, how the dialog spoken by the actor differed from the written one.



The **Still Photographer** takes the still photographs that are used in publicizing the movie. Stills and instant photos are also used to help maintain continuity.

The **Gaffer** (or **Chief Lighting Technician**) heads up the crew responsible for lighting and other electrical matters during filming. The Gaffer reports to the Director of Photography and makes sure that his or her orders are carried out.



The **Best Boy** is the assistant to the Gaffer. This person orders all necessary lighting equipment and oversees the lighting crews.

The **Lighting Crew** (also **Lighting Technicians** or **Electrician**) is a group of technicians who install, operate, and maintain lighting. They retrieve the particular light that the Gaffer asks for, put it in position, raise or lower it, and wait for orders from the Gaffer to turn it on or off. If necessary, they add diffusing material in front of the light or adjust the width of the light beam by opening or closing the light's barn doors—black metal shutters attached to the light unit.

The **Genny Operator** sets up and operates a generator—a machine by which mechanical energy is changed into electrical energy.

FULL CREWS AND LOW-BUDGET CREWS

The structure of the technical crew varies from film to film, depending on the budget and the requirements of the script. Below are the two most common combinations of crew members.

The Full-Feature Crew

Camera:

Director of Photography
 Camera Operator
 Focus Puller
 Clapper Loader
 Dolly Grip

Lighting:

Gaffer
 Best Boy
 Lighting Crew
 Key Grip
 Grip Crew

Sound:

Sound Mixer
 Boom Operator

The Low-Budget Crew

On the “Low Budget” crew, the Director of Photography manages lighting and operates the camera. This is quite often the case on low-budget features and TV drama.

Camera:

Director of Photography
 Focus Puller/Loader

Lighting:

Gaffer
 Lighting Technician
 Key Grip
 Best Boy

Sound:

Sound Mixer
 Boom Operator

“That movie [Lost in Translation] was done with minimal equipment. When I met Lance [Acord] I had been accustomed to working on large-scale movies and being encumbered and enamored with all of the equipment, so much so that the humanity can get lost. I’ve since become very interested in working light. It’s not because of the economics, but rather because it brings you closer to your subjects. So often the machinery of our industry distracts us, and we lose touch with what we are hired to do. I find it truly rewarding to be able to get the striking results we achieved on this spot with such a simple approach.”

—Michael Williams, Director
