

How the set is run

This is a training module from the ScreenSkills 'From Script to Screen' programme.

The text includes multiple choice questions for you to answer. Each question is identified with the words 'Multiple choice question' and finishes like this:

Question end

That's so you can stop and think. Each question end is followed by the correct answer and feedback.

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Section A: Introduction

Welcome to the set. This is where the magic happens! I'm Malik. I'm a 2nd AD, and I'm here to tell you about how the set is run.

It could be halfway up a mountain, in the middle of a snowbank, or on a tropical island. A "set" isn't always inside a sound stage or studio. But, wherever it is, as you know by now, it takes a boatload of people besides the Cast and the Director to make it work.

From Camera to Costume, Make-Up to Construction, and everything in between, all that Crew needs to be coordinated by someone like me, from the Assistant Director team. Our job is to figure out how to optimise the time, talent, and budget on the set.

And to do that, organisation is key. It really means everyone working together to help the Cast and Director do their jobs in the best way possible to create a successful piece of content.

What you'll need to know is how all the moving parts fit together so you can make good decisions and be as effective as possible when you're working on set. Let's find out more.

Section B: Who's on the set?

Multiple choice question. Think about what Crew will be needed to bring a script to life.

Which of these departments would be needed on set to film a scene?

- A. Location
- B. Art Department
- C. Camera, Lighting and Rigging
- D. Sound
- E. Costume and Make-Up
- F. Stunts
- G. Set Medics
- H. Continuity

Question end

They're all needed. Filming even a short section of the script needs all of those departments to work together. Let's see why...

The Location Department must find the right setting to fit the Director's vision. They'll work closely with the Production Designer to do this. And they have to make sure that the details are sorted out – like permissions, extra space for working, storage and catering, access routes, road closures and so on.

Camera, Lighting, Riggers and Grips work to the instructions of the Director of Photography to make sure the lighting is right and the Director can capture all the shots they want. The Director of Photography is also referred to as a DP, DoP or Cinematographer.

Of course, the Costume and Hair and Make-Up Departments make sure the Cast look the part before and during the shoot. Even a stray hair out of place can wreck continuity!

The Set Dressing team, working to the Art Department's instructions, get the set dressed specifically for the scene and ensure there's continuity from any scenes already filmed. They have to make sure things like props and vehicles are all arranged and working correctly so that we stay on schedule.

The Sound Department positions boom microphones or radio mics on the Actors and around the set. They're responsible for capturing all the dialogue and live sound sources to help create the audio effect the Director wants.

The Script Supervisor looks out for continuity errors and helps the Director on set by checking the dialogue and that they've got all the shots they need. That's called making sure there's enough 'coverage'. They also match the timing of what's actually filmed with what was originally planned so cuts or additions can be made if necessary.

If stunts are needed, these are meticulously planned, and the Stunt Coordinator has to make sure this set up is filmed safely for the Performers and all the Cast and Crew on set. They'll liaise with the Director and 1st AD closely in Pre-production and also during the shoot. Costume and Hair and Make-up have to be ready to reset the Performers for each take if their appearance is altered by the stunt.

And finally, let's not forget the Creator. They keep working on the script, even during filming. That might be because the Director or Producer requests changes, or because they want to refine the script once they see the words come to life through the Actors.

That's a very quick look at the departments that crew the set. It's a super-exciting, fast-paced, quick-changing place to work, so let's look at the people who keep it all on track. That's where I work, on the AD team.

Section C: Who's in the AD team?

These are the roles in the AD team (plus the Director) in order of hierarchy:

1. Director
2. First Assistant Director (1st AD)
3. Second Assistant Director (2nd AD)
4. Third Assistant Director (3rd AD)

5. Floor Runner

You can see that there is a team of ADs, supporting each other and the Director to ensure that all time on set is used as effectively as possible.

The Director interprets the script for the screen using their creative style and vision. You probably won't have a lot of interaction with the Director!

The 1st AD runs the set, so the Director can focus on the Cast and the shots. They coordinate the inputs of all the Crew – Art Department, Lighting, Sound, Costume, Stunts and so on. They're responsible for the shooting schedule, and that's vital for making the best use of time and money, and for helping people do their best work.

The 1st AD is the voice you hear most on the radio. They're trying to keep everything running smoothly and on time, and to solve problems before they happen.

And then there's the 2nd AD. That's me!

I work from the Production Truck, which is usually parked at the Unit Base, or 'Base Camp' as it's sometimes called. While I'm not based on set, I manage the Cast and Background Artists. That means knowing the scripts inside out, and sourcing and booking Background Actors who fit what the Director wants. Along with the Production team, I'm across all Cast for the day, getting them through Costume and Hair and Make-Up so they're ready to go onto set when they're needed.

I produce the daily callsheet that gets checked and signed off by the 1st AD. And I'm a key liaison point during filming – making sure there's clear communication between the set and the Production Office.

The 3rd AD works on set with the Director and 1st AD, and they coordinate with me, back in the production truck.

They do a whole load of stuff on set, including overseeing the Cast and Background Artists, looking after the radios, managing the Runners, ensuring quiet during takes and so on.

If you're on set, you'll work closely with the 3rd AD.

OK, let's see what you've remembered. Have a look at each of these tasks from the set, and decide who does each one.

Multiple choice question. Who fixes a replacement for the Background Artist who suddenly can't come in for filming?

- A. 1st AD
- B. 2nd AD
- C. 3rd AD

Question end

The correct answer is B. This would be done by the 2nd AD.

Multiple choice question. Who makes a change to the shooting schedule after an unexpected downpour halts an exterior shoot?

- A. 1st AD
- B. 2nd AD
- C. 3rd AD

Question end

The correct answer is A. It's the 1st AD. The 2nd AD might also help.

Multiple choice question. Who gives the cue to a Background Artist when it's time for them to walk into the shot?

- A. 1st AD
- B. 2nd AD
- C. 3rd AD

Question end

The correct answer is C. This would be done by the 3rd AD.

And there's one more role in the AD team to tell you about – the Floor Runner, or Set PA as they're sometimes called.

They're responsible for a whole range of small but vital tasks like distributing callsheets and the script pages for that day's shoot. We call those sides, by the way.

They're also assisting with radios, communicating with the 2nd AD, keeping Crew quiet during takes, fetching breakfasts and lunches, making drinks.

It all helps keep the set running smoothly.

Section D: Dealing with unexpected problems

Now we've seen how different roles come together to make the set work, let's finish with a quick scenario.

You're on the set of "City Streets". It's 8am, you've been working for an hour and filming is about to begin. Everything is going well so far, and the sun is out. Looking good!

Then the news comes over the radio. The Actor playing Steve is unwell and can't come to the set today.

Multiple choice question. What happens now?

- A. Postpone filming until the Actor playing Steve has recovered. Everyone will benefit from a day off!
- B. Quickly get a replacement for Steve. It's not a huge part and only a few of his scenes have been shot already, so it won't be too difficult to re-shoot.
- C. Work out what alternative scenes can be shot today using the location, Cast and Crew available.

Question end

The correct answer is C. The team needs to find other scenes to shoot today, to make the best use of the resources available.

Multiple choice question. Which of these departments will have to move quickly to make a new plan work?

- A. Location
- B. Art Department
- C. Camera, Lighting and Rigging
- D. Sound
- E. Costume and Hair and Make-Up

Question end

The correct answer is all of them. All departments will need to move quickly to make it possible to film other scenes.

Are the new locations accessible? Can the sets be dressed today? Do we have the right Cast and Background Actors? What about the technical rig, costumes and props? Production and the AD team will coordinate a rapid response to make the best use of the day. Let's hope 'Steve' is feeling better soon!

That simple scenario shows something important about working on set. There are lots of moving parts. And they move fast! Change is normal. Of course, it can happen because key people are unwell, but it happens for lots of other reasons too – the weather, equipment failure, changes from the Director, and so on. That's why it's important to be alert, to be proactive, to prioritise well and to communicate effectively.

That helps the set run smoothly, and makes it an exciting place to work.

And that's the end of this module. This was created by ScreenSkills.