

Overview of Role

As head of the sound department, the production sound mixer (PSM), working on High-end TV and scripted films is responsible for the quality of sound captured during filming and creating a production mix for use during post-production and, potentially, the final mix.

During pre-production, the production sound mixer plans the approach to sound recording and specifies the sound equipment required to do this. During principal photography, they direct the sound team and operate the recording equipment to record the desired sound, mostly dialogue, as clean as possible.

Core Responsibilities:

These core responsibilities are provided as a guide and are not exhaustive. The exact responsibilities on a particular production will vary depending on the scale and budget band.

1. Plan production sound during pre-production

- Become familiar with the script and any creative brief about how the set will function and how the sound team should approach cast or specific scenes
- Identify scenes that need a particular treatment or could present pitfalls for sound recording or editing
- Agree workflow and deliverables specifications with the camera department, digital imaging technician (DIT), and editorial departments
- Attend meetings and test shoots as arranged by production
- Participate in recces of chosen locations to evaluate the acoustic characteristics, potential unwanted noise sources, and identify generator positions and other factors that may affect sound recording
- Develop technically feasible options for sound equipment and recording approaches to meet script requirements and production budget
- Liaise with costume department about any required radio mic rigs
- Liaise with relevant departments to minimise any other unwanted noise on set
- Plan, book and manage the radio frequencies to be used on set

2. Arrange for equipment during pre-production

- Supply or rent sound equipment
- Purchase all consumables required for the production period
- Sort the logistics for the transport of sound equipment to and from locations when they are not organised by the transport department

3. Supervise sound crew during pre-production and principal photography

- Recruit other members of the sound department on set, sometimes negotiating work conditions
- Train sound crew on new equipment when required
- Allocate work and instruct sound assistants as required by the production schedule
- Agree overtime with production when required

4. Record sound during principal photography

- Decide how to approach each scene and the shots that compose it
- Rig, position and operate field recorders and fader control units
- Monitor sound during recording to achieve required operational levels and avoid clipping

- Request additional takes when the recording does not meet production requirements
- Route signals to record an isolated track for each microphone plus any required safety tracks
- Request and record any required “wild tracks”
- Set up and operate playback systems when there is no need for a dedicated playback operator, or when it is not handled by the music department

5. Mix sound

- Create production mixes that meet creative and technical production requirements and can be used during the editorial stages
- Produce sound mixes to feed in-ear monitors and camera links when required

6. Organise delivery of rushes following principal photography

- Produce sound reports to help dialogue editors navigate audio rushes and record any additional recording required
- Organise for audio rushes to be delivered to the DIT daily

7. Follow health and safety requirements for sound production

- Work in line with health and safety requirements as per production’s policy
- Ensure that general health and safety procedures are enforced at all times

8. Liaise with other people and departments to meet production requirements

- Discuss production requirements for sound with producers and directors
- Attend production meetings to discuss ongoing issues and changes
- Liaise with the first assistant director and pass on relevant information to sound crew about sound requirements and intentions
- Liaise with first assistant director and other departments to prevent and solve issues that may jeopardise a clean recording of dialogue
- Inform director of any issues with captured sound

Role Specific Skills:

- Applying the physics of sound and acoustic principles to achieve quality production sound
- Selecting sound equipment to meet production requirements
- Operating audio recording equipment
- Creatively mixing sound
- Evaluating the quality of captured sound

Other / Transferable Skills:

- Communication and collaboration: Communicating and working effectively with directors, other heads of department and sound assistants
- Planning and organisation: planning shot requirements, managing equipment and paperwork
- Problem-solving: troubleshooting and resolving issues that affect sound quality
- Management and leadership: allocating work and giving instructions to the sound crew

Attributes:

- Resilience, enthusiasm and curiosity: adapts positively to changing work priorities and patterns, ensuring deadlines continue to be met. Proactive and explores new ideas and

non-standard ways of working which will enhance and deliver the best results for the production

- Productivity: organises work effectively and achieves required results within deadlines. Demonstrates the drive and energy to get things done in pressurised situations and escalates appropriately when necessary
- Ethics and integrity: honest and principled in all of their actions and interactions. Respectful and inclusive of others, and meets the ethical requirements of their profession
- Flexibility: willing to both listen and respond to changing priorities and working requirements as required, while at all times maintaining high standards in a constantly changing production environment