

The Production Office

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

Hi, I'm Meera, and I'm a Production Coordinator. Welcome to the Production Office! Our team really is the glue that holds everything together. We're one of the first departments to start on a production, and sometimes we stay involved right to the end, through Post and to delivery. We organise everything from people to paperwork, from cameras to catering.

We're constantly working with every other department. I probably get 200 phone calls a day when we're in the shooting phase of a production. Some of those calls could come from people like you. Wherever you work, someone like me is going to be ready to help when you need it.

We're driven by the creative needs of the production. Making sure all the moving parts come together as smoothly and safely as possible so the ideas in the script come to life. We're working to ensure that what gets on screen is the best it can be within the budget and the schedule.

Section B: Who's who in the Production Office?

There's a pretty strict hierarchy in the Production Office, so it helps to know who does what. I'll tell you about some of the key roles.

As we go through this, it's important to remember that some roles might have different titles in different parts of the world. You can use the Glossary tool to check out any you're not sure about.

Depending on the country, you could have people at the top such as Development Producer, Head of Production, Executive Producer, or Creator.

In your role, you probably won't have much contact with them.

You're probably likely to come into contact with the Line Producer, the Production Coordinator (that's me) and the Production Secretary.

You might work in places where the Line Producer's called the Unit Production Manager or 'UPM'. Sometimes, the UPM is a separate role that reports into a Line Producer. Whichever way it's organised where you work, these are the most senior members of the Production team after the Producer.

They're responsible for all the Crew, the Heads of Departments, or HODs, and hire people, caterers, and locations. They deal with all the contracts too.

They create and manage the budget, working closely with the Production Accountant who communicates with financiers and works with the Line Producer or UPM to control spending.

And at the end of the shoot, the Line Producer or UPM oversees the wrap of the production whilst the Post Production Supervisor looks after the edit, sound, music, titles, and other Post processes.

Like I said before, our work really does cover the whole production!

Section C: Prioritisation is essential

Multiple choice question. You're on set. The Producer asks you to send the callsheet out. What do you do?

- A. Ask: "What's the callsheet?"
- B. Call the Production Coordinator
- C. Scan the latest draft with your phone and email everyone

Question end

The correct answer is B. This is a job for the Production Office. Talk to the Production Coordinator, and they'll make it happen. The Production Office handles all distribution. That's so they can make sure the right version of every document gets to the right people.

Multiple choice question. The Director is hungry and asks you to fetch her lunch. You set off to get it. But halfway to the catering truck, you get a call. One of the Actors has lost their script for the next scene. What do you do?

- A. Go and get the script
- B. I'll do it later. I'm getting the Director's lunch
- C. Uh... I'll call the Production Coordinator

Question end

These are both important tasks, but which one comes first? The Director needs to eat, but if you don't get that script to the Actor then it could delay filming, and that will cause big problems. The right choice in this case is C. Ask the Production Coordinator.

It's always OK to ask for help. I already told you I probably get 200 calls a day when we're shooting. Stuff like this is just part of what I do, and I can help you prioritise. Prioritisation is a big part of production.

In this case, I'd just give you the latest script for the Actor, and I'd get a Driver to go and pick up the Director's meal. Sorted!

Multiple choice question. Let's see how you'd handle these two challenges. We've got a script change for next week's filming. And one of the Cast on set today has just had to leave because they're sick. Which one do we tackle first?

- A. Script change for next week
- B. A Cast member is sick today

Question end

These are both crucial changes for the Production Office to deal with, and they're both urgent. The number one priority is B, the Actor who's had to leave early, because that affects filming that's due to happen right now.

The Production Office would have to amend the schedule for the day so they can film scenes that do not have the sick Cast member in. The moving of scenes will involve all departments, to make sure that they have the right Cast and props, and everything necessary to rig the shoots.

Section D: The Production Office supports the whole production process

It helps if you understand how much has happened before you arrived on the scene.

Remember, the Production Office has been around since the start.

As you saw in How Content Gets Made, development and Pre-production (which includes hiring the Crew) are done before the shoot.

A big milestone is when we start Site Surveys – known in some places as recces. That means visiting possible filming locations to make sure they're suitable for what the script requires.

Scouting Surveys come first, often many months before principal photography – that's the official term for shooting. This is when key decisions get made about where we might film and what might need to be a created set.

Director's Surveys come next, a few months before principal photography, and then the bigger Technical Surveys, where Production, Creative and Technical visit all the confirmed locations to go through the planned shots and set ups.

Around the same time we'll have a Production meeting, where every department gets a chance to ask any final outstanding questions.

Rehearsals with the Cast are usually happening alongside all this. About a week before the shoot we'll often have a Read Through, where everyone gets a sense of how the script sounds out loud, if any revisions are needed, and what the running time will be.

It's all building up to the point where we can lock the shooting script and schedule and be ready for the Production Office to issue them.

And then when risk assessments are signed off and production insurance is in place, we start principal photography. The shoot can take anything from days to months, depending on the genre, the budget, and the scripts.

We're nearly there!

After we've wrapped up production, then Post Production really ramps up. My colleague will cover more about Post in a later module.

You'll hear people talking about picture lock – that's when everyone's happy with the final cut.

Another term you might come across is grading, which is the process of imprinting the creative intent on the picture by enhancing the look. We mix in the sound and music, add credits, visual effects and subtitles or a dubbed voice.

To wrap up, here are my top three Production tips...

1. **Always carry a pen and a notebook.** If you can't do something immediately, write it down so you don't forget!
2. **If you need to send documents out, please contact the Production Office.** The Production Office needs to keep control of everything that gets shared with the Cast and Crew.

3. **Ask for help with Production tasks when you need it, particularly when there are multiple urgent requests.** The Production Office is here to help you prioritise and to make sure everything gets done on time.

Now you know what the Production Office does. Good luck, and don't be afraid to call us if you have any questions.

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