

Overview of role

As head of the Lighting Department, the Gaffer in high-end TV and scripted film is responsible for on-set lighting. They conduct recces and plan the lighting for each location. They organise the Lighting Department for a production and are responsible for electrical safety as well as for health and safety in their department. Finally, they oversee the set up and operation of lighting equipment by the lighting crew so that it meets production needs. On larger productions, or where multiple sets are required to be installed ahead of the shooting crew arrival, a dedicated rigging Gaffer overseeing a dedicated rigging crew may be engaged

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. Conduct recces of lighting department requirements

- Before recces, review production paperwork to identify any scenes with additional requirements and discuss them with the Director of Photography
- Before recces, review location restrictions, permissions and plans and electrical inspection condition reports (EICR)
- Arrange for any required additional personnel or suppliers to attend recces
- Take relevant production paperwork, measuring equipment and notetaking equipment to recces
- Assess locations and take notes and photographs of all aspects including geographical conditions, topography, shot positions, sun positions, measurements, GPS locations, access issues, security and risk assessment concerns
- Assess fuse box and switch plates of local power options for signs of overload or age
- Discuss placement of lighting to achieve desired look with Director of Photography
- Liaise with other departments about their on-set lighting requirements including for practicals, props and special effects
- Liaise with Locations Department, Art/Construction Departments and Sound Department about siting of generator, scaffold and other lighting equipment so it cannot be seen or heard on screen
- Keep notes of all requirements and update them as ideas change and develop

2. Plan Lighting for each location

- Review notes and photographs and arrange to obtain any additional information required
- Work with the Best Boy, and Rigging Gaffer if appropriate, to create equipment lists, the need for back up systems and to assess crew levels required to install, operate and remove equipment
- Assess sustainable and traditional options of power generation, investigating any location specific restrictions
- Assess the need for emergency lighting in the event of a primary source power disconnection
- Plan a power distribution system to power on-set lighting and emergency lighting with adequate circuit protection
- Design installations and rigs that comply with safe working loads, have the correct support and are appropriately fixed, consulting with specialists when required
- Design system architecture and specify earthing and protective devices for practicals and other onset electrical equipment, when relevant

- Research and select appropriate equipment for the task advising the Director of Photography about choices
- Obtain copies of safety certification where appropriate
- Assess time required to install and remove equipment against the production schedule
- Assess costings against budget, and with agreement of Director of Photography, adapt lighting list when required
- Review and edit plans as script, design requirements and schedules change
- Share updates with Heads of Department and crew, double checking that submitted lighting requests are being dealt with

3. Create methods of control for the Lighting Department

- Create a system to engage crew with relevant knowledge, skills and experience
- Create a system to monitor crews' knowledge, skills and experience against ongoing work requirements, arranging training, certification of supervision when necessary
- Create a suitable system to share instructions, lighting and practical plots, schedules and electrical requirements with Lighting Department crew
- Work with the Desk Operator to create a system to store notes against cue or slate numbers
- With the assistance of the Best Boy, create a system to order, seek approval, arrange delivery, collection, replacement and return and check condition of equipment, ensuring that suppliers are competent and relevant safety certification can be supplied
- Create and monitor a system to gain proof of compliance, arrange electrical testing and to instigate repeat testing when required
- Create and monitor a system to keep records of all electrical testing certificates for the department and identify which member of production certificates should be shared with

4. Oversee the rigging of lighting equipment

- Obtain relevant permits and licenses for cranes, parking and access from the Locations Department
- Ensure that the correct access equipment is specified and operators are suitably certified and experienced
- Implement access control measures and ensure all equipment is suitably restrained to reduce the risk of toppling or people falling causing personal injury or property damage
- Ensure everyone knows what they need to do and has all the equipment they need
- Ensure rigs are installed correctly with tie downs and weights in place when required
- Ensure there is clear communication between the desk operator and rigging crew

5. Oversee the set up of lighting equipment

- Ensure everyone knows what they need to do and has all the equipment they need
- Ensure lighting equipment is installed correctly with tie downs and weights in place when required
- Ensure there is clear communication between the desk operator and lighting crew
- For battery powered lighting, set up charging station and safe protocols for use and disposal and ensure crew are familiar on how to use, charge and transport battery and low voltage equipment
- Consult with battery suppliers about loading, operation and disposal
- Instruct the lighting crew on installation, rigging and set up of lighting and light manipulation equipment, making sure it is safe and follows the lighting plan
- Create clear colour coded or numerical identification system and methods of communicating instructions
- Check safety features are in place and working
- Make sure crew exercise caution and report any issues when moving lamps
- Advise on the correct use of heat resistant or gels
- Work with Director of Photography and Desk Operator to create shortcuts to maximise efficiency and ensure repeatability

6. Oversee the use of lighting equipment during shooting to meet production requirements

- Work with crew to obtain the best results, adjusting as required and advising on methods to achieve camera lighting effects
- Determine if the Desk Operator requires a monitor feed from Camera and arrange when needed
- Make sure battery levels are monitored throughout shooting
- Take frequent colour temperature readings to monitor light quality from discharge lighting systems
- Constantly review and keep detailed notes about the operation of lighting
- Offer support and guidance to Lighting Crew about faulty equipment and liaise with the Director of Photography and 1st Assistant Director about delays to shooting
- Make sure that any testing or retesting is carried out when required

7. Manage health and safety in the Lighting Department

- Produce, submit and distribute department risk assessment method statements
- Monitor the effectiveness of risk assessment method statements, conducting dynamic risk assessments when required
- Introduce yourself, Best Boy and Rigging Gaffer, if there is one, to the Company Senior Person Responsible (SPR) and Health and Safety Advisor
- Display appropriate notices such as the Electricity at Work Act, personal protective equipment requirements and location of policies and risk assessment method statements
- Make yourself and crew aware of the health and safety regulations, contract terms, production policy and risk assessment method statements, how these affect work and safety practices and the implications of non-compliance
- Ensure crew have all necessary information and equipment to work safely, including personal protective equipment
- Hold department briefing meetings, especially for unusual operations, allowing crew members to ask questions
- If working abroad, ensure there are adequate translators with lighting department knowledge to communicate with local crew
- Encourage near miss and accident reporting in the department
- Monitor and adjust working practices, working hours and breaks to make sure crew are properly rested
- Ensure drinking water, toilets and food are available nearby
- Ensure medical cover and nearest emergency hospital are listed on the call sheet or movement order

Role specific skills:

- Bridging the creative vision and technical application
- Developing lighting plans
- Rigging and derigging lighting equipment
- Adjusting and operating lighting equipment to achieve specific effects
- Assessing lighting outputs

Other / Transferable Skills:

- Communication. Liaising with Director of Photography about lighting requirements and the implication of lighting equipment choices and briefing crews about lighting requirements.
- Organisation. Developing departmental methods of control and managing health and safety
- Problem-solving. Methodically identifying the causes of faults in equipment
- Management. Assigning duties and overseeing work

Attributes

- Resilience, Enthusiasm and Curiosity - Adapts positively to changing work priorities and patterns, ensuring deadlines continue to be met. Is 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 their actions and interactions. They will be respectful and inclusive of others, and meet 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.