

Essential Film Crew Positions

Below is a form you can print out and use as a contact list for your production. Ideally, there are a LOT more people involved than the list provides for, but in my opinion, these are the people you cannot do without. HOWEVER, don't stress out if you don't have all these positions filled – WE DIDN'T! Following is a description of each position on the list and just how important they all are...

Producer

A producer does just that – produces things. When you're putting the project together the producer produces the money, the crew, the equipment, etc. Anyone who has an essential part in making the project happen can be, and will probably want to be, called a producer.

There are all sorts of names for producers: Executive Producer, Line Producer, etc. When you're doing a small independent production, it's senseless to bother with all the fancy titles, in my opinion. If you can have someone fill the job of Production Manager, that person will basically represent the producer(s) on set and make sure everything is running smoothly and according to budget. Most first-time producers will be working on their own, and some are also the writer and director. It's tough, but it can be done.

Director

The director is the eye of the audience. A movie is a story told in moving pictures, and the director decides which pictures will best communicate the story to the audience. Directors work closely with all the other department heads (described below) and provide a unified vision of how the finished project is going to look. The director also works with the actors to fine tune their performances to fit with the unified vision.

Directors have a lot of creative power over your production. A bad director can ruin a great script, and a great director can save a bad one. He or she is also responsible for the "feel" of the set. The screaming, frenetic directors we see characterized in movies would lead to a very uncomfortable set, disgruntled crew and probably a bad product. The director is the most essential member of the creative team. Choose him or her carefully.

Assistant Directors (ADs)

Usually there are four: the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and AD-in-training (TAD). I could go into lengthy descriptions of what each one does, but essentially they all help the director communicate with the cast and crew to accomplish everything that needs to be done on schedule. You can get away with just a 1st, but he or she should have on-set experience. Without at least one AD, your director will go insane.

Big budget productions hire a bunch of Production Assistants (PAs) as well. They do all sorts of things from directing traffic to watching the parking lot, and work closely with the Locations Manager (LM). If you have enough money for PAs, you don't need to read this – just get a producer that already knows what they're doing!

Director of Photography (DOP)

Also called cinematographers, DOPs are experts on the media you're shooting on (film, digital video, etc.) and the camera you're shooting with. They know how to light a scene to match the mood, set up the camera to match the director's vision and basically make the thing look good. There's not much more I can say about it, except that a good DOP is absolute gold. You know how some movies have breathtaking shots that make you feel like you're really *there*, and some have crappy lighting and just look like sh*t? That's the difference between a good DOP and a bad one.

Camera Operator

Well what can I say? Camera Ops operate the camera. They should know the camera well and how to handle the media, along with all the camera equipment such as dollies, steady-cam rigs, and camera cranes. They work under direct supervision of the DOP and director, and can save a lot of time, money and effort if they're good. It is very important to have an experienced Camera Op, but on really small productions sometimes the DOP operates the camera as well.

The Camera Op can also have one to several assistants, depending on the budget, the media and the camera equipment used. Film cameras often require a separate Focus Puller, for example, and a dolly requires someone to push them around (I don't know what that job is called). Work with the Camera Op to figure out the requirements for your particular shoot. I recommend at least one camera assistant, though.

Sound Mixer and Boom Operator

You will most likely be using separate sound recording on your production. This provides for greater flexibility and higher quality sound, and film cameras don't record sound like video cameras. Your Sound Mixer operates the mixing board where all the sound sources are recorded, and your Boom Op gets the microphones close to the actors without getting in the shot. A good sound crew will save you tons of headache and will make your final product that much better. You can do everything else right, but if the sound sucks, so will your movie. These people are essential to the success of your project.

If you're just using a video camera with an onboard mic, you may not need a sound crew. But in my opinion your product will sound terrible.

Gaffer, Grip and Electrics

The Gaffer sets up the lights. It sounds simple but it's actually a very complex job. The amount of hardware it takes to light a scene properly is astounding. If you don't have a lot of lights, then one person will suffice. If you plan on lighting your project like the professionals do, plan on having an "assistant" to your Gaffer, or Best Boy, a Key Electrics and assistants to supply the enormous amount of power needed for the lights, and a Key Grip and assistants to move everything around and set up the gear. Not to mention Transport to move the stuff from location to location. Even on a small production, you'll do well to assign people to the key positions to make sure the gear you do have is handled properly and things get done on time. As most of the time it takes to

make a movie is spent on lighting, a good team in this area can make or break your shooting schedule.

Locations Manager (LM)

Guess what – they manage the locations. They scout out good places to shoot and work with the director and producers to decide which ones to use. They deal with authorities, property owners, and etc. to get all the necessary permits and secure the location. From paying the big bucks to landlords, to dealing with the public, right down to keeping the locations clean – LMs have a huge and varied job, and usually require a lot of assistance on big productions. For us little guys, an LM may be redundant because you're only using one location and it's your parent's basement. Or you may be "guerrilla" shooting anywhere you can set up your camera before someone kicks you out. Whatever the case, make sure your creative team thoroughly and realistically assesses the needs of the production in regards to locations.

Art Director

Also known as the Production Designer, the Art Director decides what everything that is seen in the movie is going to look like: the decorations on the walls of the main character's house, the design of special props being used, artistic themes and colours in the costumes and environment where the scenes are taking place, the look of animations and special effects, etc. He or she also works with the Set Designer and builders to create artificial sets that specifically suit the artistic and technical needs of the production.

On a smaller project you may or may not be building sets at all, or your Art Director may also be your Set Decorator and/or Props Master. This area really depends on how much money you're spending and how elaborate the environment is in which your story takes place. Again, thoroughly assess your needs and balance them out with your budget. I recommend assigning at least one person to do this work, even on a tiny set.

Wardrobe, Hair and Make-Up

These are pretty self-explanatory; I'm not going to go into detailed job descriptions. I will say that every one of these jobs is important. You might have one person doing all of them, but *someone* has to.

Caterer and Craft Service

These may be the most important, and definitely the most loved, people on your set; especially when you have a crew working for free. The productivity of the crew will quickly go down the toilet if you don't feed them. This area is easily overlooked or underestimated. Again: a happy, effective crew is one that's been fed. The Caterer cooks the meals, Craft Service provides the snacks, drinks and most importantly coffee. The Craft Service provider usually has a second job as the First Aid attendant. It's essential to have someone on your set well versed in First Aid. The safety of your crew is even more important than their hunger. You may have one person doing these jobs, but definitely have someone doing it. And provide for nutritious, tasty and energizing food in your budget. Trust me, you'll thank me later.

Producer(s)

Director

A.D.s

DOP (Cinematographer)

Camera Op

Camera Assistants

Sound Mixer/Recorder

Boom Op(s)

Gaffer

Best Boy

Key Grip

Grip(s)

Electrics

L.M.

P.A.s

Art Director (Production Designer)

Set Builder(s)

Set Decorator

Props Master

Costume Designer (Wardrobe)

Make-Up Artist

Hair Stylist

Caterer

Craft Service/First Aid
