

An Introduction to Feature Film Making

Synopsis

A brief look at the many opportunities and roles available in Feature Film Making. You might like to check out Wendy Laybourn's excellent book. "Do You Have What it Takes to Survive in Feature Film Production". This e-booklet is available through Amazon.

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INTRODUCTION TO FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION

So, you want to work in feature film production? The following is a brief look at the many opportunities available, if you want more information you might like to check out my *Do You Have What it Takes to Survive in Feature Film Production* e-booklets available through Amazon.

The title ...*'do you have what it takes to survive'*... isn't a joke. Film production is a very competitive business. It's mostly freelance so, when you're trying to find a job, your personality and passion counts as much as your talent. If you think it's a glamorous career, where you'll be filming in exotic locations and mixing with the stars – well yes, it can be just that once you gain experience and find yourself working on bigger films – but initially you might have a bit of a shock in store, there's a lot of hard work and a steep learning curve before you get to those dizzy heights! Although, if your ultimate goal is to see something you've worked on, *in whatever capacity*, up on the cinema screen and you're not willing to let anything stand in your way, then this might be just the career choice for you.

Why ...*'in whatever capacity'*...? Well, a major feature film can employ hundreds of people in several different departments, all with very specific skills. There are many more creative, technical and business skills involved than you may realise. A comprehensive film or media course might give you the basic understanding and the information you need to set you off on the right road – but there is so much more to learn about the range of jobs, skills and crafts which go into the finished movie.

The three jobs – Producer, Director, Cinematographer, which most people think of first when they're thinking of working in film, are most certainly very important – but hopefully, as you read on through the booklets, you'll realise that there might be other areas which fit your particular talents and temperament and which will give you more career satisfaction. What about the Art Department, Special Physical Effects, Costume, Sound, Post Production....?

If you're still determined to be either Producer, Director or Cinematographer, then this is a quick explanation of the roles and how long it might take you to achieve this job of your dreams – oh and I've added the Production Designer, without whom the film would have no sets, so a very important job!

Producer – he's the head honcho and the one who will say 'yes' or 'no' to a script, raise the money, oversee the production, post-production and distribution – and continue to be responsible for the film for the duration of its life. So, as you can see, leaving a film or media course will not qualify you instantly to become a Producer!

Director – he's in charge on set and is responsible for the creative vision and overall style of the film, working with the performers, the technical and creative teams and ultimately answerable to the Producer. Again, not a job you can walk into without experience.

Production Designer – Head of the Art Department, the Production Designer works very closely with the Director and other Heads of Department – Construction, Costume, Makeup and the Director of Photography – and plays a crucial role in helping the Producer and Director to achieve the ultimate 'look' of the film.

Cinematographer – aka Director of Photography. He's in charge of the Camera Crew, oversees the lighting of the set and works closely with the Director and Production Designer to create the look and feel of the film, alongside the Costume, Hair & Makeup departments and the

performers to make the Director's vision come alive on the screen. This job takes many years of experience.

So, if you're still at school and before you make your career choice, think carefully about the creative or technical skills you might have which could fit in with the business of making films, then check out which of the departments might suit you best – then, and only then, can you work out what kind of training you will need. The essential thing for any job is that you leave school with the best grades that you can manage, whether or not you take that to a higher level is dependent on the specific career you wish to follow.

Whatever training path you decide, whichever department you choose and whatever age you are, you will have to start as a junior member of the team. You have to be prepared to work hard whilst you learn your trade, doing anything and everything you are asked with a willing and pleasant attitude. It might seem harsh but no matter how good you think you are, working in film is like stepping into a different world. Hopefully, by the time you've finished reading these booklets, you'll have a better understanding of the range of jobs involved and a realistic idea of where your particular skills might fit in.

The first and hardest part, regardless of your skills level or age, is getting anyone to give you the time of day. Once you have someone's attention and, if you're grateful for the opportunity and show that you can work hard and learn fast, you're on your way – BUT - if you come out of education with just the basic skills and think that you know how to make movies already, then your chances are way lower.

All in all, if you have enough passion, enough talent and the determination to achieve your goals, working in feature film production - at any level - is a joyous thing, a career to be proud of and a career where each working day is a challenge and where '*impossible*' becomes an almost obsolete word – but beware, once you're in you'll be hooked for life - it won't be easy but you'll enjoy every challenging day!

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT JOB PROFILES

The Producer: has overall control on every aspect of a film's production from approving the script to cinema distribution.

Assistant Producer: is a highly competent administrator who works closely with the Producer throughout the production process.

Line Producer: as soon as the finance has been raised, the Line Producer supervises the preparation of the film's budget and the day-to-day planning and running of the production.

Production Manager: is a pivotal role on any film production, combining the business skills needed to run a temporary company with the creative skills necessary to understand the vision of the Producer and Director.

Production Co-ordinator: is directly responsible to the Production Manager and the Line Producer, co-ordinating the day-to-day running of the production team.

The Director: is responsible to the producer for the creative vision and overall style of a feature film and is the crucial link between the production office and the technical and creative teams.

Production Designer: works closely with the Producer and Director to achieve the visual requirements of the film and is responsible for the entire Art Department. (see also Book 2, The Art Department)

Location Manager: searches for exactly the right locations, under the instruction of the Production Designer, negotiating costs, access and all local permissions.

Assistant Directors: 1st, 2nd & 3rd Assistant Directors (AD's) provide the Director with both office and on-set support.

Production/Floor Runners & Assistants: are the foot soldiers of the production team and this job is a career starting point

Storyboard Artist: translates the screenplay into a series of illustrations to help the Director, Camera Crew & Art Department to visualise the scene.

Script and Development: Screenwriter, Script Editor who develop the story into a screenplay and oversee re-writes throughout the process.

Casting Director: organises and facilitates the casting of actors for all the roles in a film.

Product Placement Executive: is the individual employed by the production company to look after embedded marketing - otherwise known as Product Placement or Brand Integration.

Executive Producer: is either financing the film, or is representing another party which is financing the film

Co-Producer: may be the lead Producer from another production company which is involved in the film, or may have optioned, packaged or developed the project.

Associate Producer: may assist the Producer, Executive Producer or Co-Producer.

Financial Controller & Accounts Department: is responsible for managing finances, taxation and financial analysis during film production.

Publicity, Marketing, Distribution & Display: involves publicising, launching, exhibiting and sustaining films in the marketplace.

CAMERA, GRIP & LIGHTING DEPARTMENT JOB PROFILES

CAMERA CREW

Director of Photography/aka Cinematographer: under the Director of Photography's guidance the Camera Crew, Grips and Lighting teams use their skills and expertise to film the action on set to capture exactly the images that the Director wants. Liaising closely with the Art, Costume, Makeup & Hair departments throughout the shooting process, the DoP is key to maintaining the consistent 'look and feel' of the film.

Camera Operator: is in charge of the Camera Crew, operates the camera and maintains composition and camera angles throughout a given scene or shot. The seamless ease with which the camera moves is key to the narrative flow of feature films and is the Camera Operator's responsibility.

First Assistant/aka Focus Puller: the 1st Assistant or Focus Puller's primary responsibility is to maintain image sharpness on whatever subject or action is being filmed, looking after the cameras, lenses and all the associated equipment, the 1st AC is responsible for configuring the camera and accessories for each of the different shooting setups.

Second Assistant/aka Clapper Loader: the 2nd AC handles the Clapper or Slate at the start of each shot to make sure that picture and sound are synchronised, has to anticipate when the camera needs film stock/recording material replenishing and aid the 1st AD and the Operator as necessary.

Camera Trainee/Apprentice/Runner: this is the entry level job in the Camera Crew. Camera Trainees will work with every member of the Camera Crew but in particular will assist the 2nd Assistant Camera. The job is very varied and can range from getting the teas and coffees for the Camera Crew to handling lenses and filling out the camera reports. As the Trainee gains more experience and technical knowledge so the responsibility will increase.

Script Supervisor/aka Continuity: works with the Camera Crew and is responsible for ensuring the continuity of every detail in each scene during shooting for pick-up shots or re-takes and, as such, has to be the most observant person on set.

Specialist Camera Operators: includes Steadicam Operator, the Aerial Camera Crew and the Underwater or Marine Crew.

GRIPS CREW

Key Grip: is Head of the Grip Department and works with the Director of Photography and the Director, supervising the crew responsible for anything associated with the camera's operation and movement.

Best Boy Grip: the Assistant to the Key Grip is also known as the Best Boy. The term probably predates the film business as, in the early apprenticeship system, the 'Best Boy' was the Master's oldest and most experienced apprentice.

Dolly Grip: a specialist whose job it is to move the 'dolly' – a wheeled vehicle which is capable of carrying the camera and the Camera Operator for moving and tracking shots which moves along a pre-laid track.

Crane Operator: is responsible for setting up and operating all cranes on film productions which are used to carry the camera and Operator for overhead and tricky shots.

Grip: the job of the Grip is very specialised, working with the Camera Operator and the Director of Photography to make the positioning and smooth movement of the cameras possible.

Trainee Grip/Apprentice: this is the entry level for the Grip Department. Trainees work with the Grips, assisting on everything as required. An enthusiasm for all things mechanical is an absolute requirement!

LIGHTING CREW

Lighting Gaffer: working with the Cinematographer, the Gaffer designs the lighting plot and selects the right equipment for each shot based on the environment, camera angles, desired effect and available ambient lighting.

Best Boy Lighting: the 'Best Boy' is the Assistant to the Lighting Gaffer – a supervisory role, liaising with the Assistant Director, Special Effects Supervisor and Art Director.

Lighting Technician/Sparks: the responsibilities of the Sparks vary according to the size of the production. They operate the hundreds of lights and run the miles of cable necessary to illuminate the action on set.

Rigging Gaffer: supervises the rigging crew who unload and install cable, rigging equipment and light.

Console/Board Operator: is a qualified electrician with IT skills. Essentially a 'moving light' operator who programmes and controls the automated lighting on set.

Trainee Sparks/Apprentice: this is the entry level for the Lighting Department. Trainees work with the Sparks, assisting on everything as required. A national qualification in electrical technology is essential.

Generator Operator: a fully qualified specialist within the department and is responsible for operating and maintaining the generators, running feeder cables to the set and the various trailers for makeup, costume etc.

ART DEPARTMENT JOB PROFILES

Production Designer: is in charge of the entire Art Department and plays a crucial role in helping the Director to achieve the 'look' of the film.

Art Director: acts as Project Manager for the Art Department and facilitates the Production Designer's creative vision for the sets and locations.

Assistant Art Director: works directly for the Art Director, managing personnel, keeping a close eye on the budget and overseeing activities on set.

Draughtsman: this job is the core of the Art Department. The Draughtsman translates the Production Designer's sketches, references and specifications into detailed technical drawings and 3-dimensional scale models.

Art Department Coordinator: is the link between the Production Office and the Art Department. Working with the Production Manager they provide the day-to-day administration and support to keep the department running efficiently.

Standby Art Director: monitors the Art Department's work on set during filming for the Production Designer.

Supervising Art Director: works on big budget films which have a number of sets and which involves a large Art Department.

Art Department Assistant: is the 'Runner' of the Art Department which is a great opportunity to learn as much as possible about the department and improve skills. This is the entry level job.

Property Master: is responsible for all props for the production working with the Production Designer, Art Director and Production Buyer

Set Decorator: provides anything that furnishes a film set, excluding structural elements.

Greensman: supplies plants, natural scenery and a wide selection of all things horticultural, of all descriptions, from all parts of the world.

Drapesmaster: is responsible for the production and installation of all soft furnishings on the film set.

Production Buyer: works with the Set Decorator and Property Master to locate and hire or buy the required dressing and action props.

Specialist Researcher: this job is needed on historical epics or fantasy productions.

Graphics Artist: produces all the props which contain graphic items, such as money, newspapers, magazines etc.

Film Sculptor: working from drawings produced by the Art Department, usually working within the Construction Crew, create any number of special features .

Modelmaker: works alongside the Construction and Art Departments, making model sets for buildings and objects which may be too expensive to hire or may have to be destroyed as part of the action – also known as Miniatures.

Storyboard Artist: working with the Director and the Art Department, translates sequences from screenplays into a series of illustrations in comic book form.

Concept Artist: the job, sometimes referred to as an Illustrator, is to take an abstract idea and turn it into a tangible visual sketch, such as a fantasy creature or other invented element.

CONSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT JOB PROFILES

Construction Manager: has overall control on every aspect of set construction, both in the studio or on location.

Assistant Construction Manager: is a highly competent and skilled member of the Crew and works directly for the Construction Manager

Heads of Department: highly qualified individuals in either Scenic Carpentry, Scenic Painting, Ornamental Plastering or Rigging, who control their own crews within the Construction Department.

Chargehands: are responsible for their own crew of either Carpenters, Painters, Plasterers or Riggers on specific projects during production, under the direction of their Head of Department.

Standbys: experienced practitioners who are on set during shooting to solve problems or organize any changes necessary.

Scenic Carpenter: skilled in carpentry and joinery, they build all interior and exterior sets and physical scenery.

Scenic Painter: skilled at the full range of advanced decorative finishes, such as broken colour effects, replica wood graining and marbling as well as complex stencil designs.

Ornamental Plasterer: considered a craft rather than a trade because of the wide range of plastering skills required.

Rigger: responsible for assembling and installing rigging gear such as scaffolding, ropes, cables, pulleys, winches, lifting equipment and specialized access equipment.

Stagehand: they assist with everything from hanging backdrops, moving heavy props and scenery to taking care of transport.

Film Sculptor: working within the Construction Crew from drawings produced by the Art Department, creating any number of special features.

Modelmaker: works alongside the Construction and Art Departments, making model sets for buildings and objects which may be too expensive to hire or may have to be destroyed as part of the action – also known as Miniatures

Trainee/Apprentice: the entry level for all who want to work as a craftsman in the Construction Crew. Qualifications in standard construction methods, as well as skill-specific techniques are necessary.

PRODUCTION & POST PRODUCTION SOUND DEPARTMENT JOB PROFILES

PRODUCTION SOUND

Sound Designer/Supervising Sound Editor: the Sound Designer aka Supervising Sound Editor, working with the Production Sound Crew and the Post Production Supervisor (Editor), the Director and the Composer, is responsible for all aspects of the audio track, both during production and post-production, providing the film with its distinctive atmosphere for the complete audience experience.

Sound Recordist/Mixer: is responsible for recording legible dialogue and sound tracks during filming.

Boom Operator: the Boom Operator is responsible for placing the boom microphone in the best possible position, without impeding camera operation or hampering the actor's freedom to perform.

Sound Assistant: works to both the Production Sound Recordist and the Boom Operator on set. They often act as a second Boom Operator or Mixer when a specific shot might call for two people. Sound Assistants assemble, operate and maintain technical equipment.

Sound Trainee/Apprentice: this is the entry level job and you'll have to have a certain level of knowledge and training in order to get to this position.

POST PRODUCTION SOUND

ADR/Post Sync: works with the Camera Crew and is responsible for ensuring the continuity of every detail in each scene during shooting for pick-up shots or re-takes and, as such, has to be the most observant person on set.

Re-Recording (Dubbing) Mixer: works with all the sound elements – Dialogue, ADR, Foley, Sound Effects, Atmospherics and Music – mixing them together to create the final sound track.

Foley Editor: is responsible for the general sound effects which are added during the editing process.

Music Editor: is responsible for editing all music for a film or television show's sound environment, including the original score, source music and songs.

Music Supervisor: is primarily concerned with selecting songs to be placed in a film or television show's soundtrack and the licensing process necessary to clear the rights.

Composer: creates the film score to suit the Director's vision. This can encompass many combinations of styles – orchestral to vocals. The Composer may also be the Orchestrator. If not then the Orchestrator takes the Composer's music and ideas and expands them - assigning instruments, harmonies and impact points to match the production's tempo and mood. The Composer, Orchestrator, Music Editor and Picture Editor work closely together during post-production.

Audio Describing & Subtitling: this process is to make cinema accessible to the hearing impaired audience.

Foreign Language Version: overdubbing voice tracks or subtitling for distribution overseas.