



Who's who on the set: below-the-line (part 2)

Jobs description in the
production department

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Introduction

Above-the-line and Below-the-line. The terms refers to the budget where a line was drawn to separate key players on a film production.

Above-the-line gathers most of the people involved in the creative direction of the film.

Below-the-line gathers all other departments involved in the making of the film. People of this department are usually hired when the film has been financed and is ready to move into prep, (pre-production). At that time most of the Heads of Department are hired and are building their teams.

This guide focuses on the various roles in the Production department. It explains who are the key players, what responsibilities are part of their job, and what are the main qualities required to help you decide if one of these jobs may be your future career.

Choosing your path

A career in the film industry brings with it many rewards. But it takes hard work and discipline, as well as the understanding that there is no set routine. You're often working on several projects and need to keep a look out for the next one. Building solid relationships is key to advancing on set, as is gaining experience from lower level positions. Work is never steady nor guaranteed. But you do it for the love and excitement of a life in the film industry.

The wonderful aspect of a career on set is that no two productions are ever the same and there's always some new development, with advancements in equipment and technology that make your job even more exciting. There's always something new to learn. You get to work with different people, produce new stories, even travel to new locations. But it also means long

hours and serious commitment. Things don't often go smoothly and you have to be prepared for anything, from equipment issues or that dreaded plane flying overhead. Note

The timeframes of film production:

Pre-production (Prep) refers to the period prior to the shoot. It begins when the budget has been finalised and shooting dates are locked. At this stage, teams are built and preparation for the shoot begins. Depending on the size of the production, the prep can last between 8 weeks to a few months.

Production refers to the actual shooting period. It lasts between 4 weeks to a few months, depending on the complexity of the movie.

Post-Production refers to the period which follows completion of the shoot. It includes all the post-production elements (editing,

VFX, grading, music score, sound mix, etc) as well as the admin tasks, such as closing the accounts, archiving files, etc.

Below-the-line roles: production department

Line Producer

This person manages the day-to-day aspects of the production, most importantly the budget. Once the production date is set, the first person hired to manage the production is the Line Producer. They can be compared to the manager of a project in business as they are the key liaison between the producer and all activity on the production set. In essence, they are the bridge between the Above-the-line personnel and the Below-the-line crew. Hence the name Line Producer.

Unlike a Producer, the Line Producer only works on one production at a time, as all their focus and time must be on driving the production forward. That requires a great deal of time and attention to detail. It's an excellent position for advancement into becoming a producer and even a studio executive, if one so chooses, as the financial aspect of the position is key to moving into a more business role in the industry.

By monitoring and facilitating such aspects as location scouting, schedules, crew and equipment, the Line Producer reports to and ensures the production is running smoothly, on time and on budget. In addition, this position is in charge of the health and safety on this set, so certified knowledge in both areas are required.



While film school is an excellent option, consider a business degree first, then gain valuable on-set experience, starting as a Production Assistant and advancing to

Production Manager, Location Manager, Assistant Director. Additional courses in health and safety methods must be completed.

Key Qualities:

- **Attention to detail** - Perhaps more than any job on the set, this position works with every department, as well as the Producer. They must know what's going on at all times.
- **Calm under pressure** - Anything that goes wrong on the set will need to be dealt with by the Line Producer. And things don't happen one at a time.
- **Budgeting and Accounting skills** - Budgets and finances are an important aspect of this role. A background in business is essential.
- **Negotiation skills** - The Line Producer will interact with suppliers and hiring personnel. This means being able to negotiate the best deals.
- **Diplomacy** - This position works with talent and crew. Sometimes things clash. It's up

to the Line Producer to resolve any issues that may arise.

- **Recognizing problems** - As part of the health and safety aspect of the position, the ability to recognize potential hazards in advance are vital.

Production Manager

While the Line Producer oversees the production, the Production Manager, sometimes referred to as the Unit Production Manager (UPM), is more hands on with the physical aspects of production. They work under the Line Producer and handle the administrative tasks of ensuring equipment arrives on time, for example, and everything stays on budget.

On smaller productions, this position may be combined with the role of the Line Producer. Like the Line Producer, the UPM works with both the Above- and Below-the-line crews and is tasked with the more minute details as

assigned by the Line Producer. This means that the position requires many of the same skills, especially financial and budgetary skills.

During pre-production, the UPM will be hired close to the end of the process at the point when the production needs to be scheduled and on-set crew is to be hired. They will be involved with cost estimation and negotiation pay rates.

Once in production, the UPM makes sure the set runs smoothly, the production stays on time and on budget, and reports regularly to the Producer.



Film school with a production track is an excellent start. But taking business courses, especially finance and accounting is highly recommended. Gaining set experience as a Production Assistant, Production Accountant, and/or Assistant Production Manager is the way to advance to this position.

Key Qualities:

- **Organization** - A lot of details will come flying at you from many directions and quickly. Being able to juggle everything is vital.
- **Budgeting and Accounting skills** - A large part of the job is developing and maintaining budget throughout the production.
- **Maintaining laws and regulations** - Laws such as child actor restrictions and local zoning laws are the responsibility of the UPM.
- **Communication** - It goes without saying that this position deals with a lot of personnel on set and in the production office. Being able to communicate quickly and concisely is an important skill.
- **Diplomacy** - Similar to the Line Producer, the UPM deals with many personalities. They must remain calm under this pressure.



In order to move into these more senior positions, a great way to build your resume is to work in any of the following lower level jobs in the Production Department. Keep in mind that, despite being lower positions, they are all vital to the success of any production.

These include:

| Production Coordinator

The Production Coordinator works under the UPM and handles the administrative tasks of the production. This includes ensuring policies and regulations are adhered to and managing the Production Assistants.

| Production Assistant

The production's "gophers". PAs can work in the production office, performing needed tasks or can work on set, assisting wherever required. It often involves getting a lot of coffee for people.

But it's an invaluable way to learn and advance to other production jobs.

| Script Coordinator

This person is responsible for maintaining and distributing changes to the script throughout the production. They usually work in the production office.

| Production Accountant

Manages all finances and financial records of a production.

| Production Secretary

Handles administrative tasks.

Conclusion

What an audience sees on screen is the result of a great deal of collaboration behind the scenes. Depending on the size of the production, there are lots of on-set jobs. Whether you go to film school or jump right into production, starting as an assistant in any of these departments is a way to gain valuable experience and move up to the job of your dreams. Today's Key Grip is tomorrow's Director of Photography.



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