# What Everyone Does on a Film Set

by Brandon Tonner-Connolly with Alicia van Couvering
in Filmmaking
on Aug 24, 2015

For those new to physical production, here is a list of film set departments, with notes on their staff positions, responsibilities, benefits and attractions. (This is a companion piece to "The Seven Arts of Working in Film: A Necessary Guide to On-Set Protocol.)

Production
Personnel includes: Unit Production Manager, Production Coordinator, Production Secretary, Office PA's, Assistants to Directors & Producers.
Responsibilities: Organization, preparation, wrap, taking care of actors, producers, director, financiers.
Join this department if you like: Working on a movie without being chained to a set, knowing everything that's going on, solving problems, aka fielding constant complaints.
Favorite game: Choosing a new person to hate every day.

Assistant Director
Personnel includes: 1st AD, 2nd AD, 2nd 2nd AD, Key PA, Set PA's.
Responsibilities: Breaking down the script into an organized shooting schedule (1st AD), communicating with all departments on a daily basis to keep production moving forward (including creating call sheets), monitoring and facilitating on set safety for all personnel.
Join this department if you like: Collaborating with key creatives to accomplish goals, military-style hierarchy and code language, panicking over a sudden need for umbrellas.
Favorite pastime: Inventing nicknames.

Grip
Personnel includes: Key Grip, Best Boy Grip, Dolly Grip, Rigging Grips.
Responsibilities: Assembling and maintaining support equipment for camera including dollies, dolly track, and jibs; setting stands for lights and placing light shaping elements such as flags.
Join this department if you like: Engineering, puzzles, manual labor.
Know them by: Creatively-tied "signature" bandanas.

Electric
Personnel includes: Gaffer, Best Boy Electric, Electricians, Generator Operator.
Responsibilities: Under instruction of the DP and Gaffer, setting all the lights and running all electrical cable, including "work lights" and equipment power for other departments.
Join this department if you like: The art of lighting, the thrill of being asked every single morning to find power for the coffee maker.
Greatest thrill: The possibility of daily electrocution.

Camera
Personnel includes: Director of Photography, 1st Assistant Camera, 2nd Assistant Camera, DIT/Media Management, Stills Photographer.
Responsibilities: Preparing and operating the camera, setting up the monitors (if there are no VTR / video playback personnel), tracking footage and managing film or digital media.
Join this department if you like: Working with extremely fragile and expensive objects, math.
Favorite accessory: Any custom-designed holder for a generic object (i.e. velcro-attached pen sleeve, walnut-handled tape wheel…)

Props
Personnel includes: Property Master, Assistant Property Master, Prop Assistants (Tangential departments: Food Stylists, Animal Wranglers).
Responsibilities: Everything that actors touch besides costumes, set dressing, and HMU, including food, weapons, cigarettes, fake drugs. Responsible for certain "video village" items including moving directors chairs and, in certain union jurisdictions, heaters and tents.
Join this department if you like: Finding the perfect object for every occasion.
Greatest frustration: Non-actors eating prop food.

Art
Personnel includes: Production Designer, Art Director, Art Dept. Coordinator, Set Decorator, Leadman, Set Dressers, Art PAs.
Responsibilities: Responsible for all the elements of scenery including set decoration (furniture, window treatments, floor coverings etc), scenic work (set painting and aging), and construction (set building). (On larger films, the Construction, Scenic and Set Decoration elements are broken into separate departments, all still working under the overall direction of the Production Designer and Art Director.)
Join this department if you like: Flea markets, moving furniture, moving more furniture.
Constant companion: Bruises.

Costumes & Wardrobe
Personnel includes: Costume Designer, Assistant Costume Designer, Shoppers, Wardrobe Supervisor, Set Costumers, Seamstress.
Responsibilities: Design & procurement of all costumes for principal talent and background including aging, dying, and alterations. Wardrobe Supervisors and Set Costumers are responsible for organizing costumes on set as well as dressing actors and background on the day. (On larger films, Costumes and Wardrobe are broken into two separate departments. The essential division of labor is: costumes creates/ procures the clothes, and wardrobe puts them on the actors and maintains continuity.)
Join this department if you like: Clothes, full-length mirrors.
Most surprising fact to new hires: Bags of clothes are extremely heavy.

Continuity
Personnel includes: Script Supervisor.
Responsibilities: Breaking down the script, managing the continuity of blocking, props, makeup and costumes, tracking the progress of the production through the pages of the script.
Join this department if you like: Being a department of one, always being right.
Perk: Gets to sit in a chair all day.

Hair/Makeup
Personnel includes: Hair Department Head, Key Hair Department, Makeup Department Head, Key Makeup Department, Special Effects Makeup.
Responsibilities: H/MU of all on screen talent including simple prosthetics, hair extensions, etc. If necessary, Special Effects Makeup may be its own department.
Join this department if you like: Constant collaboration with actors, access to secrets.
Also known as: "The Glam Squad," "Vanities."

Locations
Personnel includes: Location Manager, Location Assistants, Location Scouts, Unit PAs.
Responsibilities: Finds locations, liaises with the outside world, opens and closes sets and holding areas.
Join this department if you like: Maps, interfacing with a wide swath of people including cops, firemen, government officials and curious neighbors.
Most useful tool: Cash, to pay off teenagers with boomboxes or persistent ice cream truck drivers.

Sound
Personnel includes: Sound Mixer, Boom Operator, Sound Utility
Responsibilities: Capturing and organizing the recorded sound of the film including dialogue, background noise, room tone.
Join this department if you like: Finding new and creative places to plant mics on set, listening to actors gripe about the director when they think no one can hear them, retrofitting tackle boxes into cord organizers.
Most sseful tool: Inscrutable poker face.

Catering
Personnel includes: Caterer, Chef, Assistant Chefs.
Responsibilities: Preparing and serving on set meals to cast and crew at pre appointed break times.
Join this department if you like: The joy of making people happy through delicious and comforting food, constantly being asked for esoteric hot sauces.
Most useful tool: Chaffing Dishes.

Craft Services
Personnel includes: Key Craft Service, Craft Service Assistants.
Responsibilities: Providing a buffet style selection of food and beverages on set ranging in size and complexity according to budget level.
Join this department if you like: Creatively cutting fruits and vegetables.
Most useful tool: Toaster Oven.

Special Effects
Personnel includes: Special Effects Coordinator/Supervisor, Special Effects Foreman, SFX Technicians
Responsibilities: Preparing and executing all practical on set effects including atmosphere (smoke, fog), wind effects, snow/rain, and pyrotechnics.
Join this department if you like: Being the coolest person on set.
Most useful tool: Fire extinguisher

Set Medic
Personnel includes: Set Medic.
Responsibilities: Stand by for on set medical needs of cast and crew.
Join this department if you like: Constantly being asked for sunscreen.
Most useful tool: Collapsible set chair.

Visual Effects
Personnel includes: VFX Supervisor.
Responsibilities: Directing and overseeing the creative and technical execution of non practical visual effects elements.
Join this department if you like: Being the person who has the final word in the endless argument about whether or not to use tracking marks.
Most useful tool: Personal monitor all others are jealous of.

Transportation
Personnel includes: Transportation Captain, Transportation Coordinator, Transportation Co-Captain, Drivers, Picture Car Coordinator.
Responsibilities: Providing transportation to set for all film elements including cast, trucks, set dressing etc.
Join this department if you like: Being at set both before and after everybody else.
Most useful tool: Coffee
(Not included on this list are the largely off-set departments of accounting, casting, post-production and publicity.)

*The above is a revised version of an article originally published in April, 2015.*