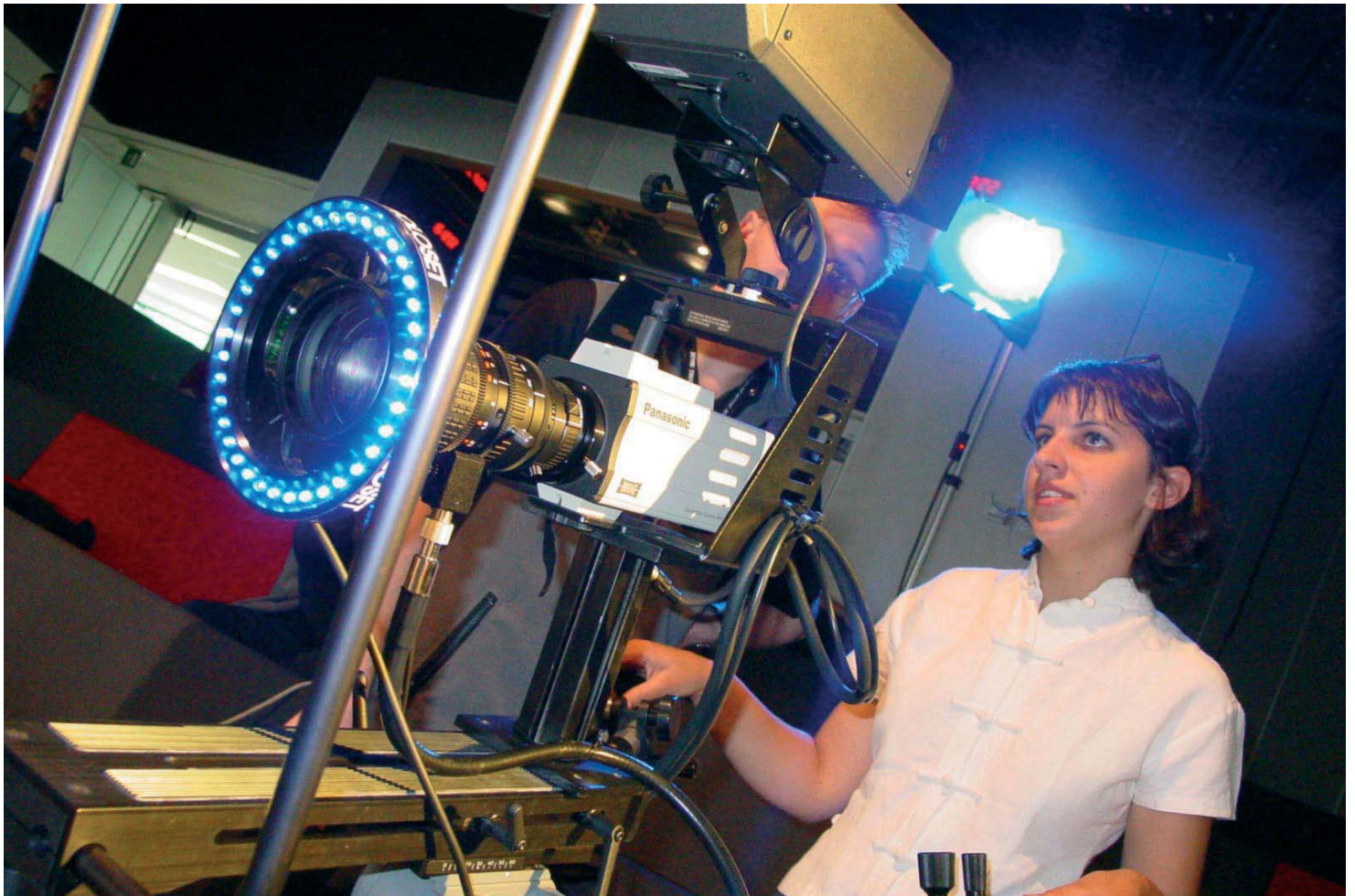


# GENERATOR

## Production: Planning the Shoot

Education Resources



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## PLANNING THE SHOOT

### BIG BUDGET, SMALL BUDGET OR NO BUDGET?

A large-scale production that has significant financial backing can afford to have a broad distribution of labour to skilled specialists who collaborate to create, distribute and exhibit the finished product. However, small-scale or independent productions are often constrained by low or non-existent budgets, limited technology and a small cast and crew. Although these constraints may challenge the creativity of the independent filmmaker, they can provide greater opportunity for creative control over decisions made during the production process.

### THE IMPLICATIONS OF BUDGET ON PERSONAL STYLE AND EXPRESSION

Many filmmakers believe that the advantages of independent or small-scale production outweigh its drawbacks. Without major studio producers dictating the terms of the production, independent filmmakers can make their own decisions about the overall shape and style of their production. Another advantage for independent filmmakers is the ability to explore personal or controversial issues that are often avoided by 'risk-averse' mainstream studios. Independent filmmakers can remain true to their own ideological position and challenge the expectations of the audience by presenting themes, alternative narratives and ambiguous characters.

A small-scale production may heavily rely on financial backing from friends, family or even the filmmaker. Whereas large-scale productions can afford complex technology to produce spectacular epics or action blockbusters for the mass market, the independent filmmaker can intentionally reject or challenge mainstream styles to capture the attention of their audience. This experimental approach is often a feature of low-budget filmmaking, where filmmakers must overcome a lack of funding through creative thinking and problem-solving strategies that ensure their film is produced successfully within its small budget. Financial constraints can force independent filmmakers to experiment with traditional conventions and seek new ways of producing films.

A filmmaker's creative strategies in responding to cost-cutting measures can work to the film's advantage, enhancing personal style and producing a stylistic result. Independent filmmakers may rely on heightened aesthetic realism or alternative production techniques to reach their audience, such as:

- Shooting real, local locations rather than setting up studio shoots, resulting in a sense of familiarity for the audience.
- Using lesser known film actors, such as non-professionals, family members or friends.
- Relying on natural lighting and making use of its imperfections.
- Emphasising dialogue rather than special effects and computer-generated imagery.
- Experimenting with narrative structure, such as scrambling chronology or giving the storyline a twist.

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF BUDGET ON EQUIPMENT

A production's budget will affect the independent filmmaker's selection of media and film format. The high cost of professional film stock and equipment have in the past presented a major obstacle to independent filmmakers; however, digital video formats and consumer-level camcorders have become more affordable and are used with much success by independent and student filmmakers. Digital technology also provides filmmakers with greater mobility and flexibility. With more recent developments in home computer technology, filmmaking has become quite accessible to the everyday person, and independent filmmakers are able to shoot and edit their vision, sound and music on their personal computer.

## PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

Although there are many differences between small and large-scale production modes, the delivery of content is ultimately reliant on the same basic production roles and phases in creating the finished product. Crew roles are assigned during the planning phase, with each member of the production crew allocated one or more specialist roles prior to filming and during the production phase. Independent filmmakers will often perform several production roles. Working in a small production team, there is the opportunity to rotate through the specialist roles to gain experience of the different responsibilities required in each.

## KEY PRODUCTION ROLES

A good crew member has a can-do attitude and the ability to problem-solve when faced with a challenging situation. Most importantly, a good crew member shows enthusiasm and respect for the project and the filmmaker's production ideas.

<b>Director</b>	The director is responsible for directing the actors and the crew to achieve the best possible outcome for each scene. The director must be absolutely familiar with the script dialogue and action and with the storyboard plan for shooting the scene. The director needs to focus the crew's attention on maintaining technical quality, especially in lighting and sound, at all times. The director ensures that everyone and everything is in its correct place and he or she is responsible for directing filming to begin and stop.
<b>Cinematographer</b>	The cinematographer operates the camera and works with the director to shoot the scene as it has been planned on the storyboard. The cinematographer is responsible for setting up the camera equipment, carefully framing each shot and shooting the highest possible quality of footage.
<b>Production assistant or floor manager</b>	The production assistant or floor manager assists the director, keeps the set clear and watches out for any potential problems. He or she is responsible for keeping track of tapes (in particular to avoid taping over previously recorded footage) and for keeping a shot record for each scene, noting the best takes and

any problems that may need to be flagged in order to reduce time in post-production.

<b>Art director</b>	The art director is responsible for the appearance of the film's settings – that is, the physical locations of the characters, including buildings, landscapes and interiors. For small-scale productions, this role may be shared between crew members.
<b>Clapper</b>	The clapper operates the clapboard and identifies each take during the shoot.
<b>Casting director</b>	The casting director suggests or searches for actors for major and minor character roles and auditions performers for the scripted roles in the film.
<b>Costume designer</b>	The costume designer selects or designs costumes that convey information about the characters and the period in which the film is set. Characters' costumes can tell the audience much about their occupation, attitude and economic status.
<b>Actors</b>	Actors portray the characters in the film. They interpret and bring to life the characters in the script.

## SCRIPT BREAKDOWN

Frequent team or production meetings assist in the collaboration process and the sharing of production ideas. A collective effort is required to ensure that the shoot runs to schedule and according to plan and that no mistakes are made during the production phase. Prior to constructing the shooting schedule, it is recommended that the screenplay is broken down according to all the components that are required to shoot every scene and sequence in the script, including:

- Equipment
- Locations and settings
- Cast and specialist crew
- Costumes and makeup
- Props

This breakdown will help the production crew devise a realistic production schedule and detail all the facilities needed to shoot the production efficiently. It may become clear that it is necessary to shoot some scenes out of order so that the production can be completed on time and with the available funds.

## SHOOTING SCHEDULE

A production or shooting schedule indicates the estimated number of days required to film each scene. The intention of the shooting schedule is to organise the shots and scenes so that no time is wasted in setting up or moving equipment and props and, most importantly, so that there is sufficient opportunity for the cast to give the best performance possible.

To create the shooting schedule, follow these guidelines:

- Break down the screenplay by location.
- Detail all the scenes to be shot at each specific location.
- Break up each scene into segments and list all the equipment, cast and crew needed to shoot the scene.
- For each segment, specify the duration, difficulty and time of day the scene needs to be shot.

The total number of days indicated by breaking down the screenplay in this way will indicate the time frame required to shoot the entire project. During production, use the shooting schedule as a guideline and frequent reminder of the time used and the remaining time available to complete filming.

### REHEARSING THE SCRIPT

Film production traditionally begins with a set-up and rehearsal. Once the screenplay is prepared, a script read-through is held to check the quality of the scripted dialogue and as a last-minute chance to make any further changes to the screenplay. The read-through also helps to prepare the entire cast and crew for the actual shoot, so it is best done on location with all cast and crew present. Actors block their scenes (the positioning of cast on set to determine how the scene will be shot) while the camera crew starts to visualise all the individual shots required to frame their performances.

### PRE-SHOOT CHECKLIST

Consulting a pre-shoot checklist before the first day of shooting will help to ensure you have everything you need. An example of such a checklist is as follows:

- Camera equipment: fully charged batteries, spare batteries, cables, microphones
- Script
- Props and costumes in labelled boxes
- MiniDV tapes
- All equipment should be labelled (especially tapes, to keep track of footage shot)

Refer to the checklist daily to avoid taking up valuable production time searching for missed items.

### YOUR NOTES

