

13. The role of cinematographer

PDF HANDOUT

The cinematographer's role involves the overall composition of the on-screen image—in terms of camera framing and picture composition, movement and lighting. The cinematographer's primary role occurs during the production phase but they also play an important role in the pre-production and post-production phases. The cinematographer works closely with the director and editor throughout the process and is responsible for the set-up and use of any necessary equipment needed for the capturing of the image (including tripod, camera, lights and dolly).

The filmmaking tasks associated with the role of cinematographer are outlined below.

Possible tasks for cinematographer

Tasks for the role of cinematographer in this assessment task might involve, but are not limited to, the following.

Pre-production

- Brainstorm with the team regarding ideas, genre, concepts and group intentions.
- Research the chosen genre and any influences for the production of the film, identifying conventions and techniques in relation to the creation of image.
- Go over the script and storyboard and make notes about how these might be presented visually.
- Collaborate with the director about how *mise-en-scène*, locations and lighting will be handled.
- Collaborate with the editor about how transitions, effects and coverage will be handled.
- Create a shot list for each scene.
- Scout for locations and create notes regarding image and lighting concerns.
- Carry out test shoots using different focal lengths, camera placement, lighting techniques, and so on.
- Make a checklist of equipment for the shoot.
- Carry out planning and research for particularly tricky shots or sequences, for example, learning how to use green screen or create the “vertigo effect”.
- Create diagrams of each location showing lighting design, camera placement and movement.

Production

- Prepare all filming equipment and make sure it is there and ready for filming.
- Set up and design all lighting to create mood and atmosphere.
- Set up and operate camera, dolly and film equipment.
- Communicate with the director regarding choices made and help solve any problems encountered during shooting.
- Make daily production notes with a description of choices made, changes to the original plan and any issues that arose during the film shoot.
- Make sure that footage is secure and back-up copies are made and stored in a group production folder.
- Communicate with the editor and sound person regarding choices of footage captured that may affect their roles.

Post-production

- Collaborate with the director and prepare for any scheduled reshoots as a result of the editing process.
- Collaborate with the editor regarding choices in colouring or image alteration in post-production.
- Screen a first draft of the film and provide comments/feedback to the director/editor.
- Attend a test screening to a new audience and make a note of reactions and/or suggestions.