**Production Roles: Focus on Director**

Lesson Objectives

In this lesson, the student will:

* share some of the difficulties encountered during pre-production and troubleshoot solutions
* focus on the challenges associated with the role of director on the short film project

Refinement Continues

  
  
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This week, you will continue your module-long look at the remaining production roles, which is intended not only to help you improve your understanding of film, but also to help you make a better film yourself, and to make the wisest decision in terms of your assessed production role.

This lesson assumes you have made the decision to be assessed as [**director**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), but is intended to be of value to all students of Film. This lesson will also be unique in that it includes a requirement to check in with your instructor about how the production process is going for you and your crew. If problems have indeed arisen, this check-in will, hopefully, help you to resolve them before they adversely affect the entire shoot.

It is important to note there are no extraneous production assignments for this module. This does not mean you have four weeks to relax. Rather, you should be hard at work on your actual film production. Do not be lulled into a state of complacency simply because you are not uploading anything to your instructor. Keep filming.

The Overall Vision

As the director, you are responsible for maintaining the overall vision for the film, which is no easy task, especially if you are working with very creative individuals who all have their own ideas about what the finished film should be. It is your task to make sure everyone is, as they say, "on the same page." This can be very challenging, especially when trying to tell people your own age what to do. A professional film director usually has the authority of years of experience behind him or her; you will most likely have neither.

Rather than give you techniques for ordering people around, this lesson will instead provide an overview of how you might frame your interactions with the other production roles and with the actors, as well. The trick to being a good director is to bring out the best in others.

Directing the Writer

  
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More likely than not, your interaction with the [**writer**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) is already mostly in the past. Hopefully, you were a significant part of all the various drafts and helped to shape what the final draft eventually became. Nevertheless, you should not hesitate to bring the writer back into the fold during production, if, in fact, scenes need to be rewritten. Rather than just doing this yourself, explain clearly what changes you need and why you think they will be effective. Then, let your writer do the rewrite. Always allow the writer to have ownership of the script.

Give credit where it is due. If an actor comes up with a better version of a line, then have the actor share the discovery with the writer. If an actor finds a way to eliminate a line altogether, explain to the writer why the change works better. If you always maintain the spirit of collaboration, then your chances of bruising egos will be minimized.

Of course, if the changes are not being made in a timely manner, then you should feel free to be more firm in your expectations. As long as you have given the writer the opportunity to do the work first, then you have no reason to feel guilty if you end up having to make the changes on your own.

Directing the Cinematographer

  
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If your [**cinematographer**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) is solid, then your major task here is to get out of the way. Allow your cinematographer room and time to get set up. If you anticipate the setup will take a long time, then call your actors later in the shoot, so they do not have to sit around. If the crew is moving from one [**shot setup**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) to the next, explain to your actors what is happening and what the [**intent**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) of the shot is. This way they will not get bored, and they will feel involved with the process. They might even be able to deliver a better result if they get a clearer sense of what you want.

If your cinematographer is not using the [**storyboard**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) to check off which angles have been shot, then make sure you do so. If shots are missed, that ends up being your fault, so watch closely. You can also assist the cinematographer by suggesting (and insisting if need be) that additional angles are shot, such as [**close-ups**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) and [**cutaways**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3). Your editor will thank you for the options later on.

You should definitely keep an eye on [**continuity**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), rather than relying on your cinematographer to do so.

Directing the Sound Designer

On set, the sound artist will be capturing the live audio, so make sure he or she is using the equipment properly and is checking levels on every shot. You can certainly offer firm reminders about recording[**room tone**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3), as well as other environmental sounds. The tendency with regards to sound is often to just record and hope for the best, so the more you can do to counteract that tendency the better.

With regards to abstract sound, you can allow your designer plenty of room to be creative by providing very clear, but open-ended, metaphors rather than by requiring a specific sound. "I want this scene to feel like a prison...Can we make the audience feel like it has a fever?...What if we heard a sound that was like jumping in a frozen lake?" Statements like these allow the designer to be imaginative, rather than feel like he or she is simply following orders.

Directing the Editor

  
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[**Editing**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) is difficult to do by committee. Like writing, it is best done solo. However, you should insist on regular updates and screenings from your editor, just so you can make sure things like pacing, rhythm, and continuity match your vision for the overall film.

As with explaining what you want to a sound designer, you might do well to couch your desires in metaphorical or even musical terms. If you know of a piece of music, for instance, that matches the pacing and intensity of what you envision for a particular scene, then play that music for your editor. Believe it or not, editing is very musical, and if you can provide your editor with a clear sound picture of what you intend, then you increase the likelihood you will actually get it.

Show your editor respect by making the job easier. Have a production slate for all shots, with a clapper, to make syncing audio go smoothly. Provide all [**assets**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3) in a timely manner, all properly and clearly labeled. If your crew is working on the same workstation, then gently remind your editor that your sound editor needs time to edit the sound mix, and your cinematographer needs time to do color correction. Be respectful but firm. Remember, everyone's mark is riding on the success of this film, so no one should be getting preferential treatment.

Directing Actors

This last piece is almost always ignored in production portfolios from student directors, yet it is, quite possibly, the most important function of a director—to help actors author their own performances. Notice, this does not mean telling actors how to deliver a line. You should, by now, sense a theme to this lesson on directing. It is the director's function to coax the imaginative powers out of his or her cast and crew, not just give orders like some kind of petty tyrant. More student films collapse for this simple reason than any other.

  
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If you have formal acting training, you are in great shape to direct actors. Even if you do not, then a few simple features of the actor's craft will serve you in your capacity as director. An actor playing a role needs to be concerned with his character's motivation and objective, not so much his character's feelings. Feelings arise out of characters pursuing their desires. The single most important questions you can ask your actors are:

* "What do you **want**in this scene?"
* "What are you going to **do** to get it?"

Do not settle for simple answers. Keep pushing.

Make sure you establish and enforce a clear protocol on set. Actors should not give each other direction, nor should other members of the crew. Direction comes only from you. Likewise, if any member of cast or crew has a problem with another, they should come to you first. You are the hub around which the whole production process revolves.

Remember, as the camera is repositioned from angle to angle, you may need to give your actors very specific direction about body position. Do not be afraid to say something as detailed as, "Move your right shoulder up five centimeters." In other words, give the actor exploring room when it comes to creating a character, but do not waste time when it comes to giving your cinematographer exactly what the shot requires.

There are, also, several important differences between stage acting and screen acting, which you will need to be aware of because, in all likelihood, you will be dealing with stage actors, who are used to having to project their voices and to being bold with their gestures. Film acting is a very understated craft, and you will need to be prepared to tell your performers when they are going over the top.

Jump Cut

If you have time, check out this series on YouTube, in which the British actor, [**Michael Caine**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000323/), discusses the ins and outs of screen acting. This [**Acting in Film Workshop**](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Njs6ZNSoFC0&feature=related) series is still one of the best of its kind.

The more you understand about the craft of acting, the more likely you are to give effective feedback, which, in the final analysis, leads to a better film.

Managing the Chaos

Of course, there are a multitude of other tasks that do not fall specifically under any one production role. These would normally be handled by other members of the crew, but on a short, student film project people will look to you as the director to make sure things are done. You will either need to clearly delegate these responsibilities to others (best choice) or take them all on yourself (not a good idea, for your own health and sanity).

* Create a schedule and stick to it.
* Treat people's time and talents with respect and dignity.
* Communicate clearly.
* Create the space for creativity, but maintain focus.
* Be firm with your expectations.
* Put out small fires early, before they become infernos.

If you need advice and inspiration, check out the classic book on directing, [***Film Directing Shot by Shot***](http://www.amazon.com/Film-Directing-Shot-Visualizing-Productions/dp/0941188108), by Steven Katz.

Finally, if you have time, check out an [**interview by Charlie Rose**](http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/10607), featuring the acclaimed writer and director, [**Jane Campion**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001005/), as she discusses her views on the art of film directing.

Check-In

Head over to the [**Production Office**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_prod.htm) to provide information to your instructor on your progress.

Production Timeline

You and your crew should be able to wrap up production in the next few weeks, and be ready to head into [**post-production**](https://courses.pamojaeducation.com/shared/Courses%20M2016/M2016%20Film%20SL/Semester%204/week48/48_03.htm?_&d2lSessionVal=2dicqRFpCLeBUUxjQHoBQLex9&d2l_body_type=3). This does not mean shooting is necessarily over. In fact, frequently you will find some sequences simply do not work well and need some extra shots or cutaways in order to cover a bad continuity error, for example. Do not hesitate to reassemble the shooting crew if you feel it is necessary, even after principal photography is over.

For now, you have a few weeks to wrap things up on the production end, but they will go quickly. Make sure you keep making forward progress on getting all the footage you need in order to tell your story properly and well.