

The cinematographer's responsibilities as outlined below is an attempt to describe the duties a cinematographer is likely to encounter during his/her career. No two jobs are the same and the duties will contract or expand depending on the scale and complexity of the job. As can be seen, there is a vast amount that a cinematographer is required to know and do and this can only be learnt over a number of years of filming. Our thanks to John Hora ASC who drew up this list for publication in the American Cinematographer magazine. It has been slightly adapted for this website to reflect Indian technical terminology.

I Preproduction

A. Conceptual research and Design

- * Discuss all aspects of script and director's approach to picture in preliminary talks with director
- * Analyze script as whole
- * Analyze story structure
- * Analyze characters
- * Research period, events, general subject and appropriate design elements
- * Devise style, visualize approach
- * Continue talks with director on new ideas
- * Come to agreement with director
- * Discuss and come to agreement with production designer
- * Discuss and come to agreement with technical adviser.

B. Practical Research and Design.

- * Ascertain or find out budget requirements
- * Scout and approve locations
- * Plot sun position for locations
- * Check local weather
- * Check tide tables near ocean
- * Review, discuss and approve set plans
- * Review, discuss and approve spotting plans for stages
- * Review and approve props, picture cars, airplanes, boats, horse-drawn vehicles, mock-ups and miniatures

C. Technical Research and Design.

- * Visit laboratory to calibrate, customize and evaluate exposure system for any combination of electronic or chemical image capture, and establish developing, printing, set timing and transfer protocols
- * Visit equipment vendors
- * Explore new equipment
- * Learn how new equipment works
- * Invent (or cause to be invented) special equipment or techniques for show
- * Standardize and create effects bible for show
- * Help create and approve any storyboards
- * Design (or cause to be designed) and approve any built-in or practical lighting fixture
- * Design lighting-plot plan and rigging for stages and locations with gaffer and key grip

D. Quality Control

- * Choose and approve crew, film stock, lab, equipment, second-unit and visual-effects crews
- * Supervise manufacture and testing of new modified equipment
- * Visit sets under construction
- * Approve wild walls, ceiling pieces and any moving set pieces
- * Check lighting-fixture crew
- * Walk locations and stages with all departments to discuss requirements
- * Approve set colors and textures
- * Approve costume colors and textures
- * Approve makeup and hair
- * Generate (or cause to be generated) and approve equipment lists for camera, electric and grip
- * Check dailies screening rooms for correct standards

E. Implementation

- * Cast stand-ins
- * Train crew to use any new equipment
- * Walk locations and stages with director and device shooting plan
- * Make list of special equipment for production manager and indicate number of days required
- * Work with assistant director on shooting schedule (order and days required for each scene)
- * Estimate and order film stock (type, size and quantity)
- * Generate (or cause to be generated) and approve rigging and shooting manpower and man-days
- * Assist other departments in getting required equipment, manpower and tests
- * Drop by all departments and visit department heads at least twice a day to answer any questions
- * Mediate any problems between departments
- * Check loading of production trucks or cargo containers for location or international shipping
- * Visit cast run-throughs and rehearsals
- * Advise and back up director on any problems
- * Help production problems

F. Testing

- * Shoot tests for style
- * Shoot tests for lab
- * Shoot test for lighting of principal actors
- * Shoot tests for camera and lenses
- * Shoot tests for wardrobe and makeup
- * Shoot tests for any special effects processes, unusual rigs props or methods

II Shooting

A. Planning

- * Check and approve all call sheets and shooting order of the day's work

B. Blocking

- * Watch rehearsal of scene to be shot
- * Device shot list with director (coverage)
- * Choose lens and composition; show to director for approval
- * Make sure composition and movement fulfill scene task
- * Work out mechanical problems with camera, dolly and crane grips
- * Set any camera-movement cues
- * Place stand-ins and rehearse, fine-tune
- * Ensure proper coverage of scene for editor
- * Work with assistant director on background action

C. Lighting

- * Design lighting to show set/location to best advantage relative to story, style and dramatic content
- * Light each actor to reinforce and reveal character
- * Make sure mood and tone of light help to tell story
- * Design light for minimum reset time between setups
- * Utilize painter for control of highlights, shadows, aging, dusting-down of sets and props
- * Set and match light value, volume, color and contrast of each setup (exposure)
- * Set any lights cues (dimmers, spot lights, color changes and any preprogramming)

D. Preparation

- * Work out any sound problems
- * Work out any problems with other departments
- * Check, set and approve all stunts with stunt coordinator
- * Set any additional cameras required for stunts
- * Double-check safety with all concerned
- * Show shot to director to make any final changes
- * Get actors in for final mechanical rehearsal; solve any outstanding problems

E. Photography

- * Photograph scene
- * Approve or correct take
- * Check parameters and reset for next take
- * Shoot any plates
- * Shoot any video playback material
- * Move to next step

F. Administrative

- * Define first setup in morning and after lunch
- * Make sure that stills are taken of scene

- * See that ?making of? and/or EPK crews get needed footage
- * Make sure script supervisor has any special camera or lighting notes
- * Check film raw stock inventory
- * Try to shoot up short ends
- * Check that camera logbook is being kept up to date
- * Complete day's work
- * Discuss first setup for the next day
- * Ensure that camera, electrical and grip crews get all copies of equipment rental or purchase invoices and approve before accountants pay vendors
- * Take care of any future or ongoing production at end of day
- * Check for return of all unused equipment

G. Quality Control

- * Call in for lab report
- * View previous day's work in projected dailies with director, producer, editor and camera crew
- * Discuss and approve dailies
- * Consult with makeup, wardrobe, production designer and assistant director about dailies
- * View, discuss, correct or approve second-unit or effects dailies
- * Order reprints if necessary

H. Training

- * Teach beginning actors movie technique (hitting marks, size of frame, lenses, etc.)
- * Train camera crew for next job up the ladder

I. Contingency

- * If director is disabled, finish day's shooting for him or her

III. Postproduction

A. Additional Photography

- * Discuss and be aware of delivery dates for all postproduction
- * Photograph or approve any additional scenes, inserts, special effect or second-unit footage

B. Timing (Color and Density)

- * Time and approve trailer for theaters and TV
- * Approve all optical and digital effects compositions
- * Time the picture
- * Retime until correct

C. Quality Control

- * Approve final answer print
- * Show to director for OK
- * Approve interpositive (IP)
- * Approve internegatives (IN)
- * Approve release prints
- * Approve show prints from original negative
- * Approve all blowups or reductions

D. Telecine/Color Correction

- * Supervise and approve film or digital original transfer to electronic or film media (Hi-Def, NTSC, PAL, Scam masters, digital intermediates, archival masters, etc.)
- * Supervise and approve all transfers to and from digital intermediates
- * Supervise and approve all letterbox, pan and scan or reformatting of film
- * Supervise and approve tape-to-tape color correction and VHS, DVD, digital projection media, etc.
- * Show electronic transfers to director for OK

E. Publicity

- * Do any publicity (newspaper, magazine, Internet, radio, TV, DVD commentary etc.)

F. Restoration/Archival

- * Be available for any future reissue, archival reprint or electronic transfer of film.

This list of duties of the cinematographer was published in January 2003 by the American Cinematographer magazine.