

PREPRODUCTION CHECKLIST

1. Make a Production Schedule:

- a. Block out dates for all your shoots; Aim to leave at least 3 weeks for careful editing. If you are editing at the last minute, you will be stuck using your first cut rather than having time to try a few different versions, and you won't have time for polishing, fine-tuning, and post-picture lock work such as color correction and sound mixing (these can make a huge difference).
- b. Log, take notes, and assemble selects / rough scenes while you are still in production
- c. Check with other members of your camera group to make sure you are not planning overlapping shoot dates.
- d. *Be realistic about scheduling – a typical rule of thumb is that it takes approximately one 8-hour shooting day to cover 2-4 minutes of script time.*

2. Crew Up:

- a. Plan in advance to make sure you have all the crew members you need for your shoots. Make sure to ask members of your group and other members of the class ahead of time to make sure you aren't scrambling for crewmembers at the last minute.
- b. Remember, the more you are able to delegate specific jobs to specific people, the more you'll be able to focus on directing and getting the performances you want out of your actors. At a minimum, you should consider having at least a gaffer and a sound recordist / boom operator on your crew. Additionally, you might consider having a DP (so you are not shooting and directing at the same time), a camera assistant (especially if you're doing dolly moves or complicated focus pulls), a production / costume designer, etc.

3. Visualize your project's "Look":

- a. As you move from the written script to thinking about your piece on screen, think broadly about what kind of color palette, mood and tone you want your piece to have.
- b. Collect images that inspire you visually and post them to the class blog.

4. Find and secure Locations:

- a. Make a list of all the locations that appear in your script, and list a few options for each one.
- b. Always bring a still camera with you for location scouting. Visit at several times of day if possible
- c. Take notes about the available light in the location. Think in terms of planning your lighting creatively around what's already there.
- d. Think about the size of the location and what kind of options will be available for placing lights and camera positions. Will you be able to move far back enough to get wide shots if needed?
- e. Make sure to ask a lot of questions – you should find out about availability, any limitations or scheduling issues, circuits and outlets.
- f. Try to get a sense of any noises or hums in the space that may cause sound issues (fridges should be turned off – always make sure to turn them back on before you leave! – vents and fluorescent lights can make noise, etc.).
- g. If possible, you might want to move furniture away from walls to avoid casting harsh back shadows. Make sure you will be able to make the changes you need to the location, both in terms of set dressing / props and in terms of logistics (eliminating noise, moving furniture and lights, etc).
- h. Post location photos to the class blog.

5. Casting:

- a. Bad actors and age-inappropriate casting are often the downfall of student films. It will really pay off to spend time and be creative about casting – Unless they are truly perfect for the part, *don't just cast your friends!*
- b. Be creative about how you go about looking for actors – try craigslist, local casting resources, calling local theater programs, community / adult ed acting classes, putting up flyers, just asking non-professional regular people in the community who might happen to be the right physical type for the role.
- c. Consider teaming up with other class members to hold a common casting type of open audition.
- d. Make sure your posting / flyer contains relevant info about the roles you are casting (include age, physical characteristics, short blurb describing character, date /time / length of audition, materials that need to be prepared (such as monologue), your contact info, shoot timeframe, remuneration – you're not paying them, but you should always offer a DVD of the finished film for their reel)
- e. Hold open auditions in a space where you can separate the person auditioning from the people who are waiting.

- f. Make a form for people to fill out (including contact info, experience, scheduling constraints, etc)
- g. Consider whether you want to ask for a monologue, a cold reading of a scene (good to test chemistry between two people), or reading from your script.
- h. Always give some directions / suggestions after the first reading. You want to see if your actor is able to change aspects of their performance / responds well to direction.
- i. Videotape auditions if possible – include CU to see facial expression and MS to see gesture / body language.
- j. Let actors know when they can expect to hear from you
- k. Consider holding callbacks if you need to see more.

6. **Production Design (questions to ask yourself):**

- a. What is the Film's theme?
- b. What are its mood progressions?
- c. What kind of location should each sequence have?
- d. What statement should each location make towards the film's premise?
- e. How should each set be lit?
- f. What kind of props go with the set?
- g. What kind of belongings do the characters keep around them?
- h. What kind of clothes does each character wear and what do the clothes tell us?
- i. How does their wardrobe vary from scene to scene?
- j. What color palette and progression would promote the film's thematic development?

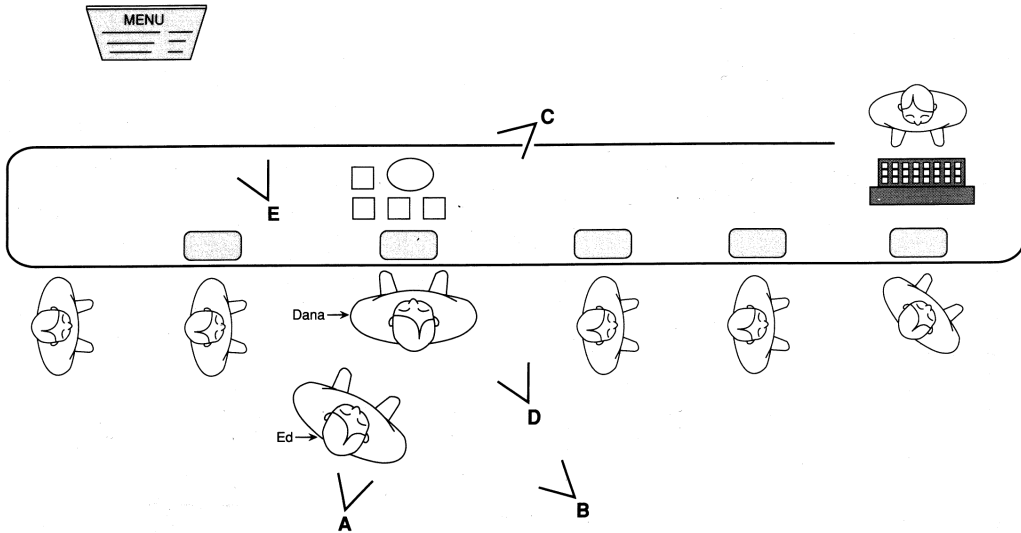
7. **Prepare costumes, props, set dressing**

8. QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN DEVELOPING A SHOOTING SCRIPT

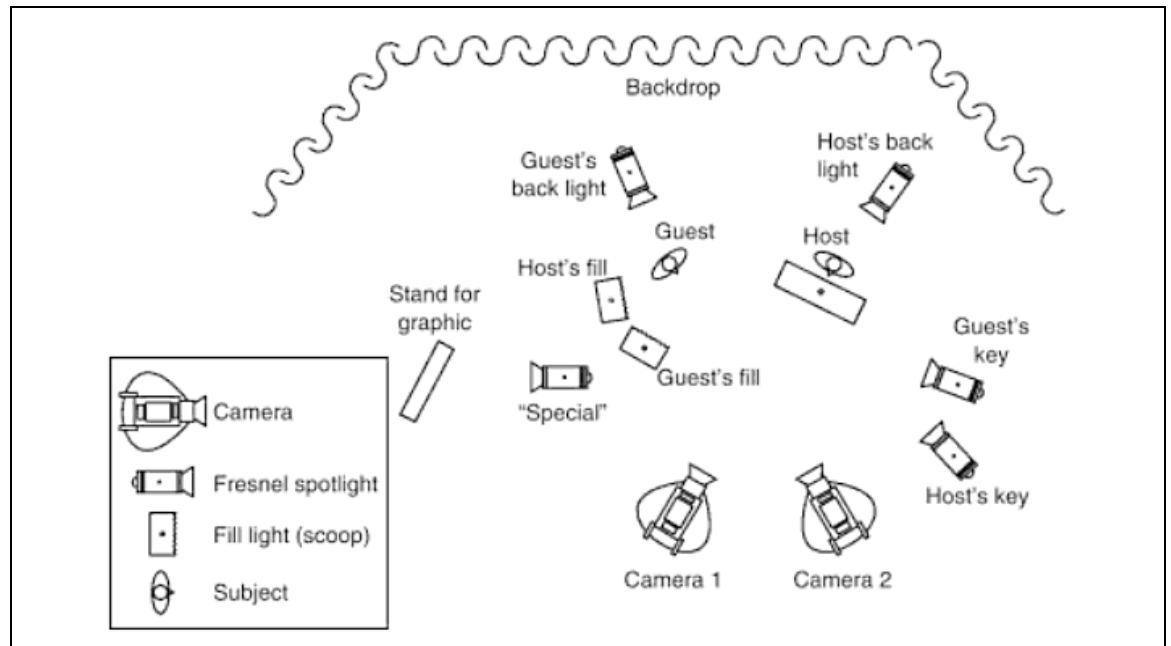
- a. What do you need to show to establish environment?
- b. When do you show establishing info?
- c. When do characters move and how to show movement (follow character / make shot wider / let character leave frame / show another character's eyeline change)
- d. At each significant moment, whose POV are we sharing – does POV shift? When / how?
- e. What are significant eyelines and when do they change?
- f. When / why does the camera move?
- g. How can you use composition to show relationships (framing, focal length, arrangement of characters, etc)?
- h. What kind of coverage do you need (critical moments should have more coverage / more editing options)?

9. Make a Floorplan / lighting plot for each Location

- Sketch a simple floorplan
- Mark Camera positions (designate A, B, C etc)
- A should be the widest shot, since it uses the most lighting and determines how subsequent shots look
- Figure out placement of lights in the scene



A. FLOORPLAN DIAGRAM



B. LIGHTING PLOT

Break down your shooting script:

- e. Number each scene in your script
- f. Bracket off each intended shot
- g. Designate each shot as CAM A / B/ C
- h. Give each bracket a shot description
- i. Make sure to leave lots of generous action overlap so you have editing options
- j. A great exercise is to analyze a dialogue scene in a feature film – watch the scene, make a floor plan, and try to figure out how to draw all the camera positions into the floor plan.

14. INT. LIBRARY CAFETERIA - MOM - DANA & ED

DANA places a mug of coffee on her tray next to her red helmet. She slides the tray in sync with the quick pace of the line crowded with impatient students. She stops at the heat lamp glowing over several small cartons of french fries. She picks up a carton and contemplates the soggy, yellow potatoes. DANA sighs and places the fries on her tray.

MCS DANA ED'S VOICE
You can't live on french fries alone. CS ED

DANA, startled, turns to Ed who is chomping on a huge banana.

DANA
Do you always sneak up on people?

ED moves alongside Dana as she progresses to the grill.

ED
You were up and out early...

DANA reads the menu above the grill. 2 SHOT

DANA
I've got classes, remember? DANA'S POV OF MENU

ED
Try the Varsity Burger, it's not bad.

DANA
Whose lunch is this?

ED touches DANA on the arm with his banana hand. INSERT BANANA

ED
Tired...?

DANA glares at the menu CS ED

DANA (hissing)
Do not touch me.

She slides the tray away. ED is momentarily stunned, then catches up with DANA, standing close.

ED
Dana... everybody cries.

10. Make a Storyboard



11. Make a Shooting Schedule

- a. See sample schedules on course website / downloads