

Production

The production phase is where it all comes together on location and your idea becomes a reality. You've planned ahead so you can focus on performance rather than problems. You will be telling the story with light, sound, performance, set design and camera work. Enjoy!

LIGHTING: Lighting creates mood and supports the story. Use lights for those reasons and not simply to increase illumination. Remember, everything is done for a purpose.

Things to remember:

1. Mood is created by light.
2. Shadows tell the story. Concentrate on shadows.
3. The direction of the light creates mood.
4. Add to existing light sources for a realistic look.
5. Lighting requires extension cords and enough electricity.
6. Lighting creates a safety hazard. Be very careful!

PRACTICE:

1. Notice the source and direction of the light in the room where you are.
2. Set up a camera, a light, a monitor and a model.
3. Place the light behind the talent and check the look.
4. Place the light at various places around the talent and see what happens.
5. Use a light to raise the level of an existing light source like a table lamp.

AUDIO: One thing that reduces the believability of an independent film is poor or inconsistent audio. You cannot use built in camera microphones. Find a camera with an audio input and learn how to use it.

Things to remember:

1. Do not use the built-in camera microphone.
2. Try to place the microphone as close to the source as possible.
3. Try to be consistent with microphone placement throughout the shoot. To accomplish this you must plan ahead – remember the storyboard?
4. Try to minimize other sounds on location.
5. Be careful with the audio levels on the camera. It is best to have manual control of your audio levels.
6. Record some “room sound” – 60 seconds of sound from the area without any dialogue that you can use to cover audio holes during the edit.
7. NEVER use automatic gain control. This causes the background noise to rise and fall as the gain control searches for sound

PRACTICE:

1. Listen for all the sounds in the room where you are. Make notes.
2. Have a cast member deliver lines.
3. Collect the audio with a built-in camera microphone.
4. Collect the same audio with an external mic next to the camera.

5. Collect the same audio with the external mic moved close to the cast.
6. Look at storyboards to decide how to place microphones as close as possible to the cast.

SET DESIGN: Don't forget the things we see in the background of a set. Everything in the picture is used to reinforce the story.

Things to remember:

1. Items in the background are not random. They are there for the story.
2. You can use set pieces to establish continuity
3. Be careful not to feature specific product labels. The company might object to the use of their product in your story.
4. Be careful to note the placement of props if you have to re-set the scene.

PRACTICE:

1. Look at the background in your favorite movie. What do you see? How do the things in the background relate to the characters?
2. Notice how and when recognizable products are used in a film –and when the products are not specific.

CAMERA: You already know that filmmaking is much more than pointing a camera and shooting. But of course, the camera is where many people express the most interest. Use composition, camera movement and the iris to get the most cinematic look for your independent production.

COMPOSITION TIPS

1. A film is made up of a sequence of individual shots, each of which is composed to be powerful and to connect to the next shot.
2. Each shot has a foreground, middle ground and background. Make sure to place items of interest in all areas – a combination of location, props, cast and lighting.
3. Use a combination of wide shots, medium shots and closeups to keep the story moving and to keep it visually interesting.
4. The angle of the camera is important to the psychology of the shot. In general, these rules apply. Looking up at the talent increases their importance. Eye level is believable and sincere. High angle, shooting down at the talent, diminishes their importance.

PRACTICE:

1. Look at the opening of your favorite film and count the shots as they occur.
2. Do it again and comment on the composition of each shot.
3. Look for foreground, middle ground and background the shots.
4. Set up a shot with light and talent. Look at the image from various angles and see how the psychology of the shot changes.

CAMERA MOVEMENT TIPS:

1. For a more cinematic look, move the camera instead of using the zoom lens.
2. Use a rolling cart or an office chair for a dolly. Move smoothly.
3. Decide if you want to have the camera on a tripod or handheld. Each choice creates a specific mood.
4. When on a tripod, you can have the action move in and out of the frame
5. When handheld, you can decide how “shaky” you want the shot to be

PRACTICE:

1. Notice the camera movement in you favorite films
2. Set up a model with light and camera. Compare the look of the shot when on tripod

IRIS TIPS

1. Use manual iris rather than auto. Find you iris level with auto but change to manual to prevent the iris from jumping between levels during a shoot.
2. Try to adjust light and filters to enable the iris to be as open as possible. This allows the foreground to be softer focus
3. Maintain consistent iris levels. Make notes on your script. Move the lights on the set rather than opening and closing the iris.

PRACTICE:

1. Pop up a lights and talent on a set and include an object in the foreground
2. Light to ensure the iris is wide open
3. Observe the problems of auto iris as the talent move in and out of the shot

DIRECTING THE CAST: The biggest responsibility of the director is to help the cast deliver a realistic performance. This is a challenge when you remember that the performance is often broken up by the shot. The director has the total vision for the end result of the film, while the cast needs to concentrate on the moment.

Things to remember:

1. Make sure the cast with plenty of encouragement.
2. Help the cast make adjustments to deliver a believable performance.
3. Make sure to capture “the look” or the expression on the person’s face that is NOT speaking.

PRACTICE

1. Watch your favorite film and notice how many times the camera cuts to “the look.”

PRACTICAL TIPS: Here are a few things to help you manage your shoot.

1. Have someone watch the clock to make sure you are on schedule to shoot all the necessary shots during the time you have your cast, crew and location available.
2. Use a log to keep track of the shots you take. Mark the best ones while on location. This will save time in editing.
3. Label your tape IMMEDIATELY. Remember all of your labor is now wrapped up on that small object.
4. STORE your tape carefully.
5. Use the RECORD PROHIBIT button to prevent accidental recording over your master tape.