Theatre, Film, and Television

Entertainment: An Overview

For every position opening in Hollywood, there are numerous qualified applicants. Only a fraction of members in the Screen Actors Guild, Writers Guild of America, or the Directors Guild of America make a living off of their work. This imbalance creates a bevy of effects:

**Networking and Nepotism**
Knowing people is the key to success in virtually any industry, but especially in entertainment. The industry thrives on favors and influence. What it means is that you have to work twice as much on networking.

**Second Choices**
Few people in show business are doing what they want to be doing. Commercial photographers want to be shooting music videos, while the music video photographers want to be shooting feature films.

**Free and Cheap Labor**
With so many candidates waiting for every opening, the value of labor depreciates. Newcomers to the industry intern for months just to get a foothold.

**Frustration**
Working long hours can be irritating. Knowing that other people are succeeding effortlessly is upsetting. But watching end products that are less than excellent, and realizing that the system is not merit-based is downright frustrating.

**Tedium and Fascination**
In most production jobs, you work very hard for portions of the day, and then sit around doing nothing for equally large portions. There are some extraordinary jobs in this business, but the majority of positions are neither glamorous nor exciting. On the other hand, the few who succeed in clambering to positions with creative power tend to love their work.

**Roller Coaster Income**
Many jobs in the field have an essentially freelance nature. Even steady office jobs have a quick turnaround. Collecting unemployment between jobs is a way of life.

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**Skills**
- Flexibility
- Patience
- Creativity
- Talent
- Determination
- Good sense of humor
- Thick-skinned, able to deal with rejection
- Resourcefulness
- Ability to network and make new connections

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### FAST STATS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Production Assistant</td>
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<td>Assistant Director</td>
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<td>Clapper and Film Loader</td>
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<td>Story Editor</td>
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From: salary.com
Landing Your First Job in Film Production

As with most businesses that deal in artistic endeavors, the film and television industries don’t need to actively recruit new employees. Thousands of interested applicants clamor for jobs every year, hoping to break into the field. While blanketeting production companies, networks, and studios with resumes is one way to get hired, there are other avenues of opportunity open to students looking to break into film and television:

Internships

Most major studios, networks, and production companies use interns, and those that don’t can often be easily convinced of the benefits of hiring cheap labor. State and local film commissions are a good way to find out about productions filming on location that might need some temporary (usually unpaid) interns or assistants. Although interns usually spend their time engaged in grunt work, few opportunities offer students a better chance to learn the inner workings of these industries. In addition, interning is an excellent way to make contacts and to discover unadvertised job openings.

The Trades

The trades are the daily and weekly newspapers and magazines, such as Variety and The Hollywood Reporter, that report on trends and happenings in film and television production. In this business, knowledge is power, and the trades are the primary sources of information concerning projects in development, company shakeups, and other sources of new opportunities. The trades list job openings, auditions submission requests, and upcoming film productions.

Networking

Contacts are the key to doing business within the film and television industries. As part of an insular community, entertainment professionals look to one another for help in arranging financing, setting up projects, or securing creative talent. Unfortunately for applicants, they also tend to look to insiders when filling available job openings. Networking will allow you to make contacts who can assist you in breaking into the field.

Independent Productions

The success of low-budget, independent feature films has resulted in an unprecedented rise in the number of such projects. Independent productions offer those with little or no experience the chance to work on both short-subject and feature-length films. While the pay is often low, especially given the long work hours, the opportunity for recognition and advancement is far greater on these smaller, less rigid production crews than on industry sets.

Film School

Although receiving an undergraduate or graduate degree in film production won’t guarantee you a place inside the Hollywood community, it can provide you with a chance to gain contacts and educate yourself in the technical aspects of film. That said, unless you have an unquenchable passion for structured learning and enough money to cover tuition and living expenses, your time will likely be better spent interning, enrolling in a shorter training program, or looking for a job immediately upon graduating. You can always decide to go to film school, but if you find the right job, you’ll never want to.
Entry Level Positions

Most of the creative roles—directors, writers, actors, composers, designers, cinematographers, and editors—are entry-level positions. So, if you want to become a writer or an actor, become one—writers only need a word processor and actors only need head shots and a subscription to BackStage.

Designers, composers, cinematographers, and editors should look to student and independent films to practice their craft and build up a reel. Unlike writers or actors, there are a variety of opportunities for these artisans to earn money and build contacts while “supporting their hobby.” Production designers can find work in art departments as art directors, coordinators, costumers, prop masters, set designers, and location scouts. Sound designers can work as sound transfers, mixers, engineers, recording artists, Foley editors and so on. Cinematographers work as assistant cameramen and gaffers, and composers may work as orchestrators, conductors, music editors, and music supervisors. These positions are still competitive, but they can be acquired through standard job hunting methods: networking, informational interviews, classified ads, and working your way from one job to the next.

Between your day job and your career pursuit, you will be very busy. Unfortunately, you also need to promote yourself simultaneously. Acquiring an agent, lawyer, and manager will provide you with a stamp of legitimacy, but unless you’re extremely fortunate, these individuals will likely focus on their more prominent clients, leaving you to fend for yourself. Your next step is to cozy up to the individuals who can offer you work: producers, directors, casting agents, etc.

Examples of entry-level positions:

- Director
- 2nd Assistant Camera/Camera Loader or Clapper
- Assistant Costumer
- Assistant Editor
- Assistant Make-Up
- Assistant On-Set Dresser
- Assistant Props Master
- Boom Operator
- Casting Assistant
- Executive Assistant
- Film Laboratory Asst
- Library Manager
- Page
- Production Assistant
- Reader
- Runner
- Script Supervisor
- Set Painter/Set
- Sound Transfer Asst
- Writer’s Assistant

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Helpful Hints for Jumpstarting Your Career

If you are brand new to acting and modeling here are some tips from the experts. These apply to smaller cities as well as Los Angeles and New York.

Get a Talent Agent
Always use a legitimate state licensed actors union franchised agency. If you are planning on doing acting and modeling professionally these are the only talent agents you should use. As a professional you will sooner or later be allowed to join one of the actors unions. All union actors must work with legitimate state licensed agencies. The unions that franchise all of the legitimate agencies are Screen Actors Guild (SAG), American Federation of Radio & Television Artists (AFTRA), and Actors Equity Association (AEA).

Do Your Homework
Millions of people are trying to break into showbiz. Your job is to be professional and stay ahead of the competition. You need to know the industry professionals and executives who are currently working on a project. You have to be at the right place at the right time.

Study and Practice
Take as many classes as you can. When you do get the audition for that dream acting or modeling role, you will have to have the talent to back it up. Always keep learning and advancing your skills.

Start Small
If you are planning on becoming a star and make your living as an actor or model: learn your craft by taking smaller roles, doing plays, print work (fashion & commercial), and television commercials. These are all great things that will give you experience, skills, and credits on your resume and they all pay well.

Be a Big Fish in a Small Pond
You do not have to be in Los Angeles or New York to be successful. More than half of all television movies, shows and feature films are done in smaller cities. Consider building your resume and experience locally before hitting NY or LA. The competition is very tough and you will want to have all the skills and experience you need to beat the competition.

Television Commercials
Television commercials give you experience auditioning, working with agents, negotiating, acting, and working on a set. TV commercials also tend to pay very well. One national commercial may pay you, the talent, over $100,000 over two years.

Do Mailings Often
You need to get your name, resume and/or photo or ideas out there and often. Just like any other career, you are going to have to make some kind of financial investment in your future. Doing mailings is the best way to invest in your acting or modeling career. Someone may not need your type in February but then, bam...you are the perfect face for the new show they are doing this fall. Keep out there. In Show Business, business is the bigger word. Talent is not enough, you have to treat this like any other business to get in and stay on top.

Abridged and reprinted from www.showbizltd.com/hints.cfm
Screen Writing 101: Steps to Getting Your Foot in the Door

Step 1. Get Your Script Noticed

- Go to film school or an extension program (American Film Institute, Columbia University, New York University, University California at Los Angeles, University Southern California) - Network with best and brightest film minds. Receive training from actively employed members of entertainment community.
- Apply for screenwriting fellowship (Chesterfield Writer’s Film Project, The Nicholl Fellowship, The IFP MSP McKnight Artist Fellowship for Screenwriters, The Writer’s Arc) - Receive stipends ranging from $10,000-$30,000. Receive industry mentors and recognition.
- Enter a screenwriter contest - Receive a cash prize and exposure for your project.
- Participate in a pitch festival (Hollywood Pitch Festival, http://www.fadelineonline.com/events/hollywood_pitchfest/) - Pitch your ideas to agents, managers, and production companies.
- Hire a script consultant (costs between $500-$1000) - Receive an objective, seasoned set of eyes that will hone in on whatever is missing from your script and get advice for how to improve upon it.

Step 2. Assemble Your Team

- **Agent:** Sells the original scripts you write or gets you work at the studios based on your scripts, which constantly circulate.
- **Manager:** Performs tasks similar to that of an agent. Critical difference: a manager is permitted to produce projects.
- **Attorney:** Although it is technically the job of your agent to negotiate the terms of your contract, you should never sign a contract without first having it looked at by an attorney. Make sure the attorney in question specializes in entertainment law. Unlike typical attorneys, most entertainment attorneys work on commission in the same way as managers and agents.
- **Join a Writer’s Guild:** A Writer’s Guild is a union that acts on the behalf of writers with regard to the studios, the same way any other union negotiates on behalf of its members. It is divided into two branches – Writer’s Guild of America West (WGAW) and Writer’s Guild of America East (WGAE). In addition to negotiating the collective bargaining agreement between its members and the studios, the Guild – in exchange for one-and-a-quarter percent of its members’ dues, provides its members with several other valuable services.

Step 3. Send Script to Producers

Producers do everything from get the script sold to (or “set up at”) a studio to developing it with the writer. A producer will then be instrumental in attracting talent that will get the film made (stars and directors) and using that talent to leverage the studio into “green lighting” (committing to fund) the movie. The producer will be on the set, serving as a liaison between the director and the studio, especially if the two are at odds on either creative or budgetary issues.

Step 4. Script Sent to Story Editor

Story editors are primarily readers for studios who take part in studio meetings. Though they frequently attend staff meetings, their job is primarily to cover the bushels of scripts that are submitted to the studio.

Step 5. Script Send to Creative Editor

A creative executive, or “C.E.,” is the junior executive on any given project. Although they are full-fledged studio executives, they are inevitably paired up with a more senior executive (usually a vice president) on any given project. A creative executive’s job is to be the studio’s first official “read,” once a script has been favorably covered.

Step 6. Script Send to Vice President

The vice president can drum up some senior support to buy a script. Even though they do not technically have the power to buy a script, they can often fight hard to make a significant difference in a script’s fate. They are also the last line of creative development; once they are through giving notes, the script is now placed on the consideration block –green-lit projects (or flashing yellows, which means that they’re going to move forward contingent upon talent attachments or budget approval) bode well for a vice president, but turnaround (which means that the studio has decided to drop the project) does not.

Step 7. Script Sent to President of Production

The president of production is in charge of acquiring and overseeing the studio’s entire development slate. The president is the only staff member who can officially purchase a spec script, and frequently must approve of writers for assignments and rewrites as well.

Step 8. Script Sent to Chairman of the Studio

The chairman of the studio is one of the most powerful people in town and is in charge of the studio’s film production. The chairman is presented a list of projects for consideration by the president and must decide which of those films the studio is willing to green-light and at what budget. The chairman reports directly to the studio’s CEO and, given the ever-expanding nature of entertainment empires, might be called upon to synergize the studio’s slate of films with the various merchandising or theme park interests held by the studio’s parent company.
Additional Film-Related Positions

**Script Reading:** A script reader’s duties entail reading scripts that have been submitted to the studio or production company and writing coverage, which is a specialized industry template that includes a summary of the film’s plot, an evaluation that describes why you did or didn’t like it, and a breakdown of ratings – poor, fair, good, excellent – of such script components as character, dialogue, and story. The reader then decides whether or not to recommend the script and/or the writer; often a reader will recommend the script for purchase for commercial reasons, but will not recommend the writer. Similarly, there are times when a reader will pass on a writer’s script for commercial reasons, but will recommend the writer for consideration for future assignments. Finally the reader passes the scripts that fall into the recommend pile along to the next rung up the ladder.

**Producer Assistant:** Producer Assistants are highly competent administrators who work closely with Producers throughout the production process, from script development and pre-production through to marketing and distribution. They must be well organized, highly flexible, and possess a good overview of the film production process. Producer Assistants may be either freelancers keen to learn about the business, or long-term employees of a production company. They occupy a privileged position, which offers great insight into the film making process, and this role should not be confused with that of a Production Assistant. If they rise to the challenge, Producer Assistants may come to wield considerable influence over the production.

**Writing Assistant:** Serving as a writing assistant is a great way to get your foot in the door. The responsibilities of a writing assistant will be based upon the writer’s preferences. Some duties may include editing, research, transcribing, or clerical duties (i.e. taking notes at studio meetings). Some writing assistants may also take on responsibilities similar to that of a personal assistant such as running errands or ordering lunch for the writer. Serving as a writing assistant can help you to learn a lot about the industry (i.e. how to create an effective pitch, how to work with producers etc.) as well as revision process. If you have a good working relationship with your supervisor, they may be willing to serve as your mentor by reading your work and referring it to producers and agents looking for new talent.

**Production Runner:** Production Runners are the foot soldiers of the production team, performing small but important tasks in the office, around the set and on location. Their duties may involve anything from office administration to crowd control, and from public relations to cleaning up locations. They are usually employed on a freelance basis, are not very well paid, and their hours are long and irregular. However, the work is usually varied and provides a good entry-level role into the film industry.

**Script Editor:** Script Editors provide a critical overview of the screenwriting process, and liaise between the Producer or Development Executive and the Screenwriter. Script Editors do not offer solutions, but instead use their analytical skills to help Screenwriters identify problems, explain the potential consequences of Screenwriters’ choices, and thereby help to strengthen and develop screenplays. Script Editors are sometimes full-time employees of a Production company, but more often they are employed on a freelance basis, and their fees and levels of involvement are negotiable.

**Production Assistant:** The production assistant does just about anything and everything, from getting coffee, to making script copies to shuttling crew or equipment around town as needed. The PA position is a lot of grunt work, but can be extremely educational. It is a highly visible position in that just about anyone can give you an order, from the producer to a sound technician. The production assistants who do as they’re told without complaint are the ones who are remembered when it comes time to fill more important positions.

Sources:
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