

up sending our location manager (a man who was kind enough to let us use his location for free) on a hunt all the way to Boston – a two-hour drive each way. We were very close to running out of card space when the time came to break for lunch, and our savior returned with the card reader from Boston. The lesson here is this: if you're filming in any other city or town, make sure that you either (a) have the contact information of a local camera rental facility that has the equipment you need in case anything breaks down; or (b) bring two of everything that you can't live without.

Your Pre-Production Checklist

Before we finally pull the trigger, it's time to run through a checklist of everything we need to wrap our pre-production process and move into the production phase of our film.

1. Get Your Feet Wet – Make a \$0 Short Film.

Create a \$0 short film for the sole purpose of educating yourself on the process of making films from start to finish; nothing beats real-world experience. Try the “Film Directing Masterclass” I mentioned earlier.

2. Get Some Post-Production Experience.

Get some practice and experience with Photoshop, Premiere, After Effects, or similar software, and get yourself familiar with the post-production process. You can learn everything you need to learn in 2 weeks or less.

3. A Polished Screenplay, Obviously.

At least three to five drafts, and keep editing until you're *happy* with the results. Check for exposition, character development, etc. Read it aloud, make sure it gets the job done. Anything short of great isn't good enough.

4. *Logline.*

A strong logline should describe the central conflict and hook the reader. You'll put it up on your IMDB page, your website, social media, etc.

5. *Synopsis.*

A brief description of the main characters and the film's conflict; end it with a cliffhanger.

6. *Budget.*

Create your first film budget on Celtx, Excel, or other budgeting app.

7. *Script Breakdown.*

Break down your script and make a line-item description of your film.

8. *Create a Shot List and Schedule.*

Go over your shots and plan your day meticulously. Keep SAG rules in mind if you're working under SAG contracts.

9. *Visualize.*

It's time to visualize your film, create a storyboard, and shoot rehearsal videos for complicated action sequences.

10. *Table Read.*

Bring your friends, family, actors, producers, etc. and run through a table read.

11. *Post-Table Read Rewrite.*

Take notes during your table read and make the appropriate changes, if needed.

12. *Business Plan / Marketing Plan.*

Define your strategy for funding, making, and marketing your film.

13. Set Up an LLC and Prep Contracts.

Protect yourself and make your film legit. Sign up with the state as an LLC, start preparing contracts for actors, crew people, producers, locations, vendors, and others.

14. Set Up a Bank Account.

Create a bank account for your LLC and get a check-book/debit card. This will help you keep track of your budget and will make financial reporting and handling a lot easier.

15. Copyright Your Script.

Send your script to the copyright office and submit it to the WGA.

16. Build a Website.

Use Wix or some other web-building app to create a good-looking website. If you have no money to spare you can create a website using Wordpress for free.

17. Create a Social Media Presence.

Create a Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter account; create a logo in Photoshop and share it with the world.

18. Create an IMDB Page.

Visit the Contributor Zone and create a page for your film.

19. Create a Concept Poster.

Use your newly found Photoshop skills to create an awesome concept poster or visit freelancer websites like Fiverr to create one for you.

20. Hire Your Above the Line People.

Hire your Producer, Line Producer, AD, and designate an off-set Production Accountant.

21. Hire Your Cast.

Hold casting sessions and assemble your cast. If you are casting SAG, you need to become a signatory and submit their paperwork at least three weeks before principal photography begins.

22. Set Up Payroll and Insurance.

Work with an Entertainment Payroll provider (when doing SAG), or pay everyone via MISC 1099. Whatever you do – just make sure you do it *on the books*. Secure your insurance if you can afford it.

23. Post-Casting Table Read.

If you can't afford a rehearsal session, invite your actors to a table read. Take notes.

24. Hire Your Crew.

Hire your Department Heads: DP, Makeup, Sound, etc.

25. Hold Your First Production Meeting.

Bring your department heads together in a room. Print copies of the script for everyone and do a reading of the script from top to bottom. This is their opportunity to plan, ask questions, and get an idea from you about your vision for the film, wardrobe, makeup, hair, light, etc. (Make sure you have plenty of coffee and some snacks; it could go on for a while.)

26. Hire Your PAs.

Hire your head PA, and task him/her with finding free interns, behind-the-scenes shooters, and people who want to help make movies happen.

27. Location Scouting.

If you're not filming a movie in a location to which you already have access, you'll need to scout and secure locations; hire a location scout/manager or do it yourself.

28. DP One-on-One Meeting.

Meet with your cinematographer and go over the shot list and storyboards (don't do this during the production meeting; it'll waste everyone else's time. This meeting is all about the director and his DP coming together and deciding on the film's look, color pallet, light themes, challenges, etc.). If you happen to be your own DP, it's time to hire your crew, specifically, your key grip, gaffer, and AC. It's also time to secure your camera and light package.

29. Secure Permits.

Make sure each location is signed under contract, has a certificate of insurance, and that you have a permit to shoot there. This varies depending on your budget, but you should take every measure possible to ensure that you're operating legitimately and responsibly. Never shoot gun scenes or stunt scenes without a permit, and don't do anything stupid like block the sidewalk or shoot on a railway track without permission.

30. Secure Food & Crafty.

Make sure you have enough food, snacks, coffee, and tea to feed your hungry cast and crew for the duration of the day.

31. Greenlight.

The moment of truth: time to lock the shooting schedule, make a commitment, and send out call sheets to everyone. This is also the time to pay all the bills that need paying, upfront payments to vendors, props, wardrobe, locations, 15-pass rentals, security deposits, gear, and equipment, etc. On *Pickings* we did this about two weeks before principal photography began; however, that will vary from shoot to shoot.

32. *Early Publicity.*

I'll dive into the specifics of publicity in later chapters, but keep this in mind. While you're shooting, you need to get as many BTS photos and videos as possible, and if you have the budget to hire a publicist, hire them before you start shooting. You can use your own social media to post photos and create hype during the shoot to get those followers interested.

33. *A Toast!*

Invite everyone, and I mean *everyone*, to a celebratory drink at a local bar a few days before the shoot. It's time to say "good luck!" and thank everyone for taking part in your project. If you can't do it before the shoot, get a bottle of champagne or wine and give a toast on set at the end (or start) of day one – a tiny glass of wine wouldn't do any damage, but the gesture will go a long way.

“In order to write scripts, you must first study the great novels and dramas of the world. You must consider why they are great. Where does the emotion come from that you feel as you read them? What degree of passion did the author have to have, what level of meticulousness did he have to command, in order to portray the characters and events as he did? You must read thoroughly, to the point where you can grasp all these things. You must also see the great films. You must read the great screenplays and study the film theories of the great directors. If your goal is to become a film director, you must master screenwriting.” ~ Akira Kurosawa