# TELEVISION PRODUCTION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: WRITTEN BY DOMINIC BILLINGS

This fact sheet explores the different behind the scenes roles and responsibilities often found in television productions. Of those listed, some are necessary for a production to be possible, while others are optional - depending on the production's scale and its requirements. The roles are additionally categorised into production team, crew and postproduction, to differentiate their place in the course of the production. These areas may, however, overlap at times – depending on the nature of the production.

## PRODUCTION TEAM

### Executive Producer:

This role (interchangeable with the title of show runner, considered the "auteur" of the program) is more abstract than other roles in production, though likely the most crucial to the production happening in the first place. The concept and initiative for the program often comes from this person/s. In commercial productions, an executive producer is often the chief financial backer or production company head. Occasionally, an executive producer/show runner may have conceived the program's idea, and will develop its direction throughout the series, though wishes to delegate the tasks of executing their idea to a producer.

### Producer:

In television, a producer is generally the primary person of responsibility for the production. The program may often be their own brain-child and a producer's role co-ordinates all elements of production at its highest level. A talented producer is adept at co-ordination - of crew and cast; administrative, legal, financial, budgeting and scheduling issues, as well as being the driving creative force. With all these issues and tasks to consider, a talented producer is a great delegator, being willing and able to pass on responsibility to trusted production team members they have assembled. It's often best for the producer to delegate as many roles as necessary to ensure they have enough time (and headspace!) to coordinate the production.

### Director:

The role of director varies between programs filmed in-studio and on location shoots. A director of a multi-camera studio program is responsible overall for the inner workings of the control room, and the crew working within. As such, they hold responsibility of the final product of a program as it goes live, trying to maintain quality output from the in-studio camera operators; as well as vision switchers, audio operators and graphic operators in the control room. A talented director is knowledgeable of all equipment in studio, plus the broadcast equipment it feeds in to. Similar to a floor manager, a good director makes decisions quickly, communicates clearly, and can react with a level head swiftly to unexpected occurrences, understanding any occurrence in studio or the control room to be expected. The director communicates to the crew member's earpieces via a studio microphone.

An on-location program director carries out duties similar to what a film director may, though the TV program's vision and ultimate creative responsibility lies with the producer - whereas in film, this would be the director. The director is responsible to the producer's wishes -

though a producer may also direct, which may be favourable for some productions so the director can pay more attention to the production elements. They handle these dual roles by delegating producing tasks to an assistant on shooting days. The director's tasks include directing actors, co-ordinating the senior technical crew, as well as holding the central authority for the execution of the day's filming on-set. A director will likely work in close tandem with the producer from early in the creative process. The task of creating a shot list lies within a director's responsibility also, assisting whoever in the production team is to schedule the filming of these shots. A good director is conscious of all production elements at a big-picture level; is able to keep the day's shoot to schedule; holds a strong vision of their final product and an ability to communicate this evocatively, as well as holding a sound direction of the steps necessary to reach that vision. As the leader on-set, it's also important for a director to foster a good working environment for all cast and crew to aid the creation of the final product.

**Vision switcher:**

A vision switcher (or mixer) performs switching between the different video sources - both from camera shots and videos to be played during an in-studio shoot, selecting shots presented before them on a bank of screens in the control room,. Along with this, the role requires managing the contrast balance and colour of the final broadcast output. Performing this function occurs via a vision switching panel in the control room. In some productions, a director's role holds this task, and in others, gives instruction to a vision switcher. A good vision switcher has a natural intuition for which shots and pace of cuts suit the nature of the program.

**Floor Manager**:

In a studio-based program, the floor manager holds responsibility for operation of the studio floor where filming takes place, co-ordinating the talent, crew, props, set and tech equipment - acting as the main line of communication from the director within the control room. A good floor manager is able to co-ordinate many tasks and variables with a cool, even temperament and adapt flexibly and swiftly to the frequent unexpected occurrences typical of many shoots. They do this by communicating succinctly and clearly to the crew members they co-ordinate. Additionally, a floor manager ensures the set - with its many items and cables - is safe for all cast, crew and visitors. They will be responsible (though able to delegate) for checking that any props or required equipment are available for use; may situate and turn on lights in the absence of a lighting director; make announcements and requests to crew and audience (including keeping order on the set) as well as calling cues to begin the action. A floor manager may delegate duties to an assistant or team of runners to carry out miscellaneous duties and communicate to crew members, guests, etc. to ensure a taping goes to script and schedule. To keep the program to schedule, they may keep time, performing countdowns to the broadcast, ad breaks and upcoming segments aloud to the crew via the studio microphone. In larger productions, this role is often delegated to a separate crew member.

**Camera operator/Cinematographer/Director of Photography:**

A camera op generally operates at the instruction of the director, and the composition (or framing) of their shots may be left to their own initiative or instructed specifically to the director's or programme's need. A talented camera operator has a natural feel for shot

composition and light factors; takes instruction well and has good stamina and stays attentive on a long day's shoot, in addition to a good instinct to the action taking place. A cinematographer (or Director of Photography) is only necessary for productions that wish for one (generally when a director/producer has a specific vision of the program's appearance), as the role is concerned with the creative aesthetic of the TV program - evoking themes, emotions and setting a tone for the audience. This is done by capturing and manipulating light, as well as factoring in the use of lenses, camera type (or film stock, if not shooting on digital) and various factors related to film photography. On a smaller crew, a camera op may hold the role a cinematographer would on a production concerned with how the visuals will affect the audience. In a production involving a cinematographer, a camera op would take instruction from the cinematographer. A cinematographer collaborates prior to, and during filming with the director, to ensure the director's creative vision is translated to film.

**Audio operator**:

Depending on the scale of production, sound can be handled by a single audio operator. On larger productions however, these roles can be broken up and delegated. In a small studio, this role can advise on-air presenters and guests of the positioning of their lapel or wireless microphones, while mixing the audio output from these mics within the control room's audio mixing desk. In larger studios, a separate sound mixer would be operating an audio mixing desk, keeping the various mic outputs to a volume and quality suitable for broadcast. Location shoots may simply require a crew member operating a boom or shotgun mic to capture audio, while listening to the output through headphones to ensure appropriate audio levels are being achieved. A separate sound mixer may be used in the editing process, to mix the sound for the final product. In some cases, however, the editor may perform this task themselves, using their editing software. It serves the sound mixer best however, to capture the best audio quality possible while shooting.

**Graphics operator:**

This role prepares and displays on-screen graphics to go to air, usually via the use of a graphics-operating software on a computer. They conduct this role during an in-studio shoot, with a swift reaction and flexibility to opportunities for the display of a graphic as required by the action on camera.

**Assistant Director**:

On location-based programs, an assistant director acts as somewhat of an intermediary between the director and the cast and crew - this role is somewhat optional, and may depend on the scale of the production. For live television productions, the Assistant Director may also keep time to make sure all segments are running to the appropriate duration. The AD also counts ad breaks in and out. Assistant producer is the right-hand person to the producer, and often the first line of delegation - perhaps tasked with delegating to others in the crew, yet again. This role may occasionally serve as the producer's representative on shooting days, ensuring the shooting goes to plan. A good assistant producer communicates well with the producer and is self-motivated to carry out the tasks requested of them. Other similarly-titled producer roles delegated by the head producer may include a segment producer, tasked with being responsible for a pre-taped segment's production; or a daily producer, who may hold

responsibility for a particular day's production for a program which shoots live each weekday.

**Writer:**

A writer's role varies depending on the program. For a narrative-based program, writers are tasked with forming a screenplay to be filmed from. In a program's credits, the person who conceived the broad structure of the story (credited as "Story by...") may have been different to the person that filled that broad story out to a usable script (credited as "Screenplay by..." - this credit is also used when a script has been adapted from an existing work e.g. novel.)

In a studio-based program (i.e. talk show) a writer, or team of writers may write jokes for a host's monologue or similar segments, depending on the type of program.

**Casting director:**

A casting director casts actors or personalities to appear on camera to suit each role in a script, as instructed by the director/producer.

**Crew Production manager:**

A production manager's role varies dependent on whether the production is commercial in nature. In commercial productions, the role is head of the administrative business of the production, organising the crew and its technical requirements. A non-commercial production manager's role holds similar tasks of organising the crew and tech requirements, though may be less responsible for managing and reporting the costs. A talented production manager has a good mind for the practicalities of creating a TV program.

**Boom operator:**

Whether in-studio or on location, a boom operator's main task is operating and placing a microphone from lengthy boom poles. A boom-op positions the mic to record audio as required, ensuring the mic hovering above or near the action on-camera, is out of shot. In a large team, they communicate and receive instruction from a sound mixer in the control room.

**Make-up artist:**

This crew member is tasked with applying make-up to those appearing on screen. The use of make-up isn't essential to all productions, though in those which elect to use it, this is to make the on-screen face appear more aesthetically pleasing - or whatever the production requires - in some cases applying materials to evoke more elaborate or grotesque features. A hair stylist and wardrobe designer may multi-task under this role or be separate altogether. Along with the make-up artists, the hair stylists, costume designers, and dress technicians all combine their effort into transforming an actor into a character, or a person into a presenter.

**Costume designer:**

The costume designer selects, designs and is in-charge of all garments and accessories to be worn on-camera, as well as designing, planning, and organising the creation of the garments down to the fabric, colours and sizes. On some productions, this role is considered an art form, with each costume piece meticulously procured or created, contributing to the overall

aesthetic and creative tone of a production - perhaps conveying the inner, emotional mindset and interpretation of a character. On other productions though, the role is mostly practical to have the on-air presenters clothed appropriately.

**Production designer:**

The production designer holds the responsibility of the visual appearance of a production, evoking a vision in accordance with the producer or director. They design, plan, organise, and arrange set design, equipment availability, as well as the on-screen appearance a production will have.

**Gaffer/Lighting director:**

A gaffer is the primary electrician on-set, tasked with lighting the stage at the instruction of the cinematographer or tech manager. The term "gaffer" is often limited to film production and lighting may even be co-ordinated by the tech manager where possible. The term "best boy" refers to one of the gaffer's electrical assistants. In a smaller television production, the Gaffer positions lighting to ensure the set is well-lit.

**Dolly grip:**

A dolly grip places and moves the dolly track (dolly's being a vehicle which allows for smooth camera movement along the ground) where required by the camera op or cinematographer, motioning the dolly along the track during filming.

**Key grip:**

A key grip's responsibility is the movement of equipment for camera mountings and support when that equipment is more complex than a simple tripod. Grips may also be tasked with manoeuvring of tech equipment on a large set. Runner Runners are tasked with carrying out the miscellaneous tasks required for the production, in support of those crew members requesting it.

**Post-production Editor:**

On programs which do not go live-to-air, in post-production an editor will work alongside the director (and possibly the producer) to edit the footage that has been shot to create the final product. An editor's role is largely one of cutting together and juxtaposing shots and audio to the requirements of the director/producer. In some productions however, an editor's abilities may influence the creative output. An editor may commence work prior to the completion of the shoot and in most productions the editing process takes longer than the shoot. Editing work is commonly carried out on computer-based video editing software. An editor's ability is largely dependent on their proficiency with that software, as well as their intuitive feel for the editing together of disparate shots to create the tone and pace instructed by the director/producer. The process is fairly laborious and may go through many changes before being suitable for presentation as a final product.

**Music/Composer**:

This role is required for productions requiring their own original music - whether for an opening theme, closing credits, or music to be played throughout the program. The composer writes and sometimes also performs this music. They may also conduct or produce a group of

musicians to perform the work they have written. The tone of the composition and theme may be communicated by the producer or written based on a viewing of the cut of an episode.

**Opening titles designer/motion graphics designer:**

The opening titles displayed at the beginning of a program can set the tone of the program to come. As such, a producer will communicate to an opening titles designer a brief of what they may like these titles to convey. The titles designer may be given a lot of freedom to design and conceive an idea, or be instructed specifically, tasked with producing in accordance with this brief. The titles design should often be designed with the opening titles music in mind. This position may also be responsible for creating stings and breakers for the program, as transitions between segments. They may animate a graphic created by someone else, or produce their own graphic for animation.