

Cinematographer's Prep

Ultimately, as cinematographers we are not as concerned with how we want our film to look, as we are concerned with how we want to affect the emotional reaction of our audience at any given moment. The choices we make regarding image structure, shot design, camera placement and movement, lighting, color, composition, exposure and focus must all work in concert with the choices made by the producer, writer, director, production designer, editor, sound designer and composer as well as those of the rest of the cast and crew to illicit the desired reactions from our audience. How a film looks is not the issue that concerns us. How the audience feels is our main concern. Our job, is to use the elements within our domain to lead the audience to feel as we intend.

We must do all this while adhering to a tight schedule and budget – all the while remembering that the actors reign supreme. They are the ones who the audience sees and with whom they must identify. Our primary responsibility therefore requires that we respect the work of the actors and that we provide them with an environment on set in which they feel free to take the risks they must in order to touch the hearts of the audience. To this end, we must work orderly and efficiently in order to allow the director the necessary time with the actors.

1. **Script analysis**--what is the story about? who's story is it? What are the obstacles? What is each scene about? Who's scene is it? What is the purpose of the scene?
2. **Visual analysis**—how do you intend to design the cinematography in order to reflect the story of the script? Why? In what way, does each of your design choices compliment the telling of the story? (communicate themes and subtext) Include the lighting, exposure, contrast ratio, color, filtration, shot selection, camera movement, composition plans that you are developing with the director. How does the cinematography evolve during the progression of the narrative? How are each of our choices intended to affect the audience?
3. **Point of departure**--what films, paintings and/or photographs are you and the director using as a visual reference for the cinematography of this film?
4. **Locations** –It is best to compile an album of photographs of locations. Label each image according to set description, scene numbers and basic action to occur at each. Also Include the compass orientation of each location, a description of each location including any notes or comments you may have and the rationale behind using it.
5. **Equipment**--list the equipment you are planning to use for each scene and location; include camera, lighting and grip – also list any special effects you intend to employ.
6. **Crew**--what crew needs do you anticipate and who will fill these crews roles.
7. **Schedule**—review the AD's production schedule and make comments and suggestions regarding your concerns for the schedule and how it affects the cinematography.
8. **Plans**--draw overhead diagrams (floor plans) of your major sets and how you plan to block the actors and place the equipment. Draw story boards of “key frames” if you think they will be helpful to communicate your needs and intentions with others.