

Communication

Communication is essential for the efficient operation of a film set.

It is important that everyone knows what is expected of them, and that they in turn communicate what others can expect from them.

It is necessary that the physical work happen as quietly as possible, so that the creative decisions can be reasoned and determined. It is necessary that the work also happen as safely as possible.

Some feel that to run is to move quickly. But experience proves that any mistake is more costly than the same task executed with care and deliberation. It is often faster to walk and to think, than it is to run without thinking.

The Director must communicate to his key creative collaborators what he needs – he needs to conduct a full blocking rehearsal for each scene, so that all the crew knows what will happen, and where - so they can be prepared. The AD must know at all times, what is happening, and what will happen next. He/she is the communications command center. The AD keeps everyone on track and on time.

The cinematographer must let the AD and Director how long the set ups are expected to take, and they need to keep communicating as the time estimate changes. If you estimate 15 minutes, and at 10 minutes you realize you need another 10, then you need to tell the AD. If at 10 minutes you realize you will be ready in 2, you need to let the AD know that as well. It takes time to put the actors through the works and bring them back to set, so communication will allow this to happen simultaneously, so that time is not wasted.

A good AD, will be aware of the work involved in the set up and will notice if it looks like things are progressing as estimated, or if it looks like the crew may need more time. He/she may ask the DP for a new estimate based on what he/she is observing. The AD rarely (if ever) leaves the set – and if necessary to leave, the AD has a 2nd AD or PA “cover” him/her so there is always a representative from production within close communication with the cinematographer.

There are only three activities that should happen on set: blocking, lighting and shooting. Waiting is not one of the three – if the cinematographer waits until he/she is finished lighting to call the talent to set, then everyone will wait while the talents gets touched up before being ready – that is wasted time.

There are two essential components to communicating – there is the sender and the receiver. For the communication to be effective, it must be clear, concise and accurate. Whether talking or using hand signals, both parties must be focused on what they are doing. Eye contact facilitates communication, because it makes clear to both parties that they are connecting. Hand signals also helps keep the noise levels on set down, which enables many pairs of people to communicate simultaneously without chaos or confusion.

Similarly, the cinematographer must communicate with the other department heads so that everyone knows what is in shot - what set needs to be dressed - where the boom can be? There are many details and many people need information in order to work effectively and efficiently.

Remember, everyone on set is working toward the same goal – a great film!



Figure 7.1 Hand signals.