

Montana Film Office

HINTS FOR FIRST TIME FILMMAKERS*

There is no one way to make a movie, but there are certainly many steps necessary to producing a successful film. These suggestions will briefly touch on areas you should be thinking about if you are totally new to the filmmaking process.

Take a Class

Montana State University has a number of informative production classes. However, if you can't invest that much time, there are also weekend film schools offered by The Hollywood Film Institute's Dov S-S Simens (800-366-3456) or from Robert Bordiga's Nuts & Bolts Production Seminars (800-755-7763). Both of these courses are offered at various times throughout the year in a variety of locations.

Script

The one essential element to every film. Not only must you have a script, but it has to be "good." The story is everything. Use the script as your guide and make decisions based on what makes sense for the story. Anyone can make a film, but not everyone can make a good film.

Crew

Depending on the length of your story and how involved it is will determine how many crew members you need. A documentary about your next door neighbor will require far fewer crew members than a 50s western. Positions to think about—Producer, Editor, Director, 1st and 2nd Assistant Directors, Cinematographer, 1st and 2nd Assistant Camera, Script Supervisor, Sound Mixers, Production Designer, Costume Designer, Hair/Makeup, Gaffers, Grips, Composer, Casting Director, and Production Assistants. An explanation of crew member positions is available in the *Filmmaker's Dictionary* (see Good Books To Read When Researching the Filmmaking Process on page 2).

Cast

Unless you are using friends, you'll more than likely have to hold some kind of casting session, so think about location(s), time(s), advertising, videotaping the session, paperwork for the actors to fill out, etc. Talent Agencies can also be a great resource when looking for actors.

Locations

Locking down locations can be a very time consuming task because of the necessity of obtaining permits and permission from various owners. Check the Montana Film Office on-line production guide at www.montanafilm.com for federal and state land permitting guidelines.

Equipment

Unless you own a camera, you are going to have to borrow or rent one. You'll either shoot on film or video and you'll need lights and sound equipment, as well as camera supplies.

Insurance

Getting insurance can be the single most important thing you do in pre-production...especially when something goes wrong. Most location owners and production rental houses will not let you rent property without insurance. Since this is an unusual type of insurance, contact your insurance agent to have them point you in the right direction. Students are usually covered through the University, but don't just assume.

and last, but certainly not least.....

Financing!!!

Where are you going to get the money needed to make your film a reality? Only you can figure this out by researching how much things will cost —actors, locations, crew, catering, travel, lodging, film processing, film transfer, negative conforming, postage, and miscellaneous expenses. You can probably get donations or reduced rates on a lot of this, but filmmaking isn't cheap, even with generous contributions. I've found that as a student filmmaker, a good rule of thumb to follow is almost \$1000/minute, shooting on film. I've seen it done much more cheaply, but you don't have to ask the filmmakers how much they spent to know that.

* written by Kelsi MacIntyre – MSU Graduate 1999

Good Books to Read When Researching the Filmmaking Process

Location Scouting and Management Handbook
By Robert G. Maier

The Complete Film Production Handbook
By Eve Light Honthaner

Filmmaker's Dictionary
By Ralph S. Singleton

All three books are available on the Internet at www.amazon.com. There is also a large selection of film production books in the on-line store at www.ifilmpro.com.

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