It is generally believed that the role of a director is to transform the written words on the script into that of a visual and audible format; however, how one does that is open to interpretation.

The director’s roles and responsibilities span over all three phases of a production; Pre-Production, Production (Principal Photography) and Post-Production – all in which the director is responsible for working with crew-members from all departments and use his “creative vision” to characterize the film as a whole.

Pre-Production

Each year thousands of scripts are written, some based off of real events, some based off of earlier works (fairy-tales, comic books, music) and others entirely fictitious – what transforms these words on paper into a visual story-telling experience? The director.

Typically, the producer is the first person on-board on a project. It is their job to find an idea or script which they believe is bankable, and from there carefully pick a director suited to the story. In turn they will pitch it to the director - with the hopes of turning the script into a film. This ever-evolving Producer/Director relationship is crucial in creating a film as the two must share the same vision and passion for the project. Sticking to this vision, it is not just essential that the two agree upon casting choices and locations, but also crew members, as any mishap may remove from the essence of the film.

Essentially, the script is no more than an idea placed on paper, which is then used by the director to create a visualized concept (his vision) of the finished film. This original script becomes more of a reference point than anything else as it is adapted and reworked to equal the directors’ vision, appease both technical and narrative imperfections, and most importantly intrigue an audience; with the rule-of-thumb that the script is never complete. The magnitude of these changes vary depending on the script, some requiring minor changes such as locations or character situations, where-as others require major re-writes , as the writer and director work endlessly to create a script which can be brought to life.

Whilst each director uses different techniques to map their vision, it is standard for directors to use storyboards to communicate their visualization of the script. These storyboards include basic, yet detailed sketches, which show much of what is to be included in each shot, basically telling the story in a series of still images. Key narrative, camera specifications/movements and sound elements are detailed below the frame - allowing all departments to get a grasp of the scene from nothing but the series of images.

Rather than only communicate via images, it is essential that the director is in direct contact with all of the Heads of Departments whenever necessary. Production meetings are an open-forum for crew discussions regarding all things relating to the production itself, which should happen as frequently as two times per week whilst in pre-production. These production meetings, which are run by the 1st AD, are not just a perfect opportunity for the crew to bring up any issues relevant to the production, but also a great tool for the director and producer to make sure all departments are on track.

Contact lists, with both emails and phone numbers of the entire crew, are a necessity in creating a productive crew, they open the lines of dialogue between the director and all other departments, allowing any queries or questions to be instantly answered – however if any key decisions or problems arise it is best to discuss within the production meeting environment, alerting the entire crew of such decisions.

During the early stages of Pre-Production, the director must create in-depth character and casting briefs, based off of the characters in the script and his/her interpretation of them. These briefs will give all crew, and casting potentials a clear overview of each of the characters; clearly describing each of the conflicts (inner, personal, extra) that the character face, the characters mannerisms, the relationships between characters, the world that they live in and the age and physical descriptions of each of the characters.

The producer and director will then, working together, decide a short-list of actors based off of these briefs, considering tree major factors; the audience, the character, and the physical appearance of the actor. Having made a short-list it is then the producers’ duty to contact each of the actors, or their respective agencies, and arrange an initial rehearsal, in which the actor, director and producer all can attend. As performance is key when casting an actor, it’s best to go into this process with a clear mind as to the specifics of what the character look likes, making casting decisions solely based on said performance.

Several weeks before the production begins, actor/director rehearsals should be a regular occurrence – giving the actor the chance to develop their character and mould a working relationship with the director and the rest of the cast. This process is extremely important for directors as well – building a relationship with the cast creates trust and builds a union between all parties. It’s also determines whether or not the scene works, and identifying the significance it holds within the arch of the entire story.

During this period the director must also create location briefs, based upon his vision of the script. On a larger scale film a location scout will be assigned to find locations according to these briefs, on a smaller scale production this is left to the director and/or producer. When suitable locations are found and necessary contracts and paperwork are signed – the director, all heads of departments and any other relevant crew are required to visit the desired location to determine any possible problems and get a general feel for the location, which may require several visits to the location.

The weeks prior to the production Weeks leading to production are busy for all involved, including the director. As well as on-going rehearsals and tech-reccies, the director must work with the cinematographer to create a detailed shot-list securing enough coverage of all scripted actions; work with the first assistant director to produce and implement all safety precautions and create a daily schedule of the production to which all shots and scenes will adhere to; discuss a soundscape and soundtrack for the film with the sound department and work with the art department to design, implement and test set, prop and wardrobe designs.