

PRE-PRODUCTION

Pre-production is the process of planning some of the elements involved in a film, play, or other performance. There are three parts in a production: pre-production, production, and post-production. Pre-production ends when the planning ends and the content starts being produced.

Pre-production is essential in the filmmaking process, because without proper planning, your production could run over time, the film could go over budget, or you could find yourself in the editing room with missing content. Some even say, “Production is pre-production.” Whether its storyboarding, location scouting, or budgeting, each of the steps below plays a crucial role in the success of your project.

CONCEPT

This is where you develop your story, its structure, and plot points. Ideas often are drawn from personal experiences or ripped from the headlines. Maybe it’s a story you were told as a child, or a product of your own wild imagination. At its most basic level, a concept should be able to be communicated in three sentences — the beginning, the middle, and the end, translating to acts I, II, and III. Your second act should always be the meat of the film, with the first and third generally bookends, setting up and resolving the main plot.

TREATMENT

Your treatment is an extended summary of your film, typically 1-3 pages in length, depending on the scope of the project. It covers the whole story from beginning to end.

OUTLINE

Most writers will outline the story using index cards, so that they can easily arrange and re-arrange scenes. Once completed, give the scenes in your outline letters and numbers to stay organized. These will remain with the scenes all the way through production and post-production, so be consistent and logical about your system. You’ll likely end up adding scenes later on, so set aside unique alpha-numeric combinations for those pickups.

SCREENPLAY

When writing the screenplay, keep referencing your outline so that you never lose track of your story structure. Take advantage of great screenwriting software and tools, like Final Draft or Celtx, which will speed up the writing process. Once you’re finished, go back and re-write it. Similar to the saying about preproduction, “writing is rewriting.” The average script goes through ten drafts before even being shopped, and many more if it’s optioned or bought. Once you think your script is as good as you can make it, share it with someone who’s opinion you trust, and start getting notes. It’ll never be perfect, but you have to decide when the time is right to lock it and move on to the next phase.

SCRIPT BREAKDOWN

The script breakdown is the process in which every single item needed for the movie's shoot is identified. This includes locations, props, effects — absolutely everything. It's incredibly important to pore over every detail in this process in order to estimate a budget and schedule.

SHOT LIST

This is your shot-by-shot breakdown of each scene, with a description of the framing and other details, such as focal length, camera movement, and location.

STORYBOARD

A visual representation of each scene in your film, your storyboards can illustrate character placement, blocking, lighting positions, focal length, and other notes. If you don't have the budget to hire a storyboard artist, you'll need to rely on your own skills, or maybe have your production designer pull double duty.

FINANCE

Filmmaking is an expensive business. The producer needs to secure funding to pay for the entire pre-production, production, and post-production process, in addition to marketing and distribution once the film is complete. Getting your film funded can sometimes take years. Therefore, some filmmakers move forward without funding and pay for their film out-of-pocket; then they sell or license the rights to it after it's complete. The funding can come at any stage in the game.

LOCATION SCOUT/LOCATION HUNT

When location scouting for each scene, physically go to the location if possible. Observe things like the ambient light and sound. Bring the shot list to visualize each shot in the scene. If the location is outdoors, think about visiting it at different times of the day to see how the light and sound change. Check the weather. If you have a large crew or a lot of gear, think about access both for your crew members and production vehicles. Bring a camera to snap some photos of your locations — this will be helpful for the production designer when choosing a location. Think about what permits or property releases you might need at each location.

TECH SCOUT

Having locked all locations and produced the shot list, the director, cinematographer, production designer, line producer, and 1st AD go on the tech scout. The purpose of the tech scout is for the director to visit each and every location with the heads of each department and explain precisely what each shot will entail: where the camera will be, details of camera movement, what the

actors will be doing, and what the look of the scene will be. Again, bring a camera to snap some photos. The cinematographer can use this opportunity to replicate each shot with a still camera.

SCHEDULING

After the tech scout, the 1st AD uses the director's shot list to draw up a schedule for each day of the shoot.

CASTING

Casting is taken care of by Casting Directors, who are very good at finding actors that match the director's specifications. Obviously, the director makes the final choices, but the preliminary selection – which is the most time-consuming and tedious part – is done by the casting directors, who are, frankly, worth every penny they charge.

PRODUCTION DESIGN

After the scout, the production designer designs and oversees the production of set pieces, and arranges the procurement of anything that needs to be purchased, such as plants, furniture, and props. The costume designer does the same.