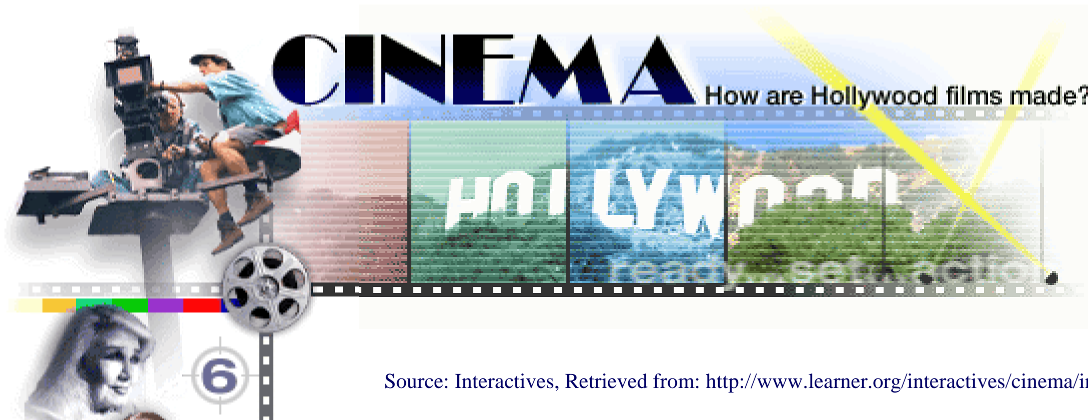

Source: Interactives, Retrieved from: http://www.learner.org/interactives/cinema/index.html

Introduction

Imagine a young child, eye level with a floor full of miniature toys, concentrating intently on building a make-believe world. To the child, the toys are not miniature figures made of plastic or wood. They are real characters with real adventures. The child frames the action, crafting scenes that unfold in a world of imagination.

Looking through the lens of a camera as actors bring to life a writer's story, the filmmaker is also peering into a world of imagination. The director, producer, actors, screenwriter, and film editor are all essential players in the journey from concept to finished film. In this remarkable process, thousands of small details—and often hundreds of people—come together to create a Hollywood film.

Join us as we explore this creative process, from the screenwriter's words to the editor's final cut. Write your own dialogue for a scene or put yourself in a producer's shoes by managing the production of a film.

Screenwriting

The year is 1890. Directors, editors, and cameramen are making silent films with the help of a "scenarist," usually an ex-vaudeville actor who invents humorous situations. But where are the screenwriters?

These early films don't need them. Without sound, there is no need for dialogue.

All of that changed with the advent of sound for film in the 1920s. Suddenly, actors needed something to say. Writers flocked to Hollywood in droves from Broadway and from the worlds of literature and journalism. For a brief time in the 1930s, some of the world's most famous

writers wrote Hollywood scripts: William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Bertolt Brecht, and Thomas Mann.

In 1932, William Faulkner earned $6,000 in salary and rights for a story, a substantial amount of money at the time. Just five years later, F. Scott Fitzgerald earned $1,250 per week, more money than he had ever earned in his life, and enough to get him out of the serious debt he had fallen into. Despite generous pay, the conditions under which these world-renowned writers labored were anything but ideal. Hollywood was a factory system, churning out movies at a furious pace. Screenwriters found themselves at the bottom rung of the studio ladder.

By the end of World War II, screenwriters were complaining about their place in the Hollywood machine. Leonard Spigelgass, editor of **Who Wrote the Movie and What Else Did He Write** (Writer's Guild, 1960), summed up the situation:

"Over the years we have been called hacks, high-priced secretaries, creatures of the director or producer, pulp writers, craftsmen, sell-outs, cop-outs, mechanical robots. No Pulitzer Prizes for us, no Nobels, no mention of our names...."

Screenwriters continued to earn little prestige for their hard work, until the filmmaking system experienced some important shifts.

The status of movie stars began to increase, and writers often found them to be powerful allies. Occasionally, stars would request a script by a particular writer, as happened with Katherine Hepburn and the movie **Woman of the Year**. Hepburn brought the script to the attention of studio head Louis B. Mayer, and the script's writers, Ring Lardner Jr. and Michael Kanin, received $100,000 for its use.

A few writers also managed to obtain creative control over their work. John Huston, a well-known filmmaker who began as a writer, demanded a clause in his contract with the studio that would give him the opportunity to direct. A screenwriter gained more respect if he demonstrated a real talent for directing.

Increasingly, writers became more important players within the studio system. Even so, some left the security and good pay of the studio to freelance for whoever held the reins—studios, stars, or other players. By the late 1940s, screenwriting was a lucrative occupation.

Writers Under Fire: The 1950s

In the 1950s, the Supreme Court declared that studios that owned chains of movie houses had a monopoly. The practice was declared illegal, and this ruling marked the beginning of the end for the Hollywood movie moguls, the all-powerful studio heads who had reigned in the early days of the studio system. As screenwriters increasingly worked on a freelance or project-by-project basis, and as the powerful studios weakened, writers no longer enjoyed the same protection they once had.

At the same time, Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began their campaign against suspected Communists. They doggedly pursued possible

Communists in the film industry, which included going after screenwriters. Without the protection of the studios, writers were easy prey.

From 1947 to 1960, many writers, including the famous "Hollywood Ten," were blacklisted as a result of their investigation by HUAC. They were not allowed to work in the movie industry, sometimes for more than a decade. To stay afloat, many blacklisted writers went underground, writing under false names and using someone else to "front" their work. The blacklisting ended in 1960. That year, Dalton Trumbo, one of the blacklisted screenwriters, was given credit for writing the popular films **Spartacus** and **Exodus**.

Screenwriting today

Screenwriters today are important and often powerful players in the filmmaking process. They are paid as well as directors and producers are, and their work is considered an art. Screenplays are often published and sold to the general public in bookstores just like novels and plays.

Though rare in the 1930s and 1940s, many screenwriters today are asking to direct in order to guide their script through the filmmaking process. The number of writers who turn to directing steadily increases year after year. Even if they do not direct, screenwriters often have a say in the project from script through production, collaborating closely with actors and directors to foster their ideas through to finished film.

Screenwriting Assignment: Writing a Scene

Could you write a convincing comedy? A thriller so real it makes viewers' hearts race? A believable drama? Screenwriting can be a difficult process. Writers must be able to set a scene and craft lifelike characters, but they also have to understand how to put believable words into their characters' mouths.

The Setup

When Harry Met Sally (1989) is a romantic comedy written by Nora Ephron. The two main characters, Harry Burns and Sally Albright, dislike each other immediately. She's cheerful, organized, and optimistic. He is a complete slob and a brooding pessimist with a grim sense of humor. Not long after meeting, they are stuck with each other on a long car trip from Chicago to New York City. To pass the time, Harry asks Sally to tell him the story of her life. What might their conversation be like, given what you know about these characters?

What Other People Wrote

Take a look at the way other people have written this scene. Is their dialogue funny? Do you think the characters would really say the things people have written?
How did Nora Ephron, the movie's screenwriter, handle this scene?

The Real Scene

The actual scene from *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), written by Nora Ephron:
HARRY: I'll roll down the window. Why don't you tell me the story of your life.
SALLY: Story of my life?
HARRY: We've got eighteen hours to kill before we hit New York.

SALLY: The story of my life isn't even going to get us out of Chicago. I mean, nothing's happened to me yet. That's why I'm going to New York.
HARRY: So something can happen to you?
SALLY: Yes.
HARRY: Like what?
SALLY: I can go into journalism school to become a reporter.
HARRY: So you can write about things that happen to other people.
SALLY: That's one way to look at it.

Some Student Written Scenes

Script #1 Submitted by: Tiffany

Harry: I'll roll down the window. Why don't you tell me the story of your life.
Sally: Are you sure you really want to know?
Harry: Why?, is there something in your past you'd like to keep hidden?
Sally: No, but it's not like its very amusing, or at least not to you.
Harry: Go ahead give it a shot, it's not like we don't have all the time in the world
Sally: We'll when I was five, my father was abducted from my family by aliens from who knows where.
Harry: Are you serious!
Sally: Yes, of course harry, that's one of the main reasons why I took up acting.
Harry: Do you actually think I'd go along with your scheme?
Sally: Well, yes! I figure I'd enjoy seeing that look on your face when I told you about my father, the whole way to New York!
Harry: We'll you sure did catch me off guard that time, you really are something.
Sally: I just thought I'd bring a little excitement into this trip.
Harry: So how was your life growing up, really?
Sally: Well I had a really great childhood but as soon as I was 19 I knew what I wanted to be over night.
Harry: And so?
Sally: Here I am in this car with you hoping that New York will bring an exciting new life for me! So here we go

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Script #2 Submitted by: Katie

Harry: I'll roll down the window. Why don't you tell me the story of your life.
Sally: Why should I tell you the story of my life?
Harry: Frankly, because anything's got to be better than driving from Chicago to New York in silence.
Sally: Are you sure about that? I kind of like the quiet...gives me time to think.
Harry: Come on Sally...if you don't talk, I may fall asleep at the wheel.
Sally: Oh, good heavens, we don't want that now, do we? I guess I'll have to keep you entertained somehow. Well, once upon a time, there was a little girl named Sally, and she was a good little girl, always smiling and happy and meticulously organized and clever.
Harry: Oh, now who could that be? Certainly not me.
Sally: Don't flatter yourself.
Harry: Come on Sally; am I really all that bad? You don't even know me.
Sally: I know enough, thank you very much.

Directing

The director's vision shapes the look and feel of a film. He or she is the creative force that pulls a film together, responsible for turning the words of a script into images on the screen. Actors, cinematographers, writers, and editors orbit around the director like planets around the Sun. Despite the director's pivotal role, most Hollywood movies are designed to pull you into the story without being aware of the director's hand. Many talented film directors with long lists of feature film credits are so skilled at being "invisible" that they are little known by the movie-going public.

The Director's Vision

Imagine you're being considered to direct a Hollywood film. You're handed a screenplay that has been "greenlighted" (given approval for production) by a major studio. As you read through it, you begin to imagine how it might play out on screen. You see the characters coming to life. You envision the lighting and hear the sound. You are absorbed in the world of the story until you see the script's final words: Fade Out.

When you're done reading the script, you ask yourself some key questions. What is the main idea or theme of the screenplay? What does the story say about the human condition in general? You also think about the script cinematically. How will the script translate to the visual language of the screen? Who is the audience? As the director, you must feel passionate about this soon-to-be film. Feeling connected and committed to the story will help you do your best work, and there's an enormous amount of work ahead.

If you are hired as the director of this film, you may need to help shape the script for the screen. A good script is the foundation for a good film, but even the best one may need to be developed or molded to work well on the big screen. Sometimes the producer will develop a script and then hand it over to the director. In other cases, the director may work with the writer early on to help develop a script from its infancy. Nowadays, the planning for a film is often underway before there is a script. A director or producer purchases the rights to a story and then hires a screenwriter. Whatever the route from script to screen, the director plays an important role in shaping the way the story is told.

Assembling the Cast and Crew

The people you work with, both the actors and the crew who will make things work behind the scenes, are crucial to the film's success. The right people will understand and respect your vision, work well with one another, and bring their own unique gifts to the filmmaking process. The film's producer normally hires the crew, but the director will have input into crucial hires such as lead actors.

A production designer is responsible for the believability of a film's scenery and sets. In essence, the production designer is the architect of the film, working to make your vision, as director, a reality. The production designer also works closely with the art director and set decorator, making certain all the visual details are accurate and the style and period of the film reflect your wishes.

The cinematographer, or director of photography, helps to translate your vision to film, scene by scene, planning shots and supervising camera operators. Often, cinematographers are artists with experience in painting and photography. Their job is to create and capture the images that best tell the story.

The actors you choose will bring your story to life. Your casting decisions will be based on such factors as availability and whether or not an actor is suitable for lead or ensemble acting, as well as on a healthy dose of intuition. Often a casting director or producer will help you select the cast.

Filming and Post-production

After months or even years of development, delays, and rewrites, the final script is set and the film goes into pre-production. During this phase, budgets are detailed, scenes are planned and designed, and a shooting schedule is prepared. Storyboards—visual representations of every shot—are prepared by a storyboard artist in consultation with the director, director of photography, and designer. Before a single frame is shot, the film is planned from beginning to end on paper. The final stages of pre-production include weeks of rehearsal, set construction, and location scouting.

Once shooting begins, you'll need to continue to communicate your vision of the film to the actors and crew. You'll also need to be able to improvise on the set and troubleshoot if necessary. This flexibility can make the difference between an acceptable production and an exceptional one. On average, you will be able to complete filming for about three script pages per day, or the equivalent of about three minutes of screen time.

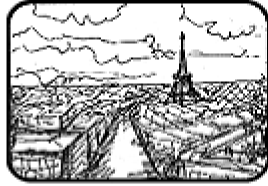
Once the shoot is over, hundreds of thousands of feet of film need to be assembled into a coherent story. Days or weeks of shooting result in only a few minutes of screen time. In the editing room, your vision will either come to life or perish. With your guidance, the film and sound editor will complete the detailed technical work required at this stage. Your "director's cut" of the film (the one you work with the editor to create) may not be the final one the audience sees. The film's producers may decide to cut certain scenes or use a different film clip for a certain effect. Editing is a collaborative process, the final step in the difficult work of bringing your vision to life.

Your stature as a director (as well as the terms of your contract with the studio) determines how much say you have in determining what version of the film is released to the public. Occasionally, a director dislikes the final cut and decides not to be listed in the credits. If this happens, the credits list Alan Smithee as the director. Alan Smithee is not a real person, but an alias used as a substitute when a director refuses to be linked to a film.

Camera Angles: Close-Ups and Long Shots

Imagine you are directing a science-fiction movie about a monster that is threatening Paris. You picture the large monster stomping among the buildings of the city, frightening citizens and wreaking havoc. How can you make this threat seem real to the film's viewers? How can you communicate your vision on the screen?

THE STORYBOARDS



An establishing shot of the city of Paris.

A long shot of the monster stopping traffic.

A medium shot of two characters discussing a plan.

An over-the-shoulder shot of a character in conversation.

A close-up of a frightened passerby.

As a director, you have many tools and techniques that can shape the look and feel of a film. You can vary a shot's perspective, lighting, location, or other qualities to achieve certain effects. One powerful way to communicate your vision is through camera angles. Shooting your movie monster from far away, for example, will achieve a very different look than if you were to shoot it up close.

During the planning stages of a film, the director and possibly the director of photography may meet with a storyboard artist to illustrate the flow of shots that will best tell the story. There are a number of camera angles that a director has at his or her disposal. The most common of these are the establishing shot, long shot, medium shot, over-the-shoulder shot, and close-up. The storyboards on this page show how these shots could be used in your science-fiction film to create different effects.

Establishing shot A shot, normally taken from a great distance or from a "bird's eye view," that establishes where the action is about to occur. In your science-fiction movie, you will probably need an establishing shot of the Paris skyline, most likely one that shows the Eiffel Tower. This will communicate to the audience that the action takes place in Paris.

Long shot A shot that shows a scene from a distance (but not as great a distance as the establishing shot). A long shot is used to stress the environment or setting of a scene. In filming your science-fiction movie, for example, you might use a long shot to show the monster causing traffic jams and panicked crowds.

Medium shot A shot that frames actors, normally from the waist up. The medium shot can be used to focus attention on an interaction between two actors, such as a struggle, debate, or embrace.

Over-the-shoulder shot A shot of one actor taken from over the shoulder of another actor. An over-the-shoulder shot is used when two characters are interacting face-to-face. Filming over an actor's shoulder focuses the audience's attention on one actor at a time in a conversation, rather than on both.

Close-up A shot taken at close range, sometimes only inches away from an actor's face, a prop, or some other object. The close-up is designed to focus attention on an actor's expression, to give significance to a certain object, or to direct the audience to some other important element of the film. In your monster movie, you might use a close-up of the monster's teeth or claws to show how ferocious it is, or decide to zoom in on a frightened passerby to illustrate his or her fear.

Producing

The film's producer acts as an administrator, communicator, and guide, helping hundreds of people reach a final goal: completing the film on schedule, on budget, and as the director envisioned. The producer administers all the various aspects of film production, from initial concept to script and budget preparation to shooting, post-production, and release. He or she does not have to be able to write, direct, edit, or act to help screenwriters, directors, editors, and actors do their best work.

A producer's guiding agenda is the budget. The producer must work within the limitations of the budget, creatively selecting the best possible people and solutions to bring the script from page to screen. If the project runs out of money, the production can't be completed. The film can't be printed or distributed, and therefore won't ever make it to theaters. Most film investors take out insurance, called a completion bond, to avoid the often disastrous financial results of an uncompleted film.

Questions? Complaints? The producer hears it all and must be diplomatic in handling problems. The producer must know everything (or know how to find out about it), be "hands-on" or "hands-off" depending on what the situation calls for, and understand the daily decisions and difficult logistics behind the art of filmmaking. A consummate manager of studio agendas and human needs, the producer always has his or her eye on the prize: the completed film.

Producing Assignment

Hollywood producer George S. Bottendorf has an idea for a World War II combat film. In this activity, it's your job to help this fictional producer balance the limitations of his budget with his desire to realize the concept for the film. The success of Bottendorf's movie, and the budget's bottom line, will depend on the choices you make about film's key elements, such as its director, cast, and location. Making the best choices will mean box office success, including both financial reward and critical acclaim.

Ready to let the cameras roll? And...action!

Get Started: The Concept

George Bottendorf's idea for this film grew out of childhood memories of his father, who often told him stories about his experiences in the Second World War. His father wanted Bottendorf to appreciate the dedication of and sacrifices made by World War II soldiers, but he also wanted him to be realistic about the harshness and horrors of war. Now, many years later, Bottendorf wants to bring his father's stories to life on film.

The Budget

Bottendorf has a total budget of $40 million available to him to produce the movie. While that may seem like a grand sum, it must cover the costs of the screenplay, director, actors, location, and special effects, plus a variety of other expenses, small and large, associated with making a film.

When you begin, your budget will include several baseline costs for things like production and supporting cast salaries. As you move through the creation of the film, other costs will be added into your budget depending on the decisions you make. Track the budget carefully as you proceed.

Hire the Screenwriter

Bottendorf's first step is to hire a screenwriter. He's looking for someone with a good track record, and he wants a good listener who can shape his grandfather's World War II tales into a dramatic and compelling narrative. Cost is a factor, but Bottendorf is most

concerned with finding a writer who can bring a unique perspective to the screenplay and who can tell a sensitive and insightful tale. Who would you choose?

- **Lindsey Pearlman** has written three successful films: **Deadly Annihilation**, **Lethal Control**, and **Fatal Mirage**. Each one has been a blockbuster hit, each more violent than the last. Although not about war specifically, Pearlman's films certainly have enough explosives and death-defying stunts to pack a wallop. Salary: $2 million.
- **Jo Williams** has written two films: one an epic miniseries for television about the fight for civil rights, the other a low-budget theatrical release that turned out to be a sleeper hit with quirky characters and a bold premise. She is a writer who takes risks and her risks have paid off. She was nominated for an Emmy for her miniseries this year. Salary: $250,000.
- A**ndrew Morton** is considered Hollywood's best script doctor, able to take other people's scripts, figure out what is wrong with them, and fix them up. His best original pieces were written 20 years ago, but he has been secretly working on a screenplay about the Korean War. Salary: $150,000.

Name the Film

The screenwriter has completed the script, and you have a unique opportunity to help name the film. As you think of the film's title, consider the following: What tone does the title convey? Is it consistent with Bottendorf's original vision for the film? Can you picture the title on a movie poster or up in lights at a multiplex? Does the title have enough punch to draw people's interest? Are there other movies that might share this title? **Name your film:**

Choose the Director

Bottendorf is thrilled with the script for **.** It has drama, romance, and tragedy, and, he feels, Oscar-winning potential. His next decision, who the director will be, is a difficult one, and vital to the film's success.

Finding a director who can create a compelling whole out of scenes that vary in tone and emotion and that are often shot out of sequence will ensure Bottendorf's story has depth and resonance. Bottendorf must also consider the director's record in bringing in a picture within budget. And what about obtaining the best performance from the actors? And familiarity with the camera? Has several powerful battle sequences, and the director has ultimate responsibility for the film's look.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Bottendorf wants a director who can boost the script's emotional impact, take risks, and create a masterwork. Who should Bottendorf choose?

- **Anna Schmidt** is a German-born director who is well known in Europe but not in America. Bottendorf watches three of her films: **The Estrangement**, a film about a married couple's struggles for true intimacy; **Safari**, a docudrama about a group of people who journey through Africa in search of an endangered feline species;

and **Afterlight**, a drama about Nazi prison camp survivors attempting to locate family members. Schmidt has a gift for eliciting deep feelings from actors as well as a documentarian's ability to capture the truth in people's stories. Salary: $250,000.

- **Steven Kingsley** is a well-known Hollywood director famous for his professionalism and gifted storytelling. Almost every movie he makes is a hit. Technically, Kingsley is a virtuoso, but he tends to veer off into simplistic endings. Bottendorf watches Kingsley's latest film, **Advent**, a science fiction parable about the coming of an enlightened being. It has great special effects, a powerful story, and a surprisingly subtle apocalyptic warning. Bottendorf notices the director's ability to grab the audience's attention. Salary: $4 million.
- **Albert Workman** is an independent film director who operates outside of the Hollywood mainstream but is well respected within it. Known for works of epic proportions, Workman has made only four films in 30 years, but they have all been critical and artistic successes. Bottendorf watches all of them once again, revisiting Workman's gorgeous landscapes, his attention to the subtleties of the performances, the careful weaving of theme and plot. Bottendorf is breathless at the end of all four films, and wonders what ever happened to this bold and brave style of filmmaking. Salary: $500,000.

Casting

With the director hired, casting decisions can be made. Bottendorf realizes that the actor he casts in the lead role will have a great effect on the tone of his picture. He wants a true actor, someone with emotional range. And again, budget is a concern. A top Hollywood star will demand a much higher salary than a lesser-known actor, driving up the costs of the film. But a big star tends to attract larger crowds to the box office. Whom should Bottendorf choose?

- **Tom Lehman** has been around for 15 years, having begun an acting career in his early teens. (He played the part of a rebellious young man on a TV sitcom.) Lately, he seems to be showing up more and more frequently on the big screen. He is a handsome, engaging actor with great potential, but he has repeatedly been cast in romantic comedies in which he often loses the girl. Salary: $500,000.
- **Will Bannister** is considered a great character actor and has already won an Academy Award for supporting actor for his sensitive portrayal of an AIDS victim in an excellent, though not widely seen, film. His performances are flawless down to the last detail, and he is easy to work with and takes direction well. He has won the respect of directors and other actors, and Bottendorf knows Bannister could create a character of intricacy, depth, and texture. Salary: $750,000.
- **Mario Parente** is, in the grand old sense of the word, a star. Every woman is in love with him, and every man secretly wishes he were him. He lights up the screen and is amazingly popular with all audiences. Without fail, every movie Parente has appeared in has been a hit. He is a good actor, but he'll have to dig deep to play the role of an uncertain soldier who witnesses great tragedy and is transformed into someone other than the traditional hero. Parente will need to

stretch his acting skills in this role, but he supposedly loves a challenge. The question is, does he have what it takes? Salary: $3 million.

Find the Right Location

Bottendorf is now ready to choose a location. With his newly hired location manager, Charlene Kristey, as well as the director, cinematographer, and production manager, Bottendorf looks for the perfect spot to film. Which location will you choose?

Once you've selected the location, the production manager and location manager get to work. They will create a temporary studio with lights, cameras, scaffolds, high camera platforms, dolly tracks, props, wardrobe houses, electrical equipment, and production facilities for viewing dailies. They must also arrange for housing and meals for cast and crew.

- **A small village in the south of France.** Kristey is familiar with this location, and knows films have been shot here before. Bottendorf loves the small-town streets and thinks the landscape will give his piece authenticity. The director spots a field three miles outside of the village that will allow for shots of sweeping terrain. Cost: $1.5 million.
- **A location in North America.** Kristey also has some experience filming in the small town of Osoyoos in British Columbia. While it doesn't exactly have the look of Europe, it is quaint enough to be visually interesting. There may be severe weather problems if the shooting schedule runs into the winter months; still, if all goes well, the reduced travel time from California will make it cheaper to film here. Cost: $750,000.

Special Effects

Bottendorf relies on his special-effects supervisor, Sven Lundquist, to bring the film's battle scenes to life. Lundquist has won every conceivable award for his work, including three Academy Awards, and he knows that it's important for the film's battle scenes to be realistic and gripping. Bottendorf can budget for special effects as follows:

- **Low budget:** With this budget, Bottendorf's chances of bringing the film in under budget are very good. However, the director and cinematographer will have a heavy burden to carry, as most of the battle-scene effects will need to be conveyed through creative camera angles and the responses of the actors. Cost: $5 million.
- **Average budget:** While this budget level won't allow Sven Lundquist to do everything he'd like to do, it is sufficient to create a convincing illusion of war and its effects. Cost: $10 million.
- **Large budget:** Lundquist is overjoyed at the special effects that will be possible with this budget. He's envisioning tanks, explosions, and highly realistic battle scenes that will make a memorable impact on the audience. Cost: $20 million.

Distribution and Marketing

Months later, the principal photography is completed and post-production (editing, sound, and music) has proceeded without a hitch. The moment of truth—the film's release to theaters—is close at hand. Your final task is deciding how to distribute and promote the film.

- **Small release:** Release the film to selected theaters in major cities. If it does well, it will be shown on an increasing number of screens. Accompanying the release will be some basic marketing, consisting of trailers on TV and in theaters, and newspaper and radio ads in major cities. This approach costs less, but doesn't gain the film as much exposure as a wider release. Cost: $5 million.
- **Media blitz:** Release the film on hundreds of screens nationwide, with an accompanying marketing blitz. This will include merchandising, a Web site, and newspaper and TV ads in media outlets across the country. Bottedorf thinks this approach will create a buzz around the release of that will have audiences flocking to the theaters. Cost: $10 million.

Acting

No cinematographer or film editor, no matter how gifted, can turn a terrible performance into a great one.

The right actor can give a screenwriter's words exciting new depth and dimensions. Actors are essential for conveying emotions to an audience, for bringing the words and ideas in a script to life. Even animated characters rely on the personalities of behind-the-scenes performers.

Imagine that you are an actor. You've worked primarily in New York theater, but have decided to try your hand at working in film. You pack your bags and head to Hollywood. In Hollywood, you meet other actors and enroll in workshops to continually hone your instruments: your voice, your body, and your imagination. You seek out an agent and have some publicity photos taken.

Once you're lucky enough to secure an agent, you are sent on interviews where you meet casting directors and read for parts. Over the course of two months, you try out for 23 roles and are chosen for none of them. Finally, you are cast in a film. It's a minor part, but substantial enough that if you do well, you will enjoy more work and exposure. After the shock wears off, you begin to prepare.

Understanding the Role

Your agent has been able to secure a copy of the script for you. It's a thriller called **Blueberry Hill**. You have been cast as Emily Grubowski, the plain, bitter wife of a has-been police officer.

You have three scenes, which will give you approximately two minutes of screen time. Somehow you must connect closely with your character. You read and reread the entire script, not just your scenes. You try to understand the characters' relationships with each other. Here is the first of your scenes, which will be shot tomorrow:

INT, Stan Grubowski's home. Night. Grubowski, seated on a sofa, stares into a blazing fire. Emily enters the room, hands him a mug of tea.

GRUBOWSKI Thanks. (Emily sits next to him. He makes no movement in her direction. There is ice between them.)

EMILY It's peculiar, isn't it?

GRUBOWSKI What is?

EMILY All this happening now. Ten years this month, that child disappeared. (Grubowski gets up, moves away from the sofa. Emily watches him closely.)

GRUBOWSKI I'm tired. I'm going to bed. (He leaves the room. Emily pokes the fire. It blazes up. She drops her head sadly.)

EMILY Turn down the thermostat, Stan.

As an actor, you must be able to become many different people. In order to make Emily come to life, you must bring to the role those parts of yourself that are similar to the character. You look deep inside yourself to find feelings that will help you come across as sad and bitter.

You study the role in depth. In order to learn your lines, you know you must learn the part. Memorizing lines without understanding the role will be of little help to you.

As you study Emily, you learn there is more to her than meets the eye. She is bitter because she has been hurt repeatedly by her husband. But she is also frightened of losing him and wants to protect him. She is a complex character, though her time on screen is brief.

You ask an actor friend to help you rehearse your lines, and after much study, you feel confident that you have done as much preparation as you can. You're ready to shoot the scene.

The Shoot: Filming the Scene

The day of the shoot, you walk onto the sound stage (or location) prepared to begin filming. The set has been constructed prior to your arrival by the "swing gang." You'll be working with a diverse crew of people to get your scene done, each of whom has an important role in the making of the movie.

- The **cinematographer** (or director of photography) is responsible for the lighting, choice of film, correct exposure, correct use of lenses, and supervision of the camera crew.
- The **mixer** is responsible recording the sound. Other sounds are added during post-production by **foley artists**.

- The **gaffer** is responsible for making sure all the lighting equipment is where it should be and operating correctly. The gaffer sets the lights so that the finished picture will have the desired effect.
- The **key grip** is responsible for the rigging (carpentry) and for moving and readying the sets and camera dollies.
- The **set dresser** decorates the set.
- The **property master** ensures the sets and actors have all the necessary dressing and props.
- The **wardrobe master** is responsible for all wardrobe needs.
- The **make-up person** is responsible for all makeup.
- The **assistant director** keeps order on the set and makes sure the production moves according to schedule. Normally hired by the producer, the assistant director aids the director but also watches over the production company's investment. Sometimes this involves prodding the director to finish the shots planned for a particular day, or hunting down actors if they are not where they should be on the set. The assistant director also functions as a record keeper and handles time cards and minor union disputes.

You are told exactly where to stand and where to move. Every time you stop someone places a piece of tape on the floor. The camera follows you slowly. You rehearse the scene on the director's command. Once. Twice. Then the director says, "Let's go for a take." You are about to be filmed for the very first time in your life.

The assistant director yells, "Quiet on the set!" The actor who appears in this scene with you (playing the role of Grubowski) moves to his position. He stares into the fire as the cinematographer instructs the cameraman to take a medium shot.

"Roll it," says the assistant director. Someone says, "Rolling." "Speed," says someone else. "Thirty-five, take one."

An assistant holds a slate in front of the actor's face and snaps it shut. This "clacker" will later aid the film editor in synchronizing the picture to the sound. "Action!" commands the director.

Seconds later, the director calls out, "Cut. Do it again." The process is repeated until the director yells, "Cut. Print it." The makeup person moves into the scene and adjusts the actor's makeup. The director now wants a close-up shot and the cameraman films several takes until the director is satisfied with each one.

Finally, it's your turn for a close-up. You know that the camera and microphone will be within a few feet of you, so you'll need to communicate ideas and emotions at a very close range.

"Action!" You enter the room clutching a tea mug, your hand trembling as you imagine Emily's might. You're careful to "hit your mark" and stop exactly where the tape was placed on the floor earlier in the day. "Cut," the director says, and tells you to do it again. Finally, he calls out, "That's a wrap."

You take a deep breath of relief. You've made it through your first day on a movie set. The assistant director gives you your callsheet, or your schedule, for the next day's shooting. The crew begins to pack away the equipment for the night. The film shot that day is sent to a lab where it is processed and made into "dailies." Dailies are film clips that are viewed after each day's work in order to evaluate performances and spot any technical problems. They are shown to only a few people—normally, only the director, producer, and director of photography.

Quiet on the Set: Film Jargon

What is a take? If you're asked to cheat, what are you being asked to do? As an actor on a film set, you'll need to know the following words and phrases.

Action The word the director uses when he wants the actors to begin performing.

actor's call Your call to the set. You will be called at least an hour before the assistant director thinks you will be needed—be sure to show up at least a half hour before that. This will help you become accustomed to the set, the props, and the atmosphere. Never be late; the cost of a crew waiting for you is enormous.

cheating When an actor takes on a physical position that would not be natural in real life, such as looking at something other than the person or object on which she is supposedly focused. This is often necessary to get the right effect or perspective on film.

close-up Positioning the camera close to an actor's face (or any object that is significant in the scene) so that the person or object fills the frame.

cut The director's instruction to stop a scene. The director is the only person on the set allowed to "cut," or stop, a scene. If the assistant director, sound mixer, or camera operator needs to stop the scene for any reason, they call out "break it."

hit your mark The ability to find your predetermined location in the scene without looking at the marks that have been placed on the floor.

long shot A camera angle used to stress the environment or setting; the camera is at a distance from the subject of the shot.

medium shot A camera position that results in full- to half-figure shots of performers.

pickup The director uses this term to indicate that he or she wants to redo a small part of the scene. For example, if a scene is going well until someone forgets a line, the director might want to pick up the scene near that point to avoid reshooting the entire scene.

print it What the director says when the take completed is good enough to use. A film print is made of the take.

setup The camera position or the composition of a shot. Each time one of these is changed, there is a new setup.

speed A term used to let the production crew know that the camera is rolling or the sound is being recorded.

take A scene that is being (or has been) filmed. It is not a rehearsal and there will be a film record of it.

that's a wrap A phrase that means, "We're done. Shooting is over for today."

Editing

The film editor must know how to tell a story, be politically savvy when working with directors and studio executives, and have a calm and confident demeanor. Millions of dollars of film and the responsibility of guiding the picture through post-production and into theaters rest in the editor's hands. Scenes may have been photographed poorly and performances might have been less than inspired, but a skilled and creative editor can assemble the film so that the audience will never see these imperfections.

To better understand the editing process, imagine you are seated in a movie theater. The lights are dim and credits appear over an establishing shot of a seacoast town in Maine. The title appears on the screen: **Blueberry Hill**. After the last credits evaporate, you see a long shot of a vacant summer cottage, then a medium shot of a mysterious-looking man pouring lighter fluid on the grass near the house and striking a match. The grass catches fire; the man flees. The vivid crackling of the fire dissolves into the sound of a young girl's laughter as she packs clothing into a cardboard box and sings along with her CD player.

Who created this scene? The screenwriter, director, cinematographer, actors, lighting designer, sound designer, and, finally, the film editor. Working with the director, the film editor shaped the scene into its final form. After hours and hours of reviewing the unedited film, he created this one-minute scene. The scene appears to take place in a seacoast town in Maine during an autumn afternoon. In truth, little of what the audience sees on screen occurred in Maine, and it certainly was not all filmed in one afternoon.

The actor who played the mysterious man was most likely filmed on a Hollywood set in late summer. The young girl was filmed on a different set in early fall. The establishing shot of the seaside town was filmed months earlier in California, not Maine. The song on the girl's CD and the sounds of the crackling fire were recorded in a studio. But when you see the finished scene, all of the sounds and images work together. They appear to have taken place at one time and in one place. That is the magic of film editing.

Cuts and Transitions: Assembling the Scene

Editors select sounds and images from all the film that has been shot and arrange them to make the movie. They also plan how one shot will best transition to the next. Assembling the opening scene of **Blueberry Hill**, the editor might choose to begin with a wide shot of the bay, focusing on the white caps and buoys that dot the water. From the shot of the grass catching fire, the editor might decide to dissolve to the girl packing clothes into a box. There are dozens of possible transitions the editor can choose, each of which will create a different feeling.
Editing often begins as soon as film has been shot. Early scenes are assembled for the producer and director to view. Occasionally, the actors will also view these early scenes. Many directors choose not to show actors these edited scenes for fear that they will affect the actors' performance.

The first cut of a film, called a "rough cut," takes up to three months to complete. The final cut may take another month to finish. Sometimes the editor works alone, sometimes with the director. The sound designer and music composer join them for the final cut, adding sound effects and the musical score. When the editing is complete and the director and producer have approved the final version of the film, this final cut is sent to a negative matcher. The negative matcher makes a negative of the film that exactly matches the final cut, and the negative is then sent to a film lab where prints are created. These prints eventually end up in theaters.

In the past, editors worked with copies of negatives called "work prints" to plan a film's scenes and transitions. When an editor was satisfied with the final film, he or she would create an edit decision list, a list of each shot in the film and its length. The list would correspond to numbers, called "edge numbers," printed on the edge of the work prints. These numbers helped a negative matcher accurately copy the work print and cut the negatives.

Today most editors use computers or nonlinear digital editing systems to compile a film. This is more efficient, but for the most part, the process is the same. The work prints, complete with edge numbers, are stored in the computer. The editor arranges the work print, and then creates an edit decision list that will be passed on to the negative matcher.

Film Editing Glossary

cut A visual transition created in editing in which one shot is instantaneously replaced on screen by another.

continuity editing Editing that creates action that flows smoothly across shots and scenes without jarring visual inconsistencies. Establishes a sense of story for the viewer.

cross cutting Cutting back and forth quickly between two or more lines of action, indicating they are happening simultaneously.

dissolve A gradual scene transition. The editor overlaps the end of one shot with the beginning of the next one.

editing The work of selecting and joining together shots to create a finished film.

errors of continuity Disruptions in the flow of a scene, such as a failure to match action or the placement of props across shots.

establishing shot A shot, normally taken from a great distance or from a "bird's eye view," that establishes where the action is about to occur.

eyeline match The matching of eyelines between two or more characters. For example, if Sam looks to the right in shot A, Jean will look to the left in shot B. This establishes a relationship of proximity and continuity.

fade A visual transition between shots or scenes that appears on screen as a brief interval with no picture. The editor fades one shot to black and then fades in the next. Often used to indicate a change in time and place.

final cut The finished edit of a film, approved by the director and the producer. This is what the audience sees.

iris Visible on screen as a circle closing down over or opening up on a shot. Seldom used in contemporary film, but common during the silent era of Hollywood films.

jump cut A cut that creates a lack of continuity by leaving out parts of the action.

matched cut A cut joining two shots whose compositional elements match, helping to establish strong continuity of action.

montage Scenes whose emotional impact and visual design are achieved through the editing together of many brief shots. The shower scene from **Psycho** is an example of montage editing.

rough cut The editor's first pass at assembling the shots into a film, before tightening and polishing occurs.

sequence shot A long take that extends for an entire scene or sequence. It is composed of only one shot with no editing.

shot reverse shot cutting Usually used for conversation scenes, this technique alternates between over-the-shoulder shots showing each character speaking.

wipe Visible on screen as a bar travelling across the frame pushing one shot off and pulling the next shot into place. Rarely used in contemporary film, but common in films from the 1930s and 1940s.

Web Sites

Internet Movie Database http://www.imdb.com A large database of movie information, including plot summaries, cast and crew lists, awards, and more.

CineMedia http://www.cinemedia.org "The Internet's largest film and media directory" offers 20,000 links to film, television, and radio industry resources.

Oscar.com: The Official Academy Awards Site http://www.oscar.com/ Read about the history of the Oscars and keep up with news about this annual awards event.

Motion Picture Association of America http://www.mpaa.org/ Movie ratings, legislation, and facts and figures on movie economics and box office returns.

MovieMaker Magazine http://www.moviemaker.com/ This bimonthly magazine features interviews with industry pundits and advice on everything from acting to distributing a film.

American Society of Cinematographers http://www.theasc.com/ Advice, articles, forums, listings of film schools, and other resources.

Cinematography Mailing List http://www.cinematography.net/ A mailing list devoted to discussing cinematography, with topics and messages archived on the Web site.

NOVA Online: Special Effects: Attack of the 50-foot Chicken
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/specialfx2/green.html Imagine you're a special effects supervisor for a movie and design a 50-foot chicken in this Shockwave game. Non-Shockwave version available.

AFI's 100 Years, 100 Movies http://www.afi.com/tvevents/100years/movies.aspx Read about the American Film Institute's picks for the 100 top Hollywood movies of all time, or play a "name that movie" game (requires Shockwave).

indieWIRE http://www.indiewire.com/index.html News and notes about independent filmmaking, with discussion forums on film topics.

Inventing Entertainment: The Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edhome.html Early movie clips—many from before 1900—and historical information about Thomas Edison's early camera and filmmaking experiments. From the Library of Congress.

Strange Loup Productions http://saturn.vfx.com/loup/glossary.html Ever wondered what a key grip or best boy is? Check this glossary of the people you're likely to find on a film set.

EditorsNet http://www.editorsnet.com/ Resources on film editing, focusing on "the art, technology, and business" of editing for movies.

Motion Picture Editors Guild http://www.editorsguild.com/ Career information on film editing, including wages, news, advice, and more.

So, You Wanna Be an Actor? http://www.sag.org/ Check the FAQS on the Screen Actors Guild—the professional

U.S. organization for actors— Web site for frequently asked questions about getting into acting.

P.O.V. Interactive http://www.pbs.org/pov/ The Web site for the PBS independent film series P.O.V. Features forums, articles, news, and other "indie" resources.

Writer's Guild of America http://www.wga.org/ Interviews with Hollywood screenwriters, tutorials and advice on writing, resources, and much more.

Wordplay http://www.wordplayer.com/welcome.html Having trouble writing your screenplay? Wordplay features articles and tutorials as well as industry advice from Hollywood producers, writers, and executives.

Classic Movies http://classicfilm.miningco.com/ Collected links and resources relating to the classic era of Hollywood filmmaking.

Women in Film http://www.wif.org/ An organization founded in order to "recognize, develop, and actively promote the unique visions of women in the global communications industry." WIF's Web site offers articles, a job bank, and information about the organization.

Books

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