FIM 1801 - FUNDAMENTALS OF CINEMATOGRAPHY

The Camera, Grip & Lighting Departments
Basic Crew Responsibilities & Additional Crew Positions

In the professional world the camera, grip and lighting departments are separate departments, but here at UNCSA School of Filmmaking they are most often fulfilled by students in the Cinematography Discipline. Below are brief explanations of what each person does in each department. Later in the term we will discuss in more detail the jobs of the camera crew only.

The Camera Crew
There are four main people on the camera crew. Some large productions have more, many small productions use less.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY (THE D.P.) – The film's Cinematographer, the D.P. is head of both the camera and lighting departments. His job involves working closely with the film's Director to achieve the photographic look of the film. He may work closely with the Production Designer to determine a palette of colors, textures and shapes that make up the total visual design of the production. The D.P. is responsible for selecting lenses, filters, film stocks and exposures. He determines the look of the lighting and the placement of the fixtures. He is familiar with diffusion materials and gels for the lights and selects which will be used on which fixtures. Essentially, he is in charge of "photographing" the film, making the technical decisions needed to achieve a specific aesthetic result.

CAMERA OPERATOR – The crew member who adjusts the composition of the shot during photography. His job is both mechanical and artistic. As the actors move about the set he must follow them, as the shot requires. In most situations his camera moves should be smooth and invisible, keeping the subject framed properly while moving seamlessly from one composition to another. The Operator works directly for the D.P.

FIRST ASSISTANT CAMERAMAN (1ST A.C.) – The person who is responsible for keeping the shot in focus during photography and maintaining the camera on the set. His job involves cleaning the gate, changing lenses and threading the film in the camera. If a camera problem occurs it is up to him to fix it or get someone in who can. The 1st AC reports directly to the D.P. The most important thing a 1st does is pull focus. During a shot the actors and camera will move about the set. By using a tape measure, reference marks and a good sense of estimation, an experienced A.C. will be able to adjust the focus distance on the lens to the current camera-subject distance on a moment to moment basis so that no matter how much someone moves they are ALWAYS in focus. Needless to say this requires a great deal of skill and practice and is one of the things that makes being a 1st A.C. one of the most demanding jobs in the business. Also known as focus puller.
SECOND ASSISTANT CAMERAMAN (2ND A.C.) – This crew member, sometimes known as the "clapper/loader," is responsible for slating the shot, loading the film in the magazines, keeping the paperwork on the film inventory and generally assisting the 1st A.C.. Since the 1st AC will tend to stay glued to the side of the camera the 2nd will do all the running for any parts, lenses, film magazines or other things, which may be needed. The 2nd AC reports directly to the 1st AC.

The Grip Crew

KEY GRIP – The head grip on the film crew who hires and supervises the other grips on the production. He/she would often attend preproduction meetings and location scouts to determine if any additional special equipment is needed.

BEST BOY GRIP – The chief assistant to the key grip. He/she generally assigns the other grips to specific tasks or areas of the production. He is the key person in charge of the grip crew, equipment, expendables and scheduling the required quantities for each day's work.

DOLLY GRIP – A grip whose primary responsibility is moving the dolly or crane for any type of moving shot.

GRIP – A general-purpose handyman, the movie set's counterpart of the theater's stagehand. His duties include rigging, laying dolly tracks, moving flats, setting up parallels, building platforms, placing reflectors and gobos, doing light carpentry, and generally performing tasks that require brawn. The grips are responsible for the safety of all equipment that they rig and are often assigned as safety crew to the camera operator and 1st AC on a dangerous shot.

In the USA, a grip is a skilled person responsible for the set up, adjustment and maintenance of production equipment on the set. Their typical duties involve camera movement, lighting refinement, and mechanical rigging. In the UK, grips work exclusively with equipment that the camera is mounted on.

The Lighting Crew

GAFFER – The chief electrician on a film unit, responsible for the lighting of a set under instructions from the director of photography. Under his supervision the electrical crew positions The Gaffer often supervises both the Grip and Electric crews. The head of the electrical department, responsible for the design and execution of the lighting plan for a production based on the request of the cinematographer.

BEST BOY ELECTRIC – The chief assistant to the gaffer. He/she generally assigns the electricians to specific tasks or areas of the production. He is the key person in charge of the electrical crew, equipment, expendables and scheduling the required quantities for each day's work.
ELECTRICIAN – A member of a motion picture production crew who, under the supervision of the gaffer and best boy electric, places and adjusts lights on the set, in the studio or on location. The person familiar with the electrical equipment on the set.

Additional Crew Position that may serve the camera, grip or lighting departments

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT (P.A.) – An entry level position on the film crew. This person performs a variety of tasks including preparation and distribution of scripts, call sheets, crew lists, cleaning and moving of some equipment, filling out paperwork such as time sheets, camera reports, etc. The PA may also help in the production office, run errands and any other type of work that is needed by the production.

DAY PLAYER – An additional crew member hired for one or more days due to special production needs. There may be additional cameras which necessitate additional camera and grip crew, large crowd scenes which would require an additional assistant director, etc.