PRODUCTION ASSISTANT TRAINING MANUAL
A Comprehensive Guide to “P.A.” Duties for Film, Television and Commercial Production

“A valuable experience for those seeking work on a feature film set. We hired 12 of 22 participants, some of whom we would hire again without question.”

Doug Lodato - Writer/Director/Producer - “Ticket Out”

Kenny Chaplin & Gary Romolo Fiorelli
2nd Edition
Production Assistant Training Seminar LLC (P.A.T.S.)

By Kenny Chaplin & Gary Romolo Fiorelli

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PREFACE

about

P.A.T.S

OVERVIEW

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3. Working in the film industry
4. The Production Assistant

MY NOTES

BIRTH OF A NOTION

For over twelve years Gary Fiorelli and Kenny Chaplin have led production crews on film locations in the United States, Canada, Europe and Africa. At each location they sought to hire qualified staff from a pool of local Production Assistants. They soon discovered that production training, for productions of all budget sizes, was missing. That prompted the two film industry veterans to use their technical knowledge to develop the Production Assistant Training Seminar LLC. The result benefits newcomers to the film business and the movie industry at large. As a result, this seminar was born.

FOUNDERS

Gary Fiorelli began his film career as a Production Assistant in the Washington DC/Baltimore area, working on Hollywood productions such as "In the Line of Fire," "The Pelican Brief," "Major League 2," and "A Few Good Men."

With a solid foundation of skills as a Production Assistant outside of Los Angeles, he moved to Hollywood. Once there, he worked on L.A.-based productions such as "Get Shorty," "Matilda," "Air Force One" and "Outbreak."

After many years of working Gary gained membership to the prestigious Directors Guild of America. Developing the relationships he had made during his tenure as a Production Assistant, he has now worked as an Assistant Director on such films as "Pirates of the Caribbean 1 and 2," "Runaway Jury," "Blades of Glory," "Rendition" and "Body of Lies."

Kenny Chaplin grew up on the Canadian prairies, in a small town far removed from the Hollywood film industry. On a whim, he boarded a plane for Australia in 1996 to seek employment as a Production Assistant on one of the most talked about films of the decade, Terrence Malick's "Thin Red Line." Successfully working 6 months earned him the confidence and experience to seek out productions requiring a skilled Production Assistant.

With his ability to pack-up and go, a phone call sent him on the road to Kansas City, Missouri, for the filming of Director Ang Lee's (once a PA himself) civil war drama "Ride with the Devil."

Within 10 years he had gained membership into the Director's Guild of America. He returned to Canada in 2005 after honing his skills in Los Angeles, New Orleans and Charlotte, N.C., on shows such as "Runaway Jury," "Roswell" and "Judging Amy." He is currently a member of the Director's Guild of Canada and employed as an Assistant Director. He has worked on such Canadian films such as “Surveillance”, “Ticket Out”, and “The Messengers”. 
INTRODUCTION

Production Assistant Training Seminar, LLC (P.A.T.S.) offers practical instruction for individuals seeking entry-level jobs as Production Assistants on local film, television, commercial and new media productions. The need for locally available and professionally trained production staff, especially Production Assistants, is a service that P.A.T.S. fulfills.

Our innovative instruction manual covers the following areas:

- An orientation of the motion picture industry and a detailed framework of skills required to seek employment in film, television and commercial production
- A detailed break-down of all the jobs on a film set
- Instruction in script breakdown
- Details on scheduling procedures and techniques
- An understanding of film set language, protocol, etiquette, and safety.
- An overview of production paperwork
- Protocol for dealing with cast and background performers
- A review of health and safety practices.

The primary goal of the seminar is to enable students to confidently and comfortably walk onto a film set with knowledge of the day-to-day requirements of a Production Assistant. We accomplish this by dispelling the mystery of how feature films, commercials, and television programs are made. Once an individual is skilled in production procedures, they are often able to work with ease in all levels of live and taped shows.

Most importantly, upon completion of the seminar, the participants’ contact information will be entered into our national database (www.patrainingseminar.com). This roster of Production Assistants is made available to production companies, producers, Unions, Guilds, and crew members. Our graduates add value to the local crew base, and increase the strength of the local production infrastructure.

Our extensive experience in the entertainment industry proves that our approach is of practical and valuable benefit. For more information about upcoming seminars, please visit either our website or call us at:

www.patrainingseminar.com

1-800-579-1570
Movies are huge undertakings. The production spends large amounts of money and in return demands competence. It takes a unique individual to work in this fast-paced, rewarding environment. While your emotional, mental and physical state will be challenged on a daily basis, you may find it the most exciting and rewarding industry to work in.

**Benefits to Working in Film**

- **Salary:** Many crew members on-location can make between $15-$60 per hour, and have accommodations, per diem, and transportation provided.

- **Meals:** Production companies provide complimentary high-quality food on the film set to ensure everyone is comfortable and focused on the job at hand.

- **Education:** Screenplays tell stories of the past, present and future. In film work, you’ll encounter topics and train in skills that you might never have had the opportunity to do in other occupations.

- **Travel:** Movie producers search the world for unique locations, reduced location fees and tax incentives, and often go outside the main industry centers to film their movie. Certified and experienced film workers travel all over the world.

- **People:** The film business draws people from all walks of life: truck drivers to lawyers, bartenders to politicians, scientists to athletes, etc. There’s no end to the interesting people you’ll meet.

**Challenges to Working in Film**

- **Weather:** You will work outdoors in all kinds of weather. Rain, wind, snow and sun are all required to make a movie come to life, and Hollywood doesn’t always make its own.

- **Time Commitment:** Long hours are not uncommon in film production. Many people adjust their personal schedules once a show begins. This commitment can average between 12 – 18 hours a day, 20 to 120 days per show, depending on the production.

- **Job Security:** Film workers and technicians are independent contractors. Employment is job to job, and there is no guarantee of steady employment.

Are you:

- An assertive individual with plenty of self-confidence?
- A creative person who enjoys problem solving?
- A team player who respects others?
- Willing to take direction and complete assigned tasks?
- Capable of working under pressure?
- Prepared for intermittent work?
- Able to handle a 60-70 hour workweek?
- Willing to be a self-employed, freelance contract employee?
- Physically fit and able to complete a variety of tasks?
- Able to interact with a variety of personalities?
- Able to sell yourself to others?

**If you answered “yes,” the film and television industry may be for you!**
The Production Assistant (PA)

Production companies, especially those from out-of-state, rely on local Interns and Production Assistants to get around and obtain needed supplies in the city/town they are so familiar with. Many departments use these individuals to help with the work that needs to be done for their departments. Often these are entry-level positions. An Intern, however, does not get paid. It is truly a means of getting a foot in the door and gaining experience. Often interns are film school students. Schools will often give an academic credit to the individual, in return for the work they are providing the production. Here are a few examples of positions and duties an individual might encounter:

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<td><strong>Set PA</strong></td>
<td>Works on the set, and may assist Security with crowd control; escorts actors to and from their trailers; delivers film to the airport or the processing lab; and helps load and unload equipment. He/she also assists with welcoming and processing the cast; electronic housekeeping; distribution of paperwork; liaison with the production office; orders meals. The Set PA works closely with every department, and that's a great advantage when you're getting started. Your varied experiences can help you decide if you want to specialize in a particular department.</td>
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<td><strong>Office PA</strong></td>
<td>Works in the Production Office, and may perform general office work; answers phones; makes copies of scripts, contracts and other documents; runs errands; and assists with scheduling and shipping.</td>
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<td><strong>Art Department PA</strong></td>
<td>Assists with office duties; runs errands; may assist with construction of props or set dressing.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wardrobe PA</strong></td>
<td>Assists with costumes; organizes and labels costumes; washes/irons costumes; runs errands; assists with making costumes.</td>
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<td><strong>Location PA</strong></td>
<td>Delivers contracts; puts up signs to direct workers to the set; makes and distributes maps to locations; cleans up locations after filming; runs errands.</td>
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**Production Assistant or Intern**

Previous experience is not necessary, as you will often be told what to do and how to do it. A dependable car and a cell phone are an assets. Make certain to list these on your résumé. On your voice-mail make your outgoing message short and professional. Primarily the Production Office, Assistant Director, and Location departments will use PA's in one manner or another.
If you do not have any training or direct experience in your field of choice:

- Familiarize yourself with the job description and the qualifications required of the Departments that you wish to apply to.
- Contact IATSE, DGA and your local Film Commission for training programs.
- Contact the local University or College film department about becoming a volunteer on school projects.
- From time to time requests are made for volunteers on small projects and low-budget (non-union) films. While IATSE & DGA may have little involvement or agreements with these projects, both organizations are willing to be of assistance. This service is meant to help encourage use of people who are trying to gain experience in the film industry.

Education

A PA doesn't have to have a college degree, though it can be helpful. With or without a degree, you greatly increase your chances of being hired if you have a usable skill and a lot of enthusiasm. Although you may have made straight A's in college in directing, lighting and editing, production companies don't hire beginners to direct or edit. They hire them as PA's.

Beneficial courses at high school or college include film/video production and theater. Learn as much as you can about the technical side of theater (lighting, makeup, set construction, etc.) because much of this knowledge is directly applicable to film production, too. Other worthwhile studies may include computer classes, art, photography, sewing, carpentry and metalworking.

Almost any professional skill can be used to some degree in film production: accounting, interior design, architecture, fashion design, music, computer programming, sign painting, aviation, hairdressing, welding, catering, etc.

Earnings

How much you earn depends on how much you work. PA's are typically paid by the day, with the fee varying between $75 and $200, depending on the budget of the film. Based on the types of tasks you will need to do, you will probably average $150 dollars a day or $500 a week. 401K plans and health benefits must be worked out on your own.

Benefits

For some people, it's a dream job. It's fulfilling, fascinating work and it's about as far from an 8-to-5 office job as you can get. There are three free meals a day while you're working, plus all the snacks, fruit and soft drinks you want. There is time off between jobs whenever you wish. You have a great deal of personal freedom in making your career choices, and there's plenty of room to advance into positions with more creativity and responsibility.

People who work in film and television production love what they do and wouldn't want to do anything else!
TALES FROM THE FIELD

Assistant Directing Department
By K. Chaplin - 2nd AD

Seeing outside the ‘little’ box

The Assistant Directors are responsible for ensuring everything is in place for the Director to ‘roll camera’. Our team ensures that the various departments haven’t overlooked any elements. We are obligated to see the bigger picture of a day’s work, to see outside the box. If you were to draw a pictogram of little boxes, you’d label each with every department. If you were to then draw a larger box around all the smaller ones and label it “AD’s”, you’d get a sense of why the request is often heard to “see outside the ‘little’ box” when a problem arises. Every request, in some way, affects another department. This should be understood, acknowledged, and respected.

Set Cell Phone

During production, the 1st AD primarily looks after ‘today’. The 2nd AD primarily looks after ‘tomorrow’. The 2nd 2nd AD and Key Set PA look after ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’. The SET cell phone is assigned to the AD who resides on set with the 1st AD, be it the 2nd 2nd AD or the Key Set PA. Its use is two-fold: for the crew to call the Production office (i.e. camera dept. needs to order film) and for the Production Office to call the Set (i.e. the UPM wants to know ‘where are you at in the day?’). The 2nd AD’s cell phone need ONLY be called regarding matters of scheduling, tomorrow and beyond. Lastly, personal calls on the Set cell phone are unprofessional.

The Production Assistant

The five key skills all Production Assistants should have are strong Communication skills, a calm Disposition, Multi-tasking abilities, Foresight, and Follow through. A first-rate PA always asks questions, has a cell phone (on vibrate), a vehicle, schedule flexibility and perseverance. There are many wanna-be’s lined up behind you.

What Time is Lunch? Well Nobody Told Me!

A Call Sheet has ALL the information any crew member will most ever need to know for the days shooting. A shooting schedule, also, has all the elements and information required for the entire run-of-production. Call sheet formatting is fairly standard, and therefore people know where to look for specific information. Yet, I always get someone asking, “What time is lunch today?” If they spent a second and looked at the Call sheet, they’d know. I love handing out Call sheets with a bold general crew call time of 08:00am stamped at the top, and hearing, “Sooo … call time is 08:00am tomorrow?”
CONCLUSION

A great many professionals in the entertainment industry began their careers as Production Assistants. It is the first and best way to see up-close what goes on behind the camera. Being on set will allow you to observe the many different crafts associated with film and television production. Invariably, you will find the thing that you like best. Maybe you'll be drawn to working with cameras; perhaps doing hair and make-up will really speak to you; or maybe you'll just want to blow stuff and get paid for it.

The skills you develop as a Production Assistant will help you, no matter which aspect of the film industry you decide to become a part of. Yes, you will work long hours; yes, you'll face inclement weather and grueling conditions. Additionally, being the "low man on the totem pole" can take its toll.

But think about it. What other job pays you to travel around the world, hang out with amazingly creative people, walk on the bridge of the Enterprise, travel back in time to key historical moments, or visit worlds populated by creatures never seen before? The great Director Robert Altman (M*A*S*H, McCabe and Mrs. Miller, Nashville, Gosford Park) once said...

"Filmmaking is a chance to live many lifetimes."

THAT'S A WRAP! SEE YOU AT THE MOVIES!

Thank you from Kenny & Gary!

If you have any questions, comments and requests
Please let us know!

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Submit your resume to:
www.patrainingseminar.com

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