Kyle Ernst

The Duties of an Assistant Director

A director’s right-hand man. During production, one of a director's’ greatest, if not the greatest assets are his/her director’s assistant. When a director is wound up in making decisions it’s good to have someone whose primary role is to take on a chunk of the workload. This makes an Assistant Director a crucial role in the filmmaking process.

What does an AD (Assistant Director) do? Well in pre-production someone needs to plan out the filming schedule, tweaking it to when actors and locations are available. Speaking of locations, the AD plans where to go and when alongside the films’ location scouts. It’s alright to compromise, but trying to settle with nothing less that perfect is a good tactic. While on-set the AD gives upcoming instructions to make the day run smoother and on course with the schedule they planned out. While the director is busy working on what is currently being shot, the AD focuses on what next will be shot.

The good news is there’s no formal education required for the job, but if they think it’ll be a cakewalk they’re dead wrong. They should have some familiarity with camera operation, lighting, sound, framing, and a general know how of how things work. They don’t need to know how to operate a camera perfectly, and it’s okay to assign crew members to do jobs they can’t, after all it’s what they do. This job is intense to take on, that being said the AD often has their own sidekick known as the Second Assistant Director. With even more help, the director can focus more on the creative aspects of a film. With all the help they can keep on schedule and not push back their shooting days. If it’s all done correctly, the producers of the film should be smiling.

But what makes someone worthy of being an AD? What characteristics should they have which proves they can do the job correctly? At the core of it a good AD is a good leader. That also means they should be assertive, but not dominate and crush other team members. They should also be good at managing the time they have and plan for whatever comes next: take initiative! They should be able to multitask and prioritize certain tasks all the while being flexible and reliable. Their communication skills are on par and they are a great problem solver. They need to commit from pre-production to post, and being committed to knowing as much as possible. As stressing as it sound the AD should keep a positive attitude through it, confidence is key.

The AD oversees equipment, props, the storyboard, the call sheet, health, safety, even down to checking the weather. They help at making a film consistent, and not have it sunny in one shot then a dramatic weather change in the next without making the viewer believe time has passed in the film.

What needs to always float in their minds is the budget that they can’t go over. What can they do and what can’t they do based solely on the money they can spend. Films get expensive fast, and that number can go up fast, so it’s something the AD has to keep an eye on. The job itself is stressful when juggling so many important tasks simultaneously, yet can be very rewarding.

 It’s important that there is a level of maintaining order for all day-to-day operations on-set. The real world can be ugly, stressful, and hectic; with the extra hands to assist the director, things can run smoother and so can overall production, and that is what makes an Assistant Director so vital in film production.