

What is an assistant director?



The first AD controls timing and work flow on set

Feature films of any scale have at least three assistant directors and they often hire casual assistant directors for crowd and action scenes.

The roles of director and first assistant director are clearly differentiated. On set, the director is concerned with the creative effect of action, performance, lighting and camera movement, all of the images and sound that are recorded by the camera. The first assistant director is responsible for the timing and work flow of everything and everybody on set.

The first assistant director is heavily involved with pre-production. They break down the script to identify all the elements that need to be considered in the shooting schedule, and produce a first draft schedule, which will be constantly modified. They also brief the producer, director and all heads of department about elements that are particularly important, such as whether the scene must be shot at sunrise or night.

They make sure the shooting schedule is as cost-effective as possible. They are required to ensure that the shooting schedule provides wet weather cover in the case of rain. They also monitor the director's schedule during pre-production, prepare the rehearsal schedule and create the final shooting schedule.

The first assistant director's job is one of delicate balance. In the producer's eyes, they are responsible for running the set on time and on budget. In the director's eyes, they are responsible for organising whatever is needed on set to realise the director's creative vision.

During production, the first assistant director is always at the director's side, organising the work on set, and fielding the many questions that arise.

They establish a shot list with the director for each shooting day. Within the shoot, they plan out the shots in the most efficient order possible. They might, for example, film actors arriving at the location while grips are laying down dolly tracks for later scenes.

They brief the crew about the order of the day – camera, lighting, grips, sound, art department – so they can organise their work and equipment in detail.

When shooting is about to commence, it's the first assistant director who calls for quiet and final checks. They call, "Roll sound." When the sound department confirms that sound is rolling, they say, "Mark it!" The clapper loader steps into frame with a slate showing the scene and take number. Then, it's the director's job to call, "Action."

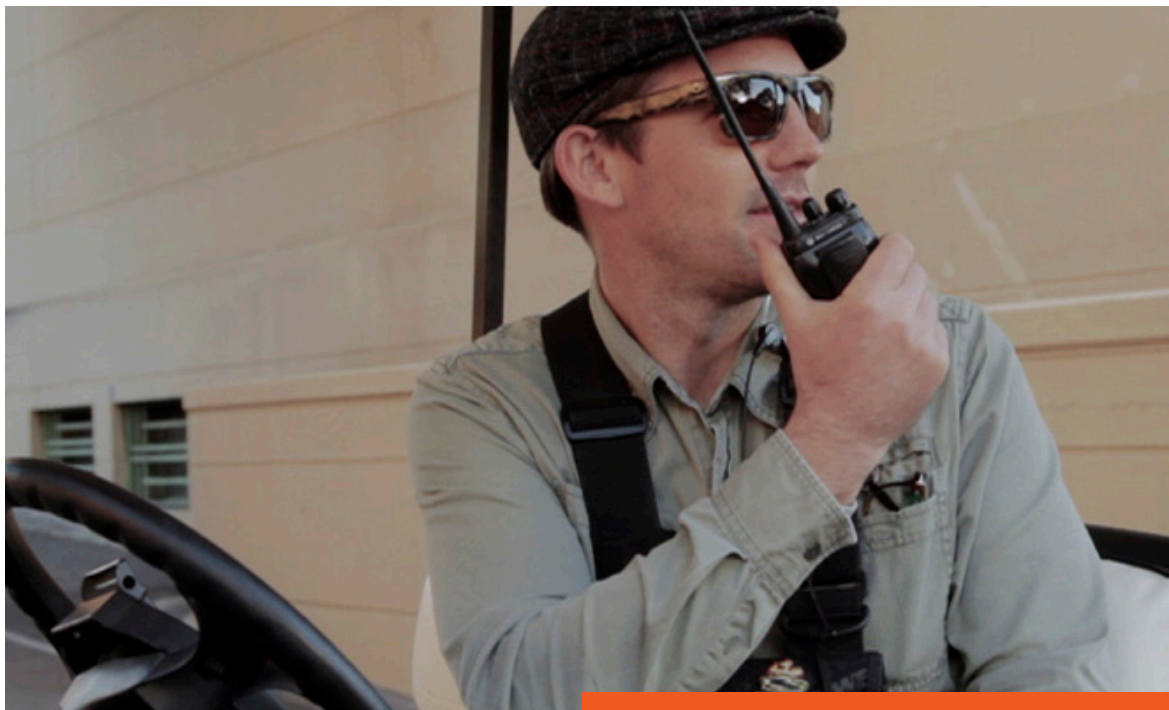
During the shooting day, the assistant director will also approve the next day's call sheet before it goes to the production office. They discuss any issues that have occurred with the production manager, such as costuming or catering. They also discuss any issues that involve the creative elements of the film with the producer. Perhaps the director is asking for too many takes. Maybe the lead actor is unhappy with the glasses he's been asked to wear. Or the director has asked for fake tattoos to be applied to the villain, but it's going to take too long to put them on each morning. If the weather is looking uncertain, the first assistant director checks that all the departments are ready to move to the weather cover set or location in the case of rain.

At the end of a well-run shoot the first assistant director thanks all concerned for a great job and heads off to their next gig.

[Click here to view interview with assistant director Killian Maguire](#)

Useful resources:

- [The Job of an Assistant Director](#)
- [Movie Set Job Description: Assistant Directors](#)
- [Creative Skillset: First assistant director](#)
- [Working as a 1st Assistant Director](#)
- [Scary Cow: Assistant Director](#)



The AD briefs the crew about the order of shots for each shoot day

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