

Topic no. 54

The Film People

The Director of Photography

A **cinematographer** or **director of photography** (sometimes shortened to DP or DOP) is the chief over the camera and lighting crews working on a film, television production or other live action piece and is responsible for achieving artistic and technical decisions related to the image. Directors of Photography (DoPs) are key Heads of Department on film productions and theirs is one of the major creative roles. They provide a film with its unique visual identity, or look.

DoPs must discover the photographic heart of a screenplay, using a variety of source material including stills photography, painting, other films, etc.

They create the desired look using lighting, framing, camera movement, etc. DoPs collaborate closely with the camera crew (Camera Operator, 1st and 2nd Assistant Camera, Camera Trainee and Grips).

During filming, DoPs also work closely with the Gaffer (who runs the lighting team), the Production Designer, Costume Designer, and the Hair and Make-up Department.

After reading the screenplay, DoPs meet with the Director to discuss the visual style of the film. They conduct research and preparation including carrying out technical recce of locations. They prepare a list of all required camera equipment, including lights, film stock, camera, cranes and all accessories etc., for the production office to order.

During preparation DoPs also test special lenses, filters or film stocks, checking that the results fit with the Director's vision for the film.

On each day of principal photography, DoPs and their camera crews arrive early on set to prepare the equipment. During rehearsals, the Director and DoP block (decide the exact movements of both actors and camera) the shots as the actors walk through their actions, discussing any special camera moves or lighting requirements with the Camera Operator, Gaffer and Grip.

Each shot is marked up for focus and framing by the 1st AC, and, while the actors finish make-up and costume, the DoP oversees the lighting of the set for the first take.

On smaller films, DoPs often also operate the camera during the shoot. At the end of each shooting day, DoPs prepare for the following day's work and check that all special requirements (cranes, Steadicams, remote heads, long or wide lenses, etc.) have been ordered. They also usually view the rushes (raw footage) with the Director.

During post production, DoPs attend the digital grading of the film, which may involve up to three weeks of intensive work.

Most DoPs work on commercials and promos as well as on feature films. Although the hours are long, and some foreign travel may be required, the work is highly creative and very rewarding.