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Chapter 5 Quiz

Question 1

The assistant director’s job is to take charge of everything that happens on set for the director. Often the role of assistant director is broken down into different sub-roles. The first assistant director has the overall assistant director responsibilities and supervises the second assistant director, while being directly responsible to the director. The first assistant director is also responsible for calling the role. The first assistant director’s job is one of the highest below the line roles in filmmaking and their role is non-creative. They are responsible for keeping the production on schedule, communicating with all the crew, and keep safety and security for the shot and the staff. It is a good skill for the first assistant director to be able to estimate how long a scene will take.

There is also the second assistant director, whose job is to create call sheets daily from the production schedule, cooperating with the production coordinator. The second assistant director also manages things backstage, such as cooperating with actors, managing the cast as they go through make-up and wardrobe. The second assistant director does this to be able to relieve the first assistant director of those jobs, allowing him to focus on other things. The second assistant director is also supposed to supervise the second second assistant director, third assistant director, assistant director trainees, and background extras.

The second second assistant director is used when there is a large or complicated production, allowing the two assistant directors (second and second second) to split the tasks of backstage manager and call sheet production.

The third assistant director works on set with the first assistant director and may cooperate with the second assistant director to move actors to and from base camp (production, cast, hair, and makeup trailers), organize crowd scenes, and supervise production assistants. There is no clear distinction between second and third assistant director, and although the Directors Guild of America has objectively defined the roles, others think the distinction is subjective.

The fourth assistant director, or additional assistant director, or key production assistant, may have several jobs. One of the most common jobs is to help with the extra work load of the second and third assistant director, maybe helping with call sheet production or helping manage backstage. Another more common job of a key production assistant is to help the first and third director manage extras in a scene where there are many them. Sometimes additional assistant directors help work with more complex scenes, like stunts, or works dedicatedly to the first assistant director to direct and control the other assistant directors to the first assistant director’s and actual director’s satisfaction.

The sub-roles differ in different countries however. For example, in North America a distinction between second and third assistant director is more common. In British and Australian productions, instead of hiring a second second assistant director, they hire 2 second assistant directors, if needed.

Question 2

Below the line refers to the people in the production area who are primarily responsible for physically getting the film done. Above the line is generally referred to as the creative side, or as the book may say, “the head and heart of the film.” Therefore the below the line is generally regarded as the noncreative side, although there can be great creativity in that area.

Question 3

PAs are important on the film set because they do all the jobs that none of the others should have to focus on, but still need to be done. PAs must be punctual and arrive places before they are expected; flexible and be able to adapt quickly to changes and mistakes; clear in what they say or write; calm, even when things are going wrong; attentive, so they are able to do what they are told reliably; professional and not act or look sloppy; resourceful and vigilant, always doing things even before they’re asked; brave, so that they can give directions or ask questions when needed; and responsible, so that they can own up to their mistakes and be serious about the job.