The role of an Assistant Director on a film includes tracking daily progress against the filming production schedule, arranging logistics, preparing daily call sheets, checking cast and crew, and maintaining order on the set. They also have to take care of the health and safety of the crew. There could be two or more assistant directors. The first assistant director’s main duties are assisting the director, co-ordinating all production activity, and supervising the cast and crew. They are also in charge of a department of other assistant directors and runners.

Overall, they provide the key link between the director, cast and crew, whilst also liaising with the production office, and providing regular progress reports about the shoot. Before the shoot, the first assistant director main task is to create the filming schedule, working in careful consultation with the director. When drawing up the shooting schedule, must also be aware of the budget, cast availability and script coverage. Preparing the storyboard, overseeing the hiring of locations, props and equipment and checking weather reports are all key pre-production duties for first AD. The Second AD's main function is to ensure that all of the First AD's orders and directions are carried out. On each day of a shoot, second AD must prepare and draw up the next day's call sheet. These details must be approved by the production office before the second AD can distribute the call sheet to the cast and crew. Ensuring that everyone knows their call time is a key responsibility any delay to filming due to bad time-keeping negatively affects the day's schedule and budget, and is considered unprofessional and inefficient. Once the day's filming has begun, second AD must ensure that all actors are ready for filming, which means co-ordinating any transport requirements, as well as make-up and wardrobe timetables. In some cases, second AD may also be in charge of finding extras, sometimes in large numbers at short notice, and arranging their transport to, and activities on, the set or location. Second AD work on a freelance basis and the job involves long and unsocial hours. The main function of the Third Assistant Director is to manage the movement and activities of background artists.

Third AD co-ordinate the extras to arrive at the right time and place for filming. Once the extras are on set or location, third Ad prepare and cue them, and sometimes also direct them in any required background action.They must also supervise and look after the extras they may be on standby on the set or location all day, despite only being needed for a short period. Third AD may have to keep members of the public out of shot and off the set or location, so that they don't interrupt filming, cast or crew. They may also liaise with the Location Manager, and may be given responsibilities with regard to the security and locking up of studios or locations after filming has taken place. First AD or second AD may also provide third AD with specific information to add to the daily progress reports before they are sent to the production office.

The role of an Assistant to the Director is often confused with Assistant Director but the responsibilities are entirely different. The Assistant to the Director manages all of the Director's in development, pre-production, while on set, through post-production and is often involved in both personal management as well as creative aspects of the production process. Historically, Assistant to Director was a stepping stone to directing work: Alfred Hitchcock was an AD, as was James Mc Teigue. This transition into film directing is no longer common in feature films. It is more common now for an Assistant to the Director to transition to a production management or producer role than to directing.