

# Assistant director

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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.<sup>[1]</sup> 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 McTeigue. 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.

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## Sub-roles

Often, the role of assistant director is broken down into the following sub-roles:

- The **first assistant director** (first or 1AD) has overall AD responsibilities and supervises the second AD. The "first" is directly responsible to the director and "runs" the floor or set. The first AD and the unit production manager are two of the highest "below the line" technical roles in filmmaking (as opposed to creative or "above the line" roles) and so, in this strict sense, the role of first AD is non-creative.<sup>[2]</sup> Their responsibility is to keep the production on schedule throughout the day, communicate to the entire crew, and to maintain the safety and security of the staff and shot itself. An assistant director must be very good at estimating how long a scene will take. (Sometimes a scene running a few pages long on the screenplay can be shot relatively quickly, while a half page emotional key moment may take all day).<sup>[3][4]</sup>
- The **second assistant director** (second or 2AD) creates the daily call sheets from the production schedule,<sup>[5]</sup> in cooperation with the production coordinator. The "second" also serves as the "backstage manager", liaising with actors, putting cast through make-up and wardrobe, which relieves the "first" of these duties. Supervision of the second second assistant director, third assistant director, assistant director trainees, and the setting of background (extras) are parts of the "second's" duties.<sup>[6]</sup>
- The **second second assistant director** (second second or 22AD) deals with the increased workload of a large or complicated production. For example, a production with a large number of cast may require the



- division of the aspects of backstage manager and the call sheet production work to two separate people.
- The **third assistant director** (third or 3AD) works on set with the "First" and may liaise with the "Second" to move actors from base camp (the area containing the production, cast, and hair and makeup trailers), organize crowd scenes, and supervise one or more production assistants (PA). There is sometimes no clear distinction between a 2AD and a 3AD. Although some industry bodies such as the Directors Guild of America have defined the roles in an objective way, others believe it to be a subjective distinction.<sup>[7]</sup>
  - The **additional assistant director** (AAD or Additional) or **fourth assistant director** (4AD or "fourth") or "key production assistant" (key PA) may have a number of duties. Most commonly, the AAD has two broad job functions. One is the contraction of the duties of an AD where the AD acts as both second AD and third AD simultaneously. For example, a production with a large number of cast may pass the 2AD call sheet production work to that of the AAD, especially when the 2AD is already performing the additional work of a third AD. The other main use of an AAD is as an adjunct to the 3AD and 1AD for logistically large scenes where more ADs are needed to control large numbers of extras. The "Additional" may also serve where the complexity of the scene or specialized elements within it (stunts, period work) require or are best served by a dedicated AD in most respects equal to a first AD - directing and controlling a number of other ADs to direct action to the satisfaction of the 1AD and the director.
  - A production assistant is one of the lowest crew in a film's hierarchy in terms of salary<sup>[8]</sup> and authority. They perform various duties required of them by ADs.

The sub-roles of assistant directors differ among nations. For example, the distinction between second second AD and third AD is more common in North America. British and Australian productions, rather than having a second second AD, will hire a "second" 2AD experienced in the same duties, and trained to the same level, to allow a division of the duties. 3ADs in Britain and Australia have different duties from a second second AD, and the terms are not synonymous.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Calling the roll

One of the first AD's most important responsibilities is to "call the roll" — that is, call out a series of specific cues for each take to ensure that all cast and crew on set are aware of exactly what is going on so they can perform their particular role at the appropriate moment. Over the years, special procedures have been developed for this task to achieve maximum efficiency during shooting, which are usually some variant of the following:

1. "Waiting on..." Though not technically part of calling the roll, first ADs may keep the set focused by frequently calling out which department is responsible for a delay in rolling a take. If the lights need to be adjusted, the first AD calls out, "waiting on lighting". If the actors are still in their trailer, the first AD calls out "Waiting on talent," etc. However, such calls can be regarded as applying excessive pressure to the department in question.
2. "Final checks, please" (or "last looks"). Once everyone is in place, and rehearsals and blocking have finished, the first AD calls out, "final checks" or "checks." This is the signal for any last minute adjustments, especially to hair, makeup, wardrobe and props.
3. Traditionally, the first AD calls "quiet on the set." However, it is more common in current productions to hear first "Picture is up!" (or "Rehearsal's up" accordingly) followed by "Quiet please!" to alert everyone that the take is ready and imminent. "Lock it down" or more commonly "Lock it Up" is also a signal (particularly on location) to ensure nothing interrupts the take. This call is crucial for third assistant