A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

MAKING YOUR FILM

(ON A BUDGET)

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WELCOME!

Thank you for investing in your creative journey and letting me be a part of your filmmaking community!

I started this community when a prominent film organization in my area that catered to beginner filmmakers announced that they were shutting down. I built relationships through this organization that opened my eyes to all the possibilities of filmmaking.

I'd tried to join budget filmmaking Facebook groups and I was surprised by how judgmental and— at times — ignorant they were. Needless to say, they weren't for me. But how was I, let alone anyone else, supposed to learn how to make a low-budget film? What if I hadn't found that film organization and only had judgmental Facebook losers to tell me "no"?

No one should feel afraid to ask how to format a script or mocked when asking about free software and affordable equipment that can produce quality results. No one should feel alone in an industry as collaborative as filmmaking. That's why I'm here.

I hope you learn something new from this guide, and please, if you have any feedback send it over to covencreates@gmail.com.

Cheers,
Coven

FINDING YOUR STORY

Story trumps everything. I've watched beautiful cinematic films that have underdeveloped stories and I've watched student films with compelling stories. Guess which ones stuck with me. Now is the your time to ask yourself: what kind of stories do I find interesting? What messages do I want to give to my future audience and what is the most effective way to tell my story?

Once you have that in mind, now is the time to get real - you don't have a budget! So you are limited to what you and your community has access to. Take inventory so you can compare your resources to the story you want to tell and meet somewhere in the middle.

LOCATION

I typically like to keep everything in 1 location for simplicity's sake. Consider people who are close to you and have access to a space. Are your parents okay with you filming in their home? Does your friend have a cute apartment they doesn't mind you being in? Well, those are your locations!

PROPS

I've known some filmmakers to write an entire story around a cool prop they have. Whether it's normal, everyday items or weird ventriloquist puppets - use whatever you know you have guaranteed access to!

ACTORS & CREW

If you grew up around actors, you would know how many of them love being in front of the camera. A few might be interested in being behind it as well, so reach out to our friends and family. Let them know what you're doing so they have the opportunity to help you make something amazing!

CULTIVATING YOUR COMMUNITY

Once you have the project and you understand the scope, now is the time to assemble your cast and crew. But how do you know who to trust?

Networking! Before you shoot a project, connect with other filmmakers in your area, try to get on a set or two. The best way to know who to work with is to work with them.

I find my networking events and set opportunities primarily through Facebook groups for filmmakers and creatives. You can also use Eventbrite or Meetup to scope out the networking events in your area!

Once you're at these events, you might feel intimidated - that's okay! I've been at events talking to people who've worked with household names and I've met people who have never made a film. It's not a competition, everyone is looking to connect.

As long as you come with authentic intentions and ask genuine, engaging questions, you will start to find your community as you continuously go to events.

If you're an introverted creative that is looking to build friendships I've got a list of my go-to questions in my **Networking Playbook**! These questions help me build genuine friendships while figuring out how we can help each other out without sounding too stuffy. **You can grab yours here!**

Don't immediately ask for a favor, stay open and curious about the people you're meeting, and stay connected! After a good conversation, grab that person's socials or phone number. It's not weird as long as you respect their boundaries.

CASTING & CREW CALLS

Building your cast and crew can be tricky because you don't know who you work well with until you work with them. As a director, I don't like taking risks when building my crew. I need people who I know are going to show up and kill it, but if I want to involve a new face, I try to get recommendations from people whose judgment I trust.

If that's not an option, there are a few things you should keep in mind when creating a call: What, Who, Where, Role, and Compensation.

WHAT?

What kind of production are you putting on? Give them a summary of the story and genre. Is it a feature or a short film? Is it a student film? These are the kinds of things people need to know for time commitment, building their reel, etc.

WHO?

Who is putting this production on? A production company? You and some film friends? Let them know who they're talking to so it doesn't feel anonymous.

WHERE?

Where is the shoot taking place? You don't have to give an exact address. City and state should do.

ROLE?

What role will they be playing? Tell them things about the character like their name, age, and any important physical characteristics about the character that you'd like the actors to have: tattoos, beard, etc.

COMPENSATION?

Ideally, this would be money and if you have a small amount to give like 50 a day, actors and crew still appreciate that. If you don't have money to offer, that's okay! Offer to provide meals, credit, and a copy of the footage.

The same things apply to a crew call, except role description would be replaced with crew positions you are looking to add to your production!

CREATING YOUR CAST

Your actors are the heartbeat of your film, cast a wide net so you have plenty of options. Alternatively, you can act in it yourself! You might feel like that's one less thing to worry about, but it could make things more complicated if you're directing the project as well.

PRINICIPAL ROLES

These roles are considered the leads of your film and typically have a lot of lines. The camera spends a lot of time following this character's story. Think Clark Kent in Superman or Jesse Pinkman in Breaking Bad.

BACKGROUND ACTORS

These are the people you see in the background of a shot. Shoppers at the mall, a family at the park, etc. They don't have lines, but they still have a story and it's their job to fill out the world in a subtler, more visual way.

BUILDING YOUR CREW

When you ask someone to work with you on a film, you should keep these two things in mind:

What responsibilities are you comfortable with trusting someone else to fulfill? What position do those responsibilities fall under?

There are A LOT of roles in film. The bigger the set, the more positions there are. On smaller sets with less production demand, there tends to be more overlap in responsibilities. When I'm putting a crew together, I focus on these 7 roles because I know they are essential to meeting most indie production needs.

It's important to note that if you're producing the project yourself, you will more than likely be filling multiple roles. These are loose guidelines but at the end of the day, it takes a village!

DIRECTOR

The director is the captain of the ship. This role is interested in guiding the creative vision for the project and conveying it to the cast and crew.

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Your cinematographer is running the camera and working directly with the director to make the visual aspect of the film connect with the mood of the script.

GAFFER

A gaffer works with the cinematographer to make sure the scenes are lit to the director's liking.

SOUND RECORDIST

A sound recordist is responsible for recording production audio and verifying that background noise hasn't messed up a take. There needs to be an open, proactive line of communication between the director and the audio recordist because it's very important to know when an audio take is unusable.

2ND ASSISTANT CAMERA

Your 2nd AC will stand in front of your camera with a clapboard before every take and announce what scene, shot, and take you're on. It's very helpful for the editing process! Sometimes a production assistant does this, but I recommend that you assign a specific person.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

A good PA proactively assists the production in any way necessary. On smaller sets, this role tends to fill in for roles that haven't been assigned, so thank your PAs and don't take them for granted.

BEHIND-THE-SCENES PHOTOGRAPHER

BTS Photographers capture behind-the-scenes photos for memories and - if you care to go down this rabbithole - play a key role in marketing your film.

If you're wondering how to get on set in one of these roles, often, the answer is to show what you're capable of by producing your own work and nurturing relationships with other creatives along the way. We'll discuss how to do that in the next chapter.

ORGANIZING YOUR PRODUCTION

Productions take a lot of planning to run smoothly, even short films. I've spent hours on pre-production just to make sure my sets are as seamless as possible because I value the cast and crew's time.

Depending on your production and your creative process, the documents you'll want to include in your pre-production process may vary. No matter the production, I always have a shot list, storyboards, and a production schedule.

A shot list is just what it sounds like, a list of shots you'll need to get on the day of the shoot. It can be as detailed or vague as you'd like, but make sure you've gone over it with your cinematographer before the shoot. Getting the actors to rehearse in the space while you go over the script with your cinematographer will help you fix any oversights with the blocking and shot composition. Doing this before the production date has saved me hours on set!

Storyboards supplement your shot list by visualizing the image you plan to achieve. I would recommend doing this for shots you have a specific vision for. On my first film, I made storyboards for every shot and didn't use most of them. Things change once you're on set, so stay open-minded and ready to adjust your plan.

Lastly, production schedules keep your cast and crew on the same page with the scenes you plan to shoot that day, what location you're shooting at, and most importantly, when they're going to have lunch.

I like to add a call sheet to the production schedule so everyone has access to each other's contact information and the schedule for the day all in one document.

This will prevent people from coming up to you to ask questions while you're working with your actors or cinematographer. It seems small now, but once you're on set you'll be glad you did.

If this all sounds overwheming, that's okay - it is! I've been producing for years and it's still hard to keep track of everything, that's why I created a **Pre-Productino Workbook** so you can spend less time tracking down paperwork and more time creating your film!

STEAL MY FILM KIT

You don't need all the fancy gadgets you see online to make a film. If you've got a camera and a couple of lamps, invest in audio. If you've got a way to record sound, invest in lighting.

After searching through all of my old Amazon orders, I found everything I bought when I started building my film kit and if I couldn't find the original item (some of my orders were *that* old), I did some digging via product description and reviews to find an equivalent.

I prefer buying mid-priced equipment because I find that it provides better quality and the material is built to last longer, but I understand people might need something just to get started! That's why I linked my TikTok Shop as well, you'll find some insanely inexpensive products on there.

Remember: it's not about your equipment, but what you do with it!

Before we get into physical products, I want to mention a free digital product that will raise the creative bar in your editing process. Davinci Resolve is unmatched in the sheer value that the free version of their editing software will give you. I don't have an affiliate link, I just love their product!

MY SOLO-FILMMAKING KIT

These are filmmaking staples I use anytime I want to create something solo or on the go!

FILMMAKER FINDS SERIES

You can find all of the products I review in my Filmmaker Finds series on TikTok and Instagram here! These products are what I use for film sets and content creation!

TIK TOP SHOP

Product equivalents from my solo-filmmaking kit and Filmmaker Finds series here, the prices are lower and there is a wide variety to choose from.

The links I've provided are affiliate links, if you buy a product through them you're supporting my efforts to continue building our community. These are items I've personally used or heard good things about. Contact me if you have recommendations you'd like the community to know about!

STAY IN TOUCH!

I hope I could offer you a fresh perspective on filmmaking! I know how hard it is to get started so it means a lot to me that you invested time in developing your creative process with me.

This community is here to support you so stay in touch! Reach out and introduce yourself, share your filmmaking wins, let us know which areas you want to improve in, and ask questions!

I truly believe that we grow better together so if you see someone struggling with their creative process, please pay it forward. Whether that's talking with them or helping them out on set, you never know how much one set of helping hands matters.

Until next time, keep creating!

Coven