PRODUCTION

In the shooting stage the director works to put the film ‘in the can.’ As well as creatively executing the shooting of the film, the director must try to keep on budget and on schedule.

Each time the camera changes position, it is called a set up. Set ups and shots are almost always the same. But if the action changes, or is condensed, or if the lens changes, it is a different shot. When making a shot list the director has to be aware of how many shots and set ups they can do per scene and per shooting day.

The normal procedure is to discuss the scene in it’s entirety with the First AD and Cinematographer, and then outline the order of the set ups. For example if there is to be a lighting change in the scene the director will want to shoot all of the shots with the same lighting, before the change. Obviously this will save time.

The director then blocks the shot and outlines the duration of each shot. Many scenes are covered in master shots, or two or three master shots, that are usually wide shots that accommodate all of the action. The director then will shoot particular shots (close ups, two shots, reverse angles) to cut with the masters.

BLOCKING

Blocking the actors lets the camera, lighting, and sound personnel know how to position for the shot. The shot may mean a dolly or tracking move. The director may rehearse the actors, or do a last minute run through while the technical crew gets ready. When they are ready the actors run through the scene, and the technical crew makes last minute adjustments. They are now ready for a take. The first assistant director asks the unit to standby, and calls for the camera and sound to start.
When ready, someone from the Camera department says rolling and from the sound department says speed. The Director calls action and the action starts. It does not stop until the director yells cut.

At times others yell 'cut' if there is a technical problem. Otherwise at the end of the take, the director may say it's good, or call for another one. After a good take the procedure is to check the technical end of things. When it is confirmed to be good for sound, camera, and the director, the shot is done and it is on to the next set up.

CONTINUITY AND COVERAGE

In shooting scenes, the director is aware of continuity. This means being aware of the action axis, screen direction, eye lines, and the dialogue and movement of performers. As well the director must know how to overlap the action and provide exits and entrances in frames for the editing. The script supervisor will point out any problems. But the director has to know how to block and position the camera with continuity in mind.

The director also has to provide coverage for the scene. This is to make sure there are enough shots of any given action to allow the editor to maximize the story telling potential for the film. The director may choose to cover material in several long takes, or may have a style of many short shots. Directors have to balance and select the ways they choose to cover the material. Different kinds of scenes call for different coverage and shot duration.

Practicality is also an issue. If the director realizes a long take isn’t going to play in its entirety, the director may not bother with additional takes, if they get the part they want. They may then move the camera to a new angle.
RUSHES

At the end of the shooting day or night, the director along with some others, (depending on the style of the production) will view the rushes of the previous day’s shooting. This is an important form of feedback. Various departments can check their work. The director can see the performances, and subsequently correct things if needed. The director can also begin a dialogue with the editor about the material. The director may also be taking notes about re-shoots, pick up shots, or second unit material that may be required.

WORKING APPROACHES

Since schedules alter, budgets become problematic, and Murphy and all of his cousins love film shoots, the director has to remain flexible, and the art of directing incorporates within it’s realm the art of compromise. Another useful requirement for directing is to be decisive. A film shoot may have anywhere from 10 to a 100 people at work. If the director is indecisive or constantly changing their mind, the unit has to wait or constantly switch gears. Indecision and tension from the director has an effect on the morale and efficiency of the crew, and usually the film suffers.

Many directors have themselves done various jobs on films. They need to have an understanding of the various crew roles and responsibilities, and as in most work situations, mutual respect for people and their work has beneficial results.

In terms of the cast, the director should never berate an actor or reveal impatience or dissatisfaction in front of the crew or other performers. All direction of actors can be done in a positive fashion. The director can also always take a cast member aside, or ease the tension by calling for a short break. The director should never ‘act out’ how they want dialogue spoken or someone to move. This gives the actor very little room to work. Actors are hired in the first place for what they can bring to the part. A smart director lets them bring it.
There is a great and wonderful tradition in film making, in which cast and crew alike try to give the director what they want. Personnel realize the director is making the film, and if they do well, the film reflects well on all who participated and made creative contributions. Directors work with this good will, and it is significant if they lose it, because of the way they treat people.

There’s a joke about film making that if you have a good crew and cast, the director can ‘phone the shots in’ as everyone can make the film if you let them. The director deals with complex situations and tasks that may be overwhelming. The key for the director is not to lose control of the film, and to ensure you are controlling it, not having it control you.

The ideal director not only has a great visual sense and story telling sense, but knows how to fit these two together. They know how to work with people to get the best out of them. They are flexible, decisive, and are able to think on their feet to find creative solutions. Directing is the most difficult task in film making, and also the most rewarding.
POST PRODUCTION

Directors usually shoot with an idea of how the pieces should fit together. They also indicate what takes they like or parts of takes they prefer for performance. They also may have thoughts about sound effects, music, voice over or other creative uses of the sound track.

The director works with the editor on what is known as the first cut. This is the cut that gives the director their artistic choices and vision of the finished film.

The director editor relationship is a key collaborative relationship. The director is not required nor is it necessary for them to sit in the editing room looking over the editor’s shoulder. Instead the two can screen the raw material or rough cut scenes and discuss the next steps. As well as stating what they think, the director should listen to what the editor thinks. It is also possible to try things one way and then another, and view the results.

The director may have spent a great deal of time shooting a particular shot, for example a complex tracking shot, and want to retain it. The editor is seeing the film material with more objectivity, and the great shot may have to be edited because the pace is wrong, or there’s a better way to tell the story. As one great director said ‘you have to throw away your best shots.’

After the director’s first cut, the producers may make some alterations and changes to the film, but in good working relationships the director is involved in this stage as well. The director is also involved in the selection of music or other sound material, and may participate or give approval for the style of titles and credits as well.

At the end of the day it is the director who is the creative identity for the aesthetics of a film. It is fitting therefore that they are involved in all of the creative decisions.
THE DIRECTOR

The Director is engaged by the Producer to direct the production of a motion picture as the term 'direct' is commonly used and understood in the motion picture industry and whatever is seen or heard in the finished product. The terms Director and directing include all related functions and activities required for translating and transferring the script, premise and idea to the audiovisual images.

The Director's function is unique and requires her participation in all creative phases of the motion picture process, including all creative aspects of sound and picture.

The Director works directly with all the creative elements of the motion picture and participates in the molding and integrating of them into one cohesive dramatic and esthetic whole.

DUTIES

Survey and approving of all locations
Planning and breakdown of shooting script
Plotting camera angle and composition within the frame
Participation in determining requirements of the set, costumes, make up, props, floor their proper perspective and functioning.
Participation in the final casting of performers
Rehearsing actors/ and any visual or audio devices
Directing the action
Directing the dialogue
Making script changes, as necessary, within her jurisdiction
The right to 'first cut' or Director's cut
Director will also participate in considerations regarding stock footage, plates, miniatures, background or other matte, optical or composite images.

(Abbreviated from the DGC)