

Overview of Role

An art director (AD) helps to create and manage the overall design and visual style for screen productions. They realise the production designer's (PD) and director's vision for the look and style of a film or TV production. The AD sets the general artistic tone that the PD requires, using imagery and aesthetics to bring concepts to life. They are the project manager of their sets. The AD takes the production designer's ideas or research and makes them into a coherent, practical space that combines all the needs of the other departments while maintaining the integrity of the designer's ideas. Art directors work to a budget, overseeing the working schedule for all required design, construction and dressing work. They oversee construction both in studio and on location. They communicate with the art department team and collaborate with the construction team, set decorators, props and effects teams.

Core Responsibilities:

These core responsibilities are provided as a guide and are not exhaustive. The exact responsibilities in a particular job will vary depending on the scale / budget band / genre of the production.

1. Interpret the brief and prepare a design visualisation

- Identify requirements or creative concept the PD may have
- Collate information about the period, genre, and type of production in relation to the design requirements to make creative design decisions
- Suggest amendments, additions, or alternatives to enhance the brief when required, providing references or designs, if necessary
- Liaise with the PD, supervising art director (SAD), and construction manager (CM) while developing the set design to ensure all proposed details are within budget

2. Research design information

- Confirm the scope, depth and specific objectives for the research
- Brief assistants on their role in the research, as required
- Assess whether existing material is relevant and up-to-date, and that they are legally allowed to use it
- Prepare the findings in a way which addresses the objectives in a concise, accurate and useful way
- Identify the nature, style, content, and creative intention of the graphic elements from the design specification and supporting information
- Ensure they record all sources of information and store this with the results of their research

- Maintain confidentiality of sensitive information in line with organisational procedures

3. Agree requirements and parameters for design activity

- Assess key information from the production brief that could impact on design, for example, budget and timescales
- Confirm priorities and resource requirements with PD and SAD
- Evaluate key information relating to scenes, locations and shooting schedules
- Identify the significance of each scene for inclusion in the schedules of requirements for the set
- Check with the production team when information about the production is incomplete
- Confirm with decision makers which visual elements and resources are required, and inform those responsible for their acquisition
- Identify functional elements, such as props, scenic design, and specialist equipment, that may be required
- Liaise with the CM regarding materials, resources and how the look can be achieved
- Review and justify costs for the proposed design

4. Determine production design requirements

- Liaise and incorporate other departments' requirements, such as those from the set decorator, SFX, VFX, stunts, grips, camera, lighting, and locations
- Determine continuity requirements
- Clarify and confirm visual style and intended impact with the decision makers
- Identify physical characteristics from design information and specifications
- Obtain specialist advice when problems are identified that are beyond their expertise
- Ensure the set design continues to adhere to the PD's vision, while being realistic within the given budget
- Ensure CM and SAD are made aware of how the drawings are developing and that the proposals do not exceed the allocated budgets
- Confirm changes requested by decision makers and incorporate them into requirements

5. Plan and present designs

- Work in collaboration with the SAD and PD to produce visualisation presentations for the director / director of photography (DOP) / producers and other decision makers

- Use visual interpretations, when required, to aid others' understanding of the creative vision, such as white card models or working drawings
- Use a full script breakdown, where a script is available, to provide further visualisation
- Check that others understand the agreed visualisation, and concerns are addressed
- Discuss the practicalities of the agreed visualisation and the type of materials, equipment, and locations that will be required in line with budget and timescales
- Communicate production requirements, provide construction teams with a folder of references of inspirations and colour / texture finishes.
- Review suggested additions or amendments to the visualisation and present changes to the relevant people
- Advise production team of the impact and implications of any changes, issues or problems which may affect the production schedule or the visualisation of the design
- Monitor changes to the production schedule and ensure relevant people report any problems or issues to you, ensuring the construction department are aware and can adapt the build

6. Create drawings to meet production requirements

- Consult with CM or SAD regarding specific techniques or other requirements
- Check and confirm that the drawings and associated material are complete and clearly convey design requirements and technical information
- Check and confirm that drawings contain information for the intended use and are completed within agreed timelines
- Check that an accurate, up-to-date issue list is maintained to show when, and to whom, the drawings have been issued
- Share drawings with SAD / PD to check for final amendments and approval
- Store records and submit drawings to the art department assistants (ADA) for issuing, using the established storage system

7. Supervise the build of sets

- Liaise with the construction department as required, confirming their understanding of the specifications
- Ensure the construction department are closely monitored in their progress of set builds
- Report progress on the build to the SAD and PD
- Liaise with the locations department when a location is to be dressed or a build carried out

- Handover sets with clear instructions to the standby art director once shooting commences

Role Specific Skills:

- Interpret the brief or concept to fully understand the brief given by the production designer
- Research and evaluation of reference material
- Produce physical or digital models
- Complete working drawings via CAD or hand-draughting based on knowledge of draughting and construction techniques
- Liaise with the PD and SAD as well as other departments (especially construction, VFX, and SFX), during the development and build stages of a set
- Train those working for you; how to draw, techniques, methods, and professional etiquette

Other / Transferable Skills:

- Communication: interpreting other's requirements and communicating requirements to other departments and colleagues
- Teamworking: collaborating within own and with other departments, liaising with construction department
- Networking: investing time in networking activities, building a network of business contacts and establishing rapport with others quickly and effectively
- Problem-solving: contingency planning and resolving issues with suggested designs so that productions remain on schedule

Attributes:

- Resilience and enthusiasm: adapt positively to changing work priorities and patterns, ensuring deadlines continue to be met. Proactive and explores new ideas and non-standard ways of working which will enhance and deliver the best results for the production
- Productivity: organises work effectively and achieves required results within deadlines. Demonstrates the drive and energy to get things done in pressurised situations and escalates appropriately when necessary
- Ethics and integrity: honest and principled in all of their actions and interactions. Respectful and inclusive of others, and meets the ethical requirements of their profession
- Flexibility: willing to both listen and learn and to accept changing priorities and working requirements and has the flexibility to maintain high standards in a changing production environment
- Professional development: develop an ethos to learn and seek out learning and networking opportunities, identifying those that will be most beneficial