

LOCATION SCOUTING & SURVEY (PREPRODUCTION)

Never arrive at a location on a shooting day without first scouting and surveying that location ahead of time. If you do, you will **inevitably** get some nasty surprises.

Deciding where you want to shoot requires thorough location scouting. This means visiting several location possibilities for each setting to determine the following:

THE LOOK

- Is the location appropriate for the action of the script?
- Does the location add to the overall emotional tone of the script and the scene?
- Is the place what you are after *aesthetically*?

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," then don't waste your time and scout another location. If the answer to all of the above questions is "yes", then continue on ...

THE ACCESS

- Can you get access to the location?
- Can you get access *when you need it*?
- Can you get access for *as long as you need it*?
- If there is a rental fee involved, can your production afford it?
- If there are strings attached, do you really want to get involved in that way? (i.e. *you want to use your grandma's house, but in return she asks you to mow the lawn for a year*).

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," then don't waste your time and scout another location. If the answer to all the applicable questions above is "yes," then continue on ...

THE LOGISTICS

- IS THE LOCATION SAFE FOR YOUR CREW, CAST, AND EQUIPMENT?
- Is there adequate natural light, or if you need to use artificial light is there enough power and access to electricity?
- Is there enough space to contain your crew, equipment, and cast?
- Is it possible for everyone to get to the location? (Do you need to arrange for special transportation?)
- Are there bathrooms accessible?

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," then don't waste your time and scout another location. If the answer to all of the above questions is "yes," then continue on ...

THE LOCATION SURVEY

Once you have secured your location, you need to revisit it to do a thorough survey. For minor locations the scouting and survey can be done in one visit. Digital photos can help recall spaces, lighting, and shot ideas (when taking these pictures, you should attempt to get as many angles as you can, both documenting the areas that you think you will be using in your scene and also in a panoramic mode; taking pictures side to side so that you can get a larger field of view when you paste them together).

For major locations you will need at least two visits. The director and the DP should go on location surveys together. **It is important to visit the location at the same time of day you anticipate shooting there** (and stay there for the length of time you anticipate shooting will last, as lighting conditions change over the day).

You will need to bring the following items to your location survey:

- digital camera
- light meter
- ruler and graph paper
- compass (to determine direction and trajectory of the Sun)
- circuit tester
- tape measure
- **a director's viewfinder** (expensive, but invaluable in letting you see what a camera lens would see without having to bring a camera to the location scouting)

The wide view and general impressions:

Draw an overhead diagram of the space (it will be used as an overhead to plan lighting and camera positions).

- walls: length, angles, height, material (this is needed to determine sound reflectivity)
- number of windows and their location
- practical lights available and their location
- layout of the floor
- power outlets and amperage (see "determining electrical distribution")

Visualize

Try to imagine (or use a director's viewfinder) what shots will work in the space. Think in terms of angles you would like to shoot from and size of shots. Take photos from these general angles to review later. Figure out how much room will be visible. Will there be movement in the shot? From where to where? Is the ground smooth enough for a dolly/track, or do you need to spend extra time making the ground even? How many shots will you need in this location?

After you have determined some rough ideas about where and how you will shoot, consider these various shot elements:

Light

- How much of the room will you need to light?
- Will you be mixing light sources (in terms of color temperature)?
- What are the colors and the reflectivity of the walls?

Setting and Art Design

- What does the setting naturally look like? (What is on the walls? What are the colors of the walls? What are the furnishings?)
- What is the background of all your shots?
- What art direction will you need? (What will you need to add, remove, or change to make the space look the way you need it to look? Can the changes be done without damaging the location? Props? Sets?)
- Will you be allowed to do this?

Of course, it is always best to find locations which need as little art direction as possible.

Sound

If you are shooting sync sound at the location, then you will need to take a moment, be quiet, and take note of the natural sounds of the location. Are there any sound issues which might pose problems on the shoot? (i.e. *construction site across the street, Timmy rehearsing with his trombone every Wednesday afternoon*). Asks questions about the location (i.e. *are you directly under the flight path of an airport? Do we have permission to turn off those refrigerators or air conditioners for a few minutes at a time?*) Get a good sense for the aural ambience of the location.

Also note if the room is acoustically "live" or "dead." Will you need sound blankets?