

Editor

This is one of a series of job profiles within the **Film** sector developed by industry experts to help industry newcomers understand the different job roles and the skills required in order to succeed. We aim to keep this information as current as possible and would welcome any comments to help us improve this profile; please e-mail us on: jobprofile@skillset.org. All job profiles can be downloaded and printed from our website www.skillset.org.

Editors are one of the key Heads of Department on feature films, responsible for First Assistant Editors, and on bigger productions, Second Assistants and Trainees. The way a story unfolds and grabs the attention of the audience is one of the most important elements in filmmaking. To ensure that the story flows effortlessly from beginning to end, each shot is carefully chosen and edited into a series of scenes, which are in turn assembled to create the finished film. This highly creative, challenging and rewarding job is the work of the Editor, who works closely with the Director, crafting the daily rushes into a coherent whole. Editors work long, unsociable hours, often under pressure. They are employed on a freelance basis by the Producer (sometimes with the approval of the film's financiers), based on their reputation and experience. Editors often work on television drama, as well as on feature films.

What is the job?

Editors work closely with the Director before shooting begins, deciding how to maximise the potential of the screenplay. On the first day of principal photography, Editors begin work in the cutting room (sometimes on location), looking at the previous day's rushes which are developed overnight at the Film Lab and synced-up (synchronised, the alignment of sound and image) by the Assistant Editor. Editors check the technical standards, as well as the emerging sense of story, and the actors' performances. Because scenes are shot and edited out of sequence, Editors may work on scenes from the end of the film before those at the beginning, and must therefore be able to maintain a good sense of how the story is unfolding. Editors select the best takes and edit them together to create scenes. In some cases, an improvised line or an actor's interpretation of their role may create some on-screen magic that can be developed into a new and exciting scene.

By the time the film wraps (shooting is completed) Editors have spent hours reworking scenes and cutting them together to create a Rough Assembly. During the post production period, the Editor and the Director work closely together, refining the assembly edit into the Director's Cut, which must be approved by the Producers, until they achieve picture lock or Fine Cut (when the Director and/or Executive Producer give final approval of the picture edit). Editors usually work in a supervisory role during the subsequent music and track laying, and sound mix.

Typical career routes

Traditionally, Editors progress from being Runners to Trainees, Second Assistants, First Assistants and eventually to become Editors. Because of the rapid changes in the film industry caused by the increasing use of digital editing techniques, this clearly delineated career progression is less easy to follow. Whilst it is still possible to work as a Trainee, 2nd Assistants are now only employed on very big budget films.

Trainees with at least two years experience are likely to progress by working as Assistants in television or on low budget films for a considerable period of time before becoming First Assistants on feature films. Some big budget productions take on Trainees and Second Assistants, and it is important to keep up to date with films in preproduction by reading the Trade Press. Because feature film production involves large amounts of money, and as the majority of producers prefer to trust their film's editing to experienced hands, the progression to becoming an Editor can be difficult. However, if Editors trust their

Assistants, they may allow them to learn and to demonstrate their talents by carrying out the assembly edit of some sections of the film. Experienced Assistants may also work as Editors on short films, which enable them to showcase their talents.

Essential knowledge and skills

Editors must have a degree of technical aptitude and wide experience of the post production process. Since most films are now edited on computers, they must also be able to use a variety of computer editing equipment. They should understand dramatic storytelling and be able to create rhythm, pace and tension. **Key Skills include:**

- ability to be creative under pressure;
- imagination and an understanding of narrative;
- excellent communication and interpersonal skills;
- developed sense of rhythm and timing in story telling;
- highly developed aesthetic visual awareness;
- ability to lead a team;
- patience, attention to detail and good organisational skills;
- knowledge of the requirements of the relevant Health and Safety legislation and procedures.

Training and qualifications

Although no specific qualifications are required for Editors, [FT2](#) (Film and Television Freelance Training) provides industry recognised training for all job roles, including Editing, involving apprentice-style attachments to professional crews, combined with short course training opportunities. Alternatively, short courses specialising in Assistant Editing for digital (non linear) cutting rooms provide a useful starting point.

[The National Film and Television School](#) (NFTS) offers industry recognised short courses for all grades. Post graduate courses are also available. Individual course accreditation in certain subject areas is currently being piloted.

As part of Skillset's and the UK Film Council's Film Skills Strategy, [A Bigger Future](#), a network of Screen Academies and a Film Business Academy have been approved as centres of excellence in education and training for film.

Where to go for more information

Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the Audio Visual Industries. The first sources of information for all jobs in the industry are the [National Occupational Standards](#). Browse Skillset's website for links to our network of training partners, information about training and access to the comprehensive [Skillset/BFI course database](#). Finally, **Skillset Careers** is UK's only specialist media careers advice service; for detailed media careers information and advice, visit www.skillset.org/careers.

Websites

- **BKSTS – The Moving Image Society**, organises events, courses, and new equipment demos, and publishes: *Cinema Technology*, and *Image Technology*; www.bksts.com
- **BECTU**, the trade union represents Editing & Post Production personnel; www.bectu.org.uk
- Shooting People, a forum on filmmaking; www.shootingpeople.org

Publications

- *Editing and Post-production* (Screencraft series published by Focal Press) by Declan McGrath
- *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective of Film Editing* (Silverman-James Press) by Walter Murch
- *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Film editing* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2004)
- *Screen International*, a weekly publication for the film industry also offering a daily on-line news service www.screendaily.com;
- *Variety*, a weekly publication for the film, television, music and interactive entertainment industries www.variety.com;
- *American Cinematographer* www.theasc.com