UNIT 14: STAGES OF PRODUCTION – 1

UNIT STRUCTURE

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14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- explain the different stages of television production
- define the terms and jargons of the field
- outline the importance of pre-production planning

14.2 INTRODUCTION

Television as a medium has been finding extensive use all over the world, which is not too surprising given its versatility. In the previous unit, you have already learnt about the tremendous growth and development of television as an industry. However, what goes on behind the screen is not as simple or as glamorous as it appears to us on screen.

The entire process is divided into three basic stages: Pre-production, production and Post Production. In this unit you will be given a clear idea of the three stages. We will also discuss the first stage, i.e., the pre-production stage in detail.

In the next two units, we will deal with the remaining two stages – production stage and post-production stage.

14.3 CONCEPT OF STAGES OF PRODUCTION

Television production is a complex, time-consuming process that demands coordination among a wide variety of people. It requires intensive planning and a whole lot of skills, time and effort to execute those plans. The aim of any television production is to translate an idea into a meaningful programme. Creative inputs, technical and personnel requirements, coordination, and finances are unique to each kind of television production. However, whatever the format or genre, planning is the fulcrum on which the success of the production stands. Once a decision is made to make a television programme, we need to prepare ourselves for the various stages of production. The procedures delineated in this unit will guide you from generation of the idea to the final programme.

Until recently, television production required the combined efforts of dozens of trained professionals, using extremely expensive and difficult-to-maintain equipment. Network-level TV programs still require many hands to produce a single show, but technological advances now allow virtually anyone with a camcorder and a blank cassette to create a video.

Regardless of the size of a program's budget or intended audience, there are three production phases that all professional productions share. These phases are

- *Pre-production*
- *Production and*
- *Post-production*

Pre-production phase

There is a saying in TV production: "The most important phase of production is pre-production". In pre-production the basic ideas and approaches of the production are developed and set in motion. It is in this phase that the production can either be set on a proper course or messed up to such an extent that no amount of time, talent, or editing expertise can save it. During pre-production, not only are key talent and production members selected, but all the major elements are planned. Research is done, the script is readied and shooting locations selected. Since things such as scenic design,

lighting, and audio are interrelated, they must be carefully coordinated in a series of production meetings.

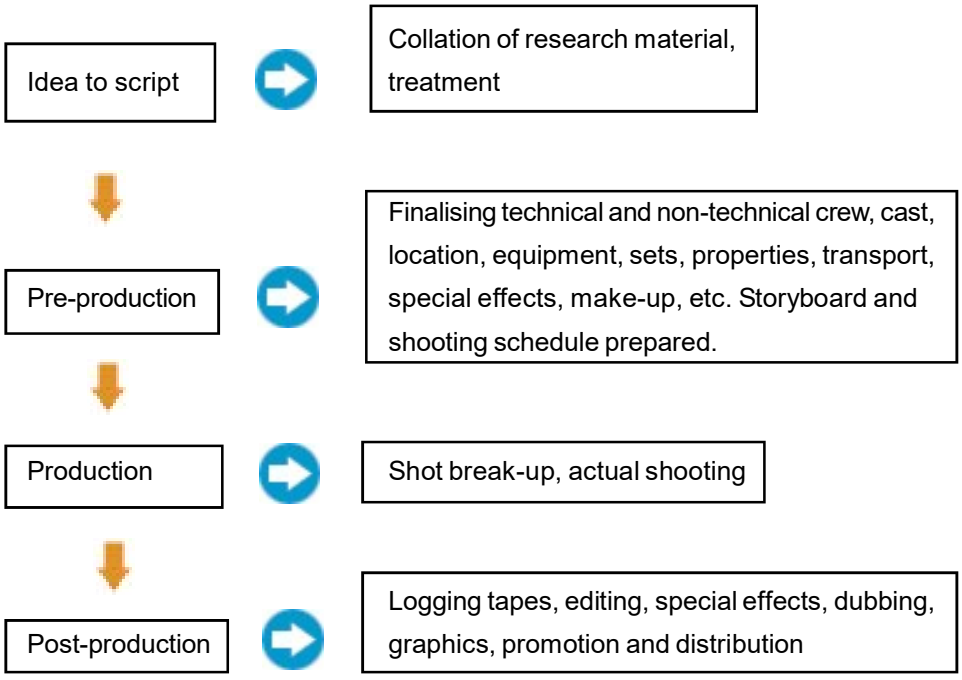
The Production Phase

The production phase is where everything comes together in a kind of final performance. It is the phase in which the actual shooting (recording or live broadcast) takes place and all the plans made during the pre-production are executed.

And, Finally, the Post-production Phase

This is the final stage in which the rushes are refined and edited into a complete programme and made ready for telecasting and distribution. For projects like films or music albums or TV shows which need promotional activity, these activities also form part of the post-production process.

The following flow chart shows the various stages of production and also how to actualize them:





CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. What are the three stages of production?

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Q. 2. Which stage of production is most crucial? Why?

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Q. 3. Define the following:

a. Pre-production

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b. Production

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c. Post-Production

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14.4 PRE-PRODUCTION

As said earlier, pre-production is the planning and preparation stage. It is an initial phase to assemble and efficiently organize the elements necessary for a successful production. During pre-production, ideas for the project are generated and decided upon. Creativity is important here. Other activities at this stage include:

- setting up the production team
- identifying tasks
- establishing timelines
- preparing a treatment and/or script
- storyboarding – visualising the entire film with the help of pictures. Storyboards pictorially represent the shots in a sequential order.
- casting- selecting talents for the programme

- gathering equipment and props
- finding locations- recce or location hunt
- procuring permits
- scheduling (equipment, shooting, personnel)
- preparing various logs
- establishing timelines
- deciding the post-production dates and studios
- deciding budgets and finance
- preparing the production and post-production logistics.
- Transportation and accomodation

During pre-production, the program idea itself is created and the script commissioned and written. Also all the personnel required for the production, i.e., the entire cast and crew is finalized and hired. Sets are designed and built, locations are identified and rented, props, costumes and production equipment are selected, created, purchased or rented and a complete production schedule established. All rehearsals for the final shooting are also completed within this period.

Pre-production starts out with identifying the goals and objectives of your video. Your target audience needs to be identified and scrutinized. This is of key importance, as everything from here on should be done with your specific audience in mind. The tone, the pace, the actors, style, language, music, length, and other aspects of the production must be geared to the temperament, attitudes and interests of your intended audience. You also need to consider your budget and take all other decisions accordingly.
Following are **12 basic steps** required for an elaborate television pre-production.

1. Identify the Purpose of the Production

This is the most important step in pre-production. In this phase the production's goals and purposes are clearly identified. What is the purpose of the production? To instruct? To inform? To entertain? Or is it to generate feelings of pride or express a social, religious, or political need? All of these considerations will determine the final look of the production.

2. Analyze Your Target Audience

The next step is to identify the target audience. The program content preferences will differ according to age, sex, socioeconomic status, and educational level of the audience. These preferences are also different depending on location. For instance the programme preference of people in North India will differ from that of people of South India. Again the rural people will have preferences different from that of the urban population.

The audience characteristics are referred to as demographics. We can see regional demographic variations, in part, by differences in local programming in various areas of the country — and sometimes by the films and network programming that local stations decide not to air.

Knowing the audience is crucial to the success of the programme and not understanding it is at the root of many failures.

3. Check out Similar Productions

It is important to check out similar productions from the past so that you can avoid making the mistakes made by these productions and learn some lessons from their strong points. Ask yourself some questions: How will your proposed production differ from previous successful and unsuccessful efforts by others? Why did they work; or, maybe more importantly, why didn't they? Of course, since production styles change rapidly, you need to take into consideration differences in time, locations, and audiences.

4. Determine the Basic Value of Your Production

Next, it is necessary to determine the overall value of the production and communicate it to a sponsor or advertiser in a convincing manner. Obviously, sponsors and advertisers want some sort of return on their investment.

We have to make certain we can justify production expenses in terms of a gain or return on the investment. For this, you'll need to ask yourself some questions. First, what is the probable size of the

audience? In determining this, you must know if your show will be a one-shot presentation or if you can recover production expenses over time by presenting the show to other audiences.

5. Develop a Treatment or Production Proposal

Now that the basic factors have been identified, it is now time to put down everything on paper. The script outlining the complete treatment is written at this stage. As you begin writing the script, you will begin to become aware of the areas in which further research is required. The first version of a script is often followed by numerous revised versions. Throughout the rewriting process, a number of story conferences or script conferences typically take place. In many instances, scene revisions continue right up to the time the scenes are shot.

Typically, in a dramatic film production, each new script version is issued on a different colour paper so that the cast and crew won't confuse them with earlier versions. In many productions, **storyboards** are also made.

One advantage of using storyboards is that it allows the user to experiment with changes in the storyline for better and stronger effect. Storyboarding definitely is a very time consuming process but makes the work much more systematic and clear. The great genius of Indian cinema, Satyajit Ray was very particular about storyboarding. Each and everyone of his films was fully storyboarded and only then shot. Now-a-days storyboards are made only for shorter productions like advertisements, short films etc.



Storyboard: A storyboard consists of drawings of key scenes with corresponding notes on elements such as dialogue, sound effects, and music. These are graphic organizers such as a series of illustrations or images displayed in sequence for the purpose of previsualizing the scene or sequence.

6. Develop a Production Schedule

In the next step, a tentative schedule is drawn up. A written timetable listing the time allotted for each production step is compiled. Generally, broadcast or distribution deadlines will dictate the production schedule.

Not planning things out carefully might cause you to miss a critical deadline, rendering the production useless.

7. Select Key Production Personnel

In this step the important members of the crew particularly the key creative team members are selected. This includes the director, production manager, production assistants, music director etc. The technical staff is usually selected later.



Recce: Recce (pronounced "*recky*") is a word used in media production, derived from "reconnoiter". It is a pre-filming visit to a location to work out its suitability for shooting, including access to necessary facilities and assessment of any potential lighting or sound issues. The term 'recce' is also borrowed from film and used in radio and television production.

8. Decide On Locations

The next step is to finalise the key locations for shooting. In case of major productions, location scouts or location managers are hired to find and coordinate the use of the locations suggested by the script. This is also known as **recce.**

Although it might be easier to shoot in a TV studio, normally audiences prefer the authenticity of "real" locations, especially in dramatic productions. Therefore selecting suitable locations is very important. It's often necessary to make changes in the on-location settings. For instance, rooms may have to be repainted or redecorated and visible signs changed to suit the theme of the production.

9. Decide On Talent, Wardrobe and Sets

Next comes selection of talent, wardrobe (costuming) and sets. Usually auditions are held to decide on the casting, to find the right talents for each role. Once the people are selected, payments are negotiated and contracts are signed.

Once you decide on the talent, you can begin wardrobe selection. The wardrobe is selected keeping in mind the theme and as per the demand of the script. For bigger productions and in cases where the budget allows, a costume designer is hired for this job.

The next step is set designing. At first a set designer is hired. He/she reads the script and accordingly draws up the set design plan and once the plan is approved by the director the plan is executed.

As the building of the set begins, the talents also begin the rehearsals. Rehearsing with the sets is important bring about a proper synchronization of the talents and the camera crew in relation to the sets.

10. Decide on the Remaining Production Personnel

Decisions on the remaining staff and production needs are made at this stage of pre-production. Key technical personnel, equipment, and facilities are decided upon and arranged. This includes the rental of both equipment and production facilities.

Next, arrangements are made for transportation, catering (food and refreshment trucks) and on-location accommodations in case of any overnight stays).

11. Obtain Permits, Insurance, and Clearances

Obtaining permits and clearances well ahead of the shooting is an important part of pre-production. Except for spot news and short documentary segments, you must arrange access permits, licenses, security bonds, and insurance policies. If this planning is not done in advance, severe constraints may arise at the time of shooting.

In locations such as shopping malls filming permits are required. Depending on the nature of the production, liability insurance and security bonds may be necessary because accidents can happen that can be directly or indirectly attributed to the production.

In some locations, the controlling agency will limit exterior production to certain areas and specific hours. In a street scene where traffic will be affected you'll need to arrange for special police.

12 Select Video Inserts, Still Photos and Graphics

Arrange to shoot or acquire videotape and film inserts, still photos, and graphics.

To reduce production costs, check out existing stock footage in film and tape libraries around the country. This is generally background footage, such as general exterior scenes of an area that will be edited into the production.

One example of a stock footage source is Doordarshan. Suppose you are making a documentary on the Babri Masjid issue and suitable footage is not available or does not meet the needs of the production,

you may use archival footage from Doordarshan.

Second unit work can also be done at this stage. This is production done away from the main location by a separate production crew that generally does not involve the principal, on-camera talent.

If part of a dramatic production calls for shots of a specific building in Guwahati, for example, a second unit can shoot the necessary exteriors while the primary unit works on interior shots (which are supposedly taking place inside the building) in Shillong where the actors live.

You will want to begin to make decisions on music at this point, including working out copyright clearances and royalties for music and visual inserts.

So from the above discussion, you must have realized that the goal of this initial phase called, **pre-production** is to assemble and efficiently organize the elements necessary for a successful production. Television professionals attest to its importance. At the network level, poor production during pre-production can add millions to the cost of producing a television series, the difference between profitability and ruin.

Finally, as pre-production draws to a close, sets and scenery are moved into place on the studio floor or at the location site, lighting instruments are set, aimed and focused and talent (performers) and production personnel complete their rehearsals.

Deciding the post-production schedules

Besides all the above, many film makers forget to pre-decide the post-production schedule, booking of the editing studio, booking the editors for offline and online editing.The delivery schedule and the lastly the marketing and advertising budget. Many films lie languishing after being completed because the marketing costs are not taken into consideration during pre-production. This is a major pitfall one must avoid.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4. What is pre-production planning?

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Q.5. What is a story-board? Why is it important?

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Q.6. What do you mean by the term 'recce'?

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ACTIVITY 14.1

1. Draw a list of crew members and things/props that you think are required for producing:

   a. A music video

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   b. A short film on child labour

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   c. Shooting a news story on a political party's public meeting

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14.5 LET US SUM UP

1) Television production is a complex, time-consuming process that demands coordination among a wide variety of people. It requires intensive planning and a whole lot of skills, time and effort to execute those plans.

2) There are three production phases that all professional productions share. These phases are

a. *Pre-production*

b. *Production and*

c. *Post-production*

3) The most important phase of production is pre-production. In pre-production the basic ideas and approaches of the production are developed and set in motion.

4) The production phase is where everything comes together in a kind of final performance. It is the phase in which the actual shooting (recording or live broadcast) takes place and all the plans made during the pre-production are executed.

5) Post-production is the final stage in which the rushes are refined and edited into a complete programme and made ready for telecasting and distribution.

6) A storyboard is a series of drawings of key scenes of a production along with corresponding notes on elements such as dialogue, sound effects, and music.

7) Recce means a pre-filming visit to a location to work out its suitability for shooting, including access to necessary facilities and assessment of any potential lighting or sound issues.

14.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No. 1 :

The three stages of production are:

- Pre-production stage
- Production stage
- Post-production stage

Ans to Q. No. 2 : The pre-production stage is the most crucial stage of production. This is because the outcome of the final programme hinges upon the planning which is done in the pre-production stage. If everything planned out well in this stage, then hassles during the shooting and editing can be avoided and the project can be smoothly concluded.

Ans to Q. No. 3 :

a. **Pre-production:** It is the stage in which the basic ideas and approaches of the production are developed and set in motion. During pre-production, not only are key talent and production members selected, but all the major elements are planned. Everything beginning from scenic design, lighting, and audio are carefully coordinated in a series of production meetings in this stage. Research is done, the script is readied and shooting locations selected.

b. Production stage: It is the stage where everything comes together in a kind of final performance. It is the phase in which the actual shooting (recording or live broadcast) takes place and all the plans made during the pre-production are executed.

c. Post-production stage: This is the final stage in which the rushes are refined and edited into a complete programme and made ready for telecasting and distribution. For projects like films or music albums or TV shows which need promotional activity, these activities also form part of the post-production process.

Ans to Q. No. 4 :

Pre-production planning means the planning which is done prior to the actual production of a programme. In this stage every minute detail beginning from the cast upto the location is planned out so that the production and pre-production stages can be executed without any hassles. The success of the production and post-production hinges upon the pre-production planning.

Ans to Q. No. 5 : A storyboard is a series of drawings of key scenes of a production along with corresponding notes on elements such as dialogue, sound effects, and music. These are graphic organizers

such as a series of illustrations or images displayed in sequence for the purpose of previsualizing the scene or sequence.

The importance of a storyboard lies in the fact that it allows the user to experiment with changes in the storyline for better and stronger effect. Storyboarding definitely is a very time consuming process but makes the work much more systematic and clear.

Ans to Q. No. 6 : Recce means a pre-filming visit to a location to work out its suitability for shooting, including access to necessary facilities and assessment of any potential lighting or sound issues.



14.7 FURTHER READING

1. Belavadi, Vasuki (2007) Video Production. Oxford University Press
2. Donald, Ralph, Maynard, Riley, Spann, Thomas (2008) Fundamentals of Television Production. Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.



14.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1. What are the three stages of production? What is the importance of each stage?

Q.2. “The most important phase of production is pre-production”. Do you agree with this statement? Why?

Q.3. The production phase is where everything comes together in a kind of final performance. Explain.

Q.4. What is the importance of recce? Is it possible to carry out a successful production without a recce?

Q.5. Why is storyboarding important? Prepare a storyboard for a one minute public service advertisement on AIDS.

Q.6. Explain all the steps that need to be followed in pre-production planning.