

48 Hour Film Project

Tips and tricks

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Introduction

The 48 Hour Film Project (48HFP from here on) is an international filmmaking contest that has grown immensely throughout the past years. In 2008, the contest was held in well over 70 cities all over the world. You can find all the related information on www.48hourfilm.com

As you are reading this document, I'll assume that you're participating in one of the upcoming events somewhere in the world. Good for you! Prepare for a weekend of creativity, stress, lack of sleep but, above all, a lot of fun. When you've participated once, you'll be hooked. Trust me.

This document contains a collection of tips and tricks that might be useful for you, the producer or teamlead. Some of these might seem superfluous, others might seem obscure, but believe me: most of the tips and tricks in this document originate from real-live events. Sometimes, the most obvious of details are those that are easiest overlooked. Whether or not you are an experienced 48HFP-veteran, or just an enthusiastic amateur-moviemaker who is about to embark on his/her first 48HFP-weekend, there will be something in this document for you.

Keep in mind that none of the items listed in this document are meant to circumvent the rules. The 48HFP-project allows you a lot of preparation before the weekend itself; do yourself a favour, and make use of this.

Good luck, and remember: Every second counts!

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The Netherlands

About the author

Paul van Geldrop is a musician and composer from The Netherlands. He first participated in the 48HFP in 2007 in the team of Richard Schut, who later became one of the driving forces behind the 48HFP-contests in The Netherlands.

Paul has partaken in the Dutch 48HFP-weekends six times thusfar, with the seventh occasion just around the corner (september 2009). In 2007, his musical score for the movie 'End' was awarded Best Music in the Amsterdam edition. More information can be found at www.paulvangeldrop.nl

Crew and cast

One of the first things you'll want to get together is a team. During the weekend, these people will be responsible for the preparation, shooting and production of your video. Let's take a look at some important aspects of putting together your crew and cast, shall we ?

1. Unless you are a veteran producer who is used to commanding a vast army of people, you might want to keep your crew small. Steering a team of 20 or more persons isn't easy, especially during a high-paced weekend such as this. Sure, it might seem fun to have an assistant to the producer, assistant to the director, three people for make-up, six for lighting, et cetera, et cetera, but chances are that at least half of them will just be hanging around doing nothing. People who hang around might get bored and demotivated, while you, the producer, need energetic miracleworkers.
2. Democracy is a wonderful thing, but pick only a few key-persons to have a say in the creative and technical process. It might seem like a good idea to let everyone have a say (and it can be), but when it comes to decisions, only a few people should have a vote. Otherwise, you'll be up to your ears in discussions the entire weekend; you don't have time for that. (This doesn't mean that people can't make suggestions, of course. It's still a team-effort).
3. Runners. Have runners. No matter how much time you've put into your preparations, there will always be something missing on the set or the production-area. During the filming, you won't have time to send a cameraman, actor or director to run errands.
4. Have separate people for key-roles, such as director and editor. Though it might seem like a good idea to combine these roles in one person, there are a few drawbacks to consider:
 - a. Pressure. These key-roles demand a lot of time and energy, and when somebody has been directing all day long, they're more than likely to be less keen and sharp when they get to the editing-table.
 - b. People get sick. This one doesn't need explaining.
 - c. The creative force; directors often try to get editors to fully display that wonderful creative vision they had during the shoots. An experienced editor who, during the editing process, decides to leave a scene 'as it is' (despite the creative vision of the director) might make the difference between getting your movie in on time or getting it there three minutes too late.
5. This next one applies to crew and cast alike: If people have to travel to get to the set or production area, make sure to keep an eye on news regarding public transport or constructions on roads. In a lot of countries, such reports and warnings on traffic and public transport are easy to check beforehand (unless there's a crash or emergency, of course). You'll feel rather silly if your DOP arrives three hours late on set because he/she was diverted in traffic 300 times because of construction works that were announced months ago.
6. During shoots, a cameraman or sound technician often has a spare minute or two while the director rages at one of the actors for not doing it right; take this moment to have them shoot some wild track and spare shots. You might be very thankful for the extra footage when post-production comes.
7. As you know, people during the 48HFP-weekend don't get paid (check the rules if you don't believe me). However, it's possible that cast and crew might have to make some expenses (fuel, traintickets, et cetera) that they'd like reimbursed. This, in itself, is not against the

rules and also very understandable. Make sure you discuss this beforehand and come to a clear agreement on this. A violent row about a \$10 trainticket is not something you want to deal with during this weekend.

8. There are quite a few forms (waivers, release forms, et cetera) that you have to turn in with your movie. Get them sorted at the start of the weekend, not after half of the crew and cast has already gone home.
9. Keep an eye on the overall atmosphere during the weekend. Making a movie in 48 hours is not as easy as it sounds (actually, it doesn't even sound easy) and can involve a lot of stress and anxiety. Take the time to let people relax when they need to. Having one of your actors fly off the handle at the director or cameraman on Saturdaynight while you still have twenty takes to go is not going to improve the endresult.

Equipment

Ah, equipment! The wonderful world of DATs, mikes, lenses, cables and all the other thingies, at the end of the weekend, will help you make a terrific movie! When things go wrong during the 48HFP-weekend, it is often in this corner. Bitrates, framecounts, defects, wiring.. it's a complex technical world out there. Time for a few pointers on the hard- and software you'll be using!

1. Make sure you have back-up equipment if you can. Even though you're only allowed to use, for example, two cameras during the weekend, there is no rule that states you can't have a third camera standing by at the production-area in case one of other two decides that Saturday-evening is a good time to explode or, more likely, develop a simple yet timeconsuming defect. An extra set of cables and convertors is also not going to hurt you. You won't be the first teamlead who cries him- or herself to sleep at night because you lost three hours due to a defect XLR-connector.
2. If you rent or borrow equipment for the weekend, get the corresponding technician to practice with it beforehand. Sure, it might cost you an extra day of rent on that expensive camera, but the results will be much better if your cameraman doesn't have to sift through a hundred pages of manual while your entire crew and cast is anxious to shoot that first scene.
3. Have your technical crew keep a constant check on the functioning of their equipment. Imagine how you'll feel when the audio on your overhead mics turns out to have developed a buzz or hum during the third take and you don't find out until the end of the day. Such checks might take a bit of time, but it's worth it.
4. During the weekend, you'll need to transfer audio and video footage from the set to the production-area. Make sure that the equipment is compatible; do they use the same technical settings ? Does your editing workstation have the correct inputs, or do you need a convertor between, say, the DAT-recorder and the mixer ? Such matters are easily checked beforehand.
5. Agree on technical settings beforehand. What bitrates are used, which formats are used, how are the settings on sound and camera ? The less time you have to spend on conversing raw material from one device to another in post-production, the better. Especially with large blocks of raw material, having to convert from 96Khz/24bits to 44.1Khz/16bits might take up a lot of valuable time. Keep in mind that some software (especially consumer-level programs) can't deal with high-end settings; check the specs on equipment and software before you start.
6. Whenever possible, let your crew work with equipment and software they are familiar with. Sure, an experienced AVID editor might find his or her way around Final Cut Pro with some encouragement, but it'll cost valuable time that you don't have.

The process

During the weekend itself, there is often a complex workflow between technicians, director, editor, actors, et cetera. A smooth process will ensure a more relaxed and productive weekend, so let's see how you achieve this.

1. Create a strict and comprehensive planning of the weekend. Make sure you incorporate every aspect of the weekend, such as:
 - a. Storyboarding
 - b. Writing
 - c. Rehearsal
 - d. Lighting
 - e. Make-up
 - f. Sound- and videochecks
 - g. Lunchbreaks
 - h. Preparing for editing
 - i. Editing
 - j. Audio montage
 - k. Music
 - l. Credits
 - m. Travelling
 - n. Rendering
 - o. Burning your movie to DVD
 - p. Etc, etc.

Your schedule should be tight and foolproof, but allow for some buffer (look up the concept buffer in relation to projectmanagement on the Internet if you're not sure what I mean) .

Things will go wrong and take longer than expected. Account for this. Make sure everyone knows the schedule for the weekend. After all, the deadline is strict, and having the movie finished in time should be everyone's goal. You may also find the following tip useful regarding buffers in schedules: If you build in buffers in the schedule, you don't need to tell everyone; people are often inclined to use all the time assigned to them. Say, for example, that you planned 2 hours for rehearsal, but planned an extra hour as a buffer (perhaps one of the actors isn't quite as fast as you'd like). If you tell the actors this, they might be inclined to make use of that extra hour; from the start; this isn't what you planned that extra hour for! The buffers are for emergencies. Be strict; time is of the essence.

2. Keep It Simple. Making a movie in 48 hours is difficult enough as it is. Though it may seem great to have a script that features three different storylines, it will be difficult to incorporate these storylines into a comprehensible movie in such a short timespan. Remember that the people watching and judging your movie don't have the intimate grasp of details that you as the writer or producer may have and therefore completely miss your wonderfully artistic vision. Why not show the work-in-progress to your neighbour or auntie and see what they think ? If they don't 'get' your nihilistic cinematic work of art, it's likely that the rest of the audience also won't 'get it' during the screening.
3. Keep people informed. When the different elements (genre, line, prop, character) are assigned to you, tell your teammates. When you're done storyboarding, present it to crew and cast. Especially people in post-production can use this information to prepare for

their part of the action. For example, if you're assigned the genre horror and have the storyboard finished, a composer can start writing a few simple ideas to go with the scene. This will save time in post-production. If you plan to use explosions or other special visual effects in your movie, don't wait with telling your post-production crew; your editor could have been looking for suitable effects and filters during the shoots, instead of lounging on the couch reading a book.

4. One of the lines most dreaded by editors, audio-techs, special effectgurus and other members of your post-production crew is: 'We'll fix it in post'. This is often said during shoots, where some minor problem is detected such as excessive lighting, hazy audio, actors who mumble, make-up that glistens too much. The idea is that your post-production crew will work some miracle with the footage afterwards to make the problem go away. In case you didn't know this, there is no 'Fix The Crap'-button in editing software. Sure, there are many presets and filters that can make the problem a bit less, but really, really fixing something takes time and effort. Time and effort, I might point out, that could have been spent on enhancing and improving the quality of your production, instead of merely bringing it to an acceptable level. You could have saved yourself an hour of editing time by doing just one extra take without the minor problem present.

Location

Naturally, you'll be using a location to shoot your movie. Unless you plan to film your work of art in outer space, the following pointers might be useful to you:

1. Have the crew visit the location beforehand and have them look at their individual fields of expertise; is there enough natural light to work with? Are there enough electrical sockets for all your equipment? Are there bathrooms? Is there a place where actors can rehearse in peace and quiet, or change clothing? Is there a place where crew and cast take a load off their feet and have a bite to eat or a quiet smoke? Is running water available? How difficult is it to transport all the equipment onto the set? Is there an elevator nearby? Undoubtedly you can think of a few more questions yourself.
2. Is there a caretaker or contact, and how do you reach them during the weekend? Sure, that friendly janitor who showed you around and helped you out on Fridaynight might seem like a good idea, but if he's unreachable on Saturday and Sunday, there could be trouble.
3. Are there any restrictions you need to consider? For example, if you're shooting in a retirement home because that fits your movie, you might have to keep quiet during naptime. Do you really want your actors to whisper their lines for two hours while around you the elderly enjoy a nap?
4. While the inside of a location (if you're using a building) is important, the outside is just as important. If your location is located near a playground, be prepared for the sound of screaming children in the background of your film. The sound of a passing train might raise a few eyebrows from the audience when it occurs during an intense dialogue in your dramatic medieval romantic movie.
5. Do a few random takes with video and sound and see what comes up. Some defects don't show until post-production. The low-level humming of overhead power cables might not seem obvious at first, but they will come up in the audio-editing process. Small flaws like that can really ruin a great movie.

General stuff

Here are some tips and tricks that you might find useful in general. A lot of these might seem too obvious but, again, the most obvious is often most overlooked.

1. Make sure you have enough food and drinks for everyone. Also, some people are allergic to certain food groups. Others might object to eating those wonderful sandwiches you ordered because of principal reasons. Check this beforehand.
2. Read the rules. Read them well. I can't stress this enough.
3. If you've never made a short movie before, search the Internet for tips and tricks on this. There are some very helpful pointers on short movies (what to do, what not to do) widely available online.
4. Be prepared for everything to go wrong. There is bound to be some small detail that you overlooked that becomes a huge problem. It happens. Deal with it.
5. The most important aspect of all: Have fun. It's supposed to be fun.