

Case Study: Camera Operator - Henry

What do you do?

Camera operators set up shots at the director's request. We suggest possible alternatives to the director and make sure that we are always ready for the next shot.

I am a freelance camera operator, which means I work on a contract basis on all kinds of projects. These include films, television shows and documentaries.



What is your background?

I was first interested in still photography; a good friend of mine was a photographer. But I found I was more interested in movement. I always liked documentaries and thought that I'd like to try filming. Putting a camera on my shoulder and filming real life is a great thrill. That's what really attracted me to this job.

First, I worked as a film editor, and then I became a documentary camera operator.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

Camera operators need a combination of artistic ability and technical awareness. Not only do you have to operate the camera equipment, but you also have to think of creative new ideas for filming a scene.

It also helps to be a social person because you work with many different kinds of people, from actors to directors to technical people.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

Camera operators could also do still photography; it uses some of the same visual and technical skills. With more training and experience, a camera operator could give directing a try.

What changes will there be in the future?

I think the demand for camera operators will stay essentially the same.

While technology is always developing, the basic principles of filming and equipment will remain the same.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

The most challenging part of being a camera operator is finding an interesting project that's also artistically challenging. There's a lot of unchallenging work out there, like TV commercials. These jobs pay well, but they're not as much fun. It's a lot tougher to find stimulating work. You're lucky if you get one really interesting job a year.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

Yes, there are some opportunities, but not many. Any kind of film knowledge gives you a step up on others, so take advantage of college courses or any other opportunities that come your way.

What do you like about your job?

I like the variety of projects I work on and all the challenges they bring. Also, you meet a good variety of people.

What do you dislike about your job?

Sometimes the hours are very long. And if we're doing outdoor events, you get weather and rain delays, which are a

nuisance.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

Don't get discouraged. Even though there are times when you think that everything is not working, that you'll never get another job, another project will show up and the rewards, both financial and creative, are enormous. So, don't give up, it's a wonderful job.

A day in the life

7:00 am - 8:00 am

Arriving on the set. Discussing the first shot with the director and giving my input.

8:00 am - 9:00 am

Setting up the camera: working with the grips to set up a dolly that the camera will be placed on to move it around.

9:00 am - 10:00 am

Setting up the shot and discussing lighting with the director of photography.

10:00 am - 12:00 pm First shot:

- operating the camera
- making sure the actors and scene are properly framed and recorded
- discussing the scene with the director
- possibly re-shooting the scene.

12:00 pm - 1:00 pm Second shot:

- setting up
- shooting
- discussing
- re-shooting.

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Lunch.

2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Reviewing the tape/film clips recorded on the previous day.

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Taking all the equipment back to the studio.

4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Putting everything away and shutting everything down.