SOUTH AFRICAN GUILD OF EDITORS

POST PRODUCTION ROLES

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This short document aims to help producers better understand the different types of post-production roles. Though by no means exhaustive, this covers the basics of each job.

The Editor

Editors are responsible for creating a visual product by combining the raw visuals and sound in order to create a narrative. An editor is expected to know the software, as well as to have an understanding of visual language, rhythm, pace, dialogue and music and it is vital that the editor is organised and attentive to detail. Apart from the various genres, editors are also divided between the offline and online categories, each with different tasks and responsibilities. In recent years, because of software development and budget constraints, many editors have started to fulfil both tasks, but the processes are still distinct and happen consecutively.

The Offline Editor

During the offline process, the editor selects material in order to construct the narrative. Sequences are selected and combined to form a rough cut or assembly edit. During this process the structure and appearance of the rough cut will often change. The editor will work from a script to create a first cut for features and TV drama. This is not always the case for documentaries, reality shows and other factual programming. However, some producers may provide an outline while the narration will be constructed in the edit suite.

The rough cut may have been transformed through many versions in which the overall narrative was restructured, scenes dropped or re-edited — sometimes going so far as to create entirely new character perspectives. Eventually, after the producer and director are happy with the cut, the editor will fine tune the rough cut to produce a fine cut. After the fine cut is approved, the timeline will be picture locked. This means that no further changes will be made in terms of shot selection, dialogue edits and duration — no matter how small, a change after picture lock has serious consequences for all the following steps in post-production.

The duration of this process depends on the amount of footage to be processed, the type of script provided and the number of viewings needed for approval. It is advisable to involve the editor from the beginning of production.

The Online Editor/Finishing Editor

The online editor is responsible for delivering the final product according to the correct technical specifications required.

In the past online editing was a linear process performed in the final stages of post-production. During this stage a programme was reassembled using high quality visuals at full resolution. Nowadays online editing often refers to the process of adding the final titles, graphical elements and visual effects, as well as preparation for colour grading and audio mixing. If the colourist and online editor is the same person, then grading and colour correction will also happen during this process. If the offline cut comprises of proxies or low resolution visuals, the shots will now be replaced with the relevant high resolution footage, which is known as conforming. Conforming can also happen when moving between different systems, such as from an editing software to a colour grading specific software. XMLs are the most commonly used file formats to move between systems.

If required, the online editor will do compositing, which involves the combining of separate visual elements into a single image. Chroma keying (blue/green screen) falls into this category.

The online editor is also responsible for ensuring that the technical specifications for broadcast delivery are met. It is during this stage that colour bars, countdown clocks and slates are added, as per the broadcaster/client's requirements.

In the past, online editors would hand over the final visual product to the final mix department, where it was played out to tape. Nowadays, the online editor will often receive the mixed audio tracks to put them into the project and prepare this for play-out or export. Typically the online editor will also make DVDs and MPEG4s, if required.

The online process can be as short as a day, or take a few weeks, depending on the number of tasks to be performed and the duration of the final programme.

The Assistant Editor

The assistant editor is responsible for processing and organising the material for the offline editor, and also syncs up picture with audio before the editor starts working with the footage. Budget dictates how many assistant editors are working on a project. Although many editors start as assistants, it is not necessarily a junior position. Experienced assistant editors are highly sought after, especially for feature films.

In film, the role of the assistant editor is very comprehensive and the first, second and third assistant will each have responsibilities. They will manage the workflow, process the camera sheets, digitise the rushes, deal with technical concerns and sync up the rushes before the offline editor begins selecting and cutting sequences. After picture lock, the assistant editor will compile the EDL (edit decision list) for the negative cutters — if film is used as the final exhibition format.

In television, an assistant editor will help the offline editor with logging, digitising, and organising footage, plus syncing audio and finding specific shots. Sometimes the assistant will help to assemble sequences. The assistant will also be responsible for the administrative side of the editing process, making backups and authoring DVDs for viewing purposes.

It is important for the assistant editor to know the final delivery specifications of the project, to ensure correct project setup and to allow the editor to work more efficiently throughout the process.

The Junior Editor

A junior editor differs from an assistant in that he or she will be responsible for an edit, but under the mentorship or supervision of an experienced editor. Sometimes a junior will do a rough cut, and a senior editor will fine cut the programme. A junior editor may be expected to fulfil the same duties as an assistant, but the aim of this position is to train the junior editor, under the supervision of a senior editor. It is unreasonable to expect a junior editor to take full responsibility for the entire editing process.

The Colourist

A colourist is responsible for the grade and colour correction of images. The colourist will also ensure that a television programme is broadcast safe — that is, within the broadcasters technical

specifications. Multiple specifications are common; a grade for television does not have the same technical specifications as a grade for cinema release.

Because of advances in software, it is now much easier to do colour correction and many online editors also grade, but the process still requires specific skills and it is advisable to make use of a professional colourist for television programmes, commercials and feature films.

The Graphics Department

The graphic artist is responsible for all animations, maps, motions, titles, intros, end credits and photos. They will also produce any special effects required. These elements will be combined with the fine cut during the online process. Most editing software packages make it possible for an editor to produce graphical elements in the edit suite, but it is not part of the editor's responsibilities. If the editor is willing and able to produce graphic material, consider this a bonus; cutting a story together is a challenging job on its own!

The Subtitler

Subtitles are becoming more important, not just because of South Africa's many languages, but also to include the deaf and hard of hearing audience members. Sometimes an assistant or junior editor may be tasked with doing the subtitles, but it is actually a distinct position with specific skills. The subtitler must ensure that the subtitles are both title safe and broadcast safe, are legible, and present the right dramatic timing — a fine art. As burned-in subtitles are beginning to be replaced by closed-captions, this role is likely to take on more significance.

Sometimes the subtitler is also responsible for the translations and proof-reading, although this too should be considered a separate position.

The Sound Editor

The sound editor's responsibilities are to prepare all dialogue, background sounds, sound effects and music for the final mix. Responsible for editing and cleaning up the dialogue, removing any extraneous background noises from the dialogue (noise reduction).

The Sound Designer

Sound Design is an artistic component of the production. The Sound Designer needs to have imagination to create sound effects and not just re-record them. A Sound Designer is responsible for providing the sound for screen action. Depending on the film's budget, Sound Designers usually start work at the same time as the other Sound Editors.

Sound Designers spend time manipulating the original recordings using synthesizers, samplers and audio plug-ins. This is a highly creative, experimental part of the job. Most Sound Designers are also Supervising Sound Editors, so they usually oversee the "deliverables". These include the Music and Effects version of the film, which allows the dialogue track to be replaced with different language versions.

The Re-Recording Mixers (Dubbing Mixer)

Re-Recording Mixers, formerly known as Dubbing Mixers, work with all the sound elements (dialogue, automated dialogue replacement, foley, sound effects, atmospheres, and music), and mix them together to create the final soundtrack. They are primarily responsible for ensuring that film sound is

correct both technically and stylistically. In the final mix, the soundtrack is further refined in consultation with the director, and mixed to a 5.1 Surround Sound industry standard.

The Supervising Sound Editor

Supervising Sound Editors are responsible for all sound post production. They are the director's main point of contact for everything concerning the production soundtracks. They must have a good grounding in dialogue recording, automated dialogue replacement, foley and sound effects or music editing. On big budget film and TV productions they usually start work before shooting begins and appoint specialised Sound Editors to supervise separate teams for each area of work. For smaller productions they will be more hands on. They are responsible for the sound budget and managing the schedule to ensure it goes to plan.

SAGE - What to expect from an editor - Info for producers.pdf

For more info on roles: https://www.screenskills.com/job-profiles