



# Post-production career map

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[screenskills.com/job-profiles/browse/post-production](https://screenskills.com/job-profiles/browse/post-production)



# What is post-production?

Post-production is the final stage in film and programme making where the footage is cut, music, sound and commentary are mixed and visual effects are added. Many of the key creative decisions that make a production most memorable are made in the cutting room. It's where films come to life – or even get 'saved'.

## The post-production industry

The importance of the industry is recognised every year at the BAFTAs, Oscars, Emmys and many other awards. Categories such as editing, visual effects and sound all show how much it is valued. It's a massive sector which continues to grow, serving not just feature films, television and commercials but also music videos, computer games, and productions streamed via the internet.

## What is the post-production process?

Post-production begins with the ingestion of all the recorded material into the server of a post-production house. This gives all the different departments access to the same digitised material.

The editor starts to view, cut and assemble the programme in an edit suite (sometimes known as the offline), often working with the director, or an edit producer if it's a documentary. While the edit is progressing, there are many other jobs taking place in different departments. These include:

- ADR: adding extra dialogue for technical reasons or to improve the storytelling
- Foley: physically creating sound effects that could not be captured on location
- Composition: creating the music that will accompany the film
- Commentary: adding voice-over to a documentary

Often, VFX (visual effects) runs parallel to the edit. VFX is the art of combining computer-generated (CG) sequences with live-action footage to create scenes that can't be filmed in real life. A whole sequence can be created by the VFX team

Now, if required, several different versions will be created for use on different platforms and in different territories all over the world.

## In reality...

In reality, the process varies from production to production. It's quite common for editing to begin before shooting has finished so the director can see how the film is coming together. On documentaries, while the commentary is usually added at the end, sometimes it's necessary to record it while on location, e.g. to accommodate the availability of the presenter.

There are always new innovations that change the process. The latest development is the shooting technique known as 'virtual production'. Traditionally, a sci-fi film with an alien landscape, for example, would be shot against a green screen with the landscape added in post-production. Today, however, it's possible to portray the landscape on massive LED screens and shoot the cast against the digital background. This means work that was once done in post now has to be ready before filming takes place.

The most important thing on any production is to understand the process and know which stages are flexible and which need to be set in stone.

## How long does post-production take?

Typically, a one-hour television documentary will need about five or six weeks in the edit. It's usual for the programme commissioners to request viewings at key points. Usually, the first is about halfway through. This is known as the 'rough cut', when the programme should be fairly well-structured but almost certainly over-length. The second viewing, the 'fine cut' is near to the end, when the programme should be very close to length with, ideally, only a few adjustments to be made.

In a feature film, the process is longer. It can take several months for the director and editor to assemble the rough cut, sometimes known as the 'director's cut', which is usually approved by producers. The whole editing process can take as long as a year.

## Where does post-production happen?

For many years, the UK's post-production industry was based firmly in the Soho area of London. Nearly all the major post-houses are still found there, clustered together within a few square miles, often in huge offices the size of department stores, housing everything a film or TV production could need, including editing, graphics, dubbing and grading, all under one roof. These post-houses are often known as 'one-stop shops', designed to attract productions that want an end-to-end solution, without the need to book several different companies.

However, not all post-production facilities are in Soho. Major studios such as Pinewood, Elstree and Warner Bros at Leavesden all have their own post facilities on site. And in the last 20 years, major post-production facilities have been established all over Britain, as big broadcasters have moved their production base out of London to cities such as Cardiff, Manchester and Glasgow. There are also a large number of smaller independent cutting rooms and graphics companies operating across the UK. They may be small, but many have developed a good reputation for a particular aspect of post-production, such as ADR or grading.

We are now right at the beginning of the next evolution, with superb broadband enabling picture-editors to cut programmes using their own equipment in a spare room or garden shed, and even transmitting them live to air. It will be quite a while before a huge project like a James Bond film, costing hundreds of millions, is edited in someone's kitchen, but change is happening and at quite a pace, so if you want to join the post-production industry, it is possible to do so from almost anywhere in the UK.

## Why choose a career in post-production?

All the roles require a mix of technical skills and creativity, plus the ability to communicate and work well in a team. Whichever role you choose, it can lead to a great career.

Post-production may not appeal to everyone, as the working environments are usually indoors, sometimes without any natural light. One of the best things about working in post is being part of a highly creative and motivated team. If you are in

a post house, projects will be handed from one specialist to another, and everyone will need to make sure their work is of the highest standard. When it's working well, it can feel like you are part of a big family.

If post-production is for you and you have a talent for the job, you will be able to build a reputation and become sought after by the biggest productions, perhaps winning an Emmy, a BAFTA, or even an Oscar, for your work.

## Employment prospects

At the moment the industry is growing, so you should be able to find work. While some post houses offer staff jobs, it's most likely that you will need to be freelance for at least part of your career. Go to [screenskills.com/developing-your-career/freelance-toolkit](https://www.screenskills.com/developing-your-career/freelance-toolkit) to learn how to do this.

In post-production there will always be new technology that can dramatically change how things are done, so you will need to continue to learn and be alert to new trends throughout your career. As you progress, there will be the opportunity to move into management, either leading a team or possibly setting up a post-production house of your own.

## Routes in

There is no set route into any of the roles in post-production. Everyone working in the industry will have a different story to tell about how they got there. Here are some ways in that you could try:

### The apprenticeship route

An apprenticeship is a job combined with training, so it's a great opportunity to earn as you learn. You might find post-production companies that are offering apprenticeships as a post-production technical operator, or something similar. Go to [screenskills.com/job-profiles/browse/post-production](https://www.screenskills.com/job-profiles/browse/post-production) to find out more about the relevant apprenticeships for each role.

### The university route

It's not essential to go to university to get into post-production; it's more important to have evidence of your technical skills and your craft. However, if you want a degree, take a look at ScreenSkills' Select list of recommended courses at [screenskills.com](https://www.screenskills.com).

[com/select-courses](https://www.screenskills.com/select-courses) and find one in post-production. We recognise courses with strong links to industry, which may be useful in helping you to make contacts and get your first job.

## The entry level job route

Getting an entry-level job is a great way to get to know the industry, build contacts and make your way up to your chosen role. You might find a post-production company that will take you on as a runner, trainee or edit assistant. Research the companies you'd like to work for. Take a look at [ukscreenalliance.co.uk/directory](https://www.ukscreenalliance.co.uk/directory) for a list of reputable post-production companies. Check out their websites for job vacancies. Write and ask if they have any entry-level roles.

## Networking

Networking is an important part of getting jobs within the post-production industry. Increase your connections by going to industry events. [screenskills.com/training-and-opportunities](https://www.screenskills.com/training-and-opportunities) is a good place to start. Do some skills training and get to know people there. Join post-production groups on social platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn. Become part of the conversation.

## Build a portfolio

For roles such as composer or sound assistant, it can be useful to create a showreel of your work. Go to [screenskills.com/starting-your-career/building-your-portfolio](https://www.screenskills.com/starting-your-career/building-your-portfolio) to learn how to do this.

## Pay

Pay is usually negotiated on daily or weekly rates. To find out the going rate for your role, check out Bectu's rate cards. ([bectu.org.uk/get-involved-in-the-union/ratecards](https://www.bectu.org.uk/get-involved-in-the-union/ratecards))

## Hours of work

Working in post-production often involves irregular hours. You can expect early mornings and late finishes. If you need workplace stability and set hours, this is probably not the industry for you.

## What next?

Details of the routes into each job role can be found at [screenskills.com/job-profiles/post-production](https://www.screenskills.com/job-profiles/post-production). There's information about freelancing, networking and building a portfolio at [screenskills.com/starting-your-career](https://www.screenskills.com/starting-your-career)

## Looking for further advice?

If you're interested in a career in post-production, check out these websites to find out more:

**ScreenSkills**, for information on careers [screenskills.com/job-profiles/browse/post-production](https://www.screenskills.com/job-profiles/browse/post-production) and courses [screenskills.com/starting-your-career/screenskills-select](https://www.screenskills.com/starting-your-career/screenskills-select)

**UK Screen Alliance**, a trade association that represents the UK screen industries: [ukscreenalliance.co.uk](https://www.ukscreenalliance.co.uk)

**BBC Academy**, training and development for the BBC and wider industry: [bbc.co.uk/academy](https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy)

**Royal Television Society**, bursaries, jobs and training schemes in the TV industry: [rts.org.uk/education-and-training-pages/education-training](https://www.rts.org.uk/education-and-training-pages/education-training)

**The Institution of Engineering and Technology**, membership organisation with careers information in engineering: [theiet.org/career](https://www.theiet.org/career)

**BECTU**, the media and entertainment union: [bectu.org.uk](https://www.bectu.org.uk)

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## Post-production management

**Post-production supervisor**  
Helps a producer achieve as much as possible in the edit process without going over budget.

Post-production supervisors are experienced in all the creative and financial processes of film and TV programme-making and manage every step of the post-production pipeline. They provide a post-production schedule, can hire staff for the edit, keep track of the workflow and the budget. They coordinate with sound, editing and VFX teams to ensure all the elements come together for the completion of the film or TV show.

## Post-production runner

Assists everyone in the office or studio, whether it is for ad hoc problem solving, admin or making sure there is coffee and tea ready for staff and crew. Post-production runners are efficient, great communicators and excellent at taking instructions.

They sometimes work on reception, answering the phone and making clients and guests feel welcome.

## Edit Suite

**Picture editor**  
Works closely with the director or producer to select the best shots and put them together in the right order to tell a great story. As well as being

a good technical editor, the picture editor needs to be able to structure a narrative in inventive ways to maintain interest. The length of the productions they work on can vary from a short advertisement to a music video, a segment from a magazine programme, a one-hour documentary or a feature film.

## Edit producer

Works with an editor to create a programme from the 'rushes' (raw video material). On a documentary, edit producers take all the rushes and put the best bits together, often starting by putting all the material on a timeline. They then edit it all down to time to create a concise episode or feature. On live studio programmes or outside broadcasts, edit

producers are responsible for the pre-prepared films, known as VTs, that are inserted into the programme. Very experienced edit producers may oversee an entire series, creating an overall style and carrying a narrative over several episodes.

**Edit assistant**  
Supports the picture editor by organising the recorded footage and preparing it for the edit. Edit assistants

'ingest' footage, which means processing recorded content and making sure that all the digital files and assets are correctly sorted and formatted for editing. Edit assistants may also transfer archive footage and music, look after the cutting rooms and assist the picture editor with other daily tasks.

## Archive producer

Is responsible for sourcing archive footage, negotiating a rate and getting permission to use it. The brief may be to look for news footage, film clips, commercials, music clips or published text; anything that will illustrate a point or add context to a drama or documentary.

## Graphics

**Motion graphic designer**  
Creates all the graphics that are in films, TV programmes and commercials. Motion graphic designers come up with and produce a myriad of different assets such as opening sequences, captions, titles, animated charts, credits and logos. Their role is to create a consistent 'look' that supports the tone of the programme and is often mirrored in the production design, and sometimes even the merchandise associated with it. From production to social media and branding, motion graphic designers influence the visual identity of the show.

## Sound studios

**Supervising sound editor**  
Manages the team that looks after the sound in films, TV programmes, music videos, advertising and video games.

Supervising sound editors are responsible for dialogue, additional dialogue recording (ADR), sound effects, commentary recording, background sounds, Foley and music. After picture lock, supervising sound editors attend a 'spotting session' with the director and other sound editors where they discuss any

ideas for the overall feel of the sound. They systematically work through every sound effect and line of dialogue or commentary to see what's needed. Supervising sound editors are also responsible for the sound budget and for organising the workflow.

**Sound assistant**  
Assists the sound department with various tasks within the studio environment.

Sound assistants, or sound trainees as they are also known, aid the sound editing team and help with both practical and sound-related tasks including sound recording, daily studio tidying, making sure audio equipment is ready for use and greeting guests in the studios. They usually start with smaller tasks and gain more responsibility as they become more experienced over time.

**ADR editor**  
Records the additional dialogue needed to complete a feature film, television drama and, sometimes, a documentary.

ADR stands for 'additional dialogue replacement' and is also referred to as 'post-synch'. Essentially it's recording extra dialogue in the studio after the film has been captured. ADR editors loop a short sequence over and over on a screen while a performer 're-records' the lines. ADR editors must match the new recordings very precisely to the original material to make the changes unnoticeable.

**Foley artist**  
Creates the sound effects on films, TV programmes, animation, video and games. During filming, some sounds are recorded on location while others are remade or exaggerated afterwards for a stronger effect. These might be as simple as footsteps or birdsong in the background, or as challenging as inventing what a dinosaur sounds like or how a door in a dungeon sounds when opening and closing. Foley artists work as precisely as possible to match the timing and tone of all the sound effects they add, so the audience doesn't know that the sounds were created in post-production.

**Composer**  
Creates the music for a feature or TV programme. Composers create musical scores, theme songs and opening musical pieces that accompany the filmed images. Together with the director and the

music editor, they decide where and how the music can emphasise or enhance a certain mood or moment to the fullest effect. A composer can make a film or show feel like a grand spectacle or an intimate little story, purely through the orchestration of the music.

**Music editor**  
Is responsible for all the music in a film, TV or video production. Together with the director and the composer, music editors help plan and decide the

purpose of the music that is featured. Music editors develop a temporary score or guide track that is meant to help the composer in creating original musical pieces. Music editors also liaise with the sound team and are present in all decisions involving the use or making of music.

**Sound editor**  
Systematically works through a film or programme checking the sound of each sequence - dialogue, music and sound effects - and ensuring it all comes together perfectly in sync.

Sound editors come into the picture after the recordings have been put together in the edit, but before they go to the final mix sound. This stage is known as 'track laying', and here the sound editors look at every moment in the film to check all the effects are doing the right job. Is a car door slamming loud enough? Is the Machine-gun firing powerful enough? If the effects don't have enough impact the sound editor may decide to change or add to them.

## Dubbing theatre

**Dubbing mixer**  
Mixes together all the different sound elements of a production such as music, dialogue, voice-overs and commentary, to create a final soundtrack. They balance sound levels on each track so that, for example, the music doesn't overpower the dialogue. Dubbing mixers are masters of sound and know exactly how to adjust each element for the desired effect.



## Grade and online suite

**Colourist**  
Contributes to the mood and look of a film or TV show by defining its colours. In a process called 'grading', colourists work with the director and director of photography in a grading suite to decide the colour palette and 'look' of the feature. Their work is important because it can determine the style and tone of the final production.

**Grading assistant**  
Assists the grader or colourist on a film, programme or commercial. Grading assistants prepare and

load the files that the colourists will grade, and make sure that everything is ready and checked for technical errors. In addition to helping with technical tasks, grading assistants will also make sure the edit suite is ready for the production staff attending the grading sessions.

**Online editor**  
Polishes the edits made by the picture editor to create the final version of the production. Where picture editors work on sorting, cutting and arranging the raw footage until it gets to a stage known as 'picture-locked', online editors continue from the picture lock until it is a finished production. This process includes conforming the images to the highest possible resolution, formatting the files and cleaning up the images.

## Subtitler

Provides the subtitles, or captions, that are written versions of dialogue and sound on the screen.

There are two different types of subtitler who require different skills. The first role translates all the dialogue into different languages, making it possible for people all over the world to enjoy the film or programme. This requires excellent language skills and a good knowledge of technical and slang words. The second role for a subtitler is to create captions for the deaf and hard of hearing. They describe all the dialogue, music and sound effects in two-line captions that appear on the screen. These captions are usually prepared for pre-recorded productions but sometimes the subtitles need to be added live, perhaps for a news programme, and, in this case, the subtitler will use voice-activated software to help create the captions instantly.

## Central technical area

**Tech ops supervisor**  
Makes sure all the technical facilities are running smoothly in the day-to-day operation of a post-production house, including the security of the data stored on servers.

Tech ops manage the technical equipment in the data storage area, cutting rooms for editing, dubbing theatres and grading suites. All the equipment in these departments needs to function correctly for a film or TV programme to be completed and delivered on time. They also make sure that all the technology is up to date.

**Deliverables producer**  
Is responsible for delivering all the files of a completed film or TV programme in the correct formats.

Deliverables producers encode video and audio files. The encoded files are part of the 'deliverables'. To do this, they have to know the specifications for each distributor - the resolution, the frame rate, the audio settings, and the colour. They make sure that the assets are tested and delivered within the agreed budget and on time.

# Careers in Post-production

