

# Film industry roles: Gaffer

## What Is a Gaffer?

The gaffer is the chief lighting technician on a set and is head of the electrical department. The gaffer's job is to run a team of lighting technicians to execute the lighting plan for a production. The name "gaffer" in Hollywood actually comes from British slang for a tool called the "gaff," which was a hooked metal pole used in theatre to adjust the stage lights.

The gaffer's second-in-command is the best boy electric, who helps the gaffer lead the lighting technicians.

## What Are the Responsibilities of a Gaffer?

The gaffer's job description includes responsibilities during the preproduction and production phases of a movie or television show.

- 1. Reads the script and makes note of any special lighting needs for the production.
- 2. Meets with the director, producers, and director of photography to determine their vision for the lighting.
- 3. Comes up with a plan to execute that vision, including what lights and lighting equipment will be best for the job, all within the production's budget.
- 4. Assembles the lighting crew, including set lighting technicians, lamp operators, and the best boy.
- 5. Gives the lighting plan to the best boy, who leads the lighting technicians in setting up the lights and electrical equipment. Lighting technicians use specific tools to do their job, like "gaffer tape," which secures electrical cords on set.
- 6. Observes the lighting on the film set or television set during filming and makes any adjustments to ensure the lighting is just right.

## What Is the Difference Between a Gaffer and a Grip?

As head electrician, the gaffer works with many other film crews and personnel during a motion picture production.

One such crew is the grip crew. While the lighting technicians are in charge of setting up all electrical equipment, the grip crew is in charge of all non-electrical equipment for the gaffer and camera operators. This non-electrical equipment is called "rigging," and it includes any equipment that helps to lift or hoist other equipment. The grip department specializes in camera rigs (to stabilize camera movement and achieve specific camera angles) and lighting rigs (to achieve specific lighting techniques and effects). The grip crew is led by someone called the key grip, who coordinates all rigging needs on a movie set in much the same way the gaffer coordinates the lighting needs.

The grip crew also has a crew member whose job title is "best boy," often referred to as the "best boy grip," and is not to be confused with the gaffer's best boy, the best boy electric.

