

Film Industry Role: Script Supervisor

What Is a Script Supervisor?

A script supervisor (sometimes called a continuity supervisor) is an on-set member of a film crew whose sole responsibility is ensuring continuity throughout principal photography. In film, continuity is the principle of making sure that all details in a film or TV show are consistent from shot to shot and from scene to scene. For instance, if at the beginning of a scene an actor picks up a glass with their right hand, continuity dictates that they should be holding that glass with their right hand throughout the scene—and it's the script supervisor's job to keep that detail correct.

What Does a Script Supervisor Do?

A script supervisor makes sure that the film follows the principles of continuity, even when each shot may have been taken at a different time and in a completely different order. During a film project, a script supervisor will:

- Compile a script breakdown. During pre-production, a script supervisor will read through the entire script, breaking down the various elements in each scene—for instance, what time of day a scene is supposed to be set at, what props and costumes the scene will need, and so forth. These notes are compiled into a document called a script breakdown, which is then used to inform other departments about what they need to prep for ahead of production. By getting this information to various departments beforehand, the script supervisor will be able to prevent many continuity errors before they happen.
- Take notes during every shot. During filming, the script supervisor will take careful, detailed notes during every shot—keeping track of details like which hand an actor used to pick something up, or which direction an actor was looking in when they said a specific line. This information helps the film crew reset a scene without breaking continuity. Script supervisors will also keep track of other details, like how many takes the crew shot of each scene, the length of the scenes, and even slate information.
- Maintain the most current script. If any changes happen to the script during film production (whether an actor improvised a detail or a plot point was tweaked), it's the script supervisor's job to write these changes down for future reference. The script supervisor is in charge of keeping the most up-to-date version of the script, so that if a department head comes up to you with script questions, you'll be able to give them the answer that maintains continuity.
- Consolidate notes into production book. Once shooting has wrapped, the script supervisor compiles their notes into a series of production reports called a "production book." This book serves as a reference point for the post-production team (mainly editors and visual-effects artists), helping to ensure they're following the right script so they can avoid making continuity errors of their own.

What Qualities Do You Need to Become a Script Supervisor?

Here are some essential qualities that every script supervisor should possess:

- **Organization:** Script supervision requires working with a massive amount of data—from shot lists to props to costumes to the direction of the light in a scene. In order to be a good script supervisor, you'll need to be able to keep track of all of this information and keep it organized, so you'll have an answer when the director asks you a question about a change that has been made, or if a scene is gearing up to be full of continuity errors.
- **Attention to detail:** As a script supervisor, you'll need to train yourself to notice the smallest of details, like what line of sight a certain shot uses and whether or not it matches the actors' eyelines in the wide shot. If you miss even tiny details, audiences will notice and be distracted during the final cut of the film.
- **Willingness to speak up:** The script supervisor position operates independently of the film crew. Since the script supervisor is a one-person crew they alone are tasked with speaking up when a continuity issue arises. As a script supervisor, if you see a shot violating continuity, it's your job to speak up and bring the error to the director's attention.
- **Approachable:** The primary job of a script supervisor is to point out errors in continuity, but it's important that you communicate these errors in a diplomatic way. You'll need to be patient if other crew members get frustrated when you tell them a lighting set-up or costume needs to be adjusted in order to maintain continuity. Efficient communication and a positive disposition are essential tools for building a good rapport with the crew.

How to Become a Script Supervisor

Ready to start learning how to become a script supervisor? Here are a few things you can do to work your way up to the job:

- **Work as a production assistant.** A script supervisor needs to have a working knowledge of many different filmmaking departments, from costumes to camera work. A script supervisor is unique in that they are a “department of one,” meaning there's not a clear position beneath them to start in to work your way up to the job. But there is another way to accumulate the necessary knowledge to qualify for this position: find work as a production assistant. The best way to develop your knowledge of film sets and different departments is by working as a production assistant on several different film projects.
- **Build relationships.** The moviemaking industry often boils down to who you know—so as you're working on different sets, make sure to build relationships with the crew and establish a list of contacts. One of the best ways to do this is by being great at your job—if other film crew members are impressed by your work as a PA, they're likely to call you back to work for them on other projects.
- **Study film in school.** While film school isn't a requirement to find work as a script supervisor, having a film degree or a few film classes under your belt can help you understand the industry better, as well as give you a leg up against others who are also applying for script supervisor positions.