

Film industry roles: Production Sound Mixer

What Is a Production Sound Mixer?

The production sound mixer (also called the location sound mixer) is the senior-most sound position during pre-production and production. They serve as a sound recordist during filming, and are responsible for recording and balancing the audio effects on set.

What Does a Production Sound Mixer Do?

The production sound mixer's job starts in preproduction. Once they are hired on for a specific video production, the production sound mixer:

- 1. Chooses what audio equipment to use for that particular project, as well as providing that equipment.
- 2. Visits the filming locations ahead of time to evaluate any potential sound problems, such as excessive background noise. For example, they evaluate whether there is heavy traffic noise in the area or whether the location is susceptible to high winds.
- 3. Hires or assembles their team, which usually includes boom operators, sound assistants, and sometimes sound trainees.

During film production, the production sound mixer:

- 1. Records sound for the film on set. This includes all actors' dialogue during every take, as well as "wild sound," which means any location sounds that the post-production team would want to use in the film or as reference.
- 2. Mixes audio in real-time, which means they balance the volume and other sound quality to ensure the audio will work for the final product.
- 3. Evaluates the quality of the audio after every take and asks for retakes as needed.
- 4. Sets up and takes down all sound equipment.

What Skills Are Needed to Become a Production Sound Mixer?

The production sound mixer is the senior-most position on the production sound team, so it's essential to have extensive knowledge and experience of sound devices and recording. Most production sound mixers start in the entry-level positions of the sound team to get comfortable with the equipment—positions like operating the boom mic or being a production assistant or sound trainee.

What Is the Difference Between a Production Sound Mixer and a Re-recording Mixer?

There is a second type of sound mixer who works during the post-production phase of filming. This mixer is called the re-recording mixer, and they're in charge of combining and balancing all dialogue audio with sound effects (both simpler effects produced by the foley artists, and complex, invented effects produced by the sound designers) and music during post-production.

The re-recording mixer is similar to the production sound mixer in that they both determine the proper sound levels for each piece of audio. But where the production sound mixer does this in the field for isolated soundbites, the re-recording mixer balances the sound for the entire film—adjusting dialogue that was filmed at different times and from different distances, deciding when the film score should be emphasized over the sound effects, and so forth.