

CUTTING ROOM PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE

Obviously you will find your time in the cutting room creatively challenging. To be involved with and to contribute to a film programme that over 10 million people may watch is a stimulating experience. You will be working with editing and production staff who will be only too prepared to indulge in philosophical debate with you and who will respect your intellect and the contribution you have to make.

However, in order to actually produce the product to the high technical standard required and within the allotted schedule, certain basics of cutting room practice must be mastered. Once these perhaps mundane details have become second nature, then creative discussions can flower in a more relaxed environment. It is no use agonising over the artistic impact of a sequence if you cannot find the material you need to complete it.

1. 'Domestic' arrangements:

- a) Collect the cutting room key from reception in the morning.
- b) Visit Film Despatch each morning and lunch time even if nothing specific is expected. Someone may have sent you something without warning, or something which other people are desperate for may be languishing on your shelf by mistake.
- c) Keep track of material entering or leaving your cutting room either with an 'in and out' book or noting arrivals and departures in your cutting room diary, in which you will also establish lists of useful telephone numbers (despatches, transfer suites etc.).
- d) Supplies of joining tape, cue sheets, meal claim forms, sharp pencils etc., should be monitored.

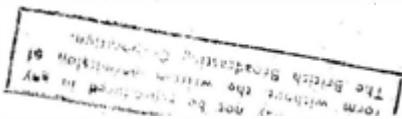
2. Rushes:

If the FOM for your programme is in the same area as you are, collect the picture rushes from the projection area after he has viewed them, and the sound rushes from transfer suite. If the FOM is at another area he will generally arrange to send the picture rushes to you and for the transfer suite in his area to send the sound.

N.B. While picture rushes will be available from the labs. 'first thing' in the morning and the FOM will have viewed them by 10.00 - 10.30 am, the sound transfer will normally only be started in the morning and will not be available to you so quickly.

At this stage you should 'book in' the material and note the front and end key number of each camera roll before it gets incorporated into any sync reels. Rushes from the labs. do not always have their key numbers printed through, so a reprint obtained at this early stage will be an advantage.

It is important to gather together the original  $\frac{1}{4}$ " tapes from the transfer suite as these are kept in the cutting room. The original negative for the picture is, however, held by the labs. who originally processed it.



### 3. Synching up:

Unlike videotape, picture and sound do not come to us in sync. The synching up process is to arrange the footage shot into large reels, each successive shot occurring in synch, by use of the clapper board or any other identifying or synchronising devices on the film (mike taps, door slams, lip movements etc.) and the picsync in the cutting room. The actual techniques of synching up defy simple description and will be quickly developed with experience. Generally you will assemble the sync roll in slate order, but your editor may have special preferences such as mute shots being put on a separate reel; this should be established before you start.

The production, especially of a long play, may specify selected takes only to be included in the sync rushes reel to save unnecessary viewing time, the non-selected or "NG" takes being synched up on separate reels.

When you sync up rushes either for your editor or at the behest of a Chief Film Editor or FOM, you will be the first person to get the full impression of the footage as it was shot i.e. picture and sound together. You may spot problems that the FOM, seeing the picture, and transfer suite monitoring the sound, would not. eg.

- a) slipping sync
- b) no sound/picture for some slate(s)
- c) a 'run-out' on the picture or sound

Technical problems like these should be brought to the notice of whoever gave you the synching up to do as soon as possible. The sooner the crew on location can be told, the more likelihood there is something being done about it, eg.

- a) a camera/tape recorder fault can be rectified
- b) a slate can be re-shot

N.B. Before spreading alarm about a problem, however, you must consult the camera and sound sheets. The crew may be aware of the sync problem or run-out and re-shot for that reason. A 'missing' picture slate may be on another camera roll if the cameraman has decided to change magazines.

eg. Roll 13 has 81 - 1. 81-2. 81-3. 81-4. 82-1.

Roll 14 has 81 - 5. 81-6. 83-1. 83-2. etc.

This indicates that the cameraman has filmed up to 81-4 on roll 13 and then changed magazines to roll 14 to be sure of completing 81-5 without danger of running out. Later in the filming he has returned to finish off the end of roll 13 with shot 82-1, which he knows will be a short shot. The sound, of course, will run consecutively through 81-1 to 81-6, 82-1, 83-1 etc.

- i) Try to keep all the takes of the same slate on the same reel of sync rushes. It is difficult to compare performances if takes 1 to 6 are on the end of one reel and takes 7 and 8 are on the head of the next.

- ii) All the synching up you do should be checked for accuracy before it is released for a viewing or for numbering. An error on one slate could put the rest of the reel out of sync. A quick rewind in sync through the Steenbeck will save gross embarrassment for everybody, especially you, at a viewing.

Each reel of sync rushes, and indeed nearly every reel of film in the cutting room, should have a reasonable length of blank spacing at the head and tail of the reel for lacing up and labelling purposes, eg.

"Head - Hills of Heaven - Sync Rushes - 14-1 to 26-4"

#### 4. Wild Tracks:

While working through your sync rushes, wild tracks will be observed. These should be carefully identified at the time, because once they have been broken out of the big roll of sound rushes it can be difficult to relate them to a specific sequence. No editor likes to open a can of wild tracks to find several rolls of mag. just labelled 'wild track atmos'.

In the heat of the moment the sound recordist's verbal identification may not be adequate for cutting room use and may be of little value when the wild tracks are broken out. eg. 'atmos. for previous sequence', 'extra dialogue for sequence shot yesterday'.

There may be several crews on your programme shooting for a few days each, so it is up to you to establish a system for cutting room use to identify wild tracks

- a) by name
- b) some kind of letter or number system
- c) some indication of the tape roll from which they came, so that extra transfers may be quickly obtained later in the schedule eg. 'W.T. 23. Extra dialogue for slate 86 (after 92. roll 9)' indicating that the dialogue is intended, as verbally identified by the recordist for use with slate 86, but is actually located on tape roll 9 after slate 92. For good measure it has been determined as the 23rd wild track of the filming.

#### 5. Viewings:

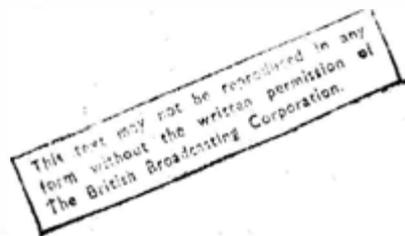
You should become familiar with the location of all the various viewing theatres at Ealing, TV Centre, Lime Grove etc., and the means by which film is moved about from place to place (vans, taxis). Any of your film sent out of the cutting room must have a proper label on all the cans giving at least the programme title and the name of the film editor, eg.

'Hills of Heaven' Episode 3

Editor: P. Evans

Sync Rushes 14-1 to 26-4

Picture and Master Sound



Some 'return address' should be taped to the cans as well if you expect projectionists at remote viewing theatres to return your film. If the viewing is at your 'local' theatre you will be expected to deliver it in time for it to be laced up, and to take it away as soon as possible after the viewing.

With the vast amount of material moving around film department buildings you must take sensible steps to ensure that your film does not go astray.

At a viewing with editor/director/producer you may like to make notes as to the observations being made about the material, in fact your editor may specifically request this, to help remind him later of people's feelings at the time.

6. Numbering:

After synching up, a matching series of inked numbers can be printed on picture and sound every foot to assist the editor to keep his material in sync while he is working with it. This is normally done by outside companies who specialise in this service.

The numbers generally take the form of a 2-letter prefix and 4 digits. You can specify the prefix, which is fixed, and the digits are run in sequence from zero for each reel of material. This process is known as 'rubber numbering', eg.

1-1 to 14-6 ..... AA0000 to AA0968  
15-1 to 24-2 ..... AB0000 to AB1649  
25-1 to 49-2 ..... AC0000 to AC2496

You may specify the prefix to have some particular significance to your programme eg.,

- a) cameras A, B and C ..... Prefix AA, BB, CC
- b) 'American' material ..... AA, AB, AC
- c) 'Bordeaux' material ..... BA, BB, BC
- d) Library footage, Dupes ..... LA, LB, DA, DB
- e) Film recording, radio mike ..... FR, RM, etc.

although the availability of letters above K should be checked with the company doing the work.

As your material has to be sent away for numbering, any conflicting demands of viewings must be borne in mind.

Particularly on a long scheduled programme, your editor may require a magnetic film copy made of the sync-up sound, which he will work with, preserving the original sound transfer as a 'master' for use later on at the track-laying and dubbing stages. Obviously this 'copy sound' should

also be numbered in sync with its master and picture rushes. The need for accurate synching up in the first place is again brought home, for an unnoticed error will be preserved once the reel of rushes has been numbered. It is very irritating for an editor working with numbered rushes to have to allow for the fact that for example, slates 14 to 26 only have their numbers a few frames out of sync.

7. Logging:

The number system on the film is then committed to paper. This involves relating the roll number, slate and take number, picture key number and rubber numbers together, plus any useful remarks such as 'end board', 'run out on sound' etc. eg.

CAM ROLL	TAPE ROLL	SLATE	KEY NUMBERS	RUBBER NUMBERS	REMARKS
15 (cont)	9	101-1	F4238741-8761	DA0006-0016	End board
16	9	102-1	8762-8794	017- 003	Neg. scratch
16	10	103-1	8795-etc.	034- etc.	

However you choose to lay out your logging and with whatever information you wish to embroider it, the objective is simply to enable you and your editor to identify any piece of film in the whole programme, eg. a small length of sound bearing only the rubber number DA0028 can be traced by your log book to being part of slate 102-1, tape roll 9 etc.

8. Breaking down rushes:

This involves breaking the large reels of sync rushes into smaller units for the editor to start cutting. Generally the rushes, having been copied and numbered if required, are broken down back into the individual shots, keeping the picture and sound for each together (copy sound if used). Your editor is likely to express personal preferences at this stage eg. should,

- a) picture and sound of each shot be interwound on same core or onto separate cores?
- b) several takes of the same slate be kept together for your editor to select the best?
- c) a series of slates that cover the same event or sequence be kept together so your editor can study the material without repeatedly lacing up his machine?

Methods will vary from editor to editor and will depend a lot on the type of programme. With a long play in which the preferred takes have been observed at the time of shooting and subsequent viewings, it would be safe to

split these from the multitude of NG attempts. With a 'verite' documentary a succession of individually slated shots may cover the same activity and so perhaps should be kept together at this stage. Some editors prefer to work from the sync reels and require no formal breaking down to be done.

Whatever method is employed, a system of labelling is vital,

- a) with tape on the individual coils of film,
- b) on the label of the can,
- c) taped 'side labels' on the cans so their contents can be identified when they are stacked on shelves.

Only as soon as you have completed all this preparatory work can your editor proceed, confident that everything that was shot

- a) is in sync,
- b) can be identified quickly,
- c) can be related to an original ie. neg. rolls held at the labs.,  $\frac{1}{4}$ " tapes and master mag. in the cutting room.

#### 9. Trims:

As your editor proceeds to cut the film he will produce trims, which are for you to look after, guard, and reproduce at a moments notice. In the early stages your editor will produce fairly long trims as he works the original footage down to a reasonable shape, and he may hang them in the trim bin. He may like you to attend him while he works to remove trims from him and thus help speed his progress. Generally, all trims from the same shot will go on the same pin of the trim bin and the same tape label can be used to identify it.

When your editor has completed a sequence the trims can be put away, although this should be checked first. Over zealous removal of trims can be as irritating as a trim bin left to overflow. The head ends of the trims of each shot should be enclosed with a rubber band, wound up, labelled and put in a can. It is as well to check at this stage that all the pieces you are putting away do in fact belong to that shot (by checking in the log book). A piece of film could have been inadvertently hung on the wrong pin and once put away wrongly will be very difficult to find again.

As your editor works over the film he will produce more and more shorter and shorter trims which will have to be filed away with the rest of the slated trims in the can. If your editor does not identify trims as he produces them, you must refer to your log book for identification.

With an efficient method of trim filing and logging it will be possible for you to locate any frame out of the nearly 1 million that you have in your possession in a 50-minute documentary shot at a ratio of 12 : 1.

#### 10. Library Footage:

The editor/director will select the sections of film they require by reference to a viewing print and track. You will then obtain for the sections needed:

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- a) a 'dupe' neg. of the appropriate kind and geometry, possessing its own key numbers
- b) a rush print from this neg. with those key numbers printed through
- c) some kind of sound track for the editor to use

The BBC Film Library will deal with your order for sections from a BBC film and after about 10 days will supply your needs via the laboratory of their choice. "External" library films have to be dealt with individually, every attempt being made to get as close to a 'master' as possible before ordering your dupe from it.

You may end up duping from original Eastman neg. 16mm show prints, 35mm release prints, Ektachrome originals, etc., but in each case the dupe negative you obtain must be of a geometry consistent with the rest of the material in your film.

Useable sound can be obtained from the non-commentary 'M & E' track of a BBC Library film, if one is available. An outside library may also be able to give you access to an effects only track, although you will most probably have to make do with a transfer from the comopt sound track on the viewing print.

#### 11. Opticals:

Any optical process required by your editor eg. freeze frames, title superimpositions etc., will also take about 10 days to obtain. The laboratories have their own optical departments or we are able to use various specialist optical companies. In the case of specialist companies, the original negative of the shots involved must be released by the holding laboratory at your request, and so you must bear this in mind if you subsequently expect the laboratory to make use of that negative for any other purpose (reprint, neg. cutting).

An optical order will normally be specified in terms of the picture key numbers, eg.

- a) 'Using slate 102-1 from roll 16 start dupe at F437 8218' (which should be just before the point where the shot is needed in the film)  
  
At F437 8234+4 frames freeze frame and hold for 20 feet.  
End dupe'
- b) 'Using slate 102-1 from roll 16 and caption enclosed start dupe at F437 8218  
  
At F437 8234+4 frames cut in super title 'Hills of Heaven'.  
  
At F437 8239 -2 frames cut out " " " "  
End dupe at F437 8249'

The 'box'  indicates exactly the part of the key number from which to count to the frame where you want an optical event to take place. When specifying the start and end of the dupe you should bear in mind how

complete the film is. If the cutting copy is finalised and a specific shot is being replaced with an optical, then you need only order the exact length involved in the cutting copy. On the other hand, if, when the optical has to be ordered, there is still some debate about the exact length of the shot to be used in the finished version, you should order sufficient dupe to allow for the maximum that seems likely to be wanted. Even if this means duping the whole slate it is better than finding at a late stage in the editing that there is not enough of the optical to meet a last minute extension. However, the cost implications should be considered.

Any complicated superimposition should be ordered in the form of a picture guide, ie. the film background shot marked in chinagraph to show the effects required and their exact positions.

You will receive a negative of the optical and a print from it. You can then incorporate this print in the cutting copy.

With all library, dupe and optical footage you will require a piece of negative to correspond with every piece of print that your editor incorporates into the film. They should have unique and matching key numbers so that neg. cutting can be accurately performed later on. You will log all pieces of dupe material as they arrive and keep all the dupe negatives you have been sent in a safe place, or send them straight away to your laboratory to be kept with all the original negative.

#### 12. Negative Cutting and Prints:

When the film is complete to everyone's satisfaction, the completed cutting copy is sent to the laboratory so that they may cut the negative to match, generally using an A & B chequerboard system. Before sending the cutting copy, check

- a) all dissolves are correctly marked,
- b) all unintentional joins ('re-sticks') are marked as such,
- c) all optical and dupe material is incorporated and the laboratories have or you are about to send them, all the corresponding pieces of negative.
- d) any shots too short to bear a key number have the nearest number by which they may be located in the original negative, written on them in chinagraph.

Specialist neg. cutting companies may be employed instead of the labs., but you should organise the movement of the original negative from the labs. and of the cut negative back to the labs. for grading and printing.

The first answer print will arrive from the labs. after about a week or so, depending on the length of your programme, and this will be viewed to check

- a) accurate negative cutting. For this reason the print should be viewed with some kind of sound track.
- b) correct appearance of dissolves
- c) cleanliness of the negative
- d) colour grading

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Problems (b), (c) and (d) can generally be remedied but (a) can raise great difficulties at this end of the schedule.

A second print will be made which will normally be the final transmission print unless further modifications to the colour grading are required by director/editor. The first print is used as viewing print from this stage on, and the transmission print carefully preserved for its final appointment with the telecine machine.

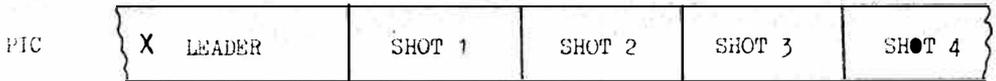
13. Track-Laying and Dubbing:

The object of track-laying is to take the finished cutting copy sound, and while keeping it all in sync, to re-distribute the individual lengths of sound track and to add others to allow the dubbing mixer to re-combine them to create the final sound image that hitherto has only been imagined by the editor and director.

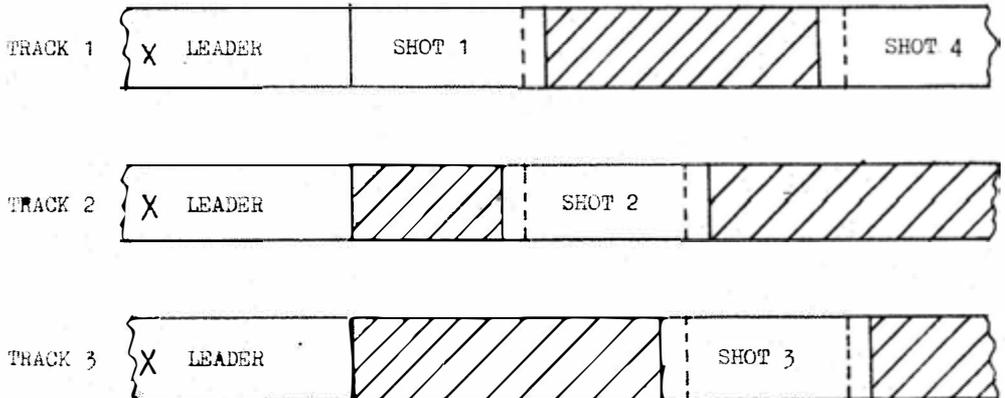
The dubbing mixer requires the sound to be on separate tracks so that individual settings of level and equalisation can be made for each, and smooth transitions can be made between them.

The practical approach to track-laying depends very much on the requirements of the programme and the time at your disposal, and techniques will quickly be developed with practice. There is no better test of your track-laying than hearing your tracks run together in a dubbing theatre.

Firstly, one proceeds to re-distribute the sync sound eg.,



By finding the original trim of each shot a useable sound overlap may be obtained and added to the piece in the cutting copy to produce:



blank spacing

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ACTION	TRACK 1	TRACK 2	TRACK 3	DISC
0 Car drives off	0 Synch FX car (14-1)			5 Dog barks
16½ Couple watching	16½	16½ Synch dialogue "I think. (24-3) ..away"	30	
30 Man in car	22	30	Int. car FX (WT 16)	

As with so much else, individual editors may have individual ideas about the details of how to complete a cue sheet, but, despite that, the following important information should be provided for the mixer:

- a) Exact footage and details of each picture cut
- b) Exact footage of each track showing if it cuts in/out or should be faded.
- c) Description of any extra 'disc' FX to be provided by the dubbing theatre staff and the footage at which they should appear.

You should insert a description of the sound on each piece of track, eg. 'synch FX car', 'synch dialogue' (with in and out words), 'WT gunshot', etc. It is useful to indicate the original slate number so that if a sound defect is revealed in the dubbing theatre then the original tape can be quickly referred to to check the problem.

It is important to realise that the dubbing mixer has never seen your film before and the only way he can get the best out of the tracks you have spent so long laying is for all your intentions to be on the cue sheets.

It is for you to ensure that all the material required gets to the dubbing theatre by the appointed time. Dubbing time is very expensive. You will need:

- a) the cutting copy picture (or a slash reversal dupe of it if the actual cutting copy is with the neg. cutters)
- b) all your tracks
- c) the original ½" tapes

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- d) your file of paperwork for the programme including camera and sound sheets and log sheets, etc.
- e) the cue sheets

You will bring away from the dub all the above plus your final mix, and if time permits, a safety copy of it which can be used for subsequent viewings, reserving the final mix for telecine. In discussion with the editor, director and mixer, any pre-mixes that may be needed for any future work on the programme (foreign versions ?) should also be taken away.

#### 14. Final Notes:

As you make up your final transmission print and final mixed track with its suitable amount of spacing head and tail etc., you could have in front of you some 2,000 feet of finished film representing nearly £1/4 million investment. Perhaps looking after these 1 million frames has been worthwhile after all.

Of course not all programmes nor all editors will employ all the methods laid out here. The pressures of time, transmission deadlines etc., will often demand that shortcuts are taken, often of a quite hair-raising nature, and it is for you to be constantly aware of the needs of the editor and programme in all the varying circumstances you will meet.

Your editor cannot be expected to concern himself with every detail of the cutting room, even if he wants to. He will often have overbearing problems of his own to do with the film, the director or the deadlines to be met. You should always try to support him.

\* \* \*

Peter Evans  
22.1.80

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