

Get paid to produce!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Television
Producer**



GARY REYNOLDS

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Contents

How to Use This Guide	3
Welcome	8
About the Author	10
1. Introduction	11
1.1 What is a TV Producer and What Do They Do?	11
1.1.1 The Many Talents of a Producer	14
1.2 The Producer’s Job	15
1.2.1 The Producer’s Responsibilities	16
1.2.2 Day-to-Day Life	18
2. What to Expect in Your New Career	20
2.1 Who Can Become a Producer?	20
2.1.1 Age in the Industry	20
2.1.2 Gender in the Industry	21
2.1.3 Race in the Industry	22
2.2 The Producer’s Life	22
2.2.1 Staff Producers and Freelancers	23
2.3 What Kind of Money Can a Producer Make?	26
2.4 The Typical Work Day	29
2.5 The Working Conditions	30
2.6 Where to Live	31

3. Learning the Ropes	33
3.1 The Process	33
3.2 Time for School	35
3.2.1 Degree Programs	35
3.2.2 Alternative Education	41
3.3 Work on Anything You Can	44
3.3.1 Volunteer Experience	44
3.3.2 Film and TV Productions	49
3.4 Complete an Internship	51
3.4.1 The Importance of Internships	51
3.4.2 The Best Places to Intern	51
3.4.3 Who to Contact at TV Stations	52
3.4.4 Other Places to Intern	53
3.4.5 How to Get the Most Out of Your Internship	55
3.5 Professional Organizations	59
3.5.1 Benefits of Joining	59
3.5.2 Some Worthwhile Organizations	60
3.6 Conferences	63
3.7 Awards	64
3.8 Magazines and Newsletters	66
4. Getting Hired	67
4.1 Cover Letters, Resumes and Demo Reels	67
4.1.1 The Cover Letter	67
4.1.2 The Resume	69
4.1.3 The Demo Reel	74

4.2 Getting Your First Job	76
4.2.1 Positions With Potential	76
4.2.2 How to Find Positions.....	77
4.2.3 Using Life Experience, Your Current Skills or Your Job to Launch Your TV Career	78
4.2.4 About Unions	80
4.3 Ways to Network	81
4.4 Getting the Job You Want	83
4.4.1 Getting Promoted.....	83
4.4.2 Hollywood...The Best Place to Start?	84
4.5 Your First Producing Job	86
4.6 Continue to Use Your Resources	87
4.7 Producing for the Internet	88
4.8 The Big-Time Job	90
5. How Others Got There	93
5.1 How I Did It	93
<i>Profile: Mark Burnett</i>	<i>97</i>
5.2 Russell Muth	99
5.3 Dean Barnes	100
5.4 Christopher Murphy	101
<i>Profile: Jonathan Murray</i>	<i>107</i>
5.5 David Mackey	109
6. Conclusion	111

7. Appendix	113
7.1 Print and Online Resources	113
7.1.1 Books	113
7.1.2 Magazines	114
7.1.3 Education-related sites	116
7.1.4 Sites for TV producers	117
7.1.5 Broadcasting job search sites	118
7.1.6 General Interest and Entertainment News Sites	119
7.2 State-by-State List of TV Stations	120
7.3 Forms for Producers	138
Video Production Script	138
Video Storyboard	140
Video Storyboard	141
Production Budget Worksheet	141
Video Crew List	146
Video Crew List	147
Talent Release Form	148
Program Proposal	149

Welcome

Welcome to the **FabJob Guide to Become a Television Producer**. In this guide we offer you a **step-by-step plan** for breaking into the exciting world of TV production and landing the “fab” job of TV Producer.

Like all FabJob career guides, this guide shares **industry secrets** and **insider information**. We have approached this guide as if we were giving this advice to a **good friend**, and we want you to **succeed** at the career you’ve been dreaming about. We hope you find this guide helpful and we hope it makes breaking into the world of TV production a reality for you.



Right up front, take a good look at yourself...

- Are you good at **keeping track of details**?
- Are you good at **managing money**?
- Can you **adhere to a schedule**?
- Do you **work well with people**?

If you answered “yes” to these questions, you already possess a number of important skills needed to produce TV programs. If you answered “no,” then you may have a little more work to do at first, but in either case **you can become a TV Producer**. You just need a plan...a checklist of what to do and when to do it. That’s what we’ll give you in this guide...**a plan for success**.

The purpose of this guide is to fill in the blanks, to demystify the whole process of breaking into television and to show you which direction to turn at the critical junctures during the important first few career-building years.

How will we do that?

We'll start by defining **what a TV Producer is** and what a TV Producer does.

We'll look at many **different types of TV programming** and TV Producers there are in this field. This guide will help you determine which type of Producer position you may best be suited for, based on your talents, needs and interests.

We'll look at **career statistics** about TV Producers, like the rates of pay, distribution of jobs in the industry and where TV Producers are living and working.

We'll chart the **basic steps** you'll need to take to end up in that special production job at the conclusion of the journey.

We'll look at the **career histories** of some successful producers of many different genres and pass on their advice on how to best prepare and proceed.

And finally, we'll share an **extensive list of resources** you can use to best achieve success.

When you're finished with this guide you'll know what step to take next and which direction to head from there on out. Along the way we'll give you tips to make the trip **a lot easier**. From that point on, with a little hard work, and if you apply what you learn here, it's just a matter of time before you'll be **where you want to be...** in an exciting, glamorous career as a TV Producer.

Will it be easy? Probably not. **Is it possible? Definitely**. Is a career as a TV Producer a realistic one for you to consider? Anyone with vision and desire can produce, but the best prepared are the most successful. Let's start preparing you for success!

1. Introduction

1.1 What is a TV Producer and What Do They Do?

“For years, I dreamt of earning a hundred bucks a week to do this...”

—Derek Harvie, Producer/Writer, *The Tom Green Show*, MTV

We all see their names in the credits of our favorite TV shows...the *Producer*. But what exactly does a Producer do? That’s a very involved question because the responsibilities of a TV Producer vary from genre to genre and from project to project.

First of all, there are **many different types of TV programming** (or **genres**) you can produce:

- **Dramas:** hour-long programs like *CSI: New York* and *Law & Order*.
- **Sitcoms:** half-hour productions like *How I Met Your Mother* and *Two and a Half Men*.



- **Newscasts:** both local and national, including news magazines like *20/20* and *Dateline*. These run on both traditional broadcast TV and cable TV.
- **Made-for-television Movies/Mini-Series:** two-hour-plus programs for both network and cable outlets.
- **Magazine Shows:** usually syndicated programs like *Entertainment Tonight* and *Access Hollywood*.

- **Talk Shows:** local, regional and syndicated shows like *Oprah Winfrey* and *Ellen DeGeneres*.



- **Game Shows:** both daytime syndicated and prime time games like *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*.
- **Documentaries:** like Ken Burns' *National Parks* and the *National Geographic Explorer* specials. These programs tend to run on PBS and cable television networks.



- **Commercials:** including local, regional and national ads.
- **Music Videos:** for MTV, VH-1 and CMT and distribution to music/dance clubs.
- **Home Shopping Programming:** both local and cable television home shopping programs need programming.
- **Infomercials:** programming like the Ronco Showtime Rotisserie & BBQ Oven and Shirt Folding Machine.
- **Internet and CD-ROM/DVD:** these media need more and more programming as they become more and more prevalent in people's homes. Many TV Producers are now producing for the Internet.

Every project in each of those genres needs at least one producer, and no matter what the genre or product, in every case, the Producer is the **ultimate decision-maker** — the big boss — the person who flies if the project works and sinks if it doesn't.

In a nutshell, the Producer **organizes** and **oversees** everything in a TV production. They are responsible for co-ordinating everything from money to script to crew to distribution. We'll get into the specifics of all their duties a little later on in this section.

The logistics of many projects are so numerous and involved, that there are actually a number of different producers on big projects: **Executive Producers, Producers, Associate Producers** and **Line Producers**.

Executive Producer

The Executive Producer is typically **the money person**. Usually all the arrangements for the **script** — and sometimes the **major stars' involvement** — have been made by the Executive Producer. While they do have a large say in the direction of the project, the Executive Producer tends to stay out of the day-to-day operations of the production. But this is *not* just a '**figurehead**' position...most Executive Producers have worked very hard for a long time and have **earned** this position.

Producer

The Producer **runs the production on a day-to-day basis**, making most of the **decisions** required to move the production forward. They are responsible for almost every aspect of the production. Very often, at the beginning of a Producer's career, they'll double up as Producer/Director and sometimes as Producer/Writer/Director. This is the position that the *FabJob Guide to Become a TV Producer* is designed to prepare you for.

Associate Producer

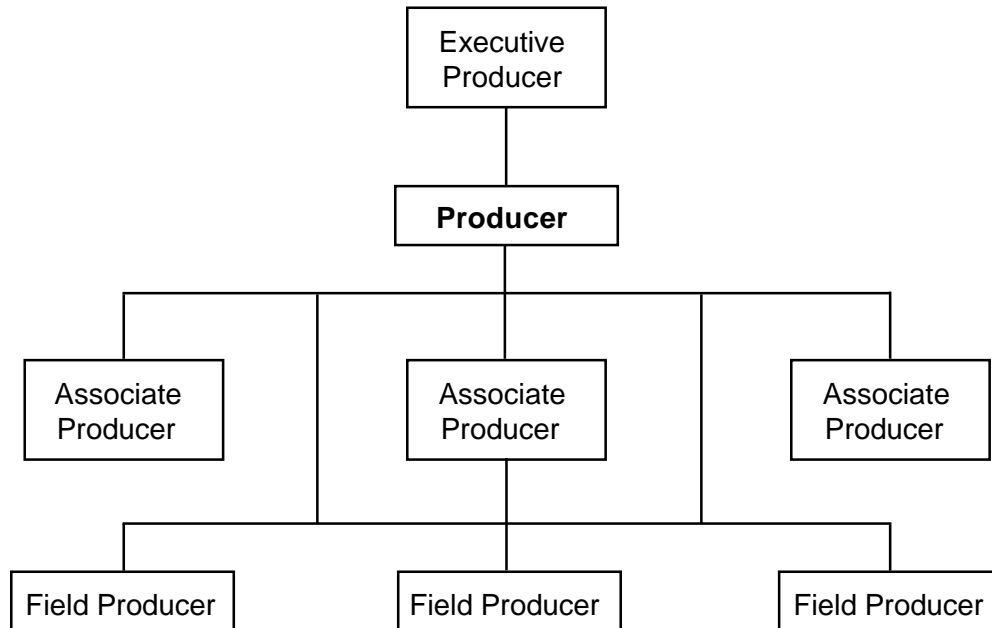
The Associate Producer serves at **the right hand of the Producer**. This person is delegated certain responsibilities solely at the discretion of the Producer.

Field (or Line) Producer

The Field (or Line) Producer assists the Producer by taking over the duties involved with **shooting on location**. Many Producers **start** their climb at this level.

Using the information you'll find in this guide, you'll be able to decide which **genre** you'd like to produce for and what **type** of producer you would ultimately like to become.

Like any organization, there is a hierarchy to these positions:



1.1.1 The Many Talents of a Producer

The TV Producer is truly **the most important crewmember** in a television production. But they earn that distinction through a lot of hard work, a lot of long hours and by bearing a massive amount of responsibility for a great number of details. Let's look at some of the characteristics of an effective TV Producer. A Producer must:

Know a little about everything

Typically, a TV Producer needs to know a little about everything that goes into creating a TV program. While the Producer doesn't actually perform the different tasks, the Producer needs to be **familiar with the duties of each crew person** in order to make some intelligent decisions.

If the Producer is not familiar with the particular responsibilities of the different crew people, there is a danger of the crew being stretched in too many directions. This can cause a loss of focus or, worse yet, result in tasks falling through the cracks. If this happens, the Producer's "**vision**" for the project is in danger. In many cases this can lead to loss of precious money and time, and that ultimately reflects on the Producer.

Be creative

The whole look, feel and sound of a project depend on the Producer, so creativity is an extremely important part of the mix. A Producer without creative vision will not go far in the business because his or her projects will not effectively communicate their messages and thus risk failing. And too many ‘bombs’ makes a Producer a cold commodity.

Be organized

Hand in hand with creativity goes **organization**. A Producer will juggle hundreds of details at a time, each of them important in moving a project from concept to finished product. A single mishandled detail can bring the whole project to a grinding halt, again wasting valuable time and money. Proficient planning is key throughout the whole production process, but it’s most critical during the early stages of production.

Be a good communicator and motivator

Finally, a TV Producer must be a good communicator and a motivator who is not only able to communicate the project’s message to the **audience**, but is able to communicate his or her vision to the **crew**.

As a Producer, conveying your **ideas** — as well as your **enthusiasm** — effectively can make all the difference. A Producer who seems muddled or gives unclear direction is just asking for failure. So, too, is the Producer who isn’t overtly excited about their project. It’s hard to motivate people if they sense you are ambivalent about the project yourself. How well you **communicate** dictates how well your people work for you.

The Producer is usually **the unsung hero**. Not many people walk away from a TV show and say, “You know, that Producer did a nice job.” You won’t necessarily get fan letters or huge write-ups in *TV Guide* or *Entertainment Weekly* all the time, but you will see your success when it comes to **reviews** of the project — or the **ratings** if it’s a broadcast production. Good reviews and high ratings will usually mean more money in your pocket for future projects.

1.2 The Producer’s Job

The TV Producer’s job is not always glamorous. The **limos, celebrities, parties and big bucks** come only to the select few who manage to succeed in the world of network television.

On the way there, the rest of us still make a **very good living**...we get a glimpse of **the good life**, we get to attend the occasional **star-studded party** and we get a lot of

personal satisfaction out of seeing our blood, sweat and tears come alive on a TV screen or computer monitor.

1.2.1 The Producer's Responsibilities

Let's take a brief look at some of the specific responsibilities of the Producer. Remember that these duties may be **different** or **more demanding** depending on the type of production or the overall financial scope of the production. A multi-million dollar, hour-long episode of *NCIS* is going to be more difficult and time-consuming to produce than a half-hour local political talk show on public access cable television.

Gets the script

The Producer obtains the **final script**. This can be done in a number of ways:

- a) The Executive Producer may **hire a writer** to write a script based on his or her own idea.
- b) The Executive Producer or Producer may **write the script** him or her self.
- c) The Executive Producer may **purchase the rights to a script** that has already been written.

Handles the financing

The Producer **determines** the **budget** for the project based on the available funding. This money can come from a number of sources:

- a) From the Executive Producer's **own investment**.
- b) From **single investors** or **investment groups**.
- c) From a **television network** or **motion picture studio** willing to fund the project.

Determines the project schedule

The Producer determines the project schedule, including **target dates** for completion of **significant events** like pre-production, shooting, post-production, final delivery and promotion. (Don't confuse this with the **daily production schedule**, which is done later by the Director.)

Hires the Director

The Producer hires the Director. The Producer then **shares his or her vision** regarding the script and makes sure the Director **understands** what is expected.

Assists with hiring cast and crew

The Producer assists the Director with hiring the **upper level crew**; i.e. Videographer/Cinematographer, Art Director, Lighting Director, Editor, etc.

The Producer is actively involved in **casting** the project with the Director. In some cases, the initial casting of big-ticket stars has been negotiated by the Producer during the script acquisition stage.

Approves the look of the production

The Producer is involved in the approval of the **set design, location selection, props, hair, wardrobe and makeup**. This ensures that the overall look of the project matches the Producer's vision.

Supervises production

The Producer's responsibilities during production (the shooting stage) are:

- To **supervise all day-to-day operations** of the crew producing the project.
- To **answer any questions** that arise and **make executive decisions** regarding the production.
- To **review and approve** the **footage** shot daily in conjunction with the Director.

Supervises editing

The Producer supervises the editing process, making sure the production **comes together** as initially envisioned. Most Producers will leave a major amount of 'creative license' to the Director and Editor, but still stay involved throughout the process.

Oversees legal and union considerations

The Producer or a designate **resolves** any legal or contractual **conflicts** regarding the project, including rights and clearances of copyrighted work, worksite grievances, labor issues, accidents, and other legal issues.

Approves the final version

The Producer approves the final version of the project. This may happen after revisions or retakes are ordered by the Producer. However, the Producer *may* elect to give the Director 'Final Cut,' which means the Producer trusts the Director's vision and judgment well enough to allow the Director to have final approval of the project.

Arranges for distribution

The Producer **arranges** for **distribution**, **duplication** and/or **broadcast** of the final product in the various mediums required: film, videotape of a number of sizes and formats, DVDs and/or video files.

Arranges for promotion

The Producer arranges the design and creation of **materials** to promote the production. This includes video trailers, TV commercials, media interviews with the stars or important creative team members and/or 'Making of' documentaries.

For **more information** on any of the phases of production, as well as resources available to producers, check out a number of books listed in chapter 7 of this guide.

1.2.2 Day-to-Day Life

It's hard to describe a **typical** "day in the life" of a Producer, because so many different things have to happen at different times for each project, and most Producers are **working on numerous projects** at a time.

Each different project will have its own set of details, concerns, problems and conflicts. Suffice it to say that you will be **very busy** and that there will rarely be two days in a row that you'll be doing the same thing. That's what I've found it to be like in the 20 or so years I've been producing.

You will want to decide what genre you're interested in producing for and determine the exact responsibilities involved before you focus on pursuing them. Re-read the list of genres above and decide which ones **interest** you, then use the **resources** listed throughout this guide to learn more about them. See if you think there is a fit between the job you want and what the Producer in that genre spends most of his or her time doing.

For example, a Producer of a **local talk show program** will not have to deal with issues involving actors' salaries and accommodations or travel and accommodations for a large crew on location. A **news** Producer will have many more legal issues to consider than a **game show** Producer.

The Producer has many responsibilities to attend to, and it can be quite a **juggling act**, but you'll rarely be bored. You can also rest assured that the successful Producer can make relatively **big money** and garner a **great reputation** when a production is successful.

Included at the end of this guide are a number of forms that will help you as a Producer keep track of details and make your job run smoothly, including: a simple split column script format; a storyboard form; a videotape logging form; a crew list/contact form; a shot sheet and a talent release form. Let me briefly describe each of the forms:

- **The Video Production Script form:** This is a form that breaks a project down to its simplest elements, video and audio. Each video shot and audio direction or dialogue can be listed side-by-side on this form, allowing people to easily understand how the project will look and sound.
- **The Video Storyboard form:** This form gives the Producer and Director a quick and easy way to demonstrate visually what a production will look like. It is made up of a number of small areas shaped like a television screen or computer monitor, where the visual elements of the project are roughly drawn in, accompanied by an area where the audio that corresponds to that video is written.
- **The Production Budget Worksheet:** This form lists dozens of the most common items that should be included in a production budget and is intended to be used as a guideline to help determine how much a project will cost to produce.
- **The Videotape Logging Form:** This form is used to keep track of what material has been taped or filmed, where it is on the tape or film and whether the take is good or not.
- **The Crew List/Contact Form:** This form lists dozens of the most common cast and crew positions on a video production and includes space where your current production cast/crew contact information for each position can be filled in for easy reference.
- **The Shot Sheet:** This form helps the Producer/Director list and define the many different shots necessary to successfully create a video production. At a glance the Producer/Director can determine what shots are being shot when and which ones use the same talent or location, making a production schedule easier to create.
- **The Talent Release Form:** A simple form to help secure the rights to use the audio and video of professional and non-professional talent recorded on-site on a particular date.