

**DAY TO DAY
of a...**

**PRODUCTION
ASSISTANT**

The Basics:

- A **Production Assistant**, also called a **PA** or **Production Associate** -- is an entry-level production position in the TV animation industry.
- A PA works **alongside producers and production coordinators** to assist the production and creative teams and make sure things are running **efficiently and effectively**.
- I would argue that a PA is easily the **SINGLE MOST VARIABLE** position in TV animation and the role of a PA can change massively depending on the particular studio/show/individual PA.

Wait, What is Production?

Production is the part of the TV animation pipeline that deals with **THE MECHANICS AND LOGISTICS** of making a tv show.

This includes everything that isn't generating art!

These are the people responsible for budgets, making schedules, facilitating reviews, moving things between departments, coming up with contingency plans, taking and distributing notes--- **BASICALLY ALL THE THINGS** that need to happen in order for a show to be made in an **ORGANIZED** fashion.

The Production Players

While Production teams can vary greatly, these are the usual suspects in a traditional TV animation pipeline:

- Producer
- Line Producer
- Associate Producer
- Production Manager
- Production Coordinator
- Production Secretary
- PA [Production Assistant]

Some shows may have some but not all of these roles. Some shows might also have additional production roles! [Such as a Design Coordinator]

Because EVERY SINGLE SHOW
has slightly different PA roles,
I will try and hit the basics...
but know there are many variables!

Now let's dive into it!

First Day as PA

As the name implies, a production assistant's primary role is **TO ASSIST THE PRODUCTION.**

The specifics of this vary, but the overall mission statement of this position is always to make the worklife of the artists/creative teams easier **SO THEY CAN JUST FOCUS ON CREATING.**

PAs and Production Coordinators try to make things as accessible and streamlined as possible so that the creative teams are not wasting valuable time trying to figure out where things are/what they need/who to ask/etc...

THIS KEEPS THE PIPELINE WORKING SMOOTHLY.

Master Note-Taker

One common PA role is TAKING NOTES IN INTERNAL MEETINGS AND REVIEWS.

Often times, the PA is the person responsible for taking notes and distributing them to the people they affect.

For example, on Proud Family, our PA sits in on the episode reviews between the director and the show runner and takes down all the notes that are discussed during that meeting.

Later, the PA will email out the notes to the director/revisionist/anyone else who needs to have the notes to act upon them.

Master Note-Taker

For this reason, it is very important that PAs take notes that are **CONCISE AND CLEAR**. It should have everything that was discussed, even things that were not fully decided on in the meeting.

For example, TV animation animatic notes might look like this:

Episode X Notes

General:

- Overall fun episode*
- Add in flashback title cards throughout*

Timecode 11:10

- Need to find clearer way to show this action. Maybe restage to over shoulder?*
- Possibly look for alt read on character Y*

Scheduling Meetings

Another duty that is often the PA's responsibility is scheduling reviews and meetings between departments.

Because of all the moving parts in animated television, finding common times when the director, art director, show runner and supervising director are all available to meet up can be tricky!

The PA and Production Coordinators work together to make sure that nothing and no one is being double [or triple] booked.

A PA who schedules will send out invites to meetings, make sure conference rooms are booked and make sure all the notes and files needed are prepped in advanced.

Office Essentials

The PA is also usually the one making sure everything in the office is functioning and available.

This includes making sure printers have paper, making sure there are pencils, pens, notebooks, etc.

Basically, just making sure that everything that someone might need to do their job well is ready and accounted for!

[Of course, in 2020, this one is pretty much on pause.]

On the Right Track

Most productions use *tracking software* or *excel* to keep track of tasks or assets.

[ie, what designs are being reused from other episodes,
which designs are in progress,
which designs are being handed out and to who.]

The PA is often the one helping to maintain and update these tracking documents and making sure that things are being turned in on time!

Organization is Everything

One of the key things you can start honing if you want to be a PA is your organizational skills!

A PA, though a junior production position, still requires you to be ON TOP of knowing where things are and who will need them. Tidy desktops and being proficient at setting up and maintaining folder systems is ESSENTIAL.

Finder of All Things!

Often times, directors and board artists will go to PAs to help find specific designs or files that they need for their episodes.

One of the things I recommend doing the second you become a PA is **FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH WHERE EVERYTHING LIVES** on the server.

That way, if a director ever suddenly asks, "Do you know where we have the topdown for the backyard?"

You can reply with a confident, "Yep! Sending it your way."

Presenting Solutions, not Problems

A major skill of a successful PA is to **NOTICE A PROBLEM** in the production pipeline... and **OFFER A POTENTIAL SOLUTION**.

For example, an amazing PA I work with noticed that the story team was always asking where designs were so she **CAME UP WITH THE IDEA** of making a folder specifically for the board artists where all the key designs would live, broken down by character, location and prop.

The best PAs have self-starting attitudes and try to think up ways to make the artists lives easier.

Being a **PROBLEM SOLVER** is a major plus in this role!

I Want to Be An Artist... Can I Start As A PA?

A RESOUNDING YES!

I know several artists in the industry who started as PAs before transitioning into an art position, myself included!

The most important thing here is BEING UPFRONT ABOUT YOUR DESIRE TO EVENTUALLY BE AN ARTIST.

I know this might seem counter-productive, but TRUST ME, if you lie about wanting to be an artist just to get a PA job, it will be a lot harder to transition down the road!

I Want to Be An Artist...

Can I Start As A PA?

The reason why honesty is best here is twofold:

1) **BUILDS TRUST** between you and the production. Being upfront with your goals will allow them to better facilitate them. For example, I knew a PA who wanted to be a designer... so the production fought to get her a cintiq for her cubicle.

2) **SHOWS MATURITY.** Even if ultimately the production *does* decide they **WOULD** rather a PA with production aspirations, the fact that you can concisely talk about your goals shows you've thought them through! Moreover, they might still reach out to you for say... an art position.

What if I Don't Know?

It is perfectly alright not to know if you are interested in pursuing art professionally... or if you want to go down the production road!

I have also worked with people who came from art school, went into production and realized they really enjoyed that space!

Being a PA is actually the PERFECT vantage point to figure out what exactly it is you want to do in the TV animation pipeline.

And that is because...

PA's See The Entire System

Because the job of the PA requires them to interact with designers, board artists, directors, show runners, and producers--sometimes even writers--

THE PA's SEE THE ENTIRE PRODUCTION PIPELINE.

You go to many of the meetings and observe what different people do, what notes they give.

You see how designs are done. How boards are done. How revisions are done.

Basically, being a PA is a crash course in learning how a tv show is run!

Dedication Goes A Long Way!

If you ARE a PA with aspirations to being an artist... there are a few steps you can take to make that easier.

Step 1:

BE THE BEST PA YOU CAN BE!

- I have heard from more than one producer about art-hopeful PAs phoning it in at their PA jobs... and that doesn't leave a great impression.

If you are a hard-working PA who really puts dedication into your role, your producers, directors, and showrunners will WANT you to succeed in whatever your goals are!

BE GOOD AT THE JOB YOU HAVE.

It will show you'll be great at the job you want!

Practice on the Side

Step 2:

DRAW ON THE SIDE! If you are a PA and you already know you want to be an artist, start honing those skills whenever you're not working!

Use the knowledge you are gaining from your proximity to directors and designers and apply what you are seeing to your own portfolio!

BE PROACTIVE

Step 3:

DO THINGS BEFORE YOU'RE ASKED!

And ask if there's more you can do.

Be observant of the people around you and if there are things you suspect might be bothering them, try devising solutions.

There is truly nothing more impressive than someone who fixes things before you even ask them to!

[This something all good PAs should do, even if you aren't interested in going into art.]

Tools of the Trade

PAs work with a myriad of programs. These can include:

- **EXCEL:**

- Almost always used in TV animation production in some capacity, usually for tracking assets and production schedules.

- **SHOTGUN:**

- A high-level production software used specifically for tracking assets and sending/reviewing notes.

- **FILEMAKER:**

- Similar to Shotgun, this is a production software used for tracking assets.

- **MICROSOFT WORD:**

- Or a similar word processor is often used for taking notes.

- **OUTLOOK/GOOGLE CALENDAR:**

- Used for scheduling meetings.

Depending on how the production is run, PAs might also need to use **Photoshop** and **Storyboardpro** if they are part of prepping artists' files to be sent to different departments.

Who do I work with?

EVERYONE.

No but really, PA's usually cross paths with pretty much everyone. Some productions have department-specific PAs.

For example, a Design PA will work exclusively assisting with the design team. And a Writers PA will work exclusively with the writing room. But if you are a general PA you might find yourself hopping from department to department as needed!

It really depends on the production.

Who do I affect?

ALSO EVERYONE.

Seriously though, even though a PA may seem like a junior position, because they are setting up meetings and moving notes around between leadership, their daily tasks affect the general flow of the entire pipeline!

Who do I affect?

It is hard to say exactly who is most immediately affected by a PA's role...
So let's create a hypothetical!

If a PA forgets to send out notes...

- First, the director would not have the notes to work with
- the board artists would not know/
be able to begin work
- the Coordinators would need to scramble to find the notes, possibly affecting the overall timeline
- the Producers might need to reevaluate the *entire production schedule*

Who do I affect?

**That was a worse case scenario,
but it's not outside the realm of possibility!**

**A PA's role may seem small,
BUT IT IS MASSIVELY IMPACTFUL.**

Helpful tips:

By now you know the drill--
these are all just my own observations
but here are a list of helpful tips!

Helpful tips:

-COMMUNICATE: If you are ever feeling unsure about what you should be doing or if you are doing something correctly, **ASK!** It's better to check-in than do something wrong.

-OFFER TO HELP: If things are ever slow for you as a PA, ask your coordinators and production teams if there is something you can assist with! Even if they don't have time to get you a task, you can probably find some small helpful thing to do.

Helpful tips:

-OBSERVE: Pay attention to things happening around you and if you notice something isn't right, let someone know! For example, I have seen PAs catch files going in the wrong folder on the server.

-DON'T ASSUME: If there is ever something that seems odd but you aren't 100% sure is wrong, **BRING IT UP FIRST!** Sometimes, there might be reasons for things to be a certain way that you aren't aware of yet.

It's good to be eager to help, but it's always important to make sure no one **INTENDED** things to be a certain way before you start changing them.

Learning and Growing

Being a PA is an incredible space to learn and grow. You have a first row seat to every department and you'll get to meet people at every stage and see how their jobs intersect.

The communication and organizational skills you learn as a PA can wind up being essential to you later in your career path...

wherever it leads you!

**And that's all
I've got!**

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