

TV Commercial. Concept and production structure

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ABSTRACT

Making a great television commercial is an art in itself. Twenty years ago, there was no official available information about the steps to follow to prepare a TV commercial throughout all phases. The main reason for that knowledge gap is that the old method used was based on multiple agencies and vendors working on the same campaign, so the single groups do not have to know everything; they just needed to understand their own role and responsibility.

In the last years, video production and post-production industries are changing very fast. Digital retooling is taking place, causing dramatic industry restructuring. The old player's large post-production facilities using dedicated, proprietary equipment are being replaced by new players, small production companies, using personal computers to produce a different type of production media with the same professional result, at a lower cost.

Nowadays, the significant reduction of video production costs, the more and more disappearing barriers to access video, as well as brands looking to spend less and get more has forced many advertisers to renounce to big agencies.

Actually, with the new technology decreasing the cost of cameras and computers is possible to produce a TV commercial in all its phases (starting from concept, writing, production, and post-production (including animation and compositing) to final video), with a small group of professionals. The one-stop-shop is becoming a growing business model. Many creative artist and directors from big agencies have resigned to establish their own production companies, and groups of talented young people are constantly gathering from all over the world.

This study will help to understand the structure and workflow of producing a TV commercial, starting from the copywriting stage until the final product, and passing through the classical production steps of cinematography and motion pictures, such as pre-production, production and post-production, understanding and analyzing every significant step of structure until the initial written concept will become a motion image.

In order to reach the objective of this study, I read and reviewed several books and web materials on different topics about stages of the production, planning, budgeting, shooting and editing, equipment and techniques, communication and documentation.

Keyword: ***Video /production structure/ Tv commercial/ small production companies/ new players***

- INTROCUCTION

TV commercials as a communication medium have had a remarkable impact on millions of people around the world has become an integral part of our everyday life. They have to create a powerful emotional response in a very short amount of time conveying a clear message, which means a lot of effort to spend in production.

Translating an idea into an interesting, engaging and worthy video product is considered a very complex process. Production faces strict timelines and budget limits and involves different people such as cast and crew working with a variety of sophisticated equipment which needs to be arranged and planned before the shooting begins.

- METHODOLOGY

This research will examine the practical stages of creating TV commercials, emphasizing effective management and detailed planning to ensure a smooth production process, efficient editing, and on-time delivery of the final product. It will focus on conceptualizing a message tailored to the target audience, crafting scripts, directing, and developing storyboards that align with the central idea. The study will also address key aspects such as budgeting, casting and selecting protagonists, music selection, and designing production schedules. Additionally, the study will involve post-production processes, including editing, music integration and sound effects, and preparing the commercial for its final screening.

Finally, this methodology will be applied to a concrete product. In fact, I will produce and direct one final video project (tv commercial) with complex technique including shooting, graphics and mixing with sounds, working on professional condition.

Then, we will go through the following 3 phases to develop a TV advertisement (Fig. 1).

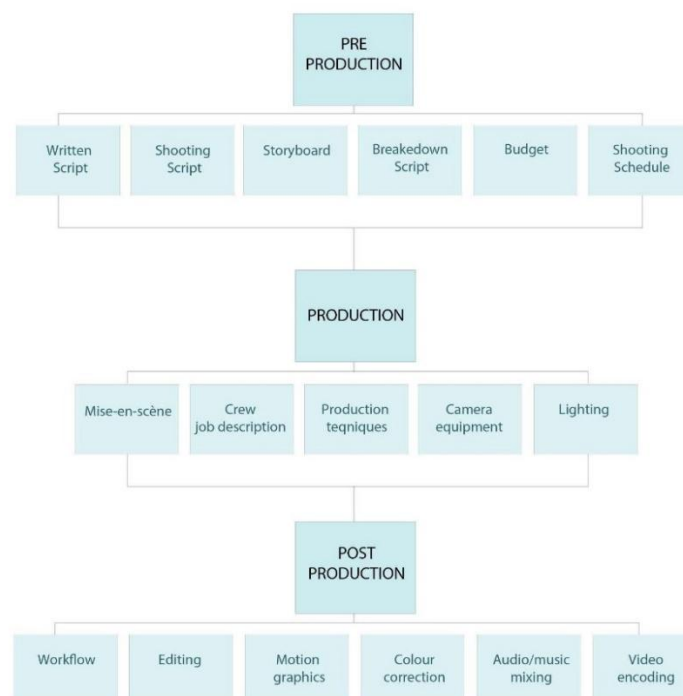


Fig. 1 Diagram of development stages of production of TV commercials (source: author's)

The most important practice to explore and understand the structure of TV commercials is:

- Create a TV commercial for a real client (Polis University)
- Analyze TV commercial and identify the best value quality and cost structure.
- Find the proper format for a 30 second TV Commercial script and write it down.
- Breakdown the script.
- Create a timeline.
- Plan a budget.
- Develop a comprehensive storyboard for the commercial, building on the initial concept and message crafted for the target audience. This will include integrating audio and visual elements, specifying camera angles and movements, and defining the duration of each scene.
- Shoot the footage on location using a professional camera, lighting, and sound equipment.
- Edit the footage on premiere pro and use

PRODUCTION STRUCTURE

- PRE-PRODUCTION

Written Script

Before beginning the scriptwriting process, it is essential to thoroughly analyze the company, its marketing objectives, target audience, and the core value proposition to develop a well-grounded concept.

A widely recognized framework that guides scriptwriting in marketing, advertising, and sales is the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action). This model explains the psychological process consumers undergo when interacting with advertisements or promotional content (Moore, 2005).

The AIDA model is structured around a four-step process designed to create effective advertising:

First grab the viewers' ATTENTION with a quick question, a setup, a funny situation, whatever.

Next, we have to develop an INTEREST in the product. What can it do for the user? How will it solve their problems?

Create a context for DESIRE. Continue to hit on the benefits of the product, how easy it is to use, how they'll be the envy of their friends and neighbors, and so on. Make them want the product.

Finally, urge your viewer to take ACTION. Tell them where to buy it, to call for more info, or to send opinion. Whatever we want them to do.

After development the basic key of marketing goals, we start working with the creative copywriting process using a Sid Field structure of a written concept for image, based on

Aristotle three-act structure, which is very practical and effective to attract the audiences' attention (Trottier, 1998, Mou and Tu, 2013; Sheppard, 2009). This model, commonly used in screenwriting, divides narrative into three acts: the Setup, the Confrontation, and the Resolution. We must clarify the point of view on the script (the perspective from which the story is told) and start writing step by step the story concept and describe the action by a certain run, using climax or turning point of the narrative to create suspense.

Shooting script

In the context of film production, the shooting script, also known as *decoupage*, refers to the process of breaking down the screenplay into different scenes, with each sequence further divided into individual shots. This process forms the structural foundation for organizing the work of the director and production team.

The work of decoupage is refined during post-production, particularly in the editing phase, where the shots are better defined. This step is crucial, as it allows for the comprehensive organization of a film or video concept, from its broad structure to the smallest details. Unlike spec scripts, shooting scripts include scene numbers and adhere to specific formatting conventions, as well as a clearly defined procedure for implementing and circulating script revisions.

In film and television production, a script breakdown refers to the detailed analysis of a screenplay in which all relevant production elements are systematically identified and categorized into organized lists. According to Glebas (2008), a "script" has a specific format as used in film production that includes dialogue, action, timing, scene description, voice over, effects, etc.

We can use a similar detailed form that goes through each scene or shot on the script and describes it according to its needs. In view of our specific product we can first divide the page down into 3 rows: script video and audio and then add for each row further details. To fill the form, it's important to take into consideration the following elements:

- Characters in the shot
- Size of shot
- Camera movement
- Camera angle
- Major Actions
- Important objects
- Sound, Voice over and Music

A similar detailed form is employed to analyze each scene or shot in the script, outlining its specific needs. For our particular product, the page can be organized into three distinct rows: Script, Video, and Audio (Fig. 2). In the first row, a description of the scene is typically provided, including key actions and significant objects. In the second row, when specifying video details, it is essential to address the following elements: characters in the shot, shot size, camera movement, and camera angle. The third row focuses on audio elements, where it is crucial to outline sound, voice-over, and music. This structured

approach ensures a comprehensive breakdown of each scene, facilitating the organization of production details.

It is important to note that the shots in the breakdown script are not arranged in the order of filming. This step occurs later in the production process, ultimately resulting in a document known as the shooting schedule.

Script	Video Shot size, c.movement, c.angle ,timing	Audio music,voice over,sound effects
Scene 4 The general shot shows moments from the graduation ceremony and party, where students dressed in ceremonial uniforms play carelessly making selfies or getting wet with champagne, etc.	Shot1 long shot (baccalaureate ceremony) travelling out eye level time 3 sec Shot2 medium shot (3 student's selfie) pan right (slow motion 60fr/s) low angle time 2-3 sec	Voice over – Development asks for education and qualitative research (Zhvillimi ka nevojë për edukim dhe kerkim cilesor.) Music

Fig. 2 Script model for TV advertisement (example taken from Polis University TV commercial script produced by the author)

Storyboard

The storyboard is the process of pre-visual thinking of scenes and builds an informational tool that helps the creative development of the scene during the production phase. The modern form of storyboarding was developed at Walt Disney Productions in the early 1930s (Whitehead, 2004), building upon several years of similar techniques employed at Disney and other animation studios. Today, storyboards are an integral component of the creative process across various media, including animation, film, music videos, TV commercials and F/X shots.

The storyboard consists of a series of rough sketches, Images or Illustrations (like comics strips), that help the director to visualize and organize the camera treatment. Serving as a visual map, the storyboard outlines how the director intends to arrange the key shots for each scene or action sequence. These still visual layouts often include accompanying text or detailed information from the script, as well as graphics representing movement, camera details, scene descriptions, voice-over, and special effects (Glebas, 2008; Tumminello, 2004) (Fig. 3).

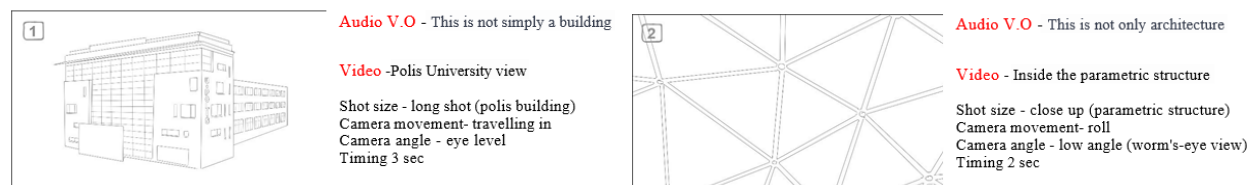


Fig. 3 Storyboard model for TV advertisement (example taken from Polis University Tv commercial script produced by the author)

Breakdown script (artwork, props, location cast)

A breakdown script is a detailed analysis of a screenplay in which all of the production elements are ordered into a schedule. This schedule is typically categorized into various categories, including cast, extras, stunts, props, special effects, wranglers, vehicles, costumes, makeup, hair stylists, special equipment, cameras, film scores, music, and more. Each category is highlighted with different colored markers within the shooting script to facilitate organization and tracking. In lower-budget productions, this process is simplified (see fig. 4), often involving fewer elements, and can be executed either manually or using digital tools such as the "tagger" feature inside the Final Draft.

scene 1
location (EXTERIOR) 1-Building / Polis university
2-parametric structure

scene 2
Location –(INTERIOR) Co-plan offices (3-st floor)
Props - Sketches black and white of parametric structure, 1 laptop or Pad, table white
rover, 2-3 roll papers, lamp carmine and turquoise, table coffee cup carmine and white,
logo coplan adhesive A3 and A4,
Costume – shirt, t-shirts, scarf: turquoise, carmine, white, grey, open beige.
Cost-

Fig. 4 Breakdown script model for low budget TV advertisement (example taken from Polis University Tv commercial script produced by the author)

Budget

A TV commercial production cost can range depending on various factors that highly influence budgeting are listed below:

1. Production Time

The longer the production time takes, the more it's going to cost.

2. The length

The longer the commercial is the more footage has to be filmed.

3. The weather

For outdoor locations, production is often subject to the unpredictability of weather conditions which can delay or halt production, impacting the overall schedule and budget.

4. Locations

The number of locations required directly influences the production budget. Travel expenses for transporting the crew between locations can quickly accumulate, and filming at certain sites may incur additional costs such as location rental fees, insurance, or permits.

5. Crew size

The size of the production crew is another critical factor in budgeting. Larger shoots may require a broader team, including additional camera operators, assistant directors, producers, and extra grips or production assistants, all of which increase the overall production costs.

6. Equipment

The cost of equipment varies depending on the production's needs. While basic equipment like a camera and tripod may be affordable, high-end commercial productions may require specialized tools, including dolly tracks, sliders, drones, steadicams, and jib arms, all of which contribute to the budget.

Additional elements, such as professional actors, makeup artists, wardrobe stylists, visual effects, animation, and advanced color correction, can also significantly raise the

production costs of a TV commercial. These factors, however, add considerable value and should be factored into the budget to ensure a polished final product.

Schedule of shooting

A shooting schedule is a detailed plan outlining each day of shooting for a video production, crucial for managing the production timeline and ensuring efficient use of resources before filming begins. Accompanying the shooting schedule is a document known as the *Day Out of Days*¹, which provides a more granular breakdown of the schedule by department—such as cast, stunts, and art department—allowing each team to plan and allocate resources accordingly for each shooting day.

Typically, the shooting schedule is developed several months in advance, as its structure directly influences the budget. While the schedule becomes more concrete as production approaches, it is common for minor adjustments to be made up until the first day of principal photography, and changes often continue to occur throughout the shoot to meet evolving production needs. Once the schedule is finalized to the greatest extent possible, it is distributed to all departments—such as the art department, wardrobe, makeup, and prosthetics—enabling them to begin planning and preparing for the specific requirements of each shooting day.

Each schedule should include the at least the following information:

- Scene Number
- Scene Name
- Number of Breakdown Sheet
- Page Count – This is where the breaking pages' down
- Location Name and Number
- Day or Night
- Interior or Exterior
- Characters names and numbers
- Extras – How Many?
- Special Notes: Animals, Vehicles, Music, Effects or Special Equipment

Dita 1	POLIS UNIVERSITY TVC SHOOTING SCHEDULE - DATE 16/03/2017 – 17/03/2017						
Ora	Location	Scene Description	Model	Props/Clothes	Light	Camera	C. At gjes
9:00 – 10:30	(tek restoranti ne katin e fundit)	Arkitektura	Agon Dalladaku, Ardita Sylaj, Arnisa Lushaj, Atthe Granica, Edin Durguti, Joana Dhiamenti, Kristina Bello, Sotir Dhomo.	Props: Tavoline rovere, laptop / tablet, makete arkitekturore te studenteve. Veshjet: T-Shirts/shall: turquoise, carmine, te bardha, gri, bezhë e hapur, etj			4
10:30 – 11:30	Zyra e Co-Plan	coplan	Drita Shutina, Eranda Janku, Fiona Imami, Iva Tavanzhiu, Zenel Bajrami.	Props: Skica la veletta, 1 laptop ose Pad, tavoline rover, 2-3 letra te mbeshtjella roll, llampe Carmine ose Turquoise, gote plastike kafë carmine ose e bardhe, logo CoPlan adeziv A3 dhe A4, Veshjet: T-Shirts/Shell: turquoise, carmine, te bardha, gri, bezhë e hapur etj.			4

¹ a standard tool used by assistant directors and production managers in the Hollywood film industry around the mid-20th century.

Fig. 4 Schedule of shooting model for low budget TV advertisement (example taken from Polis University Tv commercial script produced by the author)

- PRODUCTION

The shooting process

The shooting process involves a diverse team of professionals working under the guidance of the director. The director of photography (DP) holds primary responsibility for the film's visual aesthetic, including the selection of cameras, lenses, and film stock, as well as determining camera setups and movements. Additionally, the DP ensures the consistency of photographic quality across shots and supervises the camera crew, including the camera operator. Other key technical roles include the gaffer, who oversees the lighting setup, and the key grip, who is in charge of managing props and rigging. The sound mixer is responsible for coordinating sound recording during the filming process. In low-budget productions, these roles may be consolidated, with individuals taking on multiple tasks to optimize resources and reduce costs.

Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène (French for "placing on stage") is a term used to describe the various design elements in a video production that contribute to the visual storytelling process. It encompasses the "visual theme" or the artful portrayal of a narrative through storyboarding, cinematography, and stage design, as well as the poetic treatment of the narrative through direction (Henderson, 1976). In video production, *mise-en-scène* refers to everything that appears on screen, including the composition, choreography, and arrangement of sets, props, actor movement, costumes, and lighting. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in shaping the visual language of the film or video, contributing to both the aesthetic and narrative experience.

Crew job

According to Millerson and Owens (2008), there are basic job positions that exist on small Tv commercial production such as producer, director, director of photography; Art Director, assistant director or associate director, floor manager or stage manager (FM), Lighting /supervisor (gaffer). In small productions, single persons can be responsible for different job positions to reduce cost.

- **Producer**

The producer is primarily responsible for the business and organizational aspects of a production. This includes managing the budget, selecting the appropriate staff and crew, coordinating between departments, overseeing the acceptance of the script, and ensuring the production schedule is adhered to.

- **Director**

The director is responsible for creatively visualizing the script.

- **Director of photography**

The director of photography assists the film director by establishing the visual look. In

the case of the low budget, the director can assume also the role of director of photography deciding artistic and technical instrument regarding lighting, film stock, shot selection, camera operation, and other elements.

- Art Director

Art Directors prepare set requirements according to the script. During the shooting, Art Directors oversees the construction of the set, dressing and striking.

- The assistant director or associate director

The AD is responsible for assisting the director.

- Floor manager or stage manager (FM)

The FM is responsible for the general organization, safety, discipline (managing noise), and security in the set. Floor manager can also be substituted by an Assistant director in case of a simple set organization.

Lighting /supervisor (gaffer).

The lighting director is responsible for designing, arranging, and controlling all lighting treatment, both technically and artistically.

Production technique

There are mainly two different production techniques related to the shooting a video:

- Single-camera production, in which one camera is used to shoot everything.
- Multi-camera production in which every camera is independent on shooting the same shot from different angles (Millerson, Owens 2008).

Low budget productions usually chose the first option which is foreseen in the script in order to optimize staff and cost.

Camera equipment

Camera

The choice of the camera for shooting a tv commercial it is conditioned from the budget of the production. In this project the budget allows me to rent the best quality camera on the market, digital Arri Alexa 4k.

Lenses

The choice of lenses in film production plays a crucial role in shaping the visual field and determining which planes of the image receive emphasis. One important concept related to lens selection is *depth of field*, which refers to the zone of the image that appears sharply focused. This is determined by the construction of the lens and is measured along the camera's axis. For instance, an image might be sharply focused between 9 feet and 14 feet from the camera, while areas closer than 9 feet or further than 14 feet may appear blurred.

Depth of field is often particularly noticeable in shots where the focus shifts as the scene progresses—such as in contemporary cinema, where an actor begins out of focus and gradually comes into focus as they approach the camera. Another technique that manipulates depth of field is *rack focus*, where the focus shifts during a shot from one plane to another. For example, a foreground figure may initially be in sharp focus, and then the focus may shift to a background figure, emphasizing the change in spatial relationships and drawing attention to different elements of the scene.

Chosen Lents: Rental Arri / Zeiss prime lenses, 18mm,25mm,35mm,50mm,85mm.

Dolly truck

The camera dolly is typically employed to create shots where the camera moves toward or away from a subject while recording, a technique referred to as a *dolly shot* or *traveling in/out*. This movement allows for dynamic spatial relationships and enhanced visual storytelling. In situations where such movement is required, a *dolly truck* is often used, which is a wheeled platform that supports the camera and enables smooth, controlled motion across the set. The dolly truck ensures stability and fluidity during the shot, allowing for precise camera movement without compromising the quality of the image.

Crane

The crane is using for complex movement shot, tilting a whole building from distance. In the case of my video production, it was necessary for the final scene.

Drone

The drone is used for shooting a very long shot on eye bird angle of the city.

Lighting

In HD the number of lights is required to create the tone and mood of the scene. The quality of the video many times depend on lighting.



Fig. 5 Pictures from production phase. (example taken from Polis University Tv commercial produced by the author)

- POST-PRODUCTION

Post-production is the third and final step in video creation and production and begins after all the footage has been captured. In this phase, graphics and music can be added. Video can be filtered through color correction and special effects. Editing process means to select and cut scenes, insert effects, work with audio and sound of actors or background sounds, etc.

Workflow

Before begin editing in Premiere Pro, we need footage, graphics, audio files. The steps we take in editing video, from import or capture throughout the final output is called workflow. The basic steps of a workflow are the following:

- Import and export settings and file naming methods

The first step is to determine the best capture and export settings. Then we can import any ProRes camera files into Premiere Pro. Files should be named

sequentially, considering the number of shot, so it is easy for as to find a specific.

- Keep all your files in a folder and use an external backup

All of the files should be in the same folder in order to find them easily. It's important also to use an external hard drive to media files.

- Use bins to organize the work

Use bins to organize clips, graphics, audio, and any additional elements.

Editing

Editing is the phase of production in which the shot fragments need to be assembled in a certain order. This process consists in excluding certain footage, cutting others and establishing the final form of the video. In film history, it is considered as an aesthetic event (Guynn, 2011). In fact, the editor's art consists in giving value to a shot creating a meaningful sequence. In the nowadays digital era, video editing has maximal freedom in operating this assemblage as you can use a cut-and-paste method, and easily include different effects that cannot be achieved with linear editing.

Motion graphics

Motion graphics are actively used almost in every video production. On tv commercials, motion graphics have become part of the moving image. In the video a motion graphic is used for reading packshot with client logo and slogan, with a gradient background and supers text which is run over the footage.

Audio and music mixing

Audio post production in TV commercials usually refers to the audio synchronized with the video. In the movie, the original, or production audio recorded during the shooting lacks in performance or quality, therefore the actor or actors are brought into a sound studio to record some or all of their dialogue are dubbed, mixed or replaced. In low budget vide, this is usually impossible.

In a 30-second TV commercial is used usually an industry standard post-production technique for adding music, voice-over, and other audio elements common to commercials, all with Adobe Audition. Then we import the various audio elements and assign them to stem mixes, finesse the voice over track and mix and output the final soundtrack.

Color correction

Color correction, also referred to as color grading, is the final stage of the post-production process before a video is considered complete. While the raw footage captured by the camera may appear satisfactory, color correction allows for refinement, enhancing the vibrancy, accuracy, and overall aesthetic of the image. It also serves to align the footage with the desired mood and themes of the project.

In this project, the color correction and color grading passed through the process of correcting contrast, color balance, and hue/saturation. Using the toolset in Adobe Premiere Pro and After effect.

- Adjusting contrast, color balance, and hue/saturation of individual shots
- Using automatic color-correction techniques
- Establishing shot-to-shot consistency
- Applying color treatments
- Correcting color problems

Video encoding

All videos undergo a video encoding process, which transforms them from the original source format into a viewable format compatible with various media platforms and devices. Video encoding is the process of converting a video file into a digital format that can be accessed across different media formats, including television, digital cinema projection, web players, mobile devices, DVDs, YouTube streaming, or Blu-ray discs. This is necessary because different browsers, video players, and devices support a variety of video formats.

A key consideration in this process is that each video format has specific technical requirements, including the use of video codecs. For example, the H.264 codec is commonly used to encode videos, such as a TV commercial, as it provides a good balance between compression and video quality, making it compatible with most platforms and devices. This ensures that the video can be properly viewed and streamed across various environments.



Fig. 6 Final images after post-production process extracted from the video produced. (example taken from Polis University Tv commercial produced by the author)

- CONCLUSION

Today TV commercial production is very competitive in terms of costs having increasingly sophisticated results due to public access to new technologies. Single individuals forming their own group of freelance professionals, and following all the above-mentioned steps can achieve a high-quality production and TV commercial, with moderate cost and using group resources. The way the TV commercial project is structured allows you to control the difficult production process avoiding arbitrary situations and being more efficient in terms of organization and budget.

Having a well-structured process mean:

- Strong pre-production with a well written visual script.
- Writing a shooting script with a very detailed description of production like camera movement, shot size, camera angles, timing, audio, etc.

- Creating a visually illustrated storyboard, pass through the breakdown script, base on which will be calculated the costs up to the good organizing shooting on set with well- defined job description of the crew.
- Following this, the post-production stage with nowadays technologies can be easily finalized from home computer or by a small studio, with maximal quality and competitive cost, by following all the classical ordinary steps of post-production.
- Keep the director organized and able to optimize. If the structure is not clear and well programmed, then you're likely to get lost in the mess or have problems during the shooting, which can lead to unpredictable situations.

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