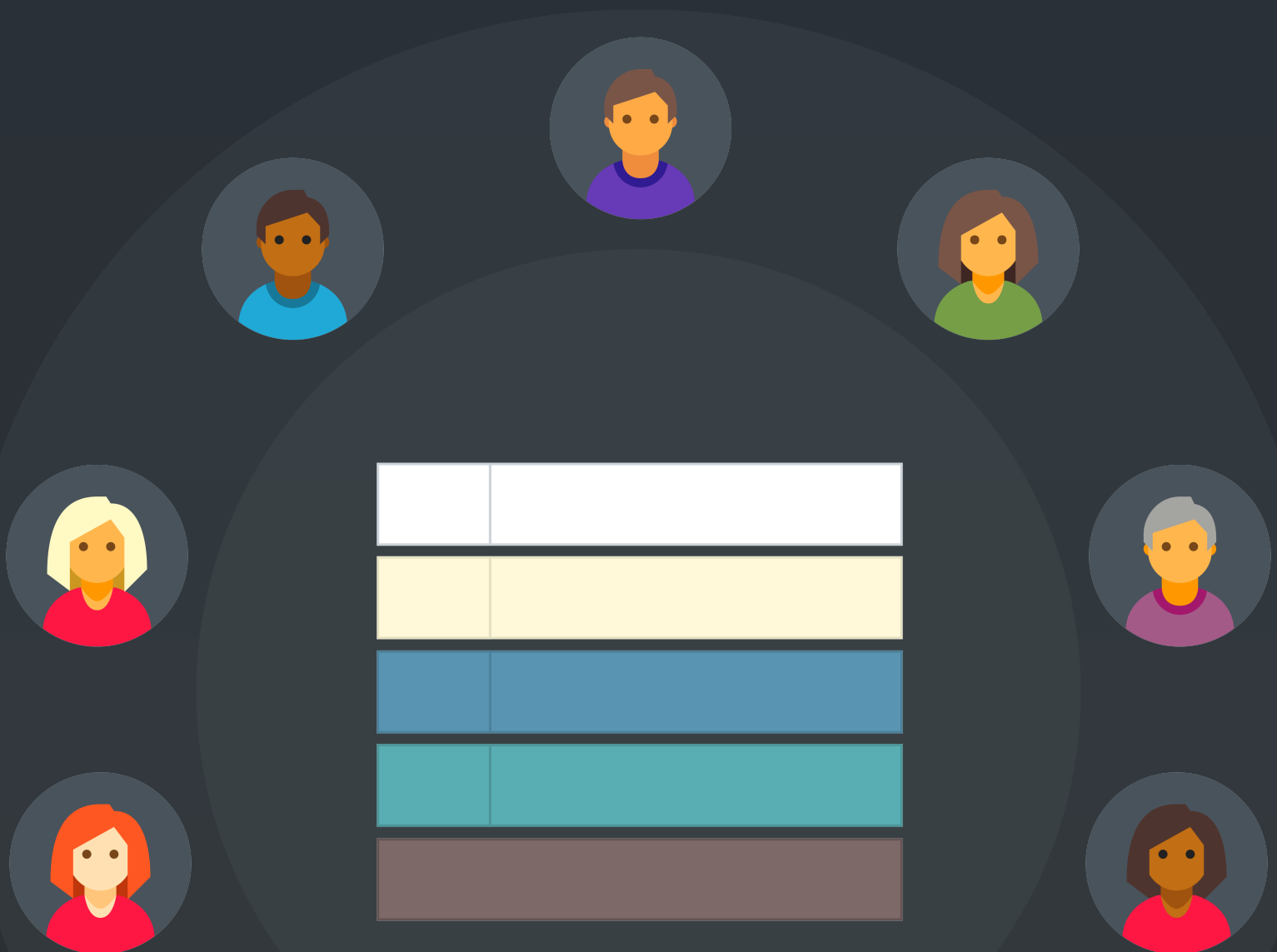# A Filmmakers Guide to Shooting Schedules

## HOW TO MAKE A SHOOTING SCHEDULE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

studio binder

# A Filmmaker's Guide to Shooting Schedules

HOW TO MAKE A SHOOTING SCHEDULE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Edited by AJ Unitas and Arnon Shorr

# StudioBinder on Shooting Schedules

Some helpful thoughts about production management from the team at StudioBinder.

Our software enables filmmakers, production companies, creative agencies and studios to better manage their productions; from organizing contacts, breaking down scripts, laying out shooting schedules and generating personalized call sheets.  www.studiobinder.com

We also regularly share our thoughts on production management, filmmaking, and the business of content creation. studiobinder.com/blog

# CONTENTS

# Introduction: Schedules Breathe

Generals have battle plans.

Surgeons have textbooks.

Filmmakers have schedules.

Whether you're dealing with a studio tentpole or an indie "bottle-show," you can't produce your film efficiently without a shooting schedule.

At a minimum, a shooting schedule utilizes your locations efficiently and maximizes talent's time. However, if you incorporate emotional needs and  group psychology, your schedule can actually improve the *quality* of your film.

*"The Revenant" was notorious for its challenging shooting schedule*

While the advice outlined in this book may seem prescriptive, it's important to note that schedules are living documents. They evolve as the parameters of your production shift and change.

As we discuss the minutiae of scheduling strategy, don't get too attached to your brilliantly-assembled jigsaw puzzle! You'll probably find yourself tweaking it until the very last day of production.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Let's start at the beginning...with a stripboard.

## WHAT IS A STRIPBOARD?

Great question. Traditionally, filmmakers used a film production board (aka stripboard) using cardboard frames that held color-coded strips of paper representing scenes in a shooting script. The strips were then reordered by the Assistant Director (AD) to become the shooting schedule.



*A stripboard being used in Wes Anderson's "A Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou"*

These days, a shooting schedule is often created on a computer in one of two ways:

**1. Spreadsheets**: Scene info is typed manually into a spreadsheet (such as this template), where "strips" are rows of cells. Spreadsheet software is ubiquitous and often free, but there's no automation of the process, so there's lots of repetitive data entry,  long turnaround times, and a high likelihood of human error.

**2. Film Production Scheduling Software**: There are great programs and web-based services (such as StudioBinder) available for production scheduling. They can save you lots of time by automating the process of importing scene data from your screenplay and transitioning to reports, breakdowns and call sheets. Dedicated software solutions may cost more than spreadsheet software, but they save you time, reduce errors, and convey professionalism when you share reports and schedules with your team.

Whether you create a schedule using paper strips, a spreadsheet, or production software, this book will introduce you to universal best practices that you can apply to any production.

Let's jump in!

# How to Use Stripboards to Create Shooting Schedules

Before we can get into the theory and nuance of fine-tuning a shooting schedule, we need to start with the basics. In this chapter we're going to explore the process of creating a preliminary shooting schedule using scheduling software. Along the way, we'll also review the quirky terminology that's unique to media scheduling.

For the sake of clarity and eye candy, we default to StudioBinder for our screenshots, but you should be able to apply what you learn to your own scheduling process, regardless of what tools you use.

## 1. AUDIT THE SCREENPLAY

Screenplays aren't just "blueprints" for a movie. They're actually computer code teeming with valuable metadata to make scheduling more efficient. When you import a screenplay into your production management software such as Movie Magic Scheduling or StudioBinder, the program parses the embedded data within the screenplay and extracts information from it...***as long as the script is formatted correctly!***

Most screenwriters aren't producers, and neglect to properly format their screenplay before handing it off for scheduling. As a result, it often falls on you to make sure the script is formatted correctly. This is called *Auditing the Screenplay*.



*Scan your screenplay for formatting errors before using scheduling software*

Here's what you should check for and fix before importing:

**Sluglines:** Most of the data your software needs is located in the sluglines, or scene headings, of your script. These need to be consistent throughout the script, or your software will not handle them correctly. Make sure that every scene and every location change has a slugline. Some writers get lazy about structure when action traverses multiple locations, opting instead to create a *flow* for the reader.

**INT/EXT:** Every scene takes place either inside (INT) or outside (EXT). Pick one. Some scenes aren't so obvious, so writers employ "I/E" or "INT/EXT". It's rare that these are necessary – you might find that "EXT" suffices in most cases. In the event that there's a scene where an interior/exterior designation is necessary, check your software to determine which format convention the software recognizes. Some software recognizes "I/E" while others require "EXT/INT," while others can't recognize either.

> **Pro Tip:** "INT/EXT. CAR" is a common slugline, but really, from a production standpoint, it's EXT, unless the car is in a garage!

**Sets:** If you have a slugline that states "INT. JOHN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY" and a later scene in the same location that's slugged

"INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY", your software will treat these as *two separate sets*. Go through the script and make sure that any time a set appears in a slugline, it's written consistently, with no variation at all.
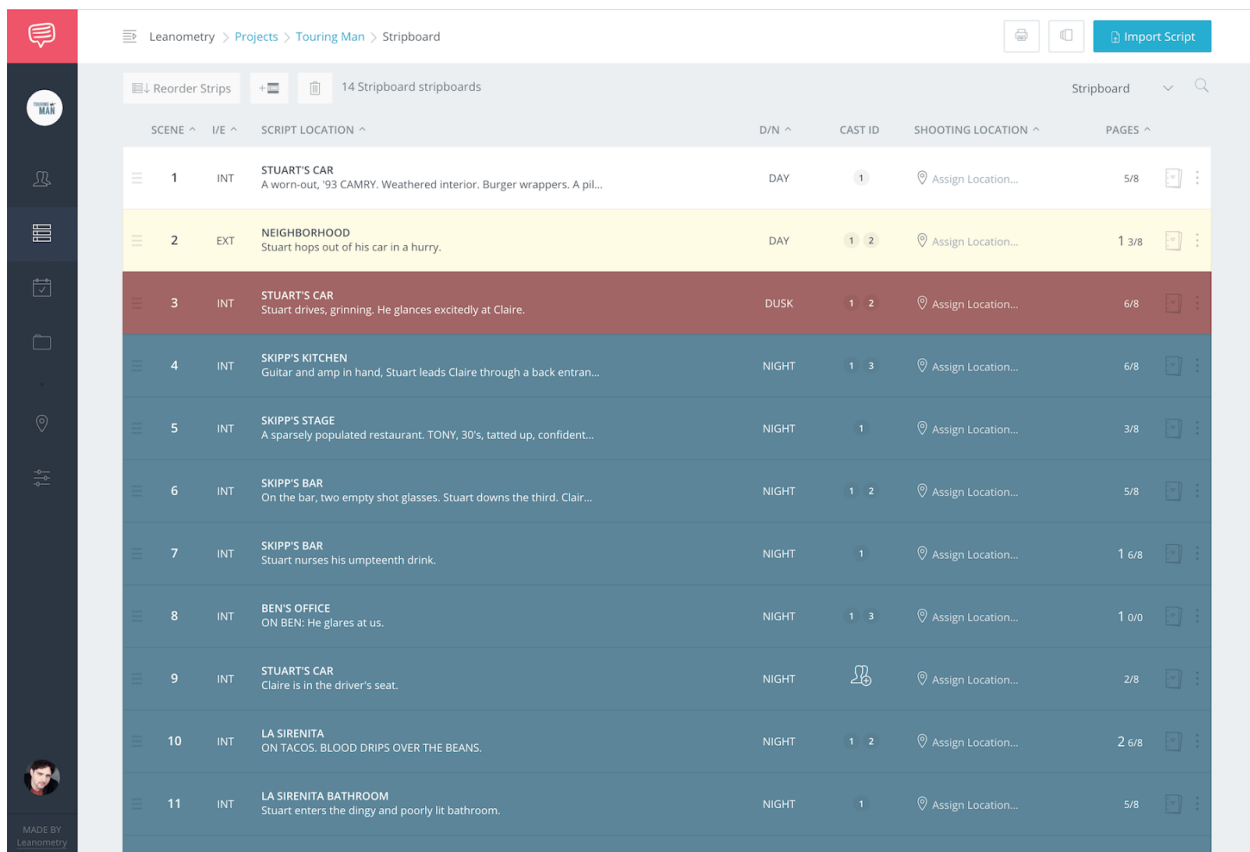
**Day or Night:** Writers love to use expressive day parts in their sluglines. "- DAWN" or "- DUSK" or "- MIDNIGHT" or "- SAME" are common. From a scheduling standpoint, very few of these expressive day parts super useful, and they tend to clutter your schedule. Some older scheduling software does not support these variations so you may need to replace them with either "DAY" or "NIGHT".

**Character Names:** Another part of the screenplay "code" that your software relies on is the character names before each block of dialog. These, too, need to be consistent. If JOHN SMITH says a few lines early in the film, and the same character's lines are labeled simply "JOHN" later in the film, your software will treat these as *two separate characters!* This is fine in the action blocks, but when character headings (the character name before a block of dialog), their names need to be consistent or the you'll end up with duplicate characters upon import. If you're using software like Final Draft to audit your screenplay, you can generate various reports such as a *character list* or a *location list*. It's a great way to identify issues and make the changes to ensure consistent formatting.

Once you've finished auditing the script, generate scene numbers, "lock" the draft, and import the screenplay!

## 2. IMPORT THE SCREENPLAY

After your shooting script has been formatted correctly, it's time to import it into your scheduling software of choice. Follow along by watching our Guided Stripboard Video where producer Arnon Shorr creates a real-world shooting schedule.



*What an imported stripboard looks like in StudioBinder*

After you import the script, all of the scenes, characters, and locations will be parsed and stacked into a stripboard for you. You can review the details in breakdown sheets (individual sheets for each scene that contain data for that scene) or review them directly in the stripboard.

**THE ANATOMY OF A SCENE STRIP**
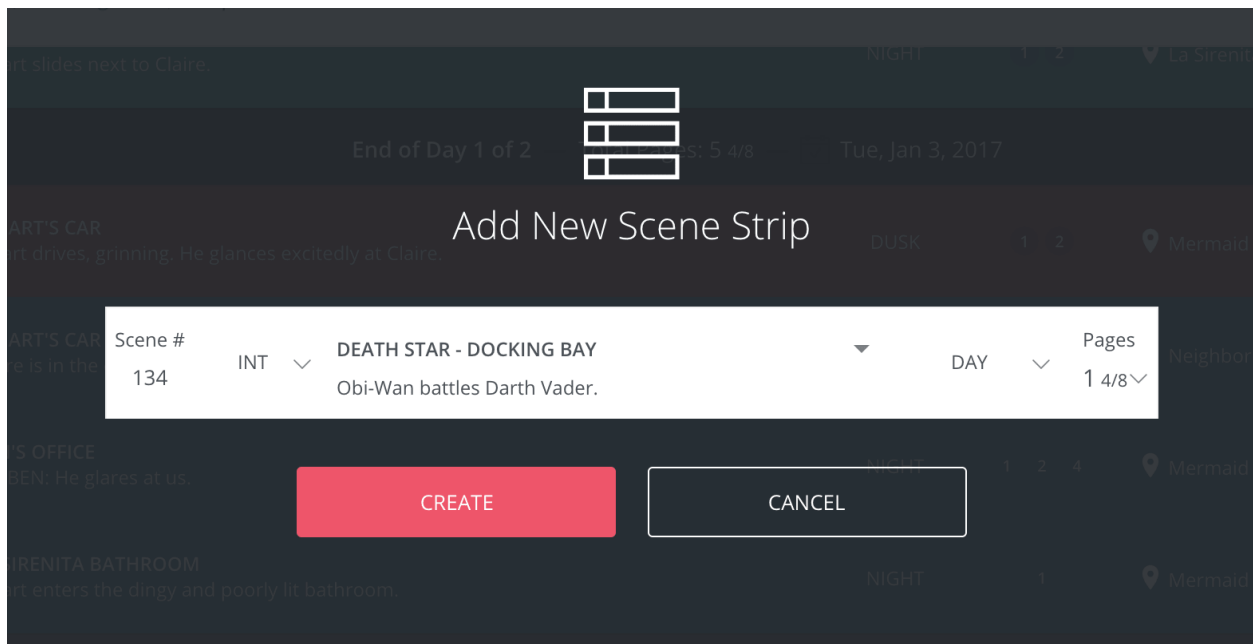


*A scene strip inside StudioBinder*

Scene strips on a stripboard contain a lot of information. Most software allows you to customize what data the strips display, but these are your typical options:

- ❖ Scene Number
- ❖ INT or EXT (Interior or Exterior)
- ❖ Scene Setting (e.g. "Death Star Docking Bay")

- ❖ Scene Description (first line of action in scene)
- ❖ Time of Day
- ❖ Characters in scene represented as Cast ID numbers
- ❖ Total page count (counted in 1/8ths)

Keep a copy of the script handy so you can refer to it easily. Some scheduling software allows you to preview the scene in script format.



*Previewing scenes helps provides invaluable context of what you're scheduling*

**STRIPBOARD COLOR CONVENTIONS**

Strips will be color-coded based on the unique combination of INT/ EXT and time of day. If your film production software supports it, other color variations may display based on dawn, dusk, sunset, sunrise, twilight, etc.

Although scheduling programs have minor <u>variations in color palettes</u>, they're typically close to these industry-standard color conventions:

| Description | Strip Color |
|---|---|
| Day Interior | White |
| Day Exterior | Yellow |
| Night Interior | Blue |
| Night Exterior | Green |
| Day Separator | Black |

## 3. ASSIGN CAST AND SHOOT LOCATIONS TO STRIPS

The next step is to make sure that every scene strip has the correct cast and physical shooting location assigned. This will help you quickly block out the schedule later.

When confirming the correct talent has been added to every scene, don't forget to assign non-speaking characters too! Scheduling software assigns characters to a strip if they have dialogue in the

scene, but it's quite common for characters to be in a scene without dialogue, so you may need to add those characters manually.



*Assigning cast members to a scene*
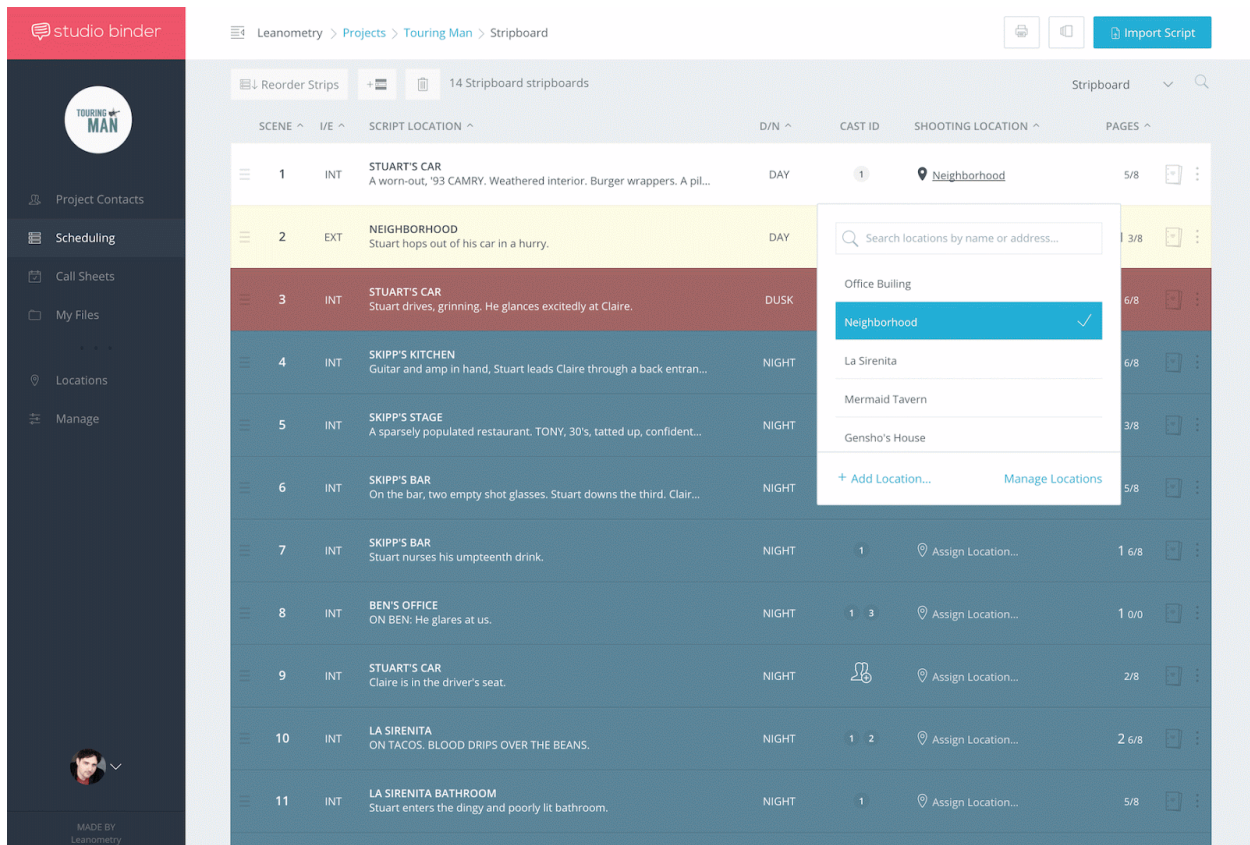
*Assigning shooting locations to a scene*

**DOUBLE-CHECK SCRIPT FORMATTING ERRORS**

If the shooting script has formatting errors (e.g. some instances of characters or location names have typos), they'll come in as duplicate characters and locations.

Even if you formatted the script correctly, it's worthwhile to double-check that there are no duplicates or formatting issues.

If you catch the mistake early enough, it's best best to return to the screenplay to correct the issue at the source. But if you've already put a

lot of work into your breakdowns and schedule, some scheduling software allows you to "merge" duplicate characters or sets.
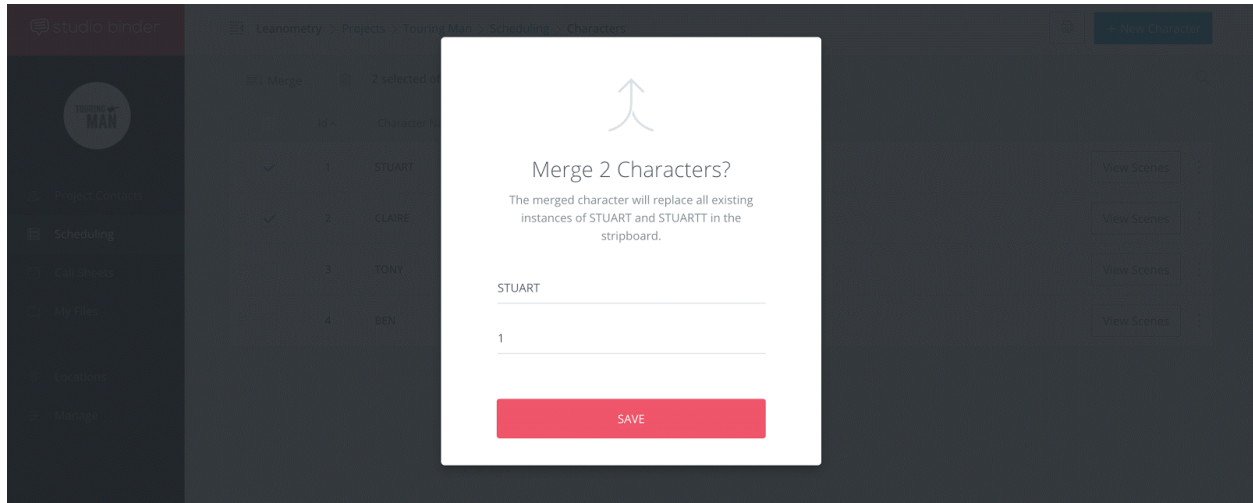


*Merging duplicate characters in StudioBinder*

## 4. AUTO-REORDER TO SAVE TIME

Now it's time to start reordering strips!

After you import your screenplay, your stripboard defaults to "script order." Scene 1 is followed by Scene 2, then Scene 3, etc. This isn't a useful starting point for organizing your shoot schedule. You need to first sort your scenes by location and time of day.

Most film production scheduling software offers auto-reordering options to help you sort your strips.

It looks like this:
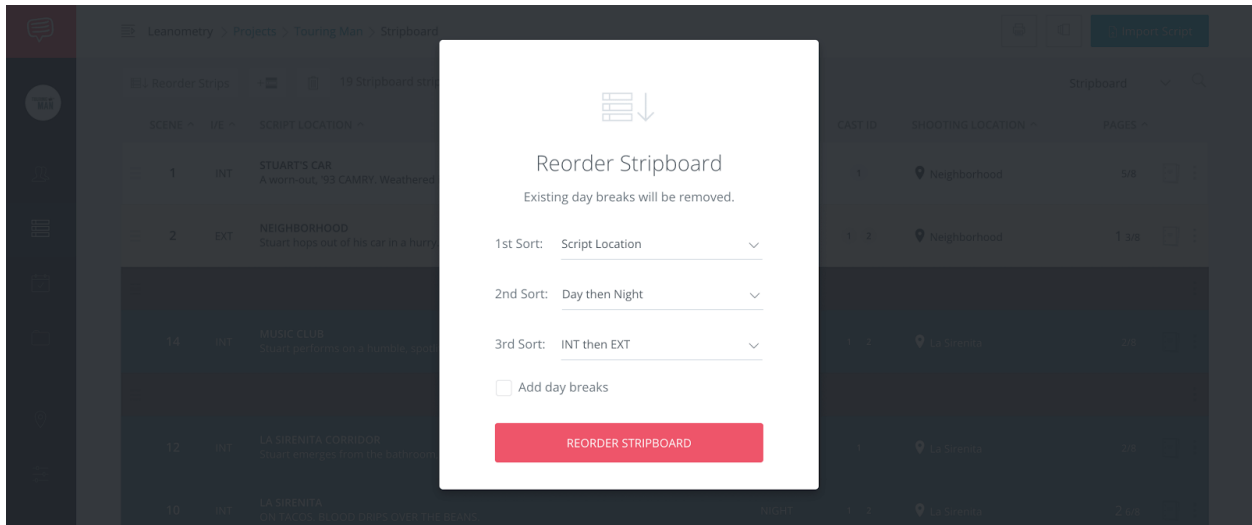
*Auto-ordering options in StudioBinder*

Just select up to three sorting parameters of your choice.

In most cases, your first sorting parameter should be *Shooting Location*. If you don't have many of your locations secured yet, order by *Scene Setting* instead.

If you add "INT or EXT" as the second sorting parameter, you'll end up with an alphabetized list of your shooting locations, subdivided by interior and exterior.

Adding Time of Day as your third sorting parameter will further organize your list by separating day scenes from night scenes for each of your locations.

## 5. DRAG-AND-DROP TO REORDER STRIPS

Now that your stripboard is blocked out by common criteria, it's time to reorder scenes manually by dragging-and-dropping. Most scheduling software makes this process quicker by providing hotkeys like CMD+X to cut strips, and CMD+V to paste.



| SCENE | DESCRIPTION | D / N | CAST | SET LOCATION | PAGES | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | **INT. STUART'S CAR**<br>Stuart strums his guitar, waiting for Claire. | D | 1  2 | ENCINO NEIGHBORHOOD | 1 3/8 ⌄ | | |
| 3 | **EXT. ALLEY**<br>Stuart meets Claire. | D | 1  2 | ENCINO NEIGHBORHOOD | 2 ⌄ | | |
| 1 | **EXT. HOUSE** | D | 1  2  5 | ENCINO NEIGHBORHOOD | 4 ⌄ | | |
| Day 1 of 2 | | Tuesday, December 12, 2016 | | | 7 3/8<br>Pages | + | |
| 4 | **INT. SKIPP'S - BAR**<br>Stuart downs a few shots and strikes a co.. | D | 1  2 | LA SIRENITA | 1 7/8 ⌄ | | |
| | Company Move | | | | | | |
| 13 | **INT. MUSIC CLUB**<br>Stuart performs on stage. | N | 1 | MERMAID TAVERN | 1 7/8 ⌄ | | |
| 7 | **INT. SKIPP'S - OFFICE**<br>Stuart and Claire are scolded by Skipp. | N | 1  2  4 | MERMAID TAVERN | 0 4/8 ⌄ | | |
| 9 | **EXT. SKIPP'S - PARKING LOT**<br>Claire carries Stuart to his car. | N | 1  2 | MERMAID TAVERN | 1 3/8 ⌄ | | |
| Day 2 of 2 | | Wednesday, Decembr 13, 2016 | | | 5 5/8<br>Pages | + | |

*Reorder the stripboard by dragging and dropping strips*

Begin by moving the scenes that you'd like to shoot in a day to the top of your stripboard. Arrange them in the order of production.

## 6. ADD NOTES USING "BANNERS"

A banner is simply a custom strip that represents a note. It is often used to represent considerations that take a significant chunk of time away from the shoot day, such as a meal break or company move.
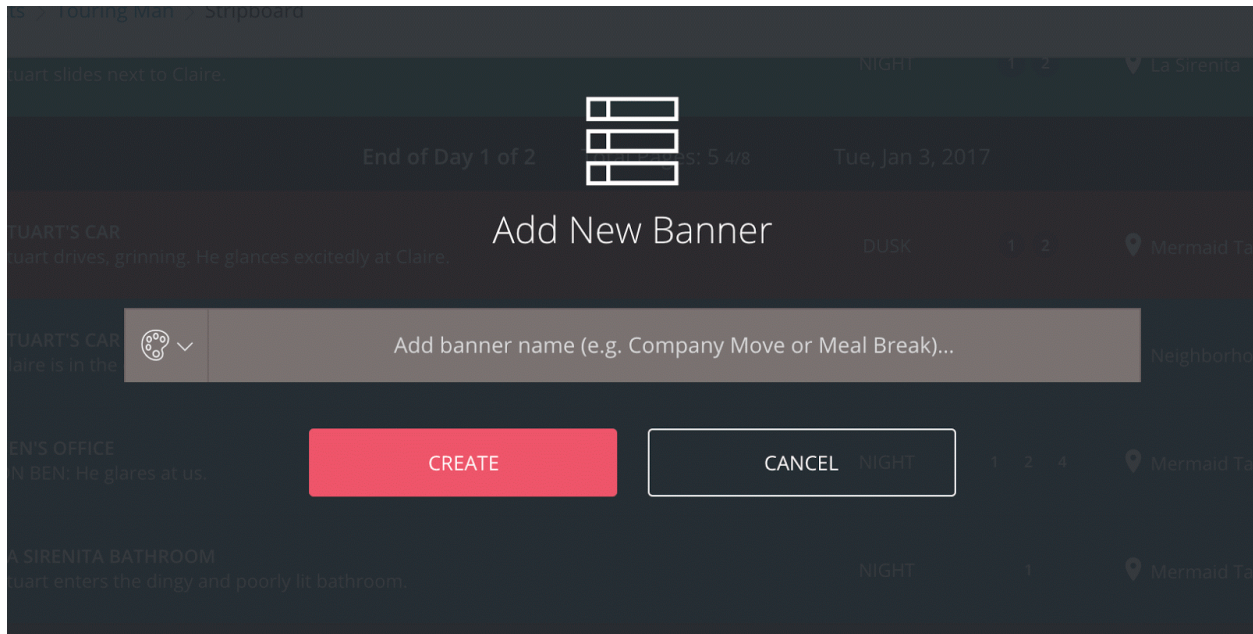


*Adding a new banner in StudioBinder*

Meal break and company move banners can appear in the stripboard you distribute to your production team. But you might find it useful to create temporary banners for yourself, to keep track of groups of scenes.

For example, if you group all the scenes with the scene heading Death Star - Docking Bay, you can emphasize the grouping better by adding a

banner above it titled "Death Star Docking Bay Scenes." Once your stripboard is completed, you can remove these temporary banners.



| | 2 | EXT | **NEIGHBORHOOD**<br>Stuart hops out of his car in a hurry. | DAY | 1  2 | ⦿ Neighborhood | 1 3/8 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Company Move | | | | | |
| | 14 | INT | **MUSIC CLUB**<br>Stuart performs on a humble, spotlit stage. Hunched over his guit... | NIGHT | 1  2 | ⦿ La Sirenita | 2/8 | |
| | | | Meal Break | | | | | |
| | 12 | INT | **LA SIRENITA CORRIDOR**<br>Stuart emerges from the bathroom, cleaned up. | NIGHT | 1 | ⦿ La Sirenita | 2/8 | |
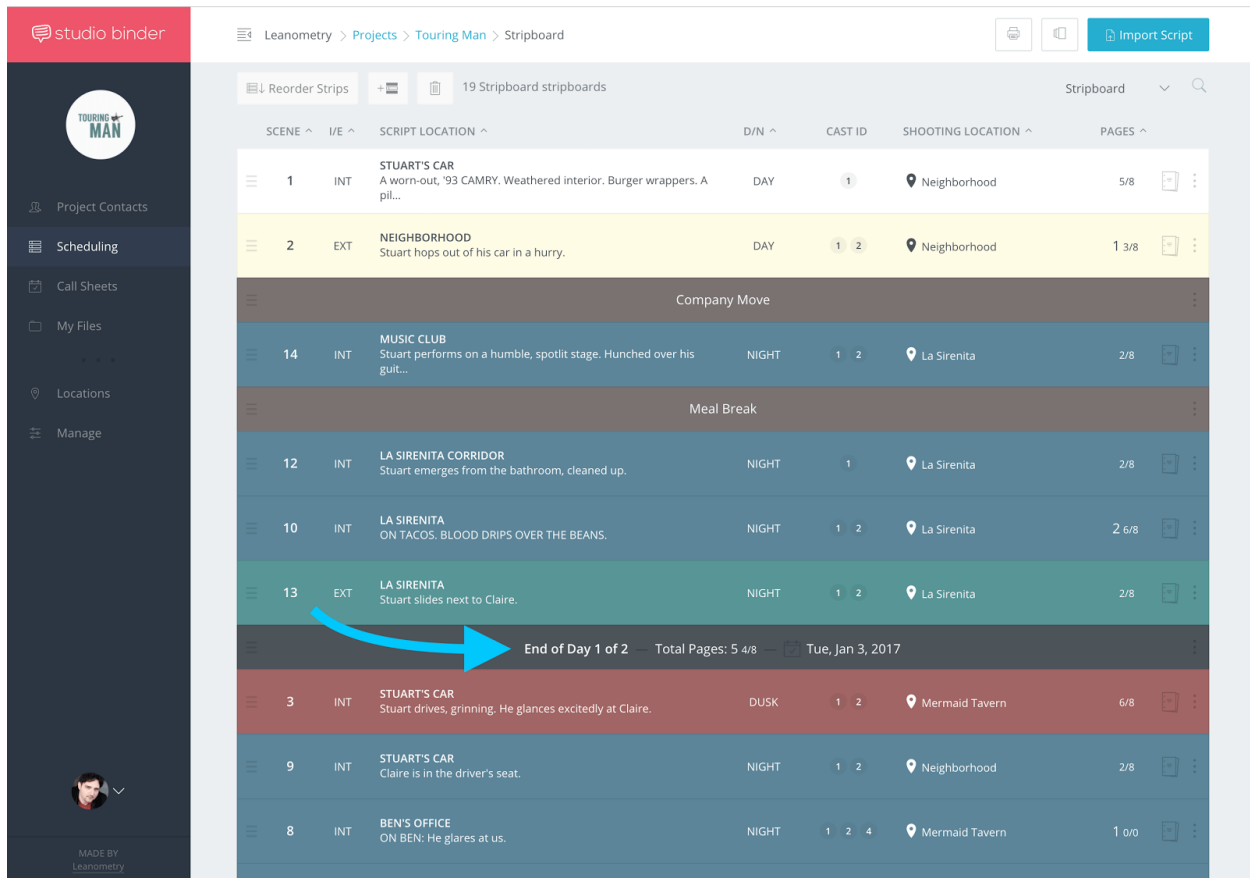
*The banners are the brown strips and are used for notes*

There's no wrong way to use banners. Use them in any way that makes your life easier!

## 7. ADD "DAY BREAKS" TO MARK THE END OF A DAY

Once you've laid out each shoot day in the stripboard, add a *Day Break*, a strip that marks the end of a shoot day. It contains information such as which shoot day it is (out of the total number of shoot days), a description, date, and the total page count for that day.

The total page count is the most important data in a day break. It's the first indication of how achievable or overambitious the day might be.

*The black strip is a day break and it identifies the end of a shoot day*

The ideal pages/day shooting rate can vary from production to production, and even from day to day within a production. The general rule for a dialogue-heavy indie film is to add a day break every 5-7 pages. High budget films can get away with 4 or fewer pages per day (and thus, more shoot days). Complicated actions usually take longer to shoot, so fewer pages-per-day are called for. Some dialogue scenes might be so easy to shoot that production can shoot 10 pages a day without breaking a sweat.

Page count is not the ultimate factor to determine the viability of a shoot day. Consult with your team to arrive at the most realistic shooting speed for your production.

Some software allows you to auto-add day breaks based on a set pages/day rate.
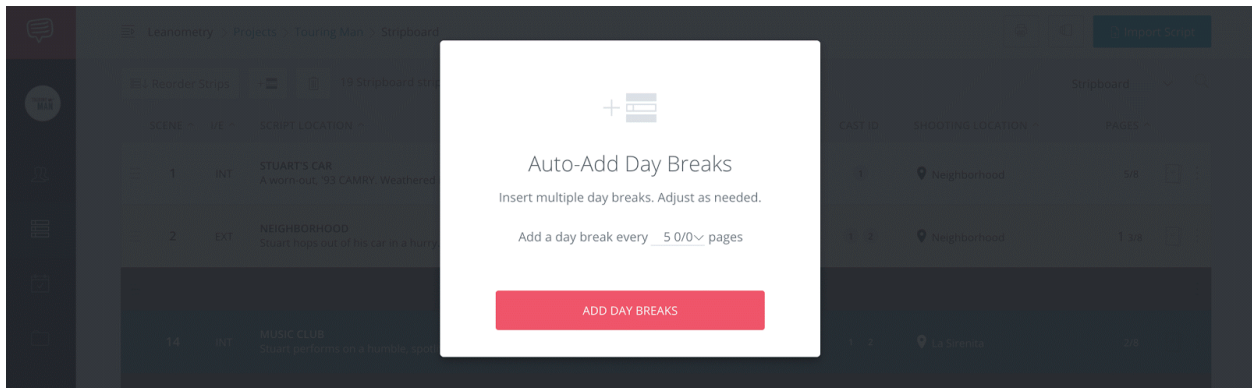


*Add multiple day breaks in one swoop*

After the day breaks have been auto-added, just drag-and-drop (or cut and paste) them and until you're happy with their placement.

## 8. THE BONEYARD

It may sound a little spooky, but a "boneyard" is simply a backlog of strips kept away from the main shooting schedule. Strips in the boneyard are unscheduled. They're typically removed from the schedule due to script changes, shooting delays, or general uncertainty. Perhaps there's one pesky scene that doesn't seem to fit

anywhere. Toss it into the boneyard until you get the rest of the schedule sorted out, then bring it back into your stripboard if there's a place where it can fit.
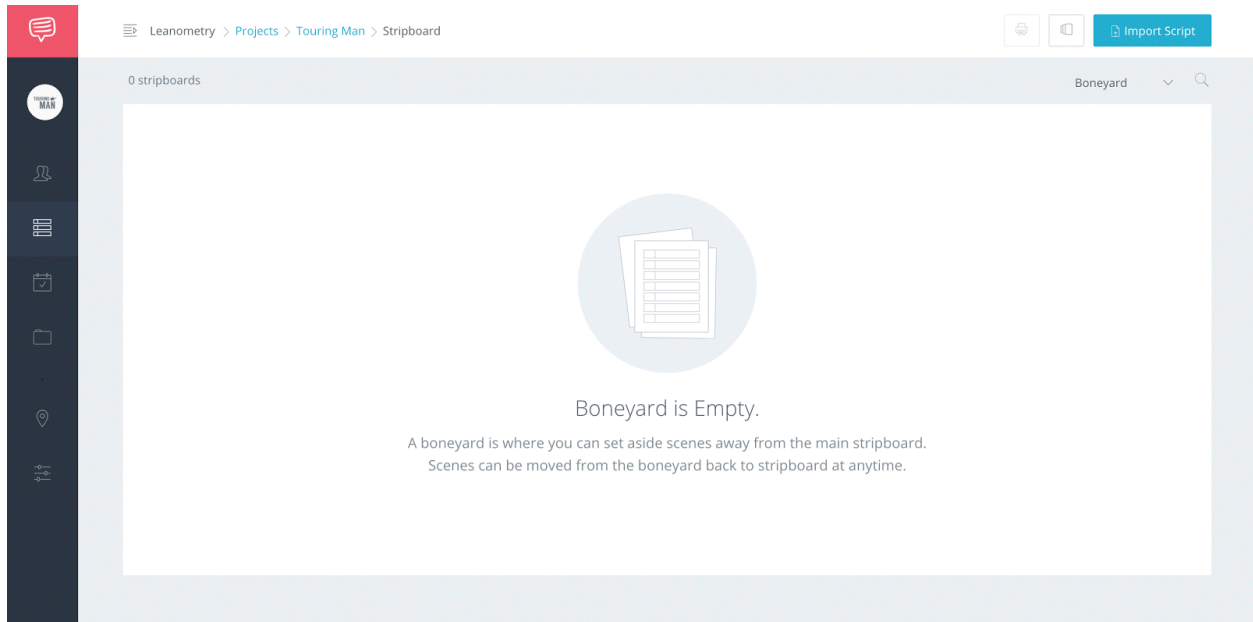


*An empty boneyard in StudioBinder*

## 9. FINE-TUNING YOUR SHOOTING SCHEDULE

Now that you have your strips and day breaks in place, it's time to tackle the fun stuff: *scheduling strategy*!

There are numerous factors to consider when scheduling:

- ❖ Talent availability
- ❖ Location availability
- ❖ Crew availability

- ❖ Minors availability

- ❖ Vehicles and equipment availability

- ❖ Time for complex setups, special effects, and stunts

- ❖ How many pages you can shoot per day

- ❖ Days off (usually every 5-6 days)

- ❖ Time off when flipping between night shoots and day shoots

- ❖ Days you can not shoot (holidays, travel, weather issues, etc.)

- ❖ Changes in physical appearances of a character (hair, weight, facial hair, etc)

In upcoming chapters, we'll explore more of these concepts as well as the various emotional and psychological criteria to take into consideration. A happy cast and crew are a productive cast and crew.

# Location, Location, Location

You've imported your script. Your breakdown sheets are complete. You've assigned cast and locations to the stripboard, added day breaks and rearranged everything. Now what?

Now it's time to fine-tune the schedule so it takes logistical and budgetary requirements into consideration.

Before getting started, re-read the shooting script again without taking any notes. Just experience it. You'll learn which scenes are more important and which are emotionally challenging. That's knowledge you'll use to craft a more effective production schedule.

That being said, refining a successful schedule starts with location.

## SHOOTING OUT-OF-SEQUENCE

Shooting out-of-sequence is a fundamental strategy of film scheduling. Basically, you arrange your scenes so that the most expensive elements of your production (the locations, stars, or special equipment) work as few days as possible.

Sometimes, in episodic television, scenes from multiple episodes in a season are shot sequentially in a location. This is called **block shooting**. There isn't really a name for it in non-episodic production, but its the same idea. Bucket your scenes by location, and try to a wrap a location before moving on to the next one.

This same strategic thinking is often applied by directors within a shoot day. Instead of shooting a scene in sequence chronologically, they will often sort their shot list by camera and lighting setups. Fortunately, for your stripboard, you don't have to worry about shot lists. Just stay focused on the overall order of the days.

The calculus of out-of-sequence scheduling can get complicated. Let's say you have a star who's costing production a small fortune a day. The priority may become wrapping all of the talent's scenes rather than location efficiency. For these calculations, consultations with your line producer may be in order.



*Similar to locations, you want to group shoot days by talent and wrap them ASAP*

## MAKING THE MOST OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

There are many ways to make the most of the production process itself in your schedule. Got a scene where characters are driving in a car? Schedule the driving scenes during a company move between

locations! Need insert shots of food being prepared? See if you can get those while the caterer sets up lunch!

This strategy becomes more critical on productions about productions. You have a scene that shows the grips unloading their truck? Find a way to shoot it at the start of the day, when your production's grips are *actually* unloading their truck.

Being aware of the production process can help you avoid bottlenecks, too. For example, if there's a scene that calls for a complex crane shot, don't schedule it first thing in the morning - shoot some simple stuff while other crew members prep the crane before you need to shoot it.

If you're shooting in a location with multiple sets (for example, the living room and a bedroom in a house), shoot the one that requires the least dressing first. Your art department can prep it quickly, then, while your team shoots that set, the art department can quietly prep between takes.

In other words, look for opportunities for leverage overlapping productivity.

# Working With Talent

A jungle needs a warrior. An alien planet needs a crashed astronaut. An exploding building needs Tom Cruise.

While organizing your schedule by location is efficient, it's not always practical when it comes to your actors. Big Hollywood stars have multiple projects going on, and the actors on an indie film may have day-jobs to juggle. As with locations, failing to schedule your actors properly can amount to a potentially expensive problem.

## SCHEDULE PEOPLE, NOT SCENES

Preparing script breakdown sheets can put your mind into a logistical frenzy: everything is seen as an "element" that needs to be accounted for, coordinated, and scheduled. But unlike a breakdown, your

production schedule isn't for stuff. It's for people, and it needs to account for people's energy and creative processes.



*The Revenant: It's easy to forget the toll performances can take on talent*

As you look at your shooting schedule, ask yourself the following questions for each scene strip:

1. Who's working hardest in this scene?
2. Who needs a break after the last scene?
3. Who hasn't been busy for a while?

Consider the ebb and flow of your cast and crew's creative energy every day, and you'll have a smoother shoot. More importantly, you'll have a schedule that inspires creativity—creativity that will feed right back into the film you're making.

## ELIMINATE DEAD TIME

A quick way to get an overview of your cast's schedule is to consult the **Day out of Days** report. The *Day out of Days* (or "DOOD") is a chart that marks your actors' work days. It looks like this:
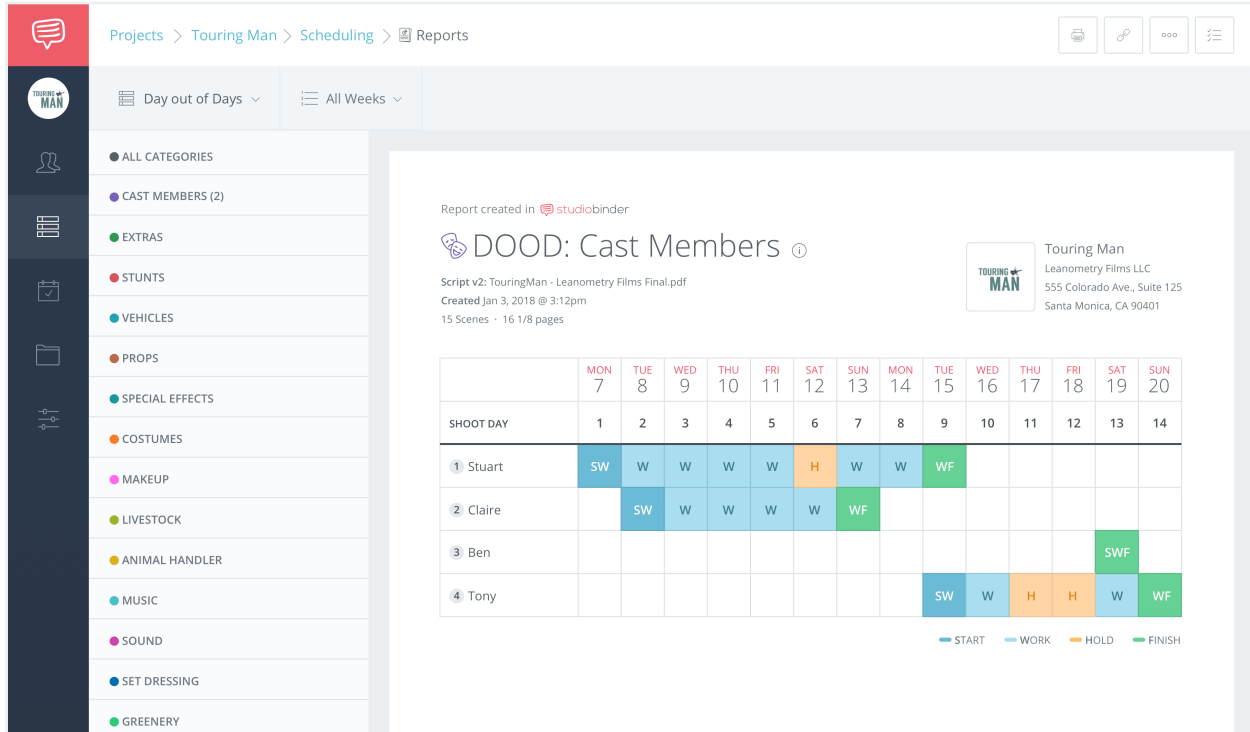


*DOOD report in StudioBinder showing what days each cast member is scheduled*

Most production management software, like StudioBinder, can generate a DOOD from your stripboard.

For each cast member, the chart indicates the day that cast member Starts Work (SW), each Work day (W), and the day the cast member's Work Finishes (WF). In some cases, a cast member works just one day, so that's marked SWF for "Start-Work-Finish."

Sometimes, you'll schedule a few days when an actor doesn't need to appear. For those days, the DOOD tends to show an "H" for "Hold."

Bear in mind that a "Hold" day is generally a paid day! An actor who's on hold is typically not permitted to take other jobs or go home from a remote location. This is done to ensure that the actor is easily available should the schedule change. Most low-budget/independent projects should not use Hold days, but should instead "Drop" the actor from the schedule on days when the actor isn't needed. In the DOOD, this is indicated with WD for "Work-Drop" on the actor's last day of work before a drop, and PW for "Pickup-Work" on the actor's next day of work after the drop. The actor is free to take other work or go home in the interim.

SAG/AFTRA has specific rules pertaining to holds and drops, so if you're scheduling a union production, you should consult the SAG agreement closely.

When you generate a DOOD off of your stripboard, you get a great overview of your talent's schedule. You can see if anyone is working too many days in a row, or if you've got characters who play small roles, but whose scenes are scheduled across too many days.

In some production management software, you can create a DOOD for other production elements such as props or vehicles. It's a great tool to help you spot inefficiencies in the schedule.

## OVERTIME

While you figure out how to schedule your talent most effectively, you also have to account for crucial non-work time requirements.

Unions, guilds, and even State and Federal employment laws specify the limits of how much you can make people work, and how much you might have to pay them if you want to push them past those limits.

In most cases, the work day is eight hours long (not counting a 30-60 minute lunch break). Anyone working past those eight hours is owed overtime (which varies by legal jurisdiction and by union requirements).

Most production personnel understand that the production day will likely run longer than that, and negotiate their contracts based on either a 10-hour or 12-hour flat rate. Overtime past 12 hours is typically very expensive, and is meant to discourage such long days, especially if they're driving themselves home at the end of the day.

When scheduling days, consider whether your crew is contracted on an 8-hour, 10-hour or 12-hour day and schedule accordingly.

## MEAL BREAKS

There are also rules and regulations regarding the frequency and duration of breaks, particularly the mid-day meal break. A typical rule is that you must provide your cast and crew with at least 30 minutes to have a meal within six hours from the start of work. There are lots of important details about what you need to do in order to qualify for a

six-hour period before the meal break (in some cases, the maximum is four hours!) so check your union and guild regulations and structure your schedule accordingly.

## TURNAROUND TIMES

At the end of each shoot day, everyone on your team needs time to rest, compose themselves, and grab a beer. This means you need to give them what is called "turnaround time" – enough time between shoot days to get sufficient rest.

Turnaround time is typically mandated by unions. As it currently stands, SAG actors are required a contractually-specified amount of turnaround time when they return to the their hotel or lodging.

Regardless of whether you're working with union talent or not, the basic rule is to aim for at least **twelve hours** between the end of one shoot day and the start of the next shoot day. In some cases, this is counted "door-to-door" — twelve hours from when your talent gets to their lodging to the next time they have to leave for work. If the drive to set is long, this means your set-to-set turnaround time needs to be longer than twelve hours.

If you schedule a day to wrap at, say, 10pm, you shouldn't start your next shoot day until 10am to preserve the 12-hour turnaround period. It's wise to give yourself a buffer, in case one shoot day runs late.

If you call your cast and crew back to set without sufficient turnaround time, it's called a "forced call", and may trigger penalties from unions and guilds (not to mention irritation from your cast and crew!).

The issue of turnaround time comes up most obviously when you're shooting nights, then switching to days. If you're scheduled to shoot nights until dawn (6am, say), your next shoot day can't start until at least twelve hours later (6pm, in our example). If you want to go from shooting nights to shooting days, you almost certainly need to take a full day off in order to avoid too short a turnaround time.



*Without a good turnaround time, Harry Potter can lose his magic*

**studiobinder**

FILM PRODUCTION SCHEDULING

# Handing Day/Night Flips

**DON'T** SCHEDULE 24H SHOOTS BY ACCIDENT!

| | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 00 | 01 | 02 | 03 | 04 | 05 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MON / TUE | MONDAY · NIGHT SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TUE / WED | TUESDAY · NIGHT SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| WED / THU | WEDNESDAY NIGHT SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | | THURSDAY · DAY SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | |
| THU / FRI | | | | | | | | | | | | | FRIDAY · DAY SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | |
| FRI / SAT | | | | | | | | | | | | | SATURDAY · DAY SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SAT / SUN | 24H OFF | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SUN / MON | | | | | | | | | | | | | MONDAY · DAY SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | |

**DO** SCHEDULE 24H DAY OFF BETWEEN DAY / NIGHT FLIPS

| | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 00 | 01 | 02 | 03 | 04 | 05 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MON / TUE | MONDAY · NIGHT SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TUE / WED | TUESDAY · NIGHT SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| WED / THU | WEDNESDAY · NIGHT SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | | 24H OFF | | | | | | | | | | | |
| THU / FRI | 24H OFF | | | | | | | | | | | | FRIDAY · DAY SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | |
| FRI / SAT | | | | | | | | | | | | | SATURDAY · DAY SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SAT / SUN | | | | | | | | | | | | | SUNDAY · DAY SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SUN / MON | | | | | | | | | | | | | MONDAY · DAY SHOOT | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Expect a full 24 hour turnaround when flipping from night shoots to a day shoot*

This is why most productions will shoot days first, then shoot nights, or will always schedule night shoots immediately prior to a day off.

If shorter turnaround times are necessity, small gestures like a nicer breakfast or an extra meal break go a long way in keeping morale up when everyone is just trying to make it through the day.

## DAYS OFF

Unions and guilds may also specify requirements for days off. On higher-end productions, two days off per 7-day week are a standard requirement. Some guilds waive the 6th day requirement allowing you to shoot 6 days before a day off.

SAG's lowest-budget feature contracts waive both the 6th and 7th day off requirements, which would allow you, in theory, to shoot a full seven-day week with no break. This is ill-advised, unless it's absolutely unavoidable.

When you planning days off, schedule them strategically:

- ❖ Schedule required days off when switching between day and night shoots.
- ❖ Set a day off two days into a shoot to give you a chance to assess progress and make staffing changes before you're in too deep.
- ❖ Schedule days off immediately after complicated days, both to give the team a break, and to give yourself a potential overflow day in the event that production fails to "make the day."

## ACCOUNT FOR EMOTIONAL SWINGS

It's difficult to construct an effective schedule if you don't take into consideration the content of the scenes, particularly in regards to the emotional highs and lows of your cast.

For example, if your performers have to shoot an emotional scene, it's best not to schedule a overly cheery scene right after it (even if it isn't particularly complicated). Shifting major emotional gears is a delicate process. Much like actors, the director also needs time to ease between emotionally complex scenes.



*Christian Bale and director McG on set of "Terminator Salvation" (pre-blowup)*

As you lay out your stripboard, it's important to know the story well enough to understand how the demands of each scene will impact the time it will take for performers and directors to deliver their best work.

With that in mind, you should schedule scenes as chronologically as possible any time you can. Not only does it make continuity simpler, but it also enables actors to more clearly follow the emotional flow of the story and maintain the emotional arcs of their characters.

CHAPTER 5

# Consider the Crew

You've sorted the shoot by location and figured out the best way to maximize your actors' output. Now you have to figure out what to do with the small army of crew members who have to show up every day.

As with talent, you'll have to be mindful not to burn out your crew, while making sure everything is as efficient as possible.

How you schedule for crew requirements depends on the types of scenes you're shooting. An elaborate highway action scene with explosives and a hundred swarming extras will involve considerably more prep time than a restaurant conversation scene.

In this chapter, we'll explore some of the most common crew considerations when creating shooting schedule.

## SETUP AND STRIKE TIMES

As you shape your schedule to conform to an 8-hour, 10-hour or 12-hour day, don't forget to include setup and strike times for every shoot day. This is the time it will take for everyone to load their equipment in, get it set up, and pack it all back up at the end of the day.



*Setup and strike times should be considered in the schedule*

If it's the team's first day at a location, setup might take a long time. This is especially true on the first day of production, when the members of your team are just starting to get to know each other. The wheels aren't greased yet, so things tend to move slowly.

If it's a skilled production team that has worked together before, and the setup is simple enough in an uncomplicated location, it's not unreasonable to expect the team to have "first shot up" within about an hour of call time. On more complicated mornings, it can take two or even three hours before the first shot is ready to roll. If you know you've got a complicated morning for your crew, consider setting your actors' call times a little later, so they're not sitting around and waiting for the first few hours of the morning.

Strike time, like setup time, is dependent on the complexity of the production and the skill of the crew. If the production is particularly large and complicated, you might benefit from hiring a "swing" crew to come in pack out all of the gear.

Of course, if you're shooting at the same location across multiple days, and if you have the luxury of leaving all of your equipment safely setup at the location (like you might if you're shooting in a studio for a week), strike times at the end of the day are minimal, as your team can simply leave most of the gear where it is and come back to it in the morning. Setup times in such an instance are also reduced, but regardless of your situation, at minimum, your actors will always need time to get into hair/makeup and wardrobe.

## KEEP COMPANY MOVES TO A MINIMUM

If you're shooting in more than one location on a particular shoot day, your team will need time to pack up all the equipment, clean up, gather the crew, and transport them all to the next location. This intra-day logistical operation is called a **company move**. If you can, avoid these as much as possible.

Company moves take a lot of time – they're hardly ever a simple half-hour matter. Think about the time it would take to pack up all this up:



*It takes a small village*

That is 2,000-10,000 pounds worth of gear, equipment, crafty, and tents that needs to be packed up, shipped out, then unpacked and set up to continue production at the next location.

And that's just a small snapshot of gear. It can easily take two hours to strike a full set. Add travel time to that, then add setup time at the next location, and you've got an estimate for the company move.

Film production and scheduling software cannot evaluate how much "stuff" there is to move so make sure you talk to your Department Heads about this.

## BE EFFICIENT WITH COMPANY MOVES

Reducing or eliminating company moves from your schedule is tricky, but can be planned for by examining the script and stripboard.

Discuss with the director if you can combine (or cheat) any two locations in one. If not, encourage your team to find two locations on the same side of town to reduce drive times.

If you need to make a company move quickly, consider hiring a 'swing team' to come to your first location as you wrap. Your crew grabs just the gear they need for the second location while the swing team wraps everything else out of the first location. This is more easily accomplished if the two locations aren't far apart.

For more pro tips about loading in and out without falling behind schedule, check out this article.

**Pro Tip:** Sometimes turning the camera around can make a location look completely different!

## THINK DEPARTMENT BY DEPARTMENT

No two scenes are alike. A scene with a zombie in it means Make-Up needs to get started early. A scene set in Victorian England means a team of costumers and set dressers need to start working well before the lighting team arrives.



*There's a lot of set design and wardrobe here that requires setup time*

Unique department setups and prep times should be factored into your shooting schedule. Look to the script and breakdown sheets to understand the complexity and additional setup times required for a given scene. And of course, discuss the requirements of production with the director and department heads as much as you can.

## CONSIDER MOS SHOOTING

**MOS**, or motor-only sync, means that the image is being recorded without a synchronous audio track. In other words, your sound crew is not needed. No need to make them stand around waiting.

When scheduling your shoot, if you know a scene does not require sound, schedule it at the beginning or end of the day. By scheduling MOS at the start or end of the day, the sound crew can arrive later, leave earlier, or pick up wild sound or other useful content.

*StudioBinder's Call Sheet Builder allows staggered call times and private notes per recipient*

## COMMUNICATE WITH DEPARTMENT HEADS

After you've developed your initial shooting schedule and shared it with the team, it's vital that the director, ADs, DP and other department heads talk through it together. Set a meeting to go through the schedule day-by-day, scene-by-scene, and if possible, setup-by-setup. Discuss each setup, who's doing what, how much time is required to prep, and where the potential trouble spots may be.

Remember that this meeting isn't just about creating the final shooting schedule. By holding this meeting, you're giving everyone a chance to learn about each other's role for the day. When your team members know each other's responsibilities, they'll be able to help each other keep up with the demands of a tight shooting schedule.

Take notes, update your stripboard, and share the updated schedule with the team after the meeting.

This will become your "official" shooting schedule.

# Using Empathy to Rally the Troops

It's easy to see production scheduling as a paint-by-the-numbers routine. Follow the steps above, make an efficient schedule, collect your check...when's craft services here?

However, what separates novice schedulers from the professionals is **empathy**. Understanding how a schedule can either *enhance* or *destroy* morale. Creating a positive environment with a culture of excellence can mean the difference between an incredible film and a mediocre one. A truly well-crafted shooting schedule turns a *crew* into a *team*. It's the underlying architecture for invigorating everyone's spirits on set, motivating excellence, and building momentum throughout a shoot day.

## ALTERNATE DIFFICULT SCENES

When you're organizing your stripboard, ask yourself if you have too many soul-sucking arduous scenes back-to-back. After a long go at a difficult scene, production should be rewarded with a quick win. Alternating between complex and easy scenes can significantly lift production spirits.



*A happy set is a productive set*

Another thing to look for are challenging scenes at the end of a day. If you find them, see if you can move them up before the meal break. By having your cast and crew get the most difficult scenes out of the way as soon as possible, everyone will breathe easier for the remainder of the day with a well-earned sense of accomplishment. Additionally, if

the difficult scene take longer to wrap, it's more manageable to push or reschedule "easier" scenes.

**Pro Tip:** If you schedule a difficult performance at the start of a day, actors can anticipate it and prep the night before.

If your team reaches burnout, it's most likely your fault. Give people the breaks they need to recharge. Don't exceed 5-6 day weeks whenever possible. Remember, their creative energy is more valuable to the production than their time!

## WORK WITH THE DIRECTOR

You should work closely with the director when crafting a shooting schedule. After all, it's the director who's beholden to your schedule when the cameras roll. Remember that the director is just as human as the rest of us and they need time to get in the groove of things. Directors need to put the crew through its motions for a while before they can learn its quirks.

*Between Scorsese, Nicholson, and DiCaprio, that's a lot of high profile talent to schedule!*

The first shoot day of a production is the director's opportunity to establish the tone of production. Some directors are taskmasters, preferring to start with technical scenes with low emotional stakes—pushing the crew to work hard, move fast, and create an adrenaline-fueled environment of accomplishment.

Other directors like to ease in and get everyone comfortable, so an easy first day works better for them.

*Wes Anderson establishes tone on his sets by doing something quirky, I bet.*

## SCHEDULING THE ACTS

There's an old Hollywood scheduling trick that you should know: Shoot your first and third acts before you shoot the second act.

When directors and actors shoot the first and third acts, they're establishing character arcs; the before and afters in the story. This provides them with a deeper understanding of their characters and story arcs during production. Once those details are established, they're free to make adjustments and incorporate more nuances during the second act to underscore the transformations between the first and last acts.

For huge productions that take months to shoot, this is also a sort of creative insurance. If something unfortunate happens to a central figure (such as a lead actor) during production, it's easier to adjust the story in the 2nd act.



*Paul Walker's unfortunate death while filming "Furious 7" required major Act 2 rewrites*

## FRONT-LOAD THE RISKS

Every production has riskier days. The earlier in the schedule you place those risky days, the more latitude you give yourself to adapt the schedule should any problems arise.

Shooting a feature outdoors in coastal New England? Front-load your schedule with the exteriors and plan for cover-sets in case it rains. If

you schedule the exteriors at the end of the shoot and you're rained out, you've got nothing else to do but go through a costly extension of your production.



*Weather changes forced "The Revenant" to shift production from Canada to Argentina*

Big action scene? If you shoot it in the first week and it doesn't play right in rushes, you've got time to think of alternative ways to bring the scene to life.

## SET MILESTONES

Spread out the major moments in the film throughout the shoot. After a big moment is in the can, everyone gets a jolt of enthusiasm and joy.

These can be extravagant things like stunts or explosions. It could be just emotional storytelling peaks. It could even be a complex choreographed camera or blocking movement.

Right after achieving a big, complex success, your cast and crew will become true believers. Distribute these energy boosts strategically.

## TAKE THE THIRD DAY OFF

It's tempting to assume our carefully prepped shooting schedules will set us up for a smooth shoot, but we all know perfection rarely strikes a film set. Because of that, the schedule needs sufficient contingency for adjustments and alterations.

Orson Welles had the following advice running sets for Roger Corman at New World Pictures:

*"Schedule a day off after your first two shoot days."*

This may sound crazy, but scheduling the third day off provides a chance to reconfigure or change crew, adjust the schedule, tweak the shooting script, or make any of a million other possible changes.

Most importantly, it allows these changes to be made before too much time or money has been sunk into the production. The team has had two days to test the waters, see how everything works, and identify problems.

Why wait a whole week to fix them?

**CHAPTER 7**

# Conclusion

At the end of the day, no amount of film production software is going to generate the "perfect" schedule.

A computer isn't aware of time constraints, human exhaustion, or the Murphy's Law variables that seem to plague every shoot.

Your shooting schedule will organize the data in the most efficient way possible, but at the end of the day it's between the Producer, Director, 1st AD, and various Department Heads to discuss and strategize the best shooting schedule that works for everyone.

So make sure you surround yourself with great people and get to work! Production is a team sport.

## MORE RESOURCES

Now that you've finished reading this guide, don't stop there! You've reviewed the principles of production scheduling, and learned what it takes to keep your next project running smoothly. If you're craving more more production how-to's, visit the StudioBinder Blog.

## SPECIAL EBOOK OFFER

As a bonus for reading this ebook, we want to offer you a special discount off StudioBinder.

StudioBinder is a modern, production management solution that will help you create shooting schedules, script breakdowns, call sheets, and more. Did we mention it's free to get started?

If you decide to upgrade, use offer code **STUDIOBINDER** and we'll discount 25% off the first month.

Thank you for reading!
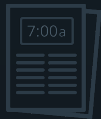
GET STARTED FOR FREE

# studio binder

Manage production contacts. Create lists and import them into new projects.

Import screenplays, create shooting schedules, stripboards, and breakdowns.

Create and send personalized call sheets. Track as cast & crew confirm call sheets.

Manage production documents and media in one place, with version history.

Collaborate with teams.

www.studiobinder.com