



With perseverance, a career within the film industry can be very rewarding.

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**In the film industry, the problem for most young people is getting their foot in the door and getting noticed. First Light offers 7 pieces of advice for young people starting out.**

It's a notoriously hard industry to break into, but with hard work and perseverance, a career within the film industry can be very rewarding.

First Light is a UK-wide organisation that uses film and media production to develop skills in young people aged up to 25. They offer 7 tips for new entrants:

### **1. Be positive**

Have a positive and enthusiastic attitude, no matter how menial a task may seem.

Many graduates think that being a runner and making the tea is beneath them, but this is the best way to get your foot in the door. Look at the positives:

- As a runner, you have the opportunity to understand the wide range of roles out there, and how they fit together. This is a skill that will be useful when you are higher up the ranks.
- Use it as an opportunity to network and make contacts in the industry. If you make a good impression, they might remember you the next time they need a pair of hands
- Use your initiative. See what needs doing without being asked first, and you're more likely to work your way up the ladder faster.

## **2. Make films!**

Have a brief and compelling pitch which could generate interest in your idea.

Want to be a script writer? Write scripts! Want to be a director? Get a group together and direct a short film!

Industry bods are more likely to take you seriously if you can actually show that you're passionate rather than just talking the talk.

## **3. Know yourself**

When you're networking or in an interview situation, you need to be able to explain, succinctly, what you're about.

Do you eventually want to work in the camera department, be a director, or write scripts? Are you passionate about documentaries, or dramas? What skills do you possess that would make you a valuable part of a team?

Have you heard of the 'Elevator Pitch'? A scenario where you end up in a lift with an executive or studio head and have two minutes to pitch your idea to them?

Whilst it's very unlikely that this will happen (and lifts don't often take a whole two minutes!), the point is that you could bump into someone important at any given time. Rather than bumbling away at them, have a brief and compelling pitch which could generate interest in your idea.

## **4. Work on your CV and covering letter**

First impressions count, and often somebody's first impression of you will be on a piece of paper sat on their desk.

If you are going to undertake unpaid work, make sure that your employer doesn't exploit you.

Your CV needs to be easy to read, clean and simple, well-written (with no spelling mistakes or grammatical errors!) and include only information relevant to the role at hand.

Your covering letter is then a chance to expand upon some of the relevant points and spell out how you fit the person specification (if there is one) or what you think they are looking for.

## **5. Beware of exploitation**

There is a lot of unpaid work around. Whilst it may be a beneficial way of getting your foot in the door, many young people simply can't afford it.

If you are going to undertake unpaid work, make sure your employer doesn't exploit you.

We recommend that:

- Unpaid work should last no longer than 4 weeks. After this the employer should pay you at least minimum wage.
- The employer should provide travel expenses.
- You should expect to receive training, dedicated supervision and flexible hours.

Arts Council England and Creative and Cultural Skills have published [a guide to arts internships](#), highlighting the legal obligations for employers.

## **6. Network**

It's not as hard as you might think. Grab a drink and introduce yourself to someone. Make sure you ask questions about them, too.

Network and make contacts in the industry. If you make a good impression they might remember you.

If you come away with a useful business card, then do follow it up and make contact, even if it's just a note to say it was nice to meet them and to bear you in mind if any opportunities arise.




Be careful not to pester people though, it might put them off!

## **7. Use social media**

It's more important now than ever before to interact online in order to find opportunities and jobs, engage with prospective employers, and generally keep up-to-date with the industry.

Last-minute runner jobs are often posted on Twitter – so get involved!

## Film

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**The UK film industry contains a great number of different roles, from writing, financing, shooting and editing film; to selling and screening those films in cinemas.**

- To find out more about [careers in film](#), visit the Creative Skillset website. [www.skillsset.org/film/industry](http://www.skillsset.org/film/industry)
- You might also want to check out [Creative England](#), which is working to support film in the English regions.
- For help and advice on film careers from BECTU, the UK's media and entertainment union, check out the [Creative Toolkit](#). [www.creativetoolkit.org](http://www.creativetoolkit.org)
- The [BAFTA guru](#) website contains interviews, masterclasses and lectures from those in the film industry. [Guru.bafta.org](http://Guru.bafta.org)

## Careers



Not

## **The Runner**

A Runner is literally someone who runs errands; you will be an all-in-one messenger, handyman, tea-maker and cleaner. However, Runners are actually essential to a shoot running smoothly, and most people start off in the industry at this level, whether or not they have been to university.

Don't see this as a position that's beneath you but look upon it as a great opportunity to learn more about all the roles available and make contacts with those around you. If you show willing and initiative, it is likely that you will move up the rungs fairly quickly.

### **Here are First Light's top tips for Runners:**

- Always show enthusiasm and good grace, no matter what the task assigned
- Be observant and use initiative and common sense – find things to do without having to be asked first
- Be flexible and willing to work long/unsociable hours
- Whilst you don't need any formal qualifications to be a Runner, a full driving license will go a long way
- Whilst it may seem more exciting to get work on bigger sets of well known films/programmes, working on smaller projects will often give you more experience

### **How to find runner jobs**

A lot of the time, runners are recruited at the last minute, so more often than not positions aren't advertised in advanced on job sites. Here are other ways to find out about openings:

- Networking – go to networking events, give out business cards and follow up with contacts (don't pester, but dropping someone a line to thank them for their time can go a long way)
- Social media – last minute opportunities often go out on Twitter
- Speculative CVs and covering letters to prospective employers
- Work experience

### **Tips for freelancers**

More and more film and TV professionals are going freelance, but there are both pros and cons to being a freelancer, and it is something you need to think about carefully before diving in. Whilst your holidays and working hours will be more flexible, you need to be financially savvy, a people-person and be able to cover yourself legally. Our top tips are below:

- Learn to negotiate your salary, research what is reasonable

- Network and maintain contacts – attend networking events, stay in touch with existing contacts, even if there is no work for you at that time
- Market yourself: business cards, social networking, a blog?
- Stay up-to-date with the goings-on of the industry: read newsletters, join Twitter, join filmmaking forums such as [Step2Collabo](#), [Ideas Tap](#) and [Shooting People](#)
- Don't forget insurance for your kit in case of damage/theft
- Keep all contracts/receipts/payslips and try to put aside a third of your earnings for your tax bill
- [How to write the perfect invoice](#)
- [Freelancing and HMRC](#)
- Don't know whether to register as a sole trader or limited company? Click [here](#)
- [Industry standards and your skills gaps](#), from Creative Skillset

### Useful careers sites:

There's loads of really great production advice available on the [BBC's College of Production website](#). [www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofproduction/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofproduction/) It's packed full of really useful technical advice, information, hints & tips alongside job profiles from across the organisation.

[The Guardian](#) [careers.guardian.co.uk](http://careers.guardian.co.uk)-Useful forums, CV clinics and Q&A sessions

#### [Step2Inspire](#)

With the latest film & TV opportunities, events and news

#### [4Talent](#)

Jobs & advice for new entrants

[My First Job in Film](#) [www.myfirstjobinfilm.co.uk](http://www.myfirstjobinfilm.co.uk) click on 'jobs board' to see opportunities. See also [www.myfirstjobinfilm.co.uk/FilmCareersHomepage.html](http://www.myfirstjobinfilm.co.uk/FilmCareersHomepage.html) for descriptions on the different roles within Film

Most people, even graduates, have to start off in the industry as runners. There are some great tips for making the most of your runner positions on the [Unit List website](#)

The Creative Skillset Film Academy Network comprises institutions identified by the UK film industry as **centres of excellence** in film education and training.

The Network is currently made up of **three Creative Skillset Film Academies**:

- London Film School, A Skillset Film Academy
- National Film and Television School, A Skillset Film and Media Academy
- Screen Academy Scotland, A Skillset Film and Media Academy

Use the links in the navigation on the left hand side of the page to find out more about each of the Creative Skillset Film Academies. [www.skillsset.org/film/industry](http://www.skillsset.org/film/industry)

- [www.workingtitlefilms.com](http://www.workingtitlefilms.com) see details of Action Programme

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### **Krysten Resnick**

is a writer and director. She studied a BA in practical filmmaking at Met Film School

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Many people go into the film industry in search of glamour, only to find it far from glitzy. You could be spending 12 hours outside in the freezing rain on one project or 14 hours struggling to solve a problem on another, forgetting to eat lunch. It is hard work, but also incredible fun.

People often ask how I managed to break into the industry, given that I graduated from film school less than two years ago. In that time I have been lucky enough to land an agent, work on various sets in a range of roles and have a few of my own projects in development. One thing we were often told in film school was that there isn't just one way in. It's true: it often requires a lot of hard work and more than a little luck.

So what steps should you take if you are serious about becoming a filmmaker?

## Getting started

**Sign up to our Film Today email**

[Read more](#)

By the time I began film school, I'd already had a bit of experience on set doing trainee camera work, and even working as an extra in order to pick the brains of anyone and everyone who'd let me.

I chose to go to the [Met Film School](#) in London because it focused on the practical nature of filmmaking, putting a camera in your hands from the first day. I was a mature student, and classroom learning didn't really appeal. Film school gave me the opportunity to learn how a production worked, try out different crew roles and, ultimately, attempt to tell the stories I wanted to tell. However, the most important thing it gave me was a network of creative and inspiring like-minded peers.

## Networking

You need to put yourself out there. Student and low-budget films are often looking for anyone and everyone to help, so if you can afford to give up a few days, it's a great way to test the waters and meet people. The film and television industry is incestuous and if you land a job (whether on a student shoot or in the major leagues) and you work hard, people will often ask you to work on another job ... and probably another. Making films is a collaborative process and people like to work with those they know they can trust.

## Make your mark

Help your friends turn their passion into projects, and they'll do the same for you. This is vital for discovering your voice as a filmmaker. When I was in film school, I wrote, directed and produced a short film called Benny and Jack's Flying Machine, which a group of student

friends helped me to make. We had no money, little time, but a whole lot of passion. The film premiered at Toronto International Film Festival Kids in 2013 and was screened at various prestigious festivals and venues, including the Moma in New York. It helped me build a name for myself and introduced me to agents.

## **Eight tips on starting a career in film and TV**

[Read more](#)

## **Try different things**

Knowing how all the departments work and what is required from them helps you become a better filmmaker. It comes back to collaboration – if you know how each department runs, it will make you better at working together. Take opportunities in film school or with your peers to try out different crew roles. You might find that other roles spark your interest and talent. Take your storytelling to different formats. Shoot a music video for a friend's band. Try making a commercial. Take on a corporate or editing job. It's all part of the experience and will help you to become a better storyteller.

## **Work it**

For every film festival you make it into, two more will say no. Projects will look promising, but can fall flat. Just because you're working today, it doesn't mean you'll be working tomorrow.

The bottom line is that there is no right answer. Like anything, work hard and love what you do and those things will shine through your projects. Remember: making films is a collaborative art, so support your cast and crew. Be as helpful and as useful as you can, make sure people want to work with you, and make yourself indispensable.

*Krysten Resnick is a writer and director. She studied a BA in practical filmmaking at [Met Film School](#)*

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