

2.c. | Set Dec Assistant and Petty Cash Buyer

In this document, we'll look at the trainee positions within the Set Dec Department. There are two trainee positions:

- Set Decoration Assistant
- Petty Cash Buyer

We'll begin by looking at the lowest position in the hierarchy: Set Dec Assistant.

Set Dec Assistant

Set Dec Assistant is technically the starting position in the Set Dec department. However, you only tend to find Set Dec Assistants on larger productions. Therefore, the common entry-level position is Petty Cash Buyer.

The responsibilities of a Set Dec Assistant are similar to that of an Art Department Assistant. These include:

- Collating paperwork
- Recording expenditure
- Running errands
- Carrying out research
- Buying and collecting props
- Completing POs (Purchase Orders)
- Any other duties to help with the day-to-day running of the department

The exact nature of what you'll be doing varies depending on the production. It can be a very varied position – potentially a cross between an Art Department Assistant and a Petty Cash Buyer.

However, because a Set Dec Assistant position is more common on larger productions, you may be pigeon-holed to a greater extent than on smaller productions. For example, I was once working on a large Amazon Prime TV series that had two Set Dec Assistants. One of them spent the entire time in the office dealing with office admin and collating receipts. As you can imagine, this wasn't a fun way to spend 9 months.

The upshot is that this position can be very varied, and it's important to be clear about what the position entails before you start.

Because a Set Dec Assistant is lower down in the hierarchy than a Petty Cash Buyer, if you have the skills to be a Set Dec Assistant, you have the skills to be a Petty Cash Buyer. Therefore, to prevent repetition, the rest of this course will focus on Petty Cash Buyers. However, don't forget about or ignore the Set Dec Assistant position, since it can be a very accessible entry-level position.

With that in mind, let's look at Petty Cash Buyers in more detail.

Petty Cash Buyer

As a Petty Cash Buyer, your main responsibilities will be:

- Visiting prop hire companies to see what props are available and booking them where necessary
- Buying low-cost items (either via the internet or in physical shops)
- Researching what props would be appropriate for a given situation / scene
- Picking up and dropping off props
- Buying consumables for either the Art, Set Dec, or Props departments (anything from stationery to screws)
- Running errands
- Collating your receipts, reconciling your expenditure, and submitting this information to Accounts and the Production Buyer

As you can see, being a Petty Cash Buyer can be a very varied position. A lot of people like it for that reason – you get to go to all sorts of places and do all manner of things.

Day to Day Life as a Petty Cash Buyer

With a lot of jobs in the industry, no two days are the same. This is especially the case when working as a Petty Cash Buyer. Sometimes you might be working in the office. If you are, you may be sourcing items and shopping online.

Alternatively, you may be recording past expenditure and collating receipts. This is one of the less exciting parts of being a Petty Cash Buyer. (We'll talk about this in more detail in section 5 when we discuss what equipment you'll need to work as a Petty Cash Buyer.)

You may also be asked to carry out some research. It's particularly common to do this if you're working on a period production. For example, you might be asked to research how a room would have been laid out during a particular period, or how a specific item would have looked during a specific year. Depending on the topic, a simple Google search might reveal the answer. Or for more complex queries, you may have to contact museums for specialist information. This may even result in a visit to a particular museum.

When you're not in the office, you'll often be out and about for all manner of reasons. This involves a lot of driving around. Sometimes this can be really nice, and you get to visit lots of interesting places. However, other times it can be less pleasant – particularly when you're driving through rush hour traffic in London. Either way, you'll probably spend a lot of time in your car. This means that, when time is short, it's common to eat your lunch while driving around.

Sometimes you'll be asked to visit some prop hire companies to see what's available and / or hire some props. Other times, you'll be asked to collect various items from suppliers. These may be props for a set, or consumables for the Props team, e.g. screws and paint. You'll often be asked to buy consumables for the Props team, so it's handy to have a basic understanding of hardware and power tools, e.g. screws, bolts, and hand tools. Once you've collected said items, you'll be asked to drop them off at particular places, often the prop store or a set.

When you drop off items at the set or location, you may even be asked to stick around and help dress the set. As I explained in section 1, dressing and striking sets normally falls to the Props department. However, when time is short, sometimes it is up to everyone to muck in and help dress a set.

If manual labour isn't your thing, don't worry – this isn't a common occurrence. You'll just be expected to help out in whatever way you can, either by fetching and carrying things, or arranging less-heavy items. Therefore, if it does happen, you're not expected to have a toolbox full of tools, similar to what a Dressing Props Trainee would have. (We'll cover exactly what you are required to have as a Petty Cash Buyer in section 5. I'm only including this example now to demonstrate how varied the Petty Cash Buyer position can be.)

That's a general overview of what you'll be doing as a Petty Cash Buyer. The important thing to realise is that every production is different. Some jobs may require you to spend a lot of time in the office. Others may require you to spend most of your time driving around and running errands.

Benefits of Being a Trainee

The benefits of the trainee positions are that you will quickly gain an understanding of how the department works, and of the responsibilities of other positions within the department. This experience will help you to decide where you'd like to go next in your career.

Perhaps you'll decide that Set Dec isn't for you because you'd rather be doing something more practical. In that case, you might decide you want to work in Props. Alternatively, you might decide you love Set Dec, which will allow you to plan your next job.

Whichever trainee position you're in, the important thing is to get as full an experience as possible. Ask the people you're working with about their roles and the roles of other departments. Try to work with as many different people as you can, learn as much as you can, and make as many contacts as you can.

Epilogue

I hope that gives you a good understanding of the Set Dec trainee positions. In the next document, we'll look at the trainee positions in the Props department.



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