

# UNDERSTANDING LOCATION FILMING





### WHAT IS A LOCATION?

Filming may take place in a purpose-built studio complex, empty warehouse or factory, or 'on location', utilising existing buildings or land in urban and regional areas. Locations may be interior (inside) or exterior (outside). In this handbook, the term 'location' refers to any area referred to as the set, unit base, or screen production space. All areas that are occupied by people directly connected to the production are included in this definition, including parking, traffic control and crew facilities such as catering or designated smoking areas.

### TYPES OF PRODUCTION SHOT ON LOCATION

Location filming tends to fall into one of the following types of activity:

- + television commercials (TVCs)  
television series and serials
- + feature films
- + short films
- + documentaries and reality television
- + web, app or online-based advertising

## TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Television commercials (TVCs) and other advertisements are regularly filmed in Western Australia using our iconic locations. TVCs generally involve anywhere between 10 and 80 people. They may have a very short production timeframe, often less than a week to prepare for the shoot, film on location, edit the project and be ready for broadcast. A TVC may be 10, 15, 20, 30 or 60 seconds long. Multiple locations are frequently used, and each may only appear on screen for a few seconds in the advertisement. Each location may be used for 4 hours or up to 2 to 3 days of filming, depending on the length of the advertisement, the complexity of the shots required, and the amount of equipment and people involved.

Filming may last for anywhere between 1 and 10 days. As a guide, a 30 second TVC is filmed over 2 to 3 days. TVCs typically require parking, traffic management, unit base setup and specialty filming equipment. There is often some form of 'set dressing' involved to adjust the look of the location to suit the needs of the advertisement, for example, placement or removal of street furniture or signage.

## TELEVISION SERIES AND SERIALS

Australian television series are generally made up of 6, 8, 13 or 26 episodes of either 30 or 60 minutes duration each, including advertisement breaks. A series can take from 6 weeks to 6 months to film, depending upon its complexity. A serial is a longer-running series, like Neighbours or Home and Away. These tend to film for 8 to 10 months of the year.

A television miniseries is usually made up of between 2 to 4 episodes, most often producing around 4 to 6 hours of television. Each instalment may be up to 120 minutes long including advertisement breaks and a miniseries can take around 3 months to film. Television programs usually have between 40 and 70 crew members on location.

The same locations often feature repeatedly, for example the homes of lead characters or their place of work, where multiple scenes across multiple episodes take place. This may require the production to return to the same location many times over the course of a season's filming. Television productions generally require a unit base and parking for trucks. They may also use specialist equipment, infrastructure and traffic management. Television productions may involve a 'second unit' as well as the main crew. The second unit is usually engaged to capture simpler shots that do not always require cast and large specialist equipment 'set-ups'. These crews usually involve up to 12 people.

## FEATURE FILMS

Feature films generally run between 90 to 120 minutes and can sometimes have a more significant impact on the area where they are filming as they can involve between 30 and 100 crew members, or more. Some films have 6 to 8-week pre-production period and they generally take 6 to 12 weeks to film in Australia, but films with bigger budgets and complex script requirements may have a longer pre-production and shoot duration. Feature films, particularly the larger productions, will often have a main

crew and a 'second unit'. The second unit can involve cast or large specialist equipment 'set-ups'. These crews can be between 10 and 40 people. Filming features can seem to happen quite slowly on location because of the equipment required to achieve the 'look' of the film and the complexity involved in getting everything to be perfect as well as meet the technical requirements of the cinema screen format.

## SHORT FILMS

These are often small, low-impact productions with limited specialist filming equipment made on a low budget by crew members who are often less experienced in screen production. They do not usually require much parking, traffic management or infrastructure. Short films take anywhere between 2 and 20 days to film, depending on the complexity of the production and the availability of crew. People employed in other industries or who are just starting out in their film career often make short films. They may not be familiar with filming protocols

and need more interaction and correspondence with permitting authorities when planning their shoot. Making a short film can be an important learning experience for filmmakers who go on to make feature films or television. Encouraging them to take a pragmatic and professional approach to filming is good for the industry and public agencies in the long term.

## DOCUMENTARIES AND REALITY TELEVISION

These usually involve small crews of less than 10 people at one time. They do not generally require parking, use very little equipment and do not stay in the same place for very long, so they have little impact on locations. Crew working on documentaries and reality television do not always know exactly where they will be located until close to the scheduled time of filming. However, unlike TVCs, features and television filming, documentaries and reality

television are often observational and do not generally interfere with other activities occurring around them, such as pedestrian access. Documentaries can take between 2 and 6 months to film, but this very much depends on the subject matter. More complex documentary series, like a David Attenborough nature series, can take up to two years to complete.

## WEB, APP OR ONLINE-BASED ADVERTISING

There has been a rapid increase in filming for promotional, advertising or informational purposes, particularly for websites. Crew sizes for this type of filming are generally the same as documentary crews, with minimal equipment and low impact on their surroundings. These kinds of productions may have a very short

production timeframe and a small budget. There is often less than a week to prepare for the shoot, film on location, edit the project and be ready for broadcast.



## ACTIVITIES ON LOCATION

Film crews often need to arrive at a location and set up very early so that they can begin filming as soon as there is enough natural light. A work day requires between 8 to 10 hours of filming in addition to a lunch break. The first to arrive and the last to leave the unit base or set are usually the caterers, unit, hair, makeup and wardrobe personnel as well as associated trucks, pop-ups, marquees and portable toilets. Much of the early activity requires the use of generators for power. Film production companies usually provide their own catering to ensure that cast and crew can eat at regular intervals, minimising time away from the set. Marquees and pop-ups used for catering should be tethered above ground or weighted, rather than pegged, to avoid damaging existing infrastructure. During the approval process the public agency FLO should check exactly what will be on site at the unit base. From time to time, producers

will ask public agencies to allow access to facilities like public toilets and shelters. Alternatively, contact details of privately owned facilities may be requested from the FLO or they may be asked to contact the owner on behalf of the production. Trucks with equipment integral to the filming process (i.e. camera, grip, lighting, generator, sound and props) are known as, essential vehicles, and they require parking as close to filming as possible, in order for equipment to be accessed regularly throughout the day. When filming is over for the day, all equipment from the filming location is returned to the essential vehicles. All signs of activity should be removed from the location unless the crew will return the following day, in which case trucks and equipment often remains on site with security personnel in place.

## WHAT IS A UNIT BASE?

For all but the smallest productions, the unit base is the hub of a film production on location. This is where meals are served and where crew and cast members gather when they are not required on set or may retreat to during unfavourable weather. The area generally includes portable pop-up marquees, tables, chairs, bins, trolleys, tea and coffee facilities, food warmers and hand washing facilities. Filming vehicles are parked nearby, including the unit truck or van, makeup, wardrobe and greenroom buses, and the catering truck.

The best place for a unit base is in an area where it has the least impact on residents and the public. This is often a park, reserve or dedicated car park, away from public thoroughfares and areas of day-to-day activity. However, it should also be in an area that is practical and close by for the film crew, so they may move easily between the base and the filming location. Equipment vehicles owned by crew may park at the unit base overnight so that residents are not inconvenienced by trucks arriving early in the morning.

