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# Television, Video, and Motion Picture Camera Operators and Editors

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(O\*NET 27-4031.00, 27-4032.00)

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## Significant Points

- Workers acquire their skills through on-the-job or formal postsecondary training.
- Keen competition for jobs is expected due to the large number of people who wish to enter the broadcasting and motion picture industries, where many camera operators and editors are employed.
- Those with the most experience and the most advanced computer skills will have the best job opportunities.

## Nature of the Work

Television, video, and motion picture camera operators produce images that tell a story, inform or entertain an audience, or record an event. Film and video editors edit soundtracks, film, and video for the motion picture, cable, and broadcast television industries. Some camera operators do their own editing.

Camera operators use television, video, or motion picture cameras to shoot a wide range of material, including television series, studio programs, news and sporting events, music videos, motion pictures, documentaries, and training sessions. This material is constructed from many different shots by film and video editors. With the increase in digital technology, much of the editing work is now done on a computer. Many camera operators and editors are employed by independent television stations; local affiliate stations of television networks; large cable and television networks; or smaller, independent production companies.

Making commercial-quality movies and video programs requires technical expertise and creativity. Producing successful images requires choosing and presenting interesting material, selecting appropriate equipment, and applying a good eye and a steady hand to ensure smooth, natural movement of the camera.

Some camera operators film or videotape private ceremonies and special events, such as weddings and conference program sessions. Those who record these images on videotape are often called *videographers*. *Studio camera operators* work in a broadcast studio and usually videotape their subjects from a fixed position. *News camera operators*, also called *electronic news gathering (ENG) operators*, work as part of a reporting team, following newsworthy events as they unfold. To capture live events, they must anticipate the action and act quickly. ENG operators sometimes edit raw footage on the spot for relay to a television affiliate for broadcast.

Camera operators employed in the entertainment field use motion picture cameras to film movies, television programs, and commercials. Those who film motion pictures also are known as *cinematographers*. Some specialize in filming cartoons or special effects. Cinematographers may be an integral part of the action, using cameras in any of several different mounts. For example, the camera can be stationary and shoot whatever passes in front of the lens, or it can be mounted on

a track, with the camera operator responsible for shooting the scene from different angles or directions. Wider use of digital cameras has enhanced the number of angles and the clarity that a camera operator can provide. Other camera operators sit on cranes and follow the action while crane operators move them into position. *Steadicam operators* mount a harness and carry the camera on their shoulders to provide a clear picture while they move about the action. Camera operators who work in the entertainment field often meet with directors, actors, editors, and camera assistants to discuss ways of filming, editing, and improving scenes.

**Work environment.** ENG operators and those who cover major events, such as conventions or sporting events, frequently travel locally and stay overnight or travel to distant places for longer periods. Camera operators filming television programs or motion pictures may travel to film on location.

Some camera operators—especially ENG operators covering accidents, natural disasters, civil unrest, or military conflicts—work in uncomfortable or even dangerous surroundings. Many camera operators must wait long hours in all kinds of weather for an event to take place and must stand or walk for long periods while carrying heavy equipment. ENG operators often work under strict deadlines.

Hours of work and working schedules for camera operators and editors vary considerably. Those employed by television and cable networks and advertising agencies usually work a 5-day, 40-hour week; however, they may work longer hours to meet production schedules. ENG operators often work long, irregular hours and must be available to work on short notice. Camera operators and editors working in motion picture production also may work long, irregular hours.

## Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors usually acquire their skills through formal postsecondary training at vocational schools, colleges, universities, or photographic institutes. A bachelor's degree may be required for some positions, particularly those for film and video editors. Employers usually seek applicants with a good eye, imagination, and creativity, as well as a good technical understanding of how the camera operates.

**Education and training.** Many universities, community and junior colleges, vocational-technical institutes, and private trade and technical schools offer courses in camera operation and



Film and video editors use computers to create a finished product.

videography. Basic courses cover equipment, processes, and techniques. It is increasingly important for camera operators to have a good understanding of computer technology. Bachelor's degree programs, especially those including business courses, provide a well-rounded education. Film schools also may provide training on the artistic or aesthetic aspects of filmmaking.

Individuals interested in camera operations should subscribe to videographic newsletters and magazines, join audio-video clubs, and seek summer or part-time employment in cable and television networks, motion picture studios, or camera and video stores.

To enter the occupation, many camera operators first become production assistants to learn how film and video production works. In entry-level jobs they learn to set up lights, cameras, and other equipment. They also may receive routine assignments requiring adjustments to their cameras or decisions on what subject matter to capture. Camera operators in the film and television industries usually are hired for a project on the basis of recommendations from individuals such as producers, directors of photography, and camera assistants from previous projects or through interviews with the producer. ENG and studio camera operators who work for television affiliates usually start in small markets to gain experience.

**Other qualifications.** Camera operators need good eyesight, artistic ability, and hand-eye coordination. They should be patient, accurate, and detail oriented. Camera operators also should have good communication skills and, if needed, the ability to hold a camera by hand for extended periods.

Camera operators, who run their own businesses or do freelance work, need business skills as well as talent. These individuals must know how to submit bids, write contracts, get permission to shoot on locations that normally are not open to the public, obtain releases to use film or tape of people, price their services, secure copyright protection for their work, and keep financial records.

**Advancement.** With experience, operators may advance to more demanding assignments or to positions with larger or network television stations. Advancement for ENG operators may mean moving to larger media markets. Other camera operators and editors may become directors of photography for movie studios, advertising agencies, or television programs. Some teach at technical schools, film schools, or universities.

## Employment

Television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors held about 47,000 jobs in 2006. About 27,000 were camera operators and film and video editors held about 21,000 jobs.

Many are employed by independent television stations, local affiliate stations of television networks or broadcast groups,

large cable and television networks, or smaller independent production companies. About 17 percent of camera operators and film editors were self-employed. Some self-employed camera operators contracted with television networks, documentary or independent filmmakers, advertising agencies, or trade show or convention sponsors to work on individual projects for a set fee, often at a daily rate.

Most of the salaried camera operators and editors were employed by television broadcasting stations or motion picture studios. More than half of the salaried film and video editors worked for motion picture studios. Most camera operators and editors worked in large metropolitan areas.

## Job Outlook

Keen competition for jobs is expected due to the large number of people who wish to enter the broadcasting and motion picture industries, where many camera operators and editors are employed. Those with the most experience and the most advanced computer skills will have the best job opportunities. Employment is expected to grow about as fast as the average.

**Employment change.** Employment of camera operators and editors is expected to grow 12 percent over the 2006-16 decade, which is about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2016. Rapid expansion of the entertainment market, especially motion picture production and distribution, will spur growth of camera operators. In addition, computer and Internet services will provide new outlets for interactive productions. Camera operators will be needed to film made-for-Internet broadcasts, such as live music videos, digital movies, sports features, and general information or entertainment programming. These images can be delivered directly into the home either on compact discs or as streaming video over the Internet. Growth will be tempered, however, by the increased offshore production of motion pictures. Job growth in television broadcasting will be tempered by the use of automated cameras under the control of a single person working either on the studio floor or in a director's booth.

**Job prospects.** Television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors can expect keen competition for job openings because of the large number of people who wish to enter the broadcasting and motion picture industries, where many of these workers are employed. The number of individuals interested in positions as videographers and movie camera operators usually is much greater than the number of openings. Those who succeed in landing a salaried job or attracting enough work to earn a living by freelancing are likely to be the most creative and highly motivated people, able to adapt to rapidly changing technologies and adept at operating a business. The change to digital cameras has increased the importance of strong com-

## Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors	27-4030	47,000	53,000	5,700	12
Camera operators, television, video, and motion picture.....	27-4031	27,000	30,000	3,100	12
Film and video editors .....	27-4032	21,000	23,000	2,600	13

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

puter skills. Those with the most experience and the most advanced computer skills will have the best job opportunities.

### **Earnings**

Median annual earnings for television, video, and motion picture camera operators were \$40,060 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$26,930 and \$59,440. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$18,810, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$84,500. Median annual earnings were \$44,010 in the motion picture and video industries and \$32,200 in radio and television broadcasting.

Median annual earnings for film and video editors were \$46,670 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$30,610 and \$74,650. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$22,710, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$110,720. Median annual earnings were \$53,580 in the motion picture and video industries, which employed the largest numbers of film and video editors.

Many camera operators who work in film or video are freelancers, whose earnings tend to fluctuate each year. Because most freelance camera operators purchase their own equipment, they incur considerable expense acquiring and maintain-

ing cameras and accessories. Some camera operators belong to unions, including the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, and the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians.

### **Related Occupations**

Related arts and media occupations include artists and related workers, broadcast and sound engineering technicians and radio operators, graphic designers, and photographers.

### **Sources of Additional Information**

For information about careers as a camera operator, contact:

- ▶ International Cinematographer's Guild, 80 Eighth Ave., 14th Floor, New York, NY 10011.
- ▶ National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians, 501 Third St.NW., 6th floor, Washington, DC 20001. Internet: <http://www.nabetcwa.org>

Information about career and employment opportunities for camera operators and film and video editors also is available from local offices of State employment service agencies, local offices of the relevant trade unions, and local television and film production companies that employ these workers.