

JOB PROFILE VIDEO ASSIST OPERATOR (VAO)

Definition

The primary task of a Video Assist Operator (VAO) is to establish, maintain, and transfer a video connection from a (film) camera to a monitor, as well as to record and play back the signal, create a rough cut if necessary, and prepare it for visual effects (VFX) and live streaming.

On larger productions, a Video Assist Operator is typically accompanied by an assistant (Video Playback Operator, VPO) to ensure they can focus their full attention on their tasks at hand.

Knowledge / Education

A VAO (Video Assistant) is a specialist video technician with knowledge of film and television production processes, including various production and post-production techniques. They also possess expertise in industry-standard (film) cameras, video transmission frequencies, and basic networking knowledge. Furthermore, software skills are required to edit recordings on location. There is no formal training program for this role in Austria. Technical training and on-set experience are beneficial.

Area of activity and responsibility

This profession has a unique feature: the Video Assist Operator is technically (equipment, know-how) located in the camera department, but assigned to the directing department in terms of task execution and exchanges information with the VFX department, DIT and the editing department.

VAO - AREA OF ACTIVITY:

Divided into the production phases of pre-production, filming and post-production, the scope of work of the Video Assist Operator includes:

Pre-Production:

- Project-specific setup of video (-transmission) equipment in coordination with the DoP, Director, VFX Department, DIT, and Editing Department
- Ensuring the functionality of all video equipment
- Quick and secure handling of all video recorders and all related functions

Filming:

- Setting up, adjusting and dismantling the video monitoring equipment (Video Village) in collaboration with the Video Playback Operator (VPO)

- Establishing video connections via cable or wireless transmission to one or multiple (film-) camera(s), and if necessary, forwarding the video signal via WiFi
- Operating the video recorder for recording and playback (including rehearsals, if requested)
- According to prior agreement with DoP or 1st AC, focusing on details during recording (e.g., focus accuracy, reflections, etc.) and providing feedback if necessary
- Creating image overlays, split screens, color keys, etc. (VFX)
- Creating a rough cut on set to immediately verify whether an effect works and/or to provide an initial reference for the editor. In live grading scenarios, the VAO works closely with the DIT.

Post-Production:

- Cleaning and returning rented equipment in coordination with the camera assistants and film production company.

Epilogue

There is currently no established job description for this profession. Therefore, in cooperation with the Austrian Association of Cinematographers, aac, this job description was formulated based on current production processes, see <https://www.aacamera.org/vao/>.