

THREE PRODUCTION PHASES

Regardless of whether you are part of the nontechnical or technical personnel, or whether you work with a big production team or all by yourself, you will inevitably be involved in one or all of the three production phases: preproduction, production, and postproduction.

Preproduction

Preproduction includes all the preparations and activities before you actually move into the studio or the field on the "first day of production. It usually happens in two stages. Stage 1 consists of all the activities necessary to transform the basic idea into a workable concept or script. In stage 2, all the necessary production details, such as location, crews, and equipment for a single-camera or multicamera production, are worked out.

Production

As soon as you open the studio doors for rehearsal or a video-recording session, or load a camcorder into the van for a field shoot, you are in **production**. Except for rehearsals, production involves equipment and normally a crew—people who operate the equipment. It includes all activities in which an event is video-recorded or televised.

Postproduction

The major activity of **postproduction** consists of video and audio editing. It may also include color correction of video clips (so that the red shirt of an actor looks the same from one shot to the next), the selection of appropriate background music, and the creation of special audio effects. When using a single camera, which means that, a scene is built by recording one shot after another with only one camera, the postproduction activities may take longer than the actual production.

PRODUCTION MODEL

Like any other model, a production model is meant to help you move from the original idea to the "finished production" as efficiently as possible. It is designed to help you decide on the most effective approach the first time around, evaluate each major production step, and finish on time. Its function is similar to that of a road map: you don't have to follow it to get from here to there, but it makes finding your way much easier. If you feel that it is restrictive and cramps your creativity or style, don't use it.

Effect-to-cause Model

Like most other production models, the **effect-to-cause model** starts with a basic idea, but instead of moving from the basic idea directly to the production process, it jumps to the desired communication effect on the target audience—the general program objective. This program objective can be reached through a specific message that, ideally, the viewer will actually receive, internalize, or act on. Because this all-important message is generated by the process of the viewer's watching the video and audio content of your television program and attaching meaning to it, we call it the process message. This process requires that you as a producer have a fairly clear idea of what you want the target audience to learn, do, and feel before you think about the necessary technical requirements. The model suggests that you move from the general idea directly to the desired effect and then back up and think about how to bring about—cause—this effect. The more the actual process message (viewer effect) matches the defined one, the more successful the communication.

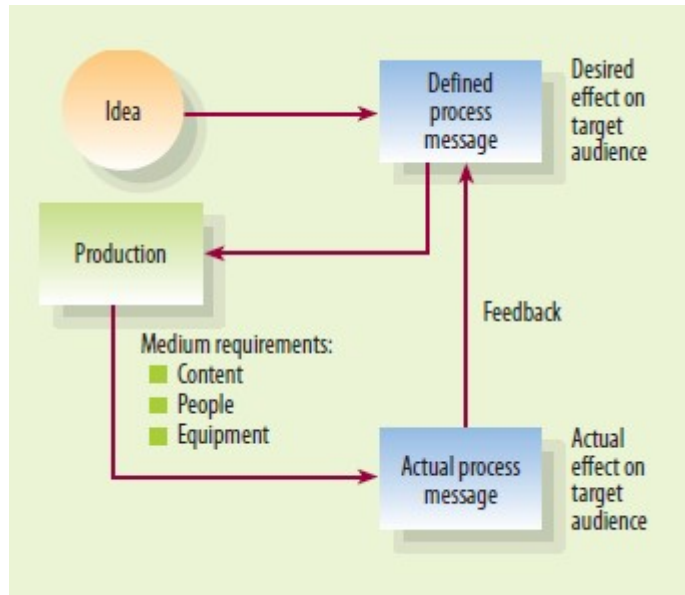


Fig.: Effect-to-Cause Production Model

Defined process message

Rather than being driven by the initial idea, the production process is now driven by the defined process message—the desired effect on the target audience. At this point you could proceed to the **medium requirements**—the people, facilities, and equipment necessary for the preproduction, production, and postproduction phases. To further streamline the production process, you should find a useful angle.

Angle

The angle is a specific story focus, a point of view from which to look at and describe an event. It can lead to an obvious bias of who tells the story, or it can be subtler and make a story more interesting to watch.

If a dog bites the letter carrier, the dog owner’s story angle might be the rising crime in the neighborhood and the dog’s attempt to protect his master. The letter carrier, on the other hand, may have quite a different view of the same event. He may well focus on the viciousness of the neighborhood dogs and the need for stricter leash laws. Both angles contain a strong and unacceptable bias. You can also use an angle that gives the story a specific approach without introducing a strong bias. For example, you could document a popular singing star by watching her give a concert for a large enthusiastic audience or by observing her during a studio recording session. The first version would be a more public “looking-at” point of view, the second a more private “looking-into” point of view. This would change not only what equipment you need (a multicamera setup with live switching or extensive postproduction for the first version) but also your shooting style (many more close-ups for version 2 than for version 1).

Medium Requirements

The advantage of this model is that the precise definition of the process message and a specific angle will help the content and production people work as a team and facilitate selecting the necessary production personnel and equipment. By first carefully defining the desired effect on the audience, you can then decide quite easily on the specific people you need to do the job (content expert, writer,

director, and crew), on where to do the production most effectively (studio or field), and on the necessary equipment (studio or field cameras, types of mics, and so forth).

Process Message Shaping Medium Requirements

Let's assume that you are to produce a 15-minute segment of a live morning show. You are told by the show's executive producer to get a lawyer who is willing to talk about an ongoing high-profile murder trial. The usual and intuitive way to approach this assignment would be to contact a well-known criminal lawyer and have the art director design a set that looks like a well-to-do lawyer's office, with an elegant desk, leather chairs, and lots of law books in the background. You would then have to arrange for the recording date, studio time, transportation for the guest, talent fees, and other such details.

When using the effect-to-cause model, on the other hand, you might come up with two different angles: one that shows the intellectual brilliance of a defense lawyer and her skill to engender reasonable doubt in the jurors, and another that reveals the emotional makeup and the inner conflict of a lawyer defending a suspect despite the overwhelming evidence that he is guilty. Here's how the two different angles might influence the resulting process messages, and, in turn, dictate different production approaches:

Process message 1: The viewer should gain insight into some of the major defense strategies used by the guest. In this case, the questions would revolve around some of the lawyer's former cases and the reasons for their success or failure. Would you need an interviewer who understands the law? Yes. The interviewer could interpret the legal language for the audience or immediately challenge the lawyer's ethics within the framework of the law. The elaborate studio set resembling the lawyer's office would also be appropriate. You may even consider conducting this interview on-location in the lawyer's actual office.

Process message 2: The viewer should gain deeper insight into the conscience and the feelings of the lawyer when handling an especially difficult case as well as how she deals with personal ethics when applying specific defense strategies. Do you now need a host who is a legal expert? Not at all. In fact, a psychologist would probably be better suited to conduct this interview. You might opt for close-ups of the lawyer throughout most of the show. You may even stay on a close-up of the guest when the host asks questions. Reaction shots (the lawyer listening to questions) are often more telling than action shots (the lawyer answering). Does this interview require an elaborate set? No. Because the interview deals primarily with the lawyer as a person rather than the person as a lawyer, you can conduct it in any environment. Two comfortable chairs on an interview set are all you would need.

As you can see, in this case the angle was not stated separately but rather embedded in the defined process message. But would you need a process message if you were to write a play? Of course not. Even a nicely formulated process message would not help you write a more effective drama. Any dramatic presentation has its own internal structure that does not benefit from stating its desired effect on the audience. It is more important to think about character development and conflict than defining whether you want the audience to cry or laugh. More goal-directed program forms, however, such as instructional shows, interviews, documentaries, and certainly advertising, can benefit greatly from a precisely stated process message.