Joe's Guide to Script Supervising

The title "Script Supervisor" might lead you to think that this person is a part of the writing team, but that's not the case. The simplest explanation of a Script Supervisor's job (also known as the "Continuity" person) is that they represent the film editor on the set. They organize and archive everything that gets filmed so that there's a record of how things were filmed for the editor to look at, as well as for the crew while in production. They are best known for watching for continuity problems, but they also make sure that everything that's meant to be filmed gets filmed, and that detailed notes are written down for reference. And finally, they're in charge of keeping track of the shot and take numbers, and getting those to the First Asst Cameraperson to get onto the slate and to anyone else who needs the shot numbers for reference (like the sound recorder).

First, what's it take to be a Script Supervisor? Organization and an eye for detail. Let's dig into some of the organization first. What's the difference between a scene number, a shot number, and a take number?

Once a script gets "locked" for production, the scenes are all numbered with permanent numbers. Even if the script gets changed after being locked, the numbers stay the same. Deleted scenes keep their numbers and are notated in the script as an "omitted scene" and any added scenes are numbered as "25A" or "25B", counting up from the scene they follow in the script.

Shot numbers are assigned for each different shot that is to be filmed in a scene, and they're usually letters. So shot "2-A" would refer to Scene 2, shot A (if there's a scene "2A" then you'd call the first shot "2A-A," which can get a bit confusing…). A new shot letter is given for each new angle, new framing, or each different part of the script, even if the camera angle doesn't change.

There is a different way of numbering shots which is simpler, but less common because it doesn't give as much information. You simply make the first setup that gets filmed shot "1" and count up for each successive shot taken throughout production. This is often easier during production, but it can get confusing to organize afterwards…

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if it was shot without audio. The time is how long did the shot go from "Action" to "Cut" – you should have a stopwatch and actually time each take. There are a half-dozen reasons to do this, but this simplest reason is so that you can quickly look and see what were full takes and what weren't based on how long they took.

The reel number is simply what video tape is this footage recorded on, so that you can easily find it. And the Time Code is approximately where the shot begins, again to easily find it on the tape. You can get that info from the camera operator.

And finally, the description: what do you put here? First, make sure to always write in a simple shot description ("C/Up Dave" or "2shot Dave and Shirley"). Then add anything anyone might want to know about this take. If a light stand fell over in the middle of the take, obviously notate that. The director might give you notes about the take – if they liked a certain line in the take, or any other info they might want written down (and passed on to the editor). If it's a Pick-Up take, where did it begin? Another type of note that gets passed on is the "circled take." Back in the days of film, only circled takes would get processed and passed on to the editor, as a money-saving device. So the circled takes were the good ones. Nowadays, the circled takes are usually the ones the director likes best, and they want the editor to take note of. You actually circle the take number of the shots the director tells you to.

By the way, don't feel that just because there's only one line for the description that it has to all fit in that space. Use as many lines as it takes, just leave the other boxes for that line blank, so it's obvious that this is the same take that you're describing.

And that's the job. At the end of each shooting day, you should make photocopies of your script and notes and give them to the producer– never give the originals (or at least not without having backup copies yourself), in case they get lost! And enjoy the job!

Finally, Take numbers refer to how many times each shot is filmed to get it right. So a shot might have only one take (if the first take went well) or it may have however many are needed to get the shot.

What if the director decides after recording a shot, to do another take from the same angle, but start halfway through the shot in the middle? Is that a new shot? Or just a new take? It's a judgment call, but usually this type of "pick up take" is called just that – if it picks up in the middle of shot "2A" then it's called "2A-P/U," so the editor knows that this take only gets part of the full shot, not the entirety.

Now on to what the Script Supervisor actually *does*. First let's go over the continuity-watching part: while a scene is in rehearsal, the Script Supervisor is watching for details and any changes in the continuity. They're watching the actors' blocking, staging, and actions, and their lines of dialogue, and keeping notes. A Script Supervisor's script is usually marked up with many, many notes about when the actor moved, what hand they used to pick up the beer mug, or other information. The simplest way to mark all that is by simply writing it into the script when the actor first performs it. Quickly, you'll develop a short hand – common abbreviations as "RH" and "LH" for right and left hand, and using the character's first initial instead of writing out the full name. Once you have all that written, you're watching the performance, looking for inconsistencies. You'll also be making sure the dialogue is accurate compared to the script. And finally, the Script Supervisor makes notes of screen direction – i.e. if the character exited camera left, in the next scene they'll need to enter from camera right, so the motion appears continuous.

A lot of continuity people carry a small camera and take photos of things that might be helpful for continuity – any detail, like if a door's left open, or how a sweatshirt is zipped, that might help remind the actor later on, or if re-shoots are necessary.

When you notice a continuity issue on set, you might be tempted to blurt it out, but you want to be careful. First (and hopefully this is obvious) don't stop the scene with your notes. The director is the only person who should stop the scene, or anyone that the director specifically allows. Even when the take is finished, you should discuss beforehand how the director wants the notes- some may be fine with you telling the actors, others may want you to tell them, so they can decide how (or if) to tell the actor.
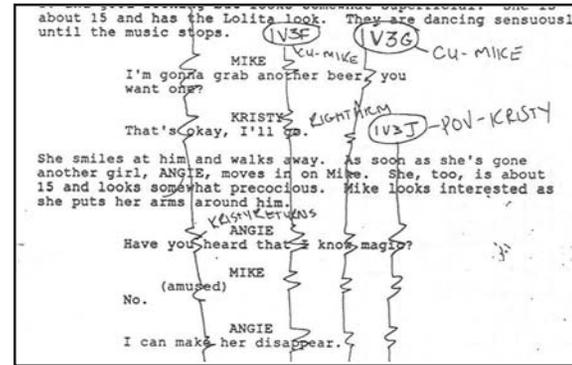
The other info you put on the script is used for the "Lined Script." A lined script is basically each shot number written on the script (often with a simple description like "C/U Mike"), with a line drawn down the page through the section of the script that the shot covered. With a lined script, it's then easy to see how much of the script got filmed, and in what shots. That way, the director and producer can easily see what's been shot and what hasn't, and the editor can see what shots he has to cover the different parts of the script.

Finally, the Script Supervisor also has a form they fill out with information about each shot and take. Usually, the script supervisor makes their own copy of the script that has this form on the back of each script page. That way their script folds open to a pair of pages that have the form on the left side and the script on the right. This way, you won't have to flip back and forth between a script and a notebook to write your notes. This form is on the "Courses" folder on the UCA MCOM network, in the "Digital Film III + IV" folder, under "Forms." Of course, you want to keep some spare copies on hand outside of the script, just in case you need extras.

Script Supervisor Form						
Shot #	Take #	Sync/MOS	Time	Reel #	T/C	Description

The form has space for the shot #, the take #, if the shot is recorded Sync (with sound) or MOS (without sound), the length of the shot, the reel or video tape number, the Time Code of the shot, and the description. Some quick explanations: The take and shot number should be self explanatory. "Sync" or "MOS" is so that everyone knows if there is audio with this shot, or