

# How to Get the Most Out of Extras

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**A**tmosphere, background actors, extras... no matter what you call them, they are indispensable

to the movie-making process. They set the tone for scenes and provide visuals beyond the primary action—often to open as well as close a scene. Fortunately, New York and L.A. producers and directors who are on the sets of the numerous Louisiana television and feature films are plying their craft—and their patience—in teaching the many willing and able extras about the film industry. I recently worked on my eleventh film and again saw some eye rolling and head shaking from above-the-line execs. But their patience and direction is rewarded when New Orleans extras have

learned how to provide atmosphere that's perfect for the scene. As with anything, there's always room for improvement. And just as production and casting companies hand out Do and Don't lists to extras, I've compiled a list of five ways to get the most out of extras to help them

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with their job.

5. Be clear regarding pay. The term "75 for 10" abbreviates \$75 for 10 hours on the set. However, newbies sometimes misinterpret this to mean \$75 an hour for each of the 10 hours, and have walked out once they learn the actual pay amount. Also, be sure to keep vouchers running throughout the day instead of having extras start

new timesheets to avoid paying overtime. And don't forget to mention how much time will be deducted for meals.

4. Explain what meals and craft services are provided. While not every production can afford top notch catering, extras need to be

told if they'll be getting a full meal or only snacks. And if there are separate craft services for cast and extras, be sure this is clear with proper signage. Also, let extras know if they need to bring their own snacks.

3. Use clear signage for parking and holding areas. This needs to be planned and implemented in advance to prevent extras from

wandering around aimlessly when they first arrive on set or location. If signage is not available, have production assistants on hand to direct extras arriving at call time.

2. Wardrobe should be organized. If wardrobe is on set for fittings, extras should have places to put their garment bags, suitcases, etc. No one wants to throw their fine linens, formal wear, or dress clothes over dirty cabinets or chairs—especially if sitting space is at a premium.

1. Coordinate AD and PA communications. Script and blocking changes are inevitable. So make sure PAs are well-trained and able to clearly and loudly articulate directions to extras before handing them over to ADs. And there you have it, five ways to help ensure that extras are well prepared for the job. ■

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