

You finally finished your film and now it's time for your premiere. Congratulations! You've gone ahead and booked a swanky private screening room for all your cast, crew, friends, and family to enjoy the movie in the best environment possible. The stage is set for a perfect screening, and the only possible thing that could go wrong would be a technical glitch up in the projection booth. How can you avoid any screening hiccups and ease the stress of this important evening? What are some small things you can do to ensure great communication with your projectionist and set expectations before it's too late to fix anything without the audience becoming aware? What should you expect from your projectionist? How far is too far when it comes to your theater rental?

First thing's first. You rented the theater and the projectionist's time, not the projection booth. Please try to understand that the projection booth is your projectionist's office space, and that space, and the equipment in it should be respected. Typically a competent and experienced projectionist will have a routine that he or she performs for any sort of projection scenario that you've presented. With enough experience, there are rarely any things that you can present to a projectionist that they haven't seen before and know how to deal with. While it's true that the technical requirements for a projectionist job have changed over the years due to the implementation of digital projectors and servers, don't think that the projectionist's job has gotten easier. While they don't have to stay up late at night splicing together film reels, or timing a film reel change perfectly with the burn mark on the celluloid, their job has evolved more to match the skillset of a network engineer. Technical troubleshooting now comes in the form of not just the projector, but also the server, the digital audio processor, amps, digital media, laptops, etc. That said, please let the projectionist do their job. Do not crowd the projection booth with people, and do not leave your belongings in the booth as it creates a hazard (remember that most of a projectionist's job is performed in the dark). Any kinks in the screening process should be worked out at least 24 hours before the screening.

Do not expect, if you show up with a rough cut or non-color graded version of your film, that the projectionist will be willing to adjust the color, contrast, gamma, or other projector settings to make your work look better. The fact is, you know that your movie isn't perfect yet, and you should inform your audience of that fact as well. Your projectionist is not your post-production supervisor and should not be expected to adjust carefully calibrated settings because you brought in an incomplete film. One thing to also be aware of is the "silver screen" issue. While it's totally cool to tell people that your film is being shown on a genuine

silver screen, please be aware that there is some brightness loss that is experienced as those screens are really optimized for 3D content. You might notice that the further you get from the center of the screen, the dimmer the picture looks. There's not really anything you can do about this, and honestly, most audiences wouldn't even notice the minute loss of foot-lambert.



Some things to make note of, if you are attending a film festival and have issues with your film's masking. When it comes to projection, masking is absolutely important to the audience's viewing experience. However, many film festivals schedule their films poorly, and deliver sub-standard media to the projectionist with little to no advance knowledge of things like running time, aspect ratio, and even post-credit scenes. These are all very frustrating for your projectionist to deal with, and masking is another issue that makes them look like the bad guy when really it's just a timing issue. Some theaters (mostly small indie houses and little screening rooms) don't even have masking on their screens. This is usually due to the fact that it's a fairly large expense to rig it up, even a manual pulley system costs thousands of dollars. Larger theaters that have the ability to mask may not have an automated system either, which leaves projectionists with the option of masking for the largest common denominator (e.g. scope vs flat) films that are in a particular block. Even if an automated

system is present, there may be no way to program a masking change outside of a DCP show run, which is pre-programmed in the theater's DCP server. It's not that the projectionist doesn't want your film to look its best, it's just that they don't have much of a choice when the pressure is on.

Audio is also another concern that you should communicate with your projectionist as early as possible about. If you have a pre-tested DCP that should be screening in 5.1, but is showing in stereo, then your projectionist may have to make some adjustments on their audio processor. If you bring in a Quicktime file that was exported an hour before the event, and it is having an audio issue, then your movie is probably screwed. Encoders/decoders mess up file exports all the time, and even DCP's sometimes don't come out perfectly the first time out. Sometimes it's something as simple as a setting checkbox not being checked, or an audio channel that was muted by accident, or assigned to the subwoofer when it should be in the center speaker. With enough notice, your projectionist should be able to help you navigate your issue, make adjustments, and get things back on track. They can't do anything to help you when the film is playing aside from adjusting the volume up or down though. The key in this, and every aspect of your screening, is communication.

To avoid any other misconceptions, understand that your film, even if color-graded and edited on a 60 inch 4K monitor, is going to look different when projected onto a twenty foot screen. If you test far enough in advance you can fix any artifacts or other inconsistencies you might see. If you show up on the day and expect a miracle, expect to be disappointed.



Lastly, relax. Your projectionist knows that you're nervous and they want to make sure you're happy if for no other reason that you'll come back and screen with them again on your next film. While your projectionist can be your confidant and your release from the stress of your screening, they are not your therapist and definitely not your punching bag. If you treat your projectionist poorly, they have every right to kick you out of their booth, and they definitely won't work with you again. Also know that projectionists talk to everyone that crosses their paths, and the film industry is a small industry run on word of mouth. If they have a problem with you, chances are they'll tell other people, or just refuse to book another screening in the future for your films or films you're associated with.

Screenings are exciting and fun events. The keys to a successful screening are respecting your projectionist, their space, and know-how; preparing and testing your film as far in advance of your event as possible, and communicating effectively any concerns ahead of time to adjust and prepare your film to make it look as good as possible to your eager audience.

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