

Assisting the Composer

A standard-of-practices guide for media composers and their assistants

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first edition

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Assisting the Composer

Thank you for reading! *Assisting the Composer* is a comprehensive handbook intended to serve as a resource to help provide clarity on the professional expectations of composers and their assistants.

This guide IS...	This guide is NOT...
...a resource that aims to prepare those who wish to assist with accurate information on the various types of assisting duties found in major studios.	...intended to change the way a composer operates his/her studio
...a way for assistants to ethically seek and find answers to hard-to-ask questions through this handbook or through their employer.	...a form of studio “policing” or “witch hunting” that will create negative attention for studios.
...a resource that outlines what to do when a challenging situation arises.	...a collective bargaining tool for assistants.
...intended to encourage fluid communication between composer and assistant.	...intended to encourage assistants to leave their jobs, but rather to encourage dialogue to find ways of improving the job quality.
...intended to educate assistants on what is universally acceptable practice so that they can evaluate their current assistantship or one they are entering.	...meant to be the holy grail of assistant protocol, but it hopes to be the spark that ignites a movement for fair and ethical employment practices among composers.

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About this Guide

It is hoped that readers of this guide will benefit greatly from its information. Everything in the following text has been carefully compiled by experienced composers and assistants, including survey data of current composers and assistants working in Los Angeles. These are people who have been through the successes and the failures, the highs and the lows, and all the areas in between. You may find that this guide unveils some of the more unpleasant realities of working for a composer. However, the general takeaway should be that assisting, in most cases, is incredibly rewarding and if it lies along your path to a successful career, chances are it will be a positive experience. All composers should strive to make that possible.

This first edition is also intended to be as helpful as it can be to composers and assistants alike, but the authors and editors do acknowledge that it is only the starting point of a discussion that could take years to procure any observable shift in the industry. As such, any input or feedback is welcomed by all. Should you, the reader, have anything you would like to ask or contribute, please send an email message to:

assistthecomposer@gmail.com

Module I

The Composer, Expanded

The first of three modules will focus on the perspective of the composer as he or she assembles and manages his/her help team.

Chapter 1 - Types of Assistants

The highest levels of media music endeavors typically involve a composer (sometimes more than one) and a team of highly-specialized individuals who provide services such as: editing, engineering, mixing, music prep, conducting, performing, and producing among others. Much like composing, attaining the highest levels of competency in these specialized jobs can take years or decades. Part of that specialization, unique to this industry, is that these individuals can execute their deeply precise and detailed work in short, concentrated bursts of output, which helps the composer meet crucial deadlines--often in the 11th hour.

Outside of these specialists, it is the composer's assistants that provide the project- or year-round help that the composer needs. While most assisted composers likely have only one assistant that handles a variety of tasks, some will hire several assistants and give each one a specialization. In an effort to provide clarity, we'll look to the latter and classify each of the assistant types as a one person/one specialty scenario. Aspiring assistants should understand that in many cases, a composer will be more likely to hire a single person who exhibits the qualities and skills of more than one type.

1.1 - The Administrative Assistant

a.k.a. Admin Assistant, Office Assistant, Office Manager, Studio Manager



The Administrative Assistant's primary role is to concentrate on all things business-related that the composer will not have the dedicated time or energy to do. The purview of this job can include anything from arranging meetings to returning signed contracts, keeping track of invoices, or even arranging travel and accommodations for the composer. Knowledge of word processors and spreadsheets (MS Office or Google Suite) is a must. Musical ability could be helpful as well, but it usually isn't a necessary requirement.

The Administrative Assistant's duties include many or all of the following:

- Managing the composer's emails and communicating on his/her behalf
- Scheduling meetings, events, spotting sessions, catering, travel, food, etc.
- Managing project budgets
- Invoicing
- Office organization (ordering supplies, maintaining a clean studio/office space)
- Taking notes in meetings
- Monitoring cue sheet submissions
- Social media management i.e. Facebook/Instagram (if applicable)
- Studio errand running (picking up equipment/mail/packages/food)

The Administrative Assistant is often in contact with:

- Composer
- Studio staff
- Clients (or their representatives)
- Composer's agent/manager
- Publicist/PR agencies
- PRO Representative (ex: ASCAP/BMI)
- Guests or friends of the studio
- Musicians
- Contractors (mixing engineers, equipment technicians, studio construction)
- Orchestrators
- Orchestra managers
- Other studios
- General inquiries

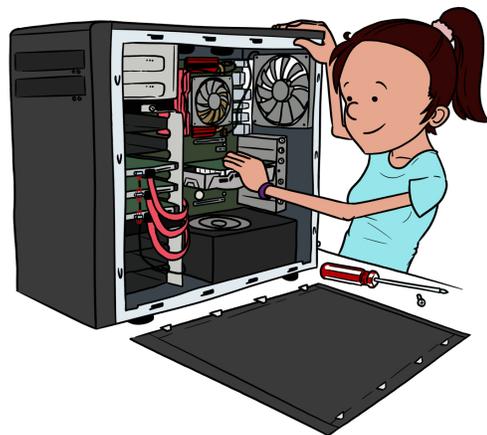
It is not uncommon for the administrative assistant to be the composer's right hand person in terms of managing studio operations including, but not limited to managing the other studio assistants (for this, the title of Studio Manager may be more appropriate). Thus, not only is it immensely helpful for the administrative assistant to have a knack for organization and multitasking, but it would be extremely advantageous for him or her to have great people skills as well as a heightened emotional awareness. This individual is often the first person that the client(s) will greet upon visiting the studio, so it is important that he/she is always professional and presentable. This is because first impressions are extremely critical in this industry and all assistants are, to some degree, a reflection of their composer in the eyes of observers and must represent the composer as professionally as possible. The administrative assistant is also often trusted with confidential information that is not to be shared with others, including other assistants; this is why a high level of trust and loyalty, in addition to all the other things, are paramount qualities for this position.

Regarding professional longevity, administrative assistants tend to stay on a composer's team longer than those in other assisting roles. In the most successful cases, some stay on the team well into their adult lives and make full careers out of it, opening the possibility to become business partners or other types of managers. The skills of an experienced administrative assistant translate extremely well to careers in the music business.

1.2 - The Studio Technician

a.k.a. Studio Tech, Tech Assistant, Technical Engineer

The studio technician handles everything tech-related, from engineering in-house recording sessions to keeping all the workstations in tip-top shape. Computer skills and knowledge of audio equipment are primary requirements. In itself, it is typically not a role that gets to create music, however, there may be opportunities to do all kinds of music-related tasks, depending on the assistant's musical competency.



The Studio Tech's duties may include most or all of the following:

- Information Technology (IT)
- Networking of studio computers and/or servers
- Upkeep of hardware/software (including maintaining and upgrading computer systems)
- Fixes technical problems on the spot

- Programs device and software workflows based on the composer's preferences
- Optimizes the studio gear and software for reliability/efficiency
- Engineers in-studio recording sessions (typically singers or instrumental soloists)
- Editing audio and/or repairing problematic audio
- Preparation and delivery of recording session data to and from recording engineers

The Studio Tech is usually in contact with:

- Composer
- Studio staff
- Equipment vendors and Tech Support
- Others on a case-by-case basis including specialists for specific hardware/software

The Studio Tech is another position that demands a high level of trust between composer and assistant. In many cases, the technician is more knowledgeable about the intricacies of the workstation(s) than the composer and is ultimately responsible for ensuring the day-to-day feasibility for the composer to complete work on the computer system(s). This role could also require a bit of a *watch-dog* mentality (depending on the composer's preferences), especially when there are other assistants, interns, or guests with computer access as he/she is best qualified to monitor for any data breach or theft such as movie files or audio samples.

To say that the Studio Tech needs to know the composer's preferred software (DAW, organizational programs, macros, OSC, etc.) is a huge understatement. This individual should strive to attain a similar mastery to these programs that a tech support agent would have. Or at the very least, he/she should be within a few mouse clicks from finding solutions very quickly. Searching forums and tech articles for problem solving should be second nature to a Studio Tech.

Studio Tech Tip: while it's a very common thing that studio systems require troubleshooting, any type of solutioning should be done in a manner that does not put a negative spotlight (or ideally any spotlight) on the composer. To make it known that a composer's studio is having tech problems (or problems of any sort) is extremely bad for business optics, not only from clients, but other studios as well. To protect the studio, the Studio Tech should either search forums for solutions on a read-only basis or if credentials are required, create an independent account or username that would not be associated with the studio.

1.3 - The MIDI Programmer

a.k.a. Music Assistant, Composing Assistant, MIDI Editor, MIDI Orchestrator, Synthestrator, Additional Music Composer (if applicable)



The MIDI Programmer, with respect to the other assistants, is arguably the one most artistically in-sync with the composer. The traditional purpose of this role is to augment the speed of music creation and production. It is critically important for this person not only to know the same DAW as the composer inside and out, but also to approach the MIDI programming in the same way and to sculpt the same kinds of MIDI details as the composer would.

With the actual production of music, sometimes the MIDI Programmer is purely someone who takes the composer's mostly finished work and polishes it to a professional standard for client demonstration/showcasing. In other cases, MIDI Programmers will be responsible for completing a piece out of nothing more than a piano sketch, guitar riff, or even nothing but thematic material from other areas of the project. Hence, it is extremely valuable for an aspiring MIDI Programmer to already have experience composing for personal projects and to possess similar artistic tendencies that would be in sync with those of the composer. More than in the other ways of assisting, MIDI Programmers perform tasks that are directly applicable to composing and/or music editing; however, simply being a MIDI Programmer is NOT a guaranteed path to becoming an elite level composer. (More on this will be covered in a later section in this guide.)

The following are typical duties of a MIDI Programmer:

- Composing, Orchestrating (to MIDI), Arranging as assigned by the composer
- MIDI Programming (drum maps, chord maps, fixing programming errors)
- Provide musical solutions (harmonization, transposition, filling in blanks, adds/cuts)
- Transcription of melodic/harmonic material (sometimes in real-time)
- Smoothly segue material to and from other musical material (dovetailing)
- Refine/update DAW templates (possibly in conjunction with Studio Tech)
- Prepare writing sessions for the composer
- Edit MIDI & audio
- Enhance music
- Complete material that was started by the composer
- Create material for the composer to finish (if applicable)

- Design accompanimental material (loops, textures, soundscapes)
- Conform existing music to updated media
- Address client musical feedback as instructed by composer
- Take musical direction from composer and apply to MIDI/Audio

The MIDI Programmer could be in contact with:

- Composer
- Studio staff
- Music Editor
- Director/Producers/Showrunners/Other clients*
- Musicians*
- Engineers & Mixers*
- Orchestrator or music prep team*

**only when instructed or directed by composer*

In the current era of media music, the MIDI Programmer will likely have the closest personal connection to the music, second only to the composer, meaning he or she knows every inch of the material he/she has worked on. This has a great value, especially in the later stages, when session prep and music prep takes place because the MIDI programmer can spot errors in the preparation more easily than others.

Since the MIDI Programmer has a viable possibility of being the creator of musical material, the discussion will almost inevitably come up regarding credit and/or royalties. This will be covered in detail later in this guide, but largely the best method of working out these specifics is to discuss it and come to an agreement *before* any work is commenced. Some composers will have ready-to-sign agreements already waiting for the MIDI Programmer.

Other Types of Assistants

Some composers also enlist the help of additional assistants or interns where help is needed beyond the scope of the traditional assistants, or when there's an opportunity to provide a learning experience to someone who is still in school or too young/inexperienced to work full-time.

1.4 - The Personal Assistant

Personal assistants lean towards duties that specifically serve the composer as a civilian, not necessarily an artist. Personal assistants have a different function than other roles, and there's an entire workforce for people who specialize in this. Typically, a composer will opt to hire someone who has no inclination to pursue a music career, but in some cases, a group of thirsty up-and-coming composers is all the composer has to choose from. If this is the case, the aspiring assistant should understand that this role isn't designed to develop their musical ability, and they should not engage the composer regarding music unless the composer explicitly asks them.

Personal Assistant duties may include:

- Picking up dry cleaning
- Ordering flowers
- Picking up lunch
- Getting car washed/maintained
- Ordering supplies for the home (toiletries, utensils, etc)
- Keeping track of personal appointments (dentist, personal lunches, personal emails)
- Pet grooming
- Picking up and transporting family/children (NOT to be confused with dedicated childcare)
- Other errands by request

The Personal Assistant is generally in contact with:

- Composer
- Composer's immediate family (spouse, partner, children, etc)
- Other staff, as requested

Some of the work done by personal assistants (and perhaps other assistants too) could qualify as household work and thus classify the worker as a household employee. It is very important to be clear on what constitutes this to prevent an issue later on. Information on this can be found at [this link](#).

Since other assistants in the studio could very well share some or all of these responsibilities, it should be the composer's responsibility to outline these kinds of duties before any assistant begins work. The assistant should also be upfront about his/her boundaries and what he/she may or may not be comfortable doing on the job. It is best to discuss and clarify these things before any work is started and should a studio assistant feel uncomfortable or unqualified to handle a specific personal task, he/she should not be met with disdain from the composer, but rather come to an agreement on what will be done and get it in writing.

1.5 - The Intern

In larger studios, interns are quite common and as one might expect, their tasks range from extremely entry-level to basic professional - with occasional exceptions that could involve some very complicated and detailed tasks.

Intern duties include:

- Vehicle runs (food, office supplies, equipment, etc)
- Fetching coffee, snacks
- Setting up tables/chairs for a meeting
- Assisting the composer with specific tasks
- Assisting the assistant(s) with their tasks

- Shadowing the composer or assistants (quiet observation of their duties)
- Simple tech tasks (file moving/cloning, searching archives)
- Organizational tasks (reorganizing/renaming files, backing up projects)
- Musical tasks (if the opportunity is offered)

The advantages of being an intern is that the skill expectations are generally low and there are often opportunities handed to the intern where if the simple expectations are greatly exceeded, the intern could “prove” him or herself and earn a possible employment opportunity later on. While lack of experience won’t make or break the intern, the expectations of personality, maturity, and accountability are usually high. Many interns are current college students or recent graduates and as such, there exists the expectation that they are responsible, reliable, and goal-oriented.

The advantages to the composer for hiring an intern is that if college credit is involved, the composer does not have to pay them, and thus many simple jobs can be handled at virtually no cost. The ideal intern candidate should have a good instinct for how he/she can be useful to the team. It is not uncommon that the composer and all the assistants are too busy to give guidance or assign a task to the intern; thus, being able to appropriately initiate or self-assign tasks can be extremely valued and appreciated by the team. There are limitations, however, to what kind and how much work can be assigned (or self-assigned) to an intern. More specifics on the legal boundaries of unpaid internships, and compensation in general, is explained in **Section 4.5** of this guide.

1.6 - The Short-Term Assistant

Short- term assistants come in very handy at the point where a lone composer, or a composer & team of assistants, don’t have enough bodies to cover all the necessary tasks in a short term (or perhaps *Crunch Time*) situation. Former interns, former full-time employees, or well-known professional acquaintances of the composer are commonly called in for these instances because they have a prior working relationship with the composer and/or assistant(s). This is ideal because there is little to no training that must take place in order to get this type of assistant to be productive right away. The tasks can vary greatly.

Short term help may involve:

- Session preparation (getting cues ready to be transferred to a recording studio)
 - Cleaning up MIDI
 - Cleaning up audio
 - Printing audio
 - Organizing session data or files
- Music preparation
 - Score preparation
 - Sending material to an orchestrator
 - Proofreading

- Assistant Relief
 - Taking over for an assistant after a full work day (i.e. the night shift)
 - Being in one place when another assistant cannot be in two places
- Additional MIDI programming, arranging, or composing

Short term helpers are typically paid at a rate reflective of their experience (or prior effectiveness) and in these instances they are typically given a single task to complete and are supervised directly by the composer or assistants, which reduces the risk of error. Like interns, the possibility of these helpers earning bigger employment opportunities most certainly exists, but again, it is not a sure thing.

1.7 - Remote Assistance

For any number of reasons, a composer might need help from someone outside the studio and will use the internet to enable that person to work from a remote location (such as the remote person's home or an alternate studio). It is difficult to measure, but this is probably the most common and also most varied type of assistant work because of the sheer number of composers and musicians with varied needs and access to technology that permits this. Any number of tasks can be done remotely, including something as sensitive as recording. Perhaps the most common reason to contract someone to do remote work is the trust/reliability factor. It can also be due to the limited number of available workstations within the studio.

Types of remote work (this list may not encompass all possibilities):

- Additional programming/arranging/composing (possibly ghostwriting*)
- Orchestration/music prep/proofreading/paper printing
- Template creation/editing
- Audio editing/score editing
- Mixing
- Organizational tasks
- Accounting

Important: one who does remote work must understand there is an inherent risk involving the **security of data**. Movie/show files and game prototypes are among the incredibly valuable pieces of intellectual property often transferred over the internet that could result in loss of revenue as well as lawsuits if their data is compromised. A remote assistant who is serious about the job should look into some security measures to ensure the safety of the data. This could be a subscription to services like Hightail or Dropbox. Some companies, like Pixar, have their own proprietary services that facilitate secure uploads and downloads of data. Other companies require the composer to install sophisticated security systems with cameras (sometimes even at the composer's home). For those who can feasibly make remote work possible, it is preferred that file transfers occur the old-fashioned way, by bringing a physical hard drive (possibly an encrypted drive) and copying the data directly at the studio then bringing it back to work on.

**On the matter of ghostwriting, which is when a composer has others composing significant segments of a project for a flat fee and no composing credit, this guide takes a neutral stance. The practice, which breaks no laws, exists for better or for worse and is almost always a private arrangement between the composer and the ghostwriter. The individual specifics of ghostwriting from studio to studio are so greatly varied that unfortunately, not much guidance can be given about the topic other than this: if you are approached by a composer to engage in ghostwriting (keep in mind the word 'ghostwriting' might never be said, but is understood), it is up to you, the helper, to decide if it is a worthwhile engagement. Remember to keep in mind that since you are, in all likelihood, forfeiting credit and royalties, the fees received should be high enough to justify the sacrifice. It is also very important that you are 100% clear with the terms of the engagement. Try to avoid starting any kind of work unless there is a clear and mutual understanding (even better if there's a written agreement to sign) between you and the composer.*

1.8 - Table of Recommended Skills and Requirements for Assistant Types

Despite the use of the word requirement, these are still recommendations and should not rule someone out of an opportunity if they are qualified in other ways.

Skill / Requirement	Admin Assistant	Studio Tech	MIDI Programmer	Personal Assistant	Intern	Short Term	Remote Assistant
Have a vehicle to run errands	●	●		●	●		
College degree, scoring program certificate, or other formal training		●	●			●	●
Advanced knowledge of Google Suite (i.e. Google Docs) or similar	●	●		●			
Advanced knowledge of DAW		●	●			●	●
Advanced knowledge of notation software			●		●	●	●
Good communication skills	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Multitasking skills	●	●		●	●		
Presentation skills	●			●	●		
Knowledge of advanced music theory/dictation			●				●
Knowledge of mixing concepts and terms		●	●			●	●
Knowledge of hardware/gear/maintenance		●				●	
Writing skills (emails/correspondence)	●						
Typing proficiency	●	●			●		
Organizational skills	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Error-catching ability	●	●	●			●	●
Detail-oriented	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Understanding of music business	●						
Ability to adapt quickly to changes	●	●	●		●	●	●
Comfort with handling intricate files and objects	●	●	●			●	●
Ability to accurately reproduce sounds, data, timing information		●	●			●	●
Ability to translate verbal ideas into music (spotting notes or adjustments)			●				●

Chapter 2 - Before Building a Team

2.1 - How a Composer Budgets for Assistance

The two primary factors that a composer needs when hiring help are 1) enough capital to spend on an assistant and 2) a capital-generating project (or stream of projects) for the assistant to assist on. Often, the former is dependent on the latter, but to highlight it this way is to make it understood that the use of an assistant should be focused and targeted towards helping where the maximum capital gain can be achieved. In other words, the assistant should be helping the composer finish music more quickly or help with business related objectives so the earning of income is at its highest efficiency. Having the assistant do things like pick up groceries and put gas in the car might be convenient, but it actually works *against* the income stream, because those tasks don't directly help in finishing the job at hand. Of course, there are times and reasons for an assistant to do such tasks (and personal assistants exist for those very reasons). Nevertheless, clearly establishing the terms of that particular assistant's job before they begin is not only important to the assistant, but also to the composer so that he/she can be mindful of how to maximize business efficiency.

The website, www.govdocs.com, has a very handy sheet that outlines the kind of metrics that a CEO (in this case, the composer) should consider when handling the business end of a relationship with assistants. The full infographic can be viewed [here](#). Some highlights are on the next page:

Revenue per Total Human Capital Spend (THCS)	THCS is a ratio comparing productivity (in this case capital income derived directly from the project budget, not royalties) to the amount spent on workers (full-time wages, benefits, contractors, short term).
Total Compensation Spend Rate (TCSR)	TCSR compares the total overall cost of the studio's workforce and compares it with the overall operating cost of the studio.

A composer who hires assistants ultimately still requires the business to be profitable, so these two metrics above are chiefly important. The THCS ratio can vary greatly from studio to studio. Composers working with generous budgets will have a larger ratio for this metric, assuming the budget outweighs the cost of the assistance (which it should). Some will actually spend their entire project budget on the assistance (making a 1:1 ratio) and use the royalty income as their capital gain. This can be a very productive method, since the assistants will likely benefit from higher wages and therefore higher levels of motivation (presumably), but it is a slow process that would take a couple of years before seeing a lucrative return on investment (ROI). Package deals, where the fee paid to the composer includes all costs associated with the music including recording, mixing, and assistant help, have been prevalent for years and sometimes they constrain what a composer might wish to pay out for assistance. These kinds of deals require the composer to be extremely diligent and it takes some careful planning to get just the right amount of assistance where needed. In cases like these where budget is limited, the THCS ratio has a chance of falling beneath 1:1. If it does, the composer would be walking atop a thin line and be very much at risk for financial loss and all the problems that come with it (stress, issues paying workers, lack of motivation, lack of productivity). If the composer is staring down the barrel of a bad THCS, he/she should carefully consider what effect it will have on the studio as an operation. If the decision is to go forward with the project and risk a loss, the onus is on the composer to make it all work such that the assistants can be not only productive, but paid at their expected and agreed rates. If that's not possible, then dialogue is encouraged to work out new deals, or the composer must simply utilize less assistance.

The other metric, TCSR, is useful to look at how much impact is had on the studio operation costs by having assistants. The assistants' costs are likely to take up a large portion of this metric and using this measurement can highlight areas where the composer may need to consider an adjustment in cost (examples: switching to a different PR company or moving into a studio with a lower monthly rent).

2.2 - How Much to Pay Assistants

The amount of money paid to an assistant might be single the most contentious topic of this guidebook. It is where both the composer and assistant will set aside all the years of training and artistry and toe their respective lines at one of the most basic business transactions, compensating a worker. The assistant will learn a lot about the composer and vice versa at this very juncture.

Is it meant to be a nerve-racking or intimidating situation? Well, no it shouldn't, but for many, it is a *hot-seat* moment where so many employees regret not taking a step in a direction that would benefit them a little more. The fear of losing out on an opportunity by showing any bit of reluctance to accept an offer is a very real and prominent thing. Any given composer who is hiring might shrug at this and be willing to discuss reasonable terms and pay, but others prey on this and use terms like “non-negotiable” to pin down the assistant and make them feel they have no choice other than accept or be replaced.

The Greater Los Angeles area is an expensive region in which to live. Because it is still very much the central hub of the American film industry, it is where most of the elite film composers work and reside and thus, it is where the in-house assistants must live too. This guide strongly urges composers to pay a living wage for full-time assistants--specifically, a living wage suitable for L.A. The reasons for this (aside from ethics and morals) include productivity, personal development, health, and privilege.

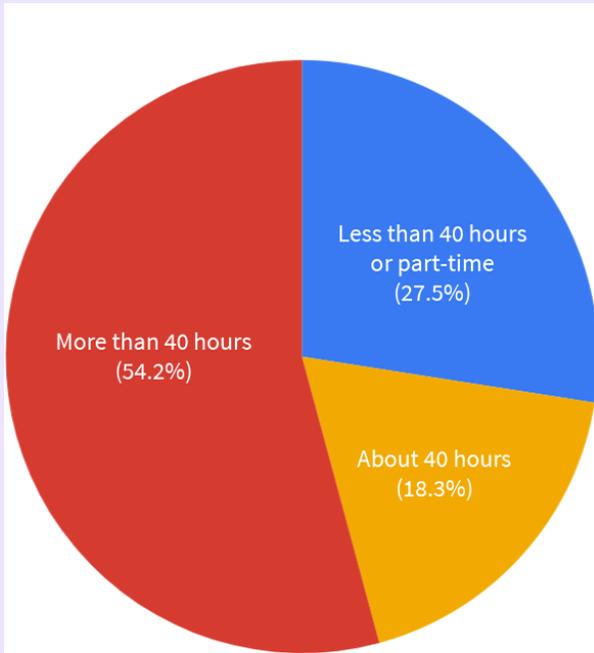
So what is a living wage? For a single person--taking all the average costs from Smart Asset's assessment of L.A. living found [here](#)--renting a one-bedroom apartment, paying utilities, car payments, fuel, food, healthcare, plus extra expenses like clothing/shoes/miscellaneous can (very conservatively) add up to \$3580 per month, or \$42,960 per year. This is assuming the individual is free of pre-existing health conditions, has no car issues, and lives within 20 miles (or a one-hour drive) from work. Notice that neither student loan payments nor musical expenses like computers, software, or instruments have been factored in to this.

To reduce these costs, an individual would more than likely have to share a living space with a roommate, rent a living space further away or in a questionable neighborhood, have a car that is already paid off or use public transportation, forego healthcare (which is currently illegal under Obamacare, but some will do this), and/or buy less expensive (and likely less healthy) food to eat. It's not to say individuals can't find creative ways to lessen the costs, but there can be adverse effects on work performance for those who may have to sacrifice a lot in order to work for a composer.

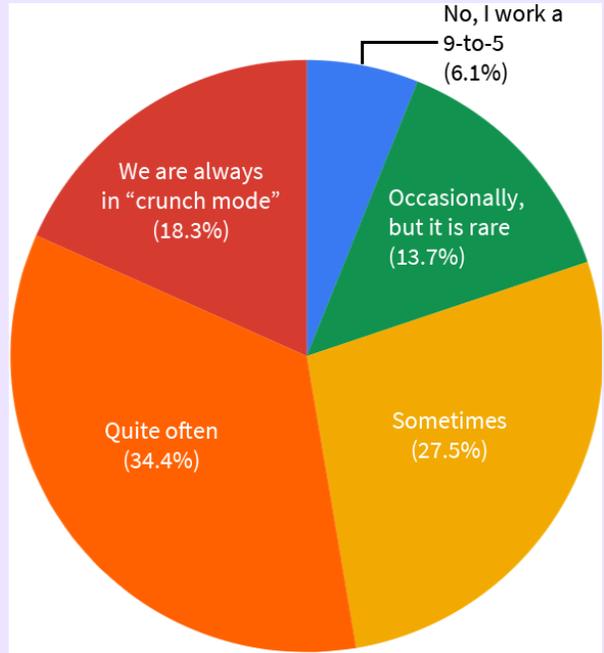
That is unless the composer pays a fair wage. Fortunately, there are a great number of composers who do pay their assistants enough to live, save money, and maintain a healthy lifestyle as they develop their careers according to the survey conducted March 2019 (see next page). However, the survey also suggests there are composers who pay assistants very little, demand long hours, and in some ways prevent the assistant from seeking alternative means of making ends meet. In terms of earned income from assisting, at least 25% of these individuals actually fall into the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) definition of very low or extremely low income categories for Los Angeles County. Sadly, many of them can't sustain living this way without extra support and end up leaving the industry or moving back to where they came from. More information about Los Angeles County's Poverty Guidelines can be found [here](#).

2.3 - Survey Data from 131 full-time and part-time assistants conducted in March 2019

How many hours a week do you work?

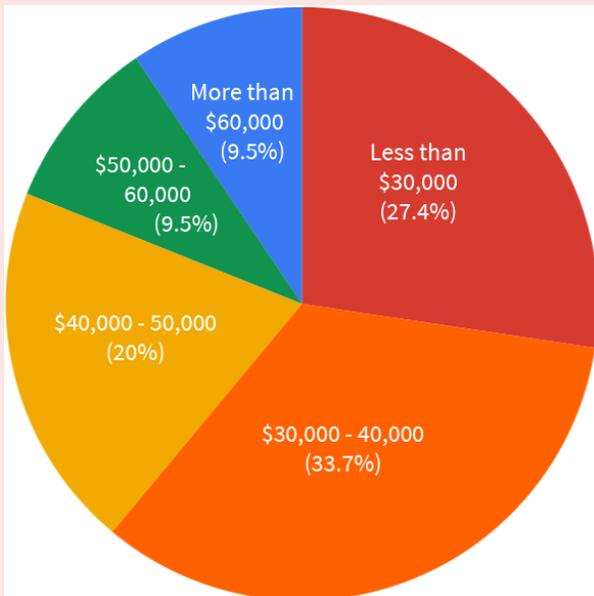


Do you work nights or weekends?

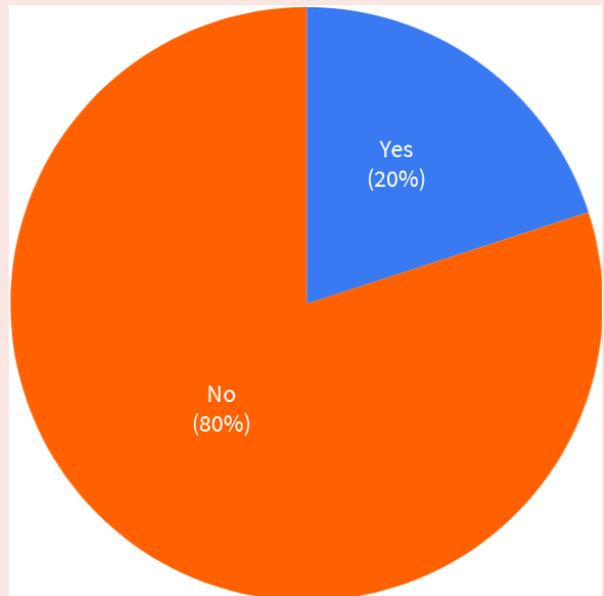


(Data from 131 assistants)

Please estimate your annual wages from your full-time assistantship (no other sources).

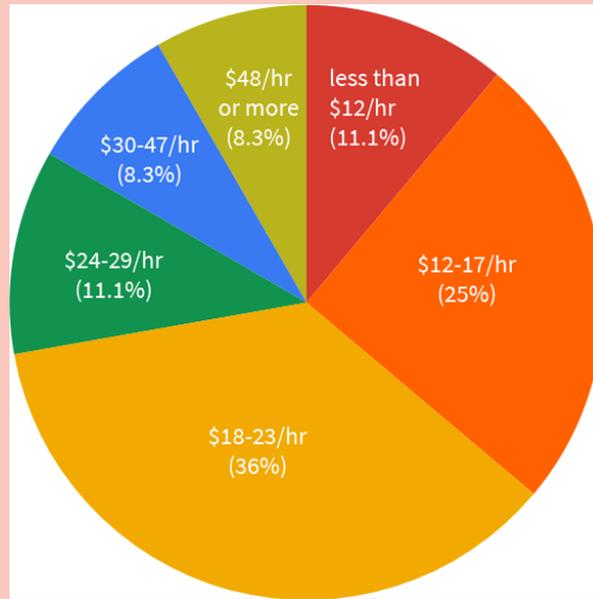


Do you get paid Overtime for work beyond 40 hours?



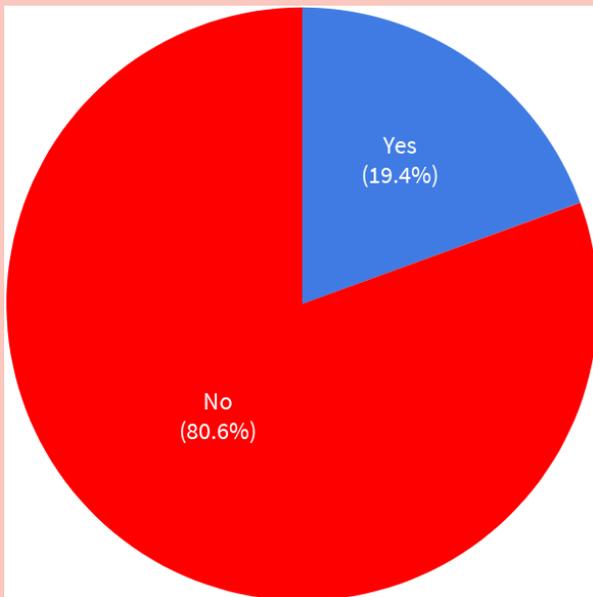
(Data from 95 full-time assistants)

Please estimate the hourly rate your part-time assistantship pays.

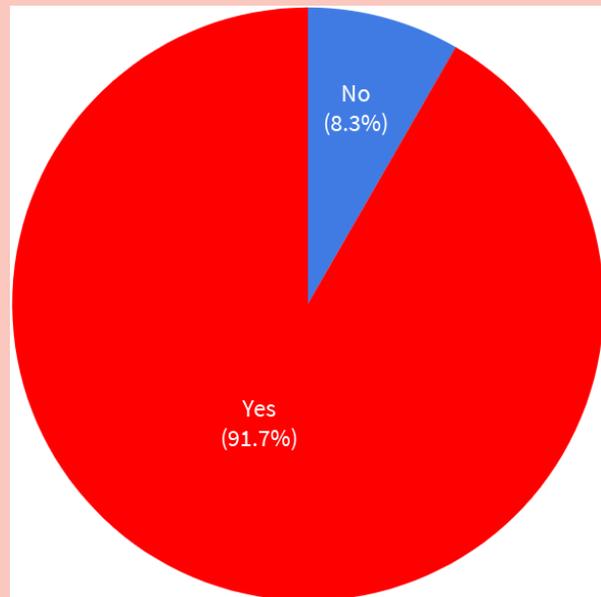


(Data from 36 part-time assistants)

Is there a guaranteed weekly hour minimum or retainer policy?



Are you expected to be on-call in case more work comes up?



(Data from 36 part-time assistants)

Looking at this data and factoring in a realistic living wage for L.A., maximizing the motivation and output of workers, and the potential for assistants to put money in savings as they progress, this guide **suggests** the following wage scales for a **full-time** assistant who meets an acceptable amount of the criteria as stated earlier in Chapter 1, working 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year.

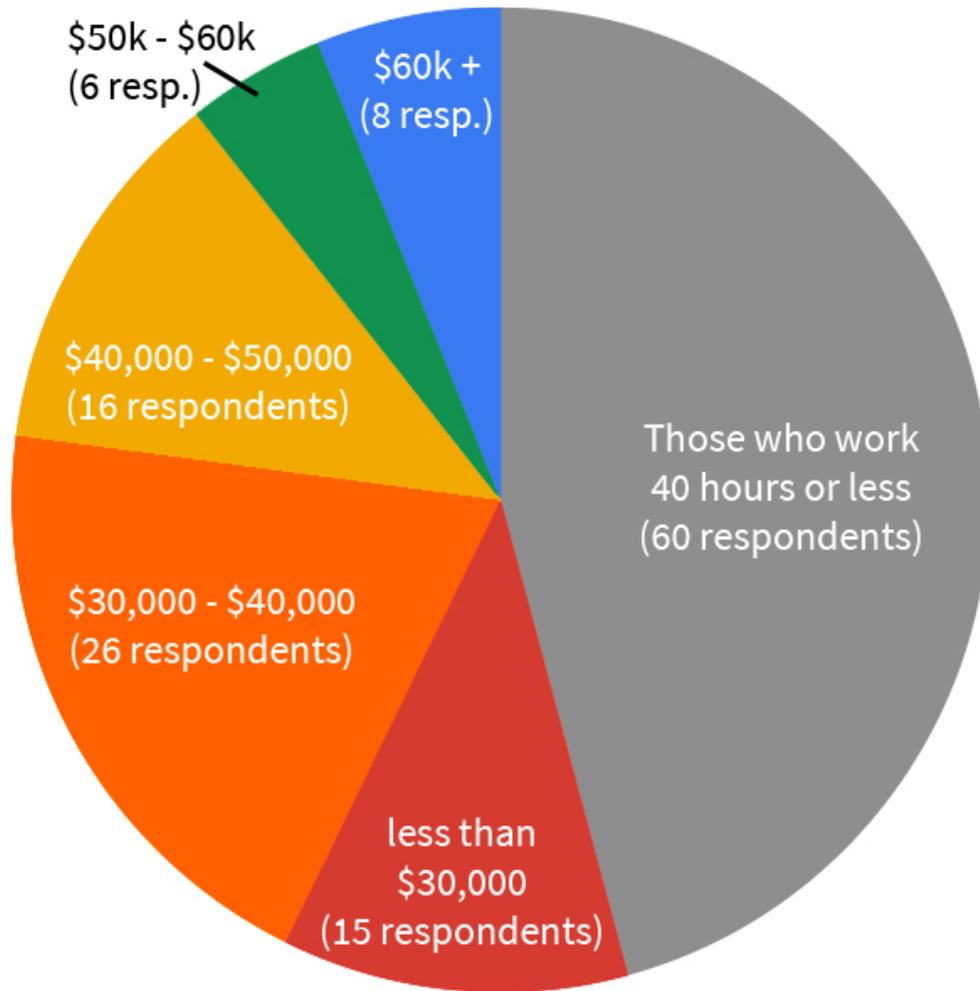
2.4 - Table of Suggested Hourly Rates to Pay Full-Time Assistants in Los Angeles

Assistant Type	Minimum	Recommended	Competitive	Generous
Admin Assistant	\$27.13	\$31.00	\$34.65	\$40.00+
Studio Technician	\$27.13	\$31.00	\$34.65	\$42.00+
MIDI Programmer	\$27.13	\$31.00	\$34.65	\$48.00+

These scales do not include any overtime pay, bonus, royalties, or any compensation that might be warranted for additional work above and beyond a traditional 40 hours per week schedule. This guide also fully acknowledges that not all assisting jobs pay hourly. To calculate these numbers, other types of pay schedules were considered including monthly salaries, weekly retainers, and per-project fees. To unify the data and compare apples to apples, everything was prorated down to an hourly rate. If composers plan to use these scales and pay a non-hourly schedule, then they should make efforts to estimate the hours involved and see where any adjustments in pay might be needed. There is a **worksheet** at the end of this chapter in **Section 2.8** that can assist with this estimation.

The need for extra work to be performed during the later stages, or *Crunch Time*, is sometimes unavoidable. Thus, it should be made absolutely clear at the beginning of the work relationship how the composer intends to handle those periods of long and sometimes grueling hours near the end of a project as well as the rest period(s) afterwards. If at all possible, a marathon schedule for individuals should be avoided. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published [this collective study](#) on overtime and extended work shifts. The research covered a range of professions and though it did not research music studio jobs specifically, it did cover other kinds of white collar jobs with similar physical demands and hours. The findings showed that in 16 out of 22 studies, there was an association between overtime and increased injury rates, illnesses, and mortality. Across the entire study, patterns of deteriorating performance were observed, particularly between the 9th and 12th hours of a shift from within a work week consisting of more than 40 hours. Two particular studies (Siu & Donald/van der Hulst & Geurts), however, suggested that increased compensation reduced adverse health and safety effects (prosperity as compared with recession or depression). There was also a correlation between health/safety and length of vacation time, indicating that longer rest periods resulted in healthier employees. To further emphasize the imbalance of actual Los Angeles composer assistant wages, the chart on the next page isolates the survey respondents who indicated they work more than 40 hours per week (71 out of 131 respondents) and shows just their estimated annual salaries.

2.5 - Estimated Annual Salaries of L.A. Assistants Who Work More Than 40 Hours Per Week



(Data from 71 out of 131 assistants)

It should be somewhat of a concern that roughly 58% of the survey takers who regularly work overtime hours are making less than \$40,000 per year because it implies that there are many more out there who might also be receiving unfair pay. Some composers would argue it's just the name of the game. The assistants are *lucky* to work on these massive projects and the tight deadlines simply leave no other option, but to make use of long stretches of hours. There is more about overtime and the dangers of extended work hours discussed in Chapter 3. Regardless, this guide will always encourage composers to not only pay their assistants appropriately for their work, but also to plan early and strategize how best to handle overtime situations in order to prevent physical and psychological health issues. If and when *Crunch Time* does happen, it is suggested that the composer pays a **scale** appropriate for the amount and type of extra work logged by the assistant. This is both to keep the assistant financially

motivated to do extra work and also as a way to deter the composer from frequently utilizing extended shifts by making them more expensive. The following table provides what is believed to be a fair starting point for overtime hours, using a variation of the basic *Premium Time* scales for TV and Film music prep workers from the American Federation of Musicians (AFM, a.k.a. the musician’s union).

2.6 - Table of Suggested Crunch Time Scales (applies to hourly rates)

100%	Straight time 6am-9pm (meaning the shift occurs within that block, not the entire block)
110%	For work done between the hours of 9pm and midnight
125%	For work beyond 12 hours in a single day (overrides the 110% scale if 12 hours are reached at any time)
150%	For work after midnight until dismissal or <i>any</i> work hours performed after 6 consecutive work days without a day off
200%	For work on the following holidays: New Year’s Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas

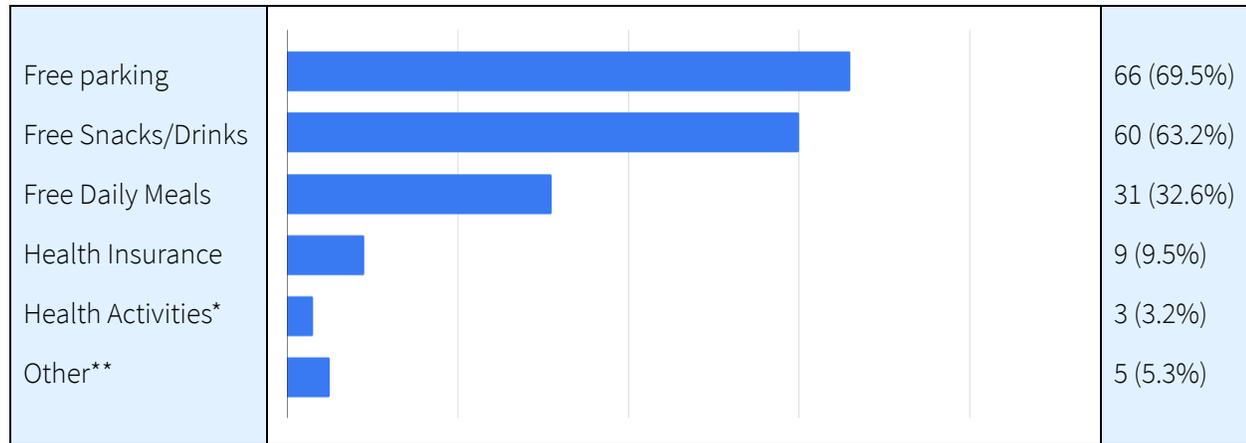
As these are suggestions and not mandates, it is 100% up to the composer whether he/she will use them. Composers who already pay at these levels are likely to already enjoy the benefits that can come with them. Those include the higher motivation of workers, better work/experience quality of incoming candidates, a higher assistant retention rate, and a culture in the studio that’s likely to make the assistant feel valued and therefore produce better quality work. These are tendencies though, not guarantees. Paying a living wage also widens the candidate pool by including those who wouldn’t otherwise be financially able to work a low-paying job due to lack of support from other sources (familial support/work grant/scholarship/savings). Many highly-qualified individuals are unfortunately unable to assist because of the current system’s prevalence towards pre-subsidized (or privileged) candidates who can “afford” to work cheaper because of their safety nets.

If the composer wishes to pay rates less than the suggested minimum, then this guide suggests that the composer offers something in addition to help the assistant either with savings on living costs or some form of career help. “Experience” or simply being present around “big projects” would NOT be considered a substitute for compensation according to this guide. Options with measurable value could include health insurance, royalties for additional composing, free meals, free parking at the studio, gas money for those traveling more than 20 miles one-way to work, pension, or use of studio time for an assistant’s personal project. Survey data on the next page from the same assistant pool shows what types of amenities and benefits some L.A. composers have been offering.

2.7 - Survey Data from March 2019

Amenities offered to full-time assistants by Los Angeles composers

(Data from 95 full-time assistants)

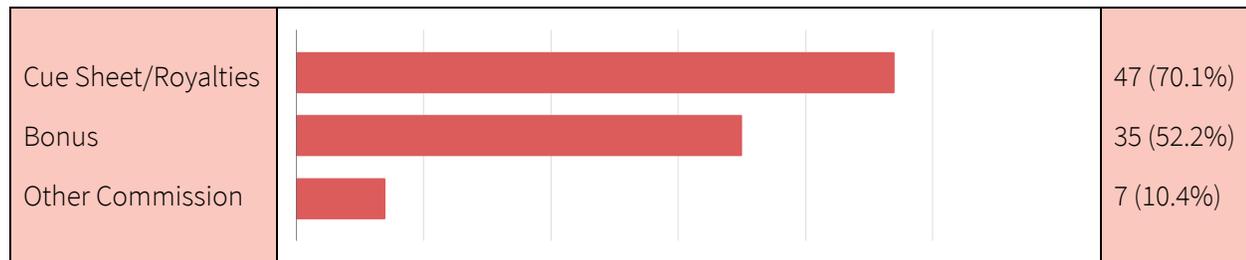


*Health Activities may include massages, spa treatments, exercise/yoga, advanced nutrition.

** Other amenities included holiday bonus, employee pension, staff meals/social events, meals with the composer, and event tickets.

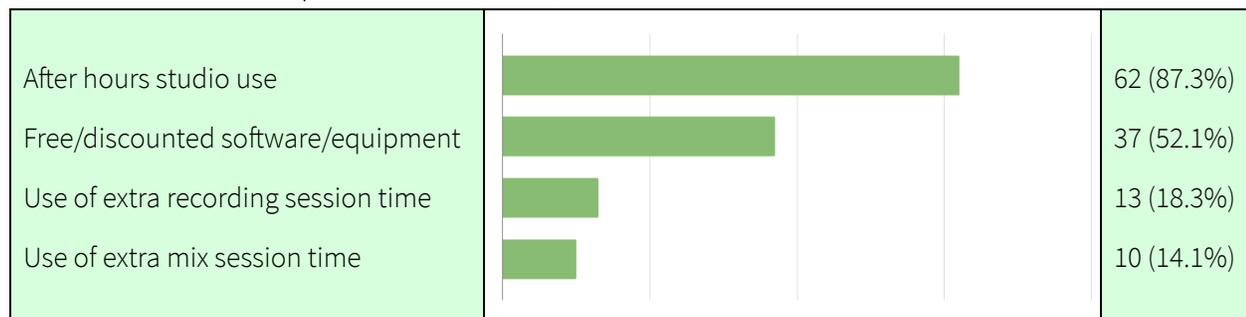
Additional Compensation offered by Los Angeles composers

(Data from 67 full- and part-time assistants)



Facilities and Equipment offered by Los Angeles composers (for assistant's personal use)

(Data from 71 full- and part-time assistants)



2.8 - Worksheet for Determining a Fair Wage for an Assistant

Pay Structure and Amount

- Hourly _____/hr Bi-weekly _____/2wks
 Weekly _____/wk Monthly _____/mo
 Per invoice (please describe the payment structure)_____

Estimated weekly number of hours for each duty (multiple roles for one person is OK)								
Role	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
Admin								
Tech								
Music								
Personal								
Total								

Weekly Hour Grand Total (WHGT) ↑

To estimate the hourly rate (for a non-hourly scale), use this formula:

Take the Weekly pay (or ↓)	and divide that amount by	WHGT	if 40 hours or less (or ↓)
50% of the Bi-weekly pay (or ↓)		{40 + [(WHGT - 40) × 1.25]}	if 41-60 hours (or ↓)
25% of the Monthly pay		{65 + [(WHGT - 60) × 1.50]}	if over 60 hours

The result is the assistant's Adjusted Hourly Rate (AHR): _____/hr

If the AHR is below the suggested minimum of \$27.13/hr before taxes, then dialogue is encouraged between composer and assistant about including other amenities or methods of adding value.

Common Amenities (add the corresponding value to the AHR)

Parking reimbursement	\$1	Health Insurance	\$5	Cue Sheet Credit*	
Snacks/drinks	\$1	Health Activities	\$1	Bonus*	
Meals	\$2	Studio Use	\$3	Samples/software sharing	\$2

Other amenities _____

*The benefit of cue sheet credit or a bonus depends heavily on the agreed-upon amount.

AHR + Amenities value = _____/hr This is a more thorough assessment of what the job is worth per hour.

Chapter 3 - Leading the Team

3.1 - The Composer as a Manager of the Studio

A studio is meant to be a creative extension of the artist so for all intents and purposes, the composer's vision of how the studio will be run is paramount. The assistant should strive to be the cerebral extension of the composer, speaking in the same artistic/technical/pragmatic language and anticipating/solving issues ideally before they would ever cause a problem. To attain this, it's important for the composer and assistant to be on the same page and **daily communication** is essential.

When choosing his or her assistants, the composer is looking for someone who fits the culture and who can not only get along with him or herself, but also anyone who is already working there. These culture fits are important for the comfort and environment of the workplace. However, it is not as simple as just finding someone who can be everyone's buddy. There also needs to be confidence in the candidate's work abilities and **trust** that the candidate won't do anything to harm anyone or anything in the studio. Sometimes background checks are performed by composers, so the assistant should not be surprised if he/she must fill out a form for this. Ultimately, the composer is taking a gamble on hiring the assistant, even if he/she came highly recommended. The assistant should never assume he/she automatically deserves to be there based only on references or qualifications. The job should be regarded as a **privilege** and be treated with a high level of respect. By doing so, the assistant is likely to last longer than those who don't.

The composer is always a teacher when there are assistants present. This doesn't mean he or she is giving tutorials constantly, but it does mean that assistants are perpetually learning and/or cementing professional habits simply by being in the same space. In the early goings, the composer is encouraged

to educate the assistant on as many concepts as possible. In most cases, it's better for the assistant to learn things **directly from the composer** as time allows, rather than from another assistant. This builds trust and a foundation for communication as well as preventing misinterpretation.

Establishing this communication early in the assistant's tenure is critical. To maintain a healthy working relationship, it's important that the assistant should feel comfortable and secure in the composer's environment. A very effective way to ensure this is to be willing to answer all the questions an assistant might have, especially those the assistant might be afraid to ask. Credit, cue sheet credit, time commitment, wages, overtime pay, raises, the possibility of a shared credit, or even handing over the reins to a project are going to be what the assistant hopes for at all times. Does that mean the assistant won't perform well if he/she doesn't receive any of those? Not at all, in fact, whether the composer intends to share some or all of these things has little bearing on the assistant's comfort and confidence in assisting altogether. **Uncertainty** has way more influence on an assistant's performance. If the assistant is left wondering about these unanswered (or unasked) questions, this could be the root of a problem that may surface in some way months or years later. However, if the composer is upfront and clear on his or her terms in regards to all the aforementioned points (even if the answer is no), the assistant is in most cases going to appreciate the clarity and perform his or her best.

In day-to-day activity, it is important for the composer to always be aware of what's happening with projects both within the studio and outside (such as client dealings, or happenings in the music department) in case he or she must change the course of an assistant's duties. The composer is encouraged to be the first one to arrive and the last one to leave work, or at least be in fluid contact with the person who is and always remain informed. Furthermore, it's important for the composer to have a sense of how many hours of labor the assistants are putting in because as the leader of the operation, the composer is generally liable for the safety of the team.

3.2 - Working Long, Working Late

The assistant should fully understand the time commitment that is expected. Depending on the needs of the composer, the hours involved could vary from 1-2 days a week with minimal hours or up to 7 days a week with hour totals near 60 or more. As long as the expectation is made absolutely clear, the assistant should not feel taken advantage of. This guide strongly recommends that the composer does not set an expectation for a lighter-than-realistic schedule such as Monday-Friday 10am-6pm--then after two weeks, the dismissal time becomes 7... then 8... then 10... then must come in on Saturday... and inevitably Sunday too. While many assistants are often hungry for experience and might jump at the opportunity to stay longer, it is unfair to expect all candidates to be able to make the same time sacrifices if it wasn't made clear at the beginning. Assistants need time away from the studio for their personal lives so they can rest, buy groceries, see physicians, make bank transactions, exercise, spend time in the fresh air and absorb the sun's rays, go to government offices (especially if from out of town) and other things that may only function during normal business hours. It's important for the composer to be understanding and flexible about these things. It is not suggested that assistants should have free reign to come and go as they please, but a composer's commitment to the assistants' off-time (including

vacation days) is almost equally as important as the assistant's commitment to their on-time. As a reminder, Chapter 2 of this guide suggests additional compensation scales for work beyond normal hours or a normal amount of consecutive work days. The guide also **strongly suggests** dialogue between the composer and assistant about this very topic as it has been a hot point in the surveys conducted in March 2019.

Further emphasizing the point of establishing an understandable and predictable time commitment, the composer should also acknowledge the necessity for the assistant (who may very well be an aspiring composer) to have time away from work to continue his/her own artistic development, which likely includes digesting and processing what has been learned by assisting the composer. Stunting this development with an overly saturated work schedule can be harmful for the assistant's output, meaning that the malignancy will eventually spread to the composer's output as well.

The authors of this guide understand this and do not recommend that a composer, having read this guide, dramatically alter his or her method of completing work before a deadline. However, they do recommend that the composer internalize these suggestions and consider small, manageable changes over time to increase the assistants' safety on and off the job because the dangers of excess fatigue are very real. Please use caution and discretion when assistants are working late. Offer Lyft/Uber rides, a nearby motel, a couch to sleep on, or other methods of keeping a tired driver off the road, as accidents can happen, have happened, and will happen. If the hours are **unexpectedly** long, providing dinner (or whatever meal of the day is appropriate) is also recommended.

Assistants often fall ill because of lack of rest. An effective way to mitigate these issues is to hire more help to spread out the hours or schedule manageable completion milestones (as much as possible) in reverse order from the final delivery date(s). Knowing how much time is needed to complete the various session prep tasks is extremely valuable.

3.3 - Composers and Creative Leadership

Composers who have risen to elite status are highly creative people, often with personalities as vibrant and dynamic as their music. These traits contribute to an exciting output that consumers and other creatives gravitate to, but due to the extreme character nuances, they also can, in some instances, create instability in the work environment. As artists with extreme talent, it's likely that many composers, during their own development, never envisioned having to be a leader of a team in the business or corporate sense. Thus, their ability to manage groups of individuals can be prone to falter, especially in high stress situations. The stress can sometimes expose weaknesses of the composer's leadership and worse than that, if there is a breakdown, the fallout can easily trickle down and put the whole team under unnecessary stress.

With this in mind, composers should make strides to evaluate situations from a high-level perspective, which can often get lost in the fray of a busy and bustling studio, where intense focus is demanded at any given second. An exercise to help this would be to wait a specific amount of time (even as little as 1-3 minutes), when possible, and focus on being calm before making a critical decision so that

the brain has time to process the events and avoid the initial knee-jerk reaction. Deep breathing can also help this process.

Creation for composers is highly intuitive and can involve lots of trial and error, however leadership and the management of people is the opposite. It requires structure, routine, and regiment. By hiring one or a team of assistants, the composer has made the decision to be a team leader (whether intended or not) and those closest to the composer will ultimately remember him/her based on how he/she treated others. Thus, it is important for the composer to be cognizant and under control of the impulsive/intuitive decisions as well as the strict, organizational ones. In this regard, it should be acknowledged that even though the power exists to ask something of someone, it may not always be the wisest choice to make that request. As an example, if the composer chooses to compose a piece at 11pm the evening before an early morning client meeting, it is not considerate to require the assistant to wait until 3am in order to begin processing the finished piece and include it in the meeting even though the assistant may be willing to do it. Success in this area of a work relationship will naturally build strength and trust and also motivate the assistant to do his/her best by recognizing the value of the assistant's time.

3.4 - Acquiring More Assistants

When making the decision to expand the assisting team, it should be one of **necessity** and not luxury. The composer should *know* when that extra help is truly needed, then plan early and execute carefully to bring in the best candidate at the right time (more on hiring candidates in Chapter 4). Adding more people creates more moving parts and more things the composer needs to responsible for--so it should always be a careful and thoughtful consideration. Ask any experienced, successful composer and they'll agree that the *right* team of three or four with good leadership can outperform just about any team of ten or twelve with average leadership.

3.5 - Dos and Don'ts for the Composer who Manages Assistants

DOS

- Be capable of most or all tasks that would be asked of an assistant (helps to recognize where an assistant might need guidance).
- Be consistent with protocols, expectations, communication.
- Be up front with each hired assistant about work tasks, hours, pay, and expectations including credit, cue sheet, or any applicable form of career advancement. Best practice is to draft a contract that provides black & white clarity on all of these items.
- Be aware of what each assistant is doing and the time involved.
- Be cognizant of the studio's bigger picture (it's good for assistants to know a lot, but no assistant should consistently know more than the composer).
- Be a mentor and give career advice when appropriate (there will always be opportunities to do so).
- Understand you can learn from your assistants just as they learn from you.
- Give recognition or praise to the assistant(s) when appropriate. Sometimes they deserve it.
- Be at least somewhat capable of functioning if one or all of the assistants aren't around.
- Practice self-awareness and always approach others in your work environment with empathy and respect.

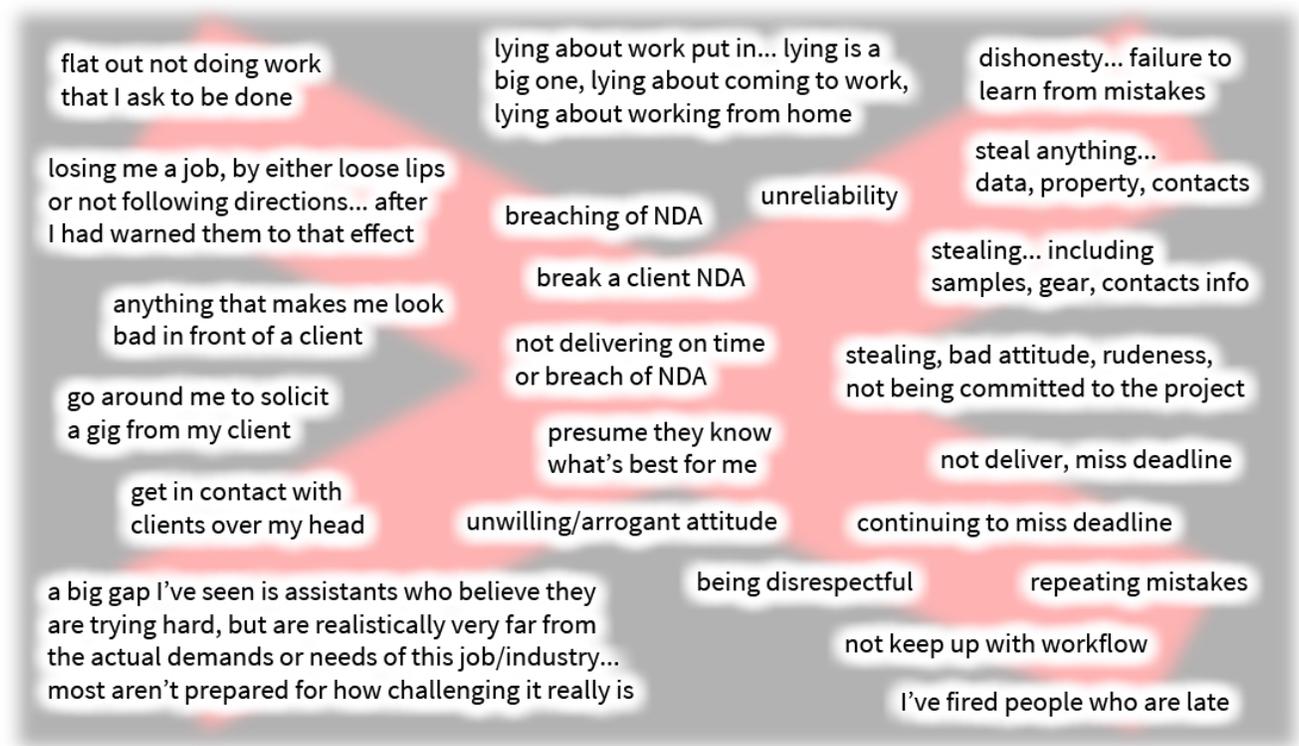
DON'TS

- Don't ignore the fact that your assistants probably don't want to assist forever (be aware of their aspirations).
- Don't ignore the elephant in the room (work out problems as soon as is appropriate).
- Don't be minimally involved in any way (remember your name goes on everything).
- Don't rely too heavily on a particular assistant and be careful not to favor one either as this may cause them to compete and potentially compromise each other's work.
- Don't assume an assistant knows your definition/interpretation of a concept if you haven't explained it to them.
- Don't assume disorganization or a condescending attitude is a character trait synonymous with success or creativity.
- Don't discourage the assistants from pursuing their ultimate goal, even if you think they can't.
- Don't reprimand or discipline an assistant in public or in front of others who may not fully understand the situation. Do this in private.

3.6 - Composer Poll: The biggest challenge in managing assistants is...



Something an assistant would do that would get him/her fired is...



3.7 - Assistant Poll:

Assistants were asked to respond anonymously: If there is **one aspect** of the composer you work(ed) for that you could **change**, it would be...



Module II

The Team, Working Together

This module focuses on the business relationship between composer and assistant and explains the processes starting from how the two entities come together, to how they coexist, and how they eventually part ways--with new experiences to take with them. Much of this module is directed towards the prospective assistant, but there is some very useful information for the composer to gain as well.

Chapter 4 - The Hiring Process, Wages, Professional Conduct & Expectations

4.1 - Job Postings

Unfortunately, while there are literally thousands of composers in Los Angeles alone, there aren't always a lot of assisting opportunities available, however they do spring up in a semi-regular fashion. Craigslist, Entertainment Careers, and some of the popular job websites (indeed.com, for one) are places where if you check regularly enough, it won't be long before a posting comes along. A more likely (but still not guaranteed) way to get a foot in the door is to look for an internship. Your absolute best bet, however, is to have a connection of some kind (mentor/colleague/classmate/friend of friend) who can refer you. While your résumé and demo reel could be brilliant, it would be naive to think that your portfolio will get you in the door by itself without any other measures taken. You must be a complete package, so doing some of the groundwork yourself to find opportunities and doing homework to capitalize on them is very much part of the process.

Tip for aspiring assistants: high-profile composers will virtually never reveal their identities when advertising an opportunity in a public place like Craigslist. In fact, they might downplay the posting altogether and make it seem like an easy-to-miss, run-of-the-mill job ad. Thus, the prospective assistant should never underestimate the posting and always treat the opportunity with the same energy as if it was his/her favorite composer needing the help... because it just might be...

Opportunities can also come about through social media such as the Facebook groups, [Perspective: A Forum for Film, TV, and Media Composers](#) and [Business Skills for Composers](#). If you're not a member of either of these, it is highly recommended that you join and contribute to the daily posts and discussions; the inspiration to create this guide was drawn directly from posts within *Perspective*.

Fun side-note: there is a website www.music-jobs.com, which has bots that crawl the internet looking for musician jobs, including those for composers and those who want to assist. It's a subscription-based service so their business model is that you pay a monthly fee to get full access to information on how to apply for daily postings that it finds around the U.S. The *fun* part is that it doesn't take long to realize that with a quick Google search, you can actually find the application information yourself for just about every posting it finds and you don't need to pay the fee, just be on the email list and you'll get just enough information to search for most of the jobs yourself at no cost. Try it out!

4.2 - Candidate Review

As you would when applying for any job, you want your résumé and qualifications to stand out. However, keep in mind that you don't necessarily want to stand out as this extreme *artiste* who is so unique, it alienates people. The best way to stand out is to present your information professionally with a nice and tidy resume (using up-to-date formatting and fonts) and a succinct email pitch (or cover letter) that includes impressive information and shows that you're an overwhelmingly good fit for the job.

It's common that you will not know at first who the composer is that you're applying to work for. This can make it a bit tough, but the good news is that many composers are looking for similar types of qualifications: experience in the same or closely related field, some clear indication that you know what you're doing (maybe you mention about an advanced function you rigged up in the Logic Environment, or how you mixed a score in 5.1 using Pro Tools), as well as some good sounding demos that prove you have a knack for this.

When you earn yourself an interview, it's time to show that you're indeed a good fit. You must strike a balance between confidence, calmness, selling yourself on what you can do without coming across as arrogant. You must also avoid the temptation to over-sell yourself. It's easy for the composer (or assistant who may be conducting the interview) to tell if you're trying too hard to impress them. Honesty will serve you well and if you don't happen to get the gig, it's a very professional thing to send a follow-up message and politely ask what could have been the difference. A thoughtful composer or studio staff member will likely respond.

Some studios have many assistants, each with different skill sets, of which some might be the same skills you possess--meaning what you do best may **not** be what they need at the moment. Especially early on in your career, you should be open to any reasonable request, and while it may not be glamorous, you shouldn't look down on it. Think of all the composers who got their start doing

nothing more than making coffee. Those rare and special opportunities (like a sudden need for an extra MIDI programmer) may elude you if you're not willing to participate in the unglamorous duties.

4.3 - The Assistant is Hired

When things go well and the composer believes a candidate is a fit for the job and gets hired, the next step is to go through and fill out any employment paperwork (W4, I-9 or W9) as well as sign an NDA (non-disclosure agreement) and a work contract (possibly other agreements too). The work contract should outline the duties to be performed and all pertinent expectations of the composer and the conduct in his/her studio. It is supremely important to have an **agreement** in place containing the **work terms** for **both parties**. If no such agreement exists, the assistant should be cautioned that they won't have anything to refer to if things start to go awry and it may be difficult to navigate and solve issues.

4.4 - Labor

The next several sections get into the legalities of labor and for now, this guide will refer to practices as they occur in L.A. (Hollywood), and any law reference will be pertaining to California law. (Note: **none** of the authors writing this document are lawyers, and this document should **not** replace the legal advice of an employment law attorney licensed to work in the State of California.) Sections 4.5, 4.6, and 4.8 are taken directly from the Department of Labor, Internal Revenue Service, and the California Department of Industrial Relations.

4.5 - Unpaid Internships

California employers are subject to both Federal and California (State) laws.

Federal Requirements

The Department of Labor (DOL) has (as of January 2018) outlined seven requirements to determine the legality of an internship under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). [From the DOL:](#)

1. The extent to which the intern and the employer clearly understand that there is no expectation of compensation. Any promise of compensation, express or implied, suggests that the intern is an employee—and vice versa.
2. The extent to which the internship provides training that would be similar to that which would be given in an educational environment, including the clinical and other hands-on training provided by educational institutions.
3. The extent to which the internship is tied to the intern's formal education program by integrated coursework or the receipt of academic credit.
4. The extent to which the internship accommodates the intern's academic commitments by corresponding to the academic calendar.
5. The extent to which the internship's duration is limited to the period in which the internship provides the intern with beneficial learning.

6. The extent to which the intern's work complements, rather than displaces, the work of paid employees while providing significant educational benefits to the intern.
7. The extent to which the intern and the employer understand that the internship is conducted without entitlement to a paid job at the conclusion of the internship.

These seven requirements comprise the "primary beneficiary test," which determines which party of the intern-employer relationship is the "primary beneficiary." If the employer is found to be the primary beneficiary, then the intern is actually an employee, and is entitled to both minimum wage and overtime pay under the FLSA.

State Requirements

On the State level, the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement (DLSE) has additional laws governing unpaid internships. These include:

1. The position must take place as part of an educational curriculum, which requires the participation of a school or similar institution.
2. The intern cannot receive employee benefits, including insurance or workers' comp.
3. The position must train the intern to work in a given industry, not just a specific company.
4. When recruiting, the employer must be upfront about the unpaid nature of the position.

If you feel your rights as an intern have been abused, contact a California employment law attorney.

4.6 - Independent Contractor vs. Employee

Broadly speaking, an "employee" is a worker on payroll, who is issued a W-2, while an "independent contractor," also known as a "freelancer," is issued a 1099. In the State of California, there is no set legal definition of what constitutes an "independent contractor," so interpretations, following court decisions and guidelines set forth by enforcement agencies, must be made on a case-by-case basis. In legal matters revolving around the employment status of a worker, the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement (DLSE) begins with the presumption that the worker is an employee. However, this presumption can be challenged via an examination of the particular details of any worker's relationship and work expectations thereof (also known as the "multi-factor" or "economic realities" test), possibly including ([from the California Department of Industrial Relations \[DIR\]](#)):

- Most significantly, whether the person to whom service is rendered (the principal, i.e. the employer) has the right to control the worker both as to the work done and the manner and means in which it is performed;
- Whether the person performing services is engaged in an occupation or business distinct from that of the principal;
- Whether or not the work is a part of the regular business of the principal or alleged employer;
- Whether the principal or the worker supplies the instrumentalities, tools, and the place for the person doing the work;
- The alleged employee's investment in the equipment or materials required by his or her task or his or her employment of helpers;

- Whether the service rendered requires a special skill;
- The kind of occupation, with reference to whether, in the locality, the work is usually done under the direction of the principal or by a specialist without supervision;
- The alleged employee's opportunity for profit or loss depending on his or her managerial skill;
- The length of time for which the services are to be performed;
- The degree of permanence of the working relationship;
- The method of payment, whether by time or by the job; and
- Whether or not the parties believe they are creating an employer-employee relationship may have some bearing on the question, but is not determinative since this is a question of law based on objective tests.

The DIR also states that even where there is an absence of control over work details, an employer-employee relationship will be found if:

1. The principal retains pervasive control over the operation as a whole;
2. The worker's duties are an integral part of the operation; and
3. The nature of the work makes detailed control unnecessary.

Furthermore:

- Regardless of the “W-2/1099” litmus test given at the beginning of this section, that is not a legal grounds for determining employment status. In other words, a 1099 is given to independent contractors, but receiving a 1099 does not automatically classify a worker as an independent contractor.
- Signing an agreement stating that one is an independent contractor and not an employee does not automatically classify a worker as an independent contractor.

Finally, the California Supreme Court recently (30 April 2018) issued a new “ABC” test for employers to determine the employment status of those who may have previously been classified as independent contractors. Under this test, all workers are presumed employees unless the company can demonstrate that *all* of the following three factors are all met:

- A. The worker is free from the control and direction of the hirer in connection with performing the work;
- B. The worker performs work outside of the usual course of the hiring entity’s business; and
- C. The worker is usually engaged in an independently-established trade, occupation, or business of the same nature of the work performed for the hiring entity.

Failure to meet even one of these factors means that the State of California classifies the worker as an employee, not as an independent contractor.

In plain English, the assistant should be correctly classified by the composer as an independent contractor (1099) or employee (W-2). Remember, employees have more rights including disability/worker's compensation if there's an accident, as well as overtime pay unless using the White Collar Exemption (see **Section 4.8**). If the composer requires the assistant to report to the studio regularly, provides a workstation, and dictates/controls the work being done, these are all factors that should classify the assistant as a W-2 employee. If you're doing these employee-classified things, but receiving a 1099 (meaning you filled out a W9 form at the start of the term instead of W4 & I-9 forms), there's a problem and you should tactfully find a way to discuss it with the composer. Another thing to keep in mind is that according to the current U.S. tax law at the time of this edition (2019), only an independent contractor (receiving a 1099) can deduct business expenses on his/her annual tax return.

4.7 - Working Under an LLC or S-Corp

Remember that classification of working for someone as an "independent contractor" (reported on a 1099-MISC) vs. working for someone as an employee (reported on a W-2) is not only contingent on how you are working, but how you are getting paid. If you are set up as a composer under an LLC or S-Corp (which many composers now are), and you are invoicing the composer you are working for under your LLC or S-Corp (so your composer is paying your company instead of you as an individual) you are not an employee, but an independent contractor. And thus, this complicates your employee/employer relationship in terms of employee rights. Be sure to research how the composer you are working for is planning on paying you and whether you are invoicing them to pay you as an individual or your company for the work that you do.

4.8 - Overtime

W-2 Employees are entitled to overtime unless they are exempt. Here are some guidelines as of 1 January 2019:

1. The "White Collar" exemption: The employee must perform duties in a specified manner and is paid a monthly salary equivalent to no less than two times the state minimum wage for full-time employment. (Most composers' companies have fewer than 25 employees, so the minimum wage used to calculate this amount is \$11/hour, which means for the White Collar exemption to come into effect, the employee must receive an annual salary of \$45,760 or more.)
2. Salary must be predetermined and guaranteed. Thus, bonuses, commissions, and other similar payments are usually not considered as part of the employee's salary when determining the exemption qualification.
3. Salary cannot be subject to reduction based on either the quality or the quantity of the work. In other words, per-hour employment is not exempt from overtime.
4. If salary has been misclassified, the employee is entitled to unpaid overtime.
5. Employers bear the burden of proof in establishing the exemption.

In the unlikely event that a dispute arises between the assistant and the composer regarding wages/overtime, first try to resolve the issue peacefully between yourself and the composer. If it becomes clear that the composer will not reach an acceptable conclusion with you, check the agreement signed at the beginning of the work term and see how disputes are to be handled. It is likely that you agreed to some form of arbitration (review of the case by an independent third party legally qualified to rule on the dispute). Regardless of what you have signed, if you think you are truly being unfairly treated in terms of work hours and the resulting compensation and you want to take action, but don't know how to proceed, contact a labor attorney.

4.9 - Studio Conduct

Working at a studio can be exciting and very enjoyable, especially when in the presence of all the musical instruments and technology you have probably read about in articles and blogs. But you must conduct yourself professionally at all times. These studios are serious businesses and while much of the equipment is probably insured, it is essential that everything in the studio is working at optimum level--meaning that you should not ever risk damaging the equipment because you were curious about trying out a sound or feature. It takes too long to fix or replace something that is broken and studio downtime is incredibly costly.

You should also uphold the same conduct with visitors and contractors who come to the studio. Be professional and always look out for the composer's best interests. It might mean you have to step in and stop someone from doing something detrimental.

It should also be noted that while you may be working closely with your composer's clients, sometimes over many months and even multiple projects, those relationships are still primarily that of the composer you are working for and not yours. It would be very bad form to use your time with a client to promote your own compositional work, other projects you may be working on, or to even pitch your own music to the client for use. It is never your project or client you are supporting, it is your composer's.

At all times, the composer is the one whose decisions should override anyone else's in regards to the assistant(s). The composer is responsible for everything that happens within the studio and all the interactions with clients and contractors, including everything the assistants do. Studio conduct should ideally be defined by the composer and passed down to the assistants directly from the composer. The rules are intended not only to protect the composer's interests, but also to protect the assistants as it is the composer's method to keep them and their careers out of harm's way through compliance.

4.10 - Human Resources (if applicable)

It is **not** common at all for a composer studio to be large enough to warrant having an HR department, but in the case of Remote Control Productions in Santa Monica, the existence of HR has been the norm for a long time. And for good reason too, as there are hundreds of people including composers, assistants, interns, and visitors circulating through the campus. HR can be helpful when problems arise such as abuse, harassment, disputes, or questions that you might feel unable to ask the composer. While HR is intended to help you, try to remember that if you can resolve an issue without

them, through healthy communication and problem solving, you'll be better off. In big corporations, the realistic duty of HR is to make sure the company itself complies with laws and does all it can to avoid lawsuits filed by employees (such as harassment or wrongful termination).

4.11 - Illness/Injury/Workers' Compensation

If an assistant falls ill, the composer should be notified immediately, and typically the assistant will be asked to leave the studio or remain home until the sickness clears up. The last thing a composer wants is for a sick assistant to affect him or herself or the rest of the team.

California employers are required **by law** to have workers' compensation insurance, even if they have only one employee. (Remember that an employee is an in-studio worker, receiving a W-2 as their tax document.) Thus, if an employee-assistant gets hurt or sick because of something that happened at work, the employer is required to pay for workers' compensation benefits. Always obtain legal clarification before taking action on this or other similar matters.

Chapter 5 - Parting Ways

5.1 - Severance

Everything must come to an end at some point, and so will assisting the composer. It is hoped that at the end of the term, the reasons for severance are positive ones. No one should hope to get fired and composers generally dislike firing people. However, it does happen. If the case is that the assistant is leaving on negative terms, it's important that he or she keeps the chin up and remains professional in regards to the studio. The reason for being fired may not sit well with the assistant, but to be vindictive and try to tarnish the reputation of that studio will do neither party any good. It's best to reserve any negativity, especially if the assistant wishes to work at another studio in the future as the media composer community in Los Angeles is small enough where just about every big composer knows each other.

Module III of this guide contains text about how assistants can evaluate their work situation(s) and determine whether they should stay or leave a job, as well as what to do if abusive or illegal activities are taking place.

5.2 - Letting Go of an Assistant

At some point, the composer may make the determination that an underperforming or sour assistant is proving more costly than beneficial and the composer will have to terminate the assistant's employment. This is never an easy thing to do, even if the reasons for firing are obvious. But when it

happens, the composer and assistant should meet in private, away from any other team members and the composer should calmly explain the reasons why the assistant is to be let go and give the assistant a specific date and time to vacate the studio. As a precaution, if the composer feels insecure about the reactions the assistant might have, he or she should accompany the fired assistant or assign someone to accompany that person until the departure.

The relationship between the two does not end there. In fact, it is still in some ways very much alive and it is in the composer's best interests that the fired assistant finds new employment as quickly and smoothly as possible. This is because firing an employee often brings negative attention to the studio especially if the fired individual struggles afterwards professionally. Depending on the circumstances, the fired employee may have a case for a wrongful termination suit or unemployment claim, which affects the studio negatively as well. To avoid this, the composer should be willing to write a letter of recommendation (an honest one, not something that misrepresents the individual) or serve as a reference to assist the individual in finding a new job. This helps both parties stay in a positive light and if the assistant succeeds in his or her next venture, this reflects extremely well on the composer.

Rarely, but sometimes, the conditions of severance are due to extreme and perhaps unethical and/or illegal incidents. If the assistant or composer feels it's a matter where legal action is appropriate, they should be absolutely sure of it first and seek an attorney or an authority that can help them.

5.3 - On the Assistant's Terms

Sometimes the assistant will make the determination that a particular studio is not a good fit for him/her and must resign. If this is the case, the assistant should try at least once to see if there could be a way to resolve the issue causing him/her to want to leave. If that doesn't help, here are a couple of ways to go about resignation. First, the assistant should let the composer know that he/she plans to end the terms of work and give at least a two week notice (even longer, if feasible) so the composer has a chance to find a replacement. If it is a situation where the resignation must happen immediately, the assistant should talk to the composer and explain the situation as best as possible. If it truly is warranted, the composer should understand and support the assistant's decision. What should be avoided is resigning in such a way that the composer can't understand. The confusion will likely cause resentment and the assistant could lose the composer as a reference to help secure his/her next gig. These relationships are incredibly important and if the relationship has value, the assistant should want to do his/her best to maintain it.

To reiterate, if the assistant feels his/her rights as a worker have been abused, it is generally a good idea to first try to reconcile with the employer respectfully and calmly. Even if the assistant's rights are, without a doubt, being abused, try to first consider that it could be out of ignorance of the law or compliance code and not out of malice. Relationships and the benefit of the doubt are generally worth preserving in the long run. However, only the assistant fully knows his/her own situation, and if the matter truly cannot be reconciled in an amicable way without outside mediation, contact a California employment law attorney.

Module III

Survive and Thrive as an Assistant

The final module offers a glimpse of the world through the eyes of a day-to-day, full-time assistant. With so many facets to the various assisting responsibilities, it can easily get overwhelming and feel like pressure is coming from all sides. The following is meant to help the assistant maintain focus on what will ultimately help him or her achieve success in that role. It will also offer tips on how to navigate or altogether avoid a dangerous workplace.

Chapter 6 - Before You Assist

6.1 - Negotiating Tips

While the types of assistants and levels of experience vary greatly, the negotiation period is almost universally the same between composers and assistants. The bottom line is composers want their business to remain as stable as possible (by not wasting any resources) and assistants want to either earn as much as possible or be rewarded with as much career advancement as possible. The more assistants know about their own skill level and how they compare to the rest of the market, the more advantageous a position they're in when negotiating terms of a professional engagement.

The assistant is at his/her strongest and most leverageable position at the **very beginning**, before any work is done. Typically, this is the point where the composer is looking at a mountain of work that hasn't started yet and has possibly been scrambling to find help (not in all cases, but definitely in some). This is true in pretty much all business, not just music. The chosen candidate is basically perfect at this point because he/she has earned the role in the composer's eyes and best of all, hasn't done anything yet to cause a blemish on their slate as a worker. While a composer or representative thereof (manager/HR/head assistant) might extend the official offer and say it is non-negotiable, the assistant should keep in mind that nothing in business is ever non-negotiable--rather it is about finding the limits of what either party is willing to accept (in a respectful/tactful way of course). Since the under-experienced assistant is likely looking at one or few opportunities, it's common for him/her to accept anything that seems okay. In most cases, it probably is okay, even if the deal favors the composer because rarely does an assistant's first gig turn into a long-term one (it could, though). More often, the first gig lasts about a year (or one project), which then gives that assistant some experience and leverage for the next opportunity. However, even a first job opportunity is still an opportunity to practice

negotiating, so the assistant should at least try and move the needle in some way towards their benefit, be that a slight increase in pay, an appropriate credit for work being done, a timeline of objectives (where the assistant starts off with one type of duty and expands after a predetermined amount of time or completed milestones), or perhaps a review period later on where if a certain level of satisfaction is met, then a promotion or pay increase is possible. As stated before, the more experience one has, the more creative one can get about negotiating and the more likely one can actually obtain those requests.

The other incredibly powerful trait that anyone in business can carry is the ability to walk away from a deal. If the terms truly aren't to the assistant's liking and there doesn't seem to be any sign of budging from the composer (which is a power play in itself), the assistant needs to carefully think about this. To accept such an offer would potentially show weakness or lack of confidence in the assistant's own abilities. However, the decision to walk away is also as risky as it is powerful. If the assistant is confident that he/she can find another opportunity, then it is probably best to move on, but this must be done in an extremely careful and professional way. In an email message or phone call, the assistant should calmly explain that after giving the offer some careful thought, a difficult decision was made to pursue something more in-sync with the assistant's goals and abilities or that other more favorable offers are being considered. The important thing is to make sure and use sensitive and sympathetic language so that the door can remain open for the opportunity to return to the negotiation table in case the composer decides to reconsider and change the offer. No matter what, the assistant should always **thank the composer** for his/her time that was invested in qualifying the candidate. If the composer doesn't come back with a new offer, then the assistant should still be content with the decision and pursue the next thing.

Sometimes, the terms offered are exactly what makes sense for both parties. If this is the case, and the assistant is looking at an offer that meets his/her criteria of a sensible and potentially beneficial opportunity, then he/she is incredibly fortunate and should accept the job in most cases. The decision to negotiate for any further benefit beyond that is up to the assistant, but he/she should probably consider very carefully what to negotiate for, if anything. The composer is likely offering a good package to prevent negotiations from happening and someone who wants to keep moving that needle could very likely get themselves sent packing. Use good sense and remember when all the business masquerades come off, the gig boils down to being part of a community of artists and technicians doing their best to make something beautiful for people to enjoy.

Ultimately, this guide aims to help maximize the opportunities that an assistant might get, but the assistant must consider that no single piece of advice will be a golden rule. As hinted earlier, assisting opportunities don't grow on trees so it's good to be flexible and not too rigid on terms because composers obviously can't give up everything to take on help. And not only that, there is likely someone willing to give up more to get that same opportunity. Does that mean assistants should undercut each other to get gigs? Absolutely not. To get favorable terms, it takes a careful and mindful approach that understands what the composer needs. A wise move would be to ask an experienced assistant/composer/mentor what to do in a given situation before making a final decision. The last bit of advice here is to beware of the composer who doesn't allow the assistant any time to make that decision... in

other words, if the composer demands acceptance right there on the spot without giving at least the rest of the day to consider all the pros and cons, it could be the sign of bad things to come.

6.2 - Before You Sign on the Dotted Line

Often the most ideal assistantships are part of operations where all the T's are crossed and I's are dotted. The composer seems to have everything well under control and everything between he/she and the assistant is in writing. Assistants should justifiably expect that all terms of their work should be in writing and accessible to the assistant for reference at any time (ideally the assistant should have his/her own copies of signed agreements from the outset). Verbal agreements are as binding as any written agreement, the only major difference is that if it is not recorded, items from a verbal agreement can be difficult to prove later on if a dispute surfaces. Thus, recording conversations would be a measure the assistant can take to protect him/herself as a precaution. And yes, it would be **weird** if the assistant carries around a recorder everywhere, so it is another area where good judgement must be used. By and large, the assistant should be cautioned about composers who regularly make verbal agreements with nothing in writing to substantiate them as well as prevent the assistant from having a leg to stand on in the future (i.e. no witness or opportunity to document).

Some frequent examples of undocumented verbal agreements composers use to entice assistants into accepting potentially bad deals include:

- Promising work on the next “big” project in exchange for working on the current “small” one. What happens often is that the small project becomes a nightmare for the assistant (as many small projects are), the terms and/or pay is not worth the stress and effort, then at the end of it, the big project comes along and the composer decides to work with someone else.
- After completing a project at a specific pay rate, the composer explains to the assistant that the next project is a smaller one and therefore he/she cannot afford the previous rate and subsequently offers less. The assistant should not ever suffer from a composer's inability to secure a project deal that allows for fair pay of his/her assistants. If the assistant were to accept this, the likelihood of another decrease happening on further projects greatly increases.
- The composer says down the road, he/she will share credit on a project with the assistant. Sometimes this does happen when a busy composer must offload some work and share composer credits, but it is usually a situation that comes out of necessity AND after a long and tested professional relationship has been established between the two parties. To promise something like this too early is very fishy. One of the smartest things the assistant can do is visit IMDb.com, research the composer, and see whether his/her prior assistants' credits have gone in a forward direction (as a result of that composer) and how quickly.

Early on in the assistant's career, taking on deals like these might actually be a good thing to gain experience and endure some challenging situations, but to be lured into ongoing repetition of these patterns with no real career or professional progression is exactly what the assistant should try hard to avoid. One year or one project is a good measure where at the end of that, the assistant should think carefully before continuing.

6.3 - Jumping From Ship to Ship

It may sound like backwards thinking, but studies have shown in the professional world that finding a job at another company (or studio) gives one a better chance at a pay increase than staying put. [See this article](#) from Forbes. General logic might suggest that if workers are valuable to the company, the boss will regularly increase their benefits as their skills and wisdom improve and do so as a way to reward their dedication and loyalty. However, the facts show that a majority of the time, bosses will keep things as they are because the status quo is regarded as a more effective way to keep stability within the company. While it doesn't speak directly about music jobs, [this other article](#) from Forbes explains why staying too long at a corporate job is not advisable if the employee hopes to gain significant pay increases. As a result, turnover happens frequently and the new same-skilled workers will come in and be paid basically the same as the ones they are replacing. When a worker decides to move on and take his/her experience to a new place, that worker generally comes with a clearer picture of what his/her self-worth is and can more effectively negotiate more favorable terms. Negotiation is almost always easier to do when the worker has no attachment to the company and that's because the worker has the power and fearlessness to say no and walk away from a bad deal. To negotiate a new deal at the same company is almost always awkward and intimidating because the boss has a good idea of the worker's potential as well as entire backlog of his/her successes and failures to reference during the talks. That's another reason dealing with a new place is easier as they don't know where the worker's weaknesses lie.

On the flip side, there are studios where assistants have been happily stationed and see regular promotions and increases as years go by. These are the places assistants should strive to be a part of because the satisfaction of the experience and wisdom gained often stretches far beyond the excellent terms and working conditions.

Another take on this (or assisting as a whole) is for the assistant to never allow the fear of losing a steady paycheck to have an influence on his/her own artistic and professional growth. So much can be learned by assisting, but it is not the only path to becoming a composer. It is very easy to become comfortable and complacent within a stable assisting gig and while it is great that the additional music/arranging/score coordinating credits are piling up and looking impressive, they honestly don't mean anything in the grand scheme because **composer credits** are exponentially more effective in leveraging future composing work. The assistant who aspires to compose should always retain the capacity to go out on a limb, take a risk, and make his/her own career advancements as a composer because waiting for someone to do that on their behalf is something that may very well never happen. Even the most generous of composers who genuinely care about the success of their assistants (even the ones most valuable to the studio) will not keep them around as assistants forever. Instead, they will lovingly send them on their way after several years to continue their ultimate pursuit, armed with the knowhow, and backed by the composers' guidance and support to avoid a career catastrophe.

6.4 - That's Not What I Was Hired For

In your contract*, under the list of expected duties for your job, you may encounter language along the lines of "...and other duties and responsibilities as required." Unless you are a minor, there is no law specifically preventing an employer from asking and expecting you to do anything, and to have grounds in which to fire you for noncompliance, as long as it is not illegal to begin with. Thus, if you were hired as a MIDI Programmer, you may be asked to take notes during a spotting session; if you were hired as a Studio Tech, you may be asked to pick up the composer's dry cleaning. Your employer's family members may even ask you to do work that has nothing to do with anything regarding the composer or the studio, such as to design a website for their outside business.

If this makes you feel uncomfortable, it is best to anticipate these things before they occur, and have language in the contract that specifically restricts you to certain types of work. However, be aware that while possible, such negotiation is usually difficult, especially if the composer has more or less *designed* the role to contain those duties. And thanks to supply and demand, your bargaining position as an under-experienced assistant could be limited. The composer may just as likely find somebody with fewer qualms about doing such work. At the very least, it is advisable to read anything before you sign it, and to request as much as you can in writing.

To reiterate: In California, oral agreements are as legally binding as signed, written agreements. However, in the case of a dispute, the existence and terms of such agreements are much harder to prove and enforce than those in writing. Also, many types of oral agreements are **not enforceable under California law; most pertinently: any oral agreement that is not to be fully performed within a year of its being made; and any oral agreement in which the parties misunderstood a material term or terms of the contract (that is, any oral agreement in which the parties did not have a consensus as to what exactly was being agreed upon).*

6.5 - Assistant Poll:

If you could go **back in time** to right before you took your assistant position and give yourself one piece of **financial advice**, what would it be?

save money along the way as much as possible be ready to be on call at all times and save as much money for gas as possible volunteer to work on more things meh, I managed my money very well, don't think I'd need to

save save money, look for other jobs that pay more invest keep that rent-controlled apartment and don't let the credit card debt get too big I have been lucky enough to be fairly compensated so I would have just made sure I did take this job and not wait for something better to come around

even though you're making more than you ever have, you should still save, cook more than you eat out, it saves a shitload in the long run have more money saved and don't buy as many sample libraries be prepared to take on another job or two so you aren't worrying about getting your next paycheck to pay the bills

just do what you love and start saving up sooner try to keep a little more supplementary income going seek other opportunities

don't take the unpaid internship I held before this position, I'd be in a better spot financially if I could get the savings back that I used to support myself maintain multiple income sources look for other jobs often don't take the job

think, you'll have to pay taxes on EVERYTHING you're making in this studio invest early in home studio equipment nothing I don't know, I have no choice don't take this job lol

learn how to do W-2's know that the guys I work for are not typical A-hole composers and that I'll be treated well and paid well... keep doing my own thing on the side and working for them and don't stress ditch it and become an attorney

stay on top of taxes pay less rent get a roommate if you don't have a spouse take another job, this one will only lose you money

I would not spend as much money on transportation to/from the studio stipulations towards other work to offset the lower pay don't do it for less than \$25/hr ...or at least \$20/hr

there will be additional writing opportunities (as anticipated), but they won't happen until more than a year from now, and when they come up, they won't be worth it always be prepared to negotiate a pay raise when your job duties change talk about compensation during the interview and negotiate

never take their words seriously deal with this for a month or two to get experience and get out to find a better paying job with less emotional stress negotiate negotiate the pay rate

don't automatically accept the offer, take time figure out how to make a counteroffer do more research into composer compensation, don't just accept from the first person offering a job try to ask for more negotiate better (WAY BETTER)

ask for more money per hour ask for higher wage sooner negotiate for cue sheet and/or overtime

after a certain point (when you've proved yourself and your boss ends up relying entirely on you), you have far more leverage than you think you do... if I had left my job abruptly, to say my boss would have been screwed would be a severe understatement

Chapter 7 - Daily Life as an Assistant

7.1 - Mental Gymnastics

Assisting a composer can put one at the extremes of all emotions. The pride and joy associated with completing a monumental project is among the best feelings a creative person or team can attain. A profession anchored around creativity, however, will inevitably come to crossroads where stress is high, deadlines are in jeopardy, and the composer may seem like your worst adversary.

Try to always keep in mind that nobody is perfect and a composer who lashes out when under stress probably does not mean to direct the anger towards the assistant. Assistants have been known throughout generations for taking the brunt of their employer's frustrations, but if you consider the composer/assistant relationship to be similar to that of a close partnership, then it might make sense that the composer feels comfortable enough to fully express his or her emotions in front of you. It generally does not mean you are to blame for the anger, especially if you did as you were instructed. There is a line, though, that should be not crossed, where the lashing out becomes abuse. If that line is crossed and you feel legitimately intimidated or afraid to work in that studio (or worse--afraid to leave that studio), you should seek help as soon as possible. See **Section 8.6** for helpful resources.

Take notes! While this seems like basic advice, it is actually something that can save you and your job quite frequently. As much the composer will allow it, you should at all times have a notepad with you to jot down any piece of information you might hear and need for later. A lot of information will be coming your way and it is in your best interest to be able to accurately recall every single bit of it.

7.2 - Navigating the Various People and Personalities

Working for a composer will put the assistant in contact with many people from the composer's respective industry. Many of whom are at your same professional level and some of whom are above that--possibly at the elite, celebrity level. It is important to know that these are the composer's contacts, **not yours**. You are entrusted as an assistant to maintain and support the composer's career and business interests and you should not engage the contacts in any way outside of the boundaries of the job. If they reach out to you directly, that is a different story, but it is highly frowned upon to initiate

anything like this for your own personal gain whether or not your intentions are pure. This includes when you are no longer working for that composer. Your success as a professional will be maximized ultimately by harvesting your own contacts from the grassroots. Working for a composer should empower you with the skills you need to maintain a successful career when your own contacts have blossomed organically.

Other people you may encounter are the music department team members such as the music editor, orchestrator, music preparation team, contractor, recording studio staff, etc. These folks can be extremely helpful at any point along the way of a project and in most cases, communication with these people is very frequent and very common. Since they are often employed in some way via their connection to the composer, they are typically happy to be available for your questions. But be advised that at any time, one of these well-intended professionals might seek information about the composer or the project and you must use your highest level of judgement to determine whether that information is safe to share. If you're not sure, **do not share** it. Tell them you'll have to find out more before you can release that information. The key thing to remember is that you work for the composer, not them. And everything you do is in line with the will and business strategy of the composer.

7.3 - Difficulties Within the Team

Whether the assistant is the only one carrying the workload or among a team of many with unique delegations, team skills are a vital part of success. Assistants that are part of a multi-assistant team should be in support of each other at all times, and when applicable, protect each other. At no point should an assistant ever undermine or sabotage another assistant's work (or that of anyone) as a way to earn favor with the composer or anyone else. One who thinks he/she will get ahead with that behavior at the expense of another assistant will not have a long lasting career. If an assistant suspects that another assistant is trying to harm the reputation of others or undermine his/her work, it should be reported to the head manager, composer, or appropriate authority in a professional manner. So rather than say, "He/she is trying to screw up my work," it is better to approach it calmly and neutrally with a statement such as, "I have a strong feeling this person is not upholding our mission as a team, could we perhaps take a closer look at his/her conduct?" There may be times where reporting such conduct could disrupt the workflow, especially around *Crunch Time* or worse, during a recording session, but it is absolutely essential that it gets handled before it's too late and irreversible damage has been done. First, determine if the problem is an isolated incident, in which case it may actually be better to discuss after emotions have cooled and the deadline has been reached (if applicable). If it is a repeated pattern with the individual, document the incidents so later, when the temperature is right, you can calmly address the behavior with that individual and inform them of their consistent and repeated infractions and hopefully reach a resolution. If the behavior continues, an escalation to the composer or appropriate authority would be the next step--again, at a sensible juncture and making sure to do so in a calm manner, referencing your documentation of the infractions. Each case is unique and specific, but the feeling of tension or no support among your teammates is very stressful. If it reaches a level of toxicity akin to bullying or abuse, this can easily become the most stressful part of the work environment. This is by all means not relegated solely to the music industry as every industry has the potential for toxic

colleagues, who may actually enjoy bringing others down. It is important to remember that angrily confronting them will not produce successful results because the initial offender might relish the reaction and loss of emotion by the accuser. Difficult or toxic teammates aren't always as easy to label as a coworker who has a bad attitude, poor communication skills, incompetence, exclusiveness (hanging out in cliques), unappreciativeness, or a bad temper. Some or all of those examples can be situational or just *office drama*. Examples of a toxic worker could be someone who intentionally and repeatedly withholds information from you; information that you need to know to do your job, or someone who repeatedly makes you feel unsafe or violated through remarks or actions even after you've made it clear it is unwelcome. It could also include extensive blaming or degradation of others, etc. Since each situation is unique and this guidebook cannot possibly provide all the answers, you are invited to send a description of your situation to the guide's authors and they will be glad to assist you. The email address is assistthecomposer@gmail.com and you are welcome to send from an anonymous email source, so long as they can somehow reply back with a helpful response. Ultimately, the victimized individuals must use their best judgement in order to not interfere with the highly critical deadlines, but they must keep in mind that as more time lapses with a problem, more value and efficiency is lost and that is never what a composer wishes.

7.4 - Asking the Tough Questions (Credits, Career Advancement)

You might ask yourself, if everything I do is for the benefit of the composer, will there ever be a time where I can benefit from all this? For all practical purposes, the answer should be a resounding yes, but it takes patience and persistence. Composers often are hesitant to give up portions of their livelihood, especially to an assistant whom they've only known for a short time. Compared to the colleagues of their generation--musicians, orchestrators, engineers whom they've known for decades, the assistant is almost like a newborn baby in their lives. You're probably not ready to be entrusted with some of the information that composer knows or something as precious as a percentage of cue sheet credit let alone a project with a shared credit or your own credit. The reason is something you will grow to understand--and that it is not so easy or cut-and-dry to simply shed a portion of the pie. Does that mean you can't approach it or talk about? Absolutely not. You, as an assistant, are there to work and ultimately grow and the composer would be doing you a disservice if he or she did not prepare you in some way for your next venture by discussing these topics at least a little.

One thing a loyal assistant ought to always be entitled to is career advice. The composer will more than likely have no shortage of stories to tell, lessons learned from past successes, mistakes, or even just little tidbits that prove valuable down the road. If you, as an assistant, aren't getting those morsels of information, it is encouraged that you try and seek those out in a tactful way. At an appropriate time, ask something like, "Do you find it easier to talk to a director in here in the studio or at another place?" The busier composers may not give you an answer right away, but it may remind them that there should always be some level of regularity to talk about being a professional creator so you can soak up these kinds of things. During the more significant slow periods (between projects, for example), it's a good time to ask for an evaluation of your performance. With that, you can really gain some

valuable insight into how your effectiveness and work ethic is perceived as well as target things you can improve on and ultimately take with you to the next chapter in your career.

Back to the tougher topics, the ideal time to discuss things like credits and royalties (only if your role would put you in consideration for those), is at the beginning of the job before any work has commenced. If you miss this opportunity, it's likely that it won't come up again until the next project (assuming they don't overlap) or when there's a break between projects and the studio resets to start all over again. Early in the process is also good, because if you are a new hire, you can afford to ask a tough question as you figure out the communication boundaries between you and the composer. So you might as well get the hardest questions out of the way. In the worst case, chances are you may be educated about those boundaries right there on the spot, but in all likelihood, you will not lose your job.

You might also ask yourself, the composer is wealthy, so how hard is it to give up a little cue sheet? The first answer to that is appearances can be deceiving. "How rich" *anyone* is, let alone a composer, might be more difficult to tell than you think. More often than not, you don't know the whole story. Aside from it being virtually impossible (and certainly unethical) for you to accurately determine his/her level of wealth, your composer may have an agreement, to which you are not privy, with the production company that requires them to be the **only** credited composer on the project. Additionally, AMPAS and the Television Academy use filed cue sheets to determine composer qualifications for award consideration. Under AMPAS rules, a film's score can be disqualified from Oscar consideration if it consists of music from too many composers. And the second answer is unless it is overwhelmingly obvious, you shouldn't assume a composer even has massive wealth, let alone wealth to freely dispose of on assistants. Whether or not the composer is wealthy, would that person be comfortable with a worker who makes his or her employer's level of wealth the primary concern? Prioritizing a big paycheck can be shortsighted and may undermine your success in the future. For an employer of any status, it is a major decision to hire help and he or she could very well be compensating you with money that hasn't been earned yet from the production. So you need to be respectful and understand there's a risk involved by hiring help because there always exists the possibility of that investment failing. In short, it should be okay to humbly and tactfully bring up these items for discussion, but there needs to be a level of sensitivity and smart timing in order to get the answers you're looking for. To put it simply, keep your artistic focus on the artistic passion that brought you into the field as well as all the things that support the composer while you are working for him/her. And keep your professional focus (basically the amount you want to be paid) on what you feel you deserve for **your** skill set and not what you think the composer can afford to pay you or reward you with.

7.5 - Managing Requirements, Setbacks, Stress

On any demanding project, there is always much work to be done. It will become challenging and it is up to the assistant on how he or she can personally manage the workloads. Sometimes what happens is the assistant will impress the composer by tackling a multitude of tasks early on when the stress level isn't very high. The composer sees this and piles more tasks on the plate of the assistant and before you know it, the intensity amplifies and the assistant runs the risk of not completing his or her

stuff. It's in the best interest of everyone to realistically estimate your work abilities and take on loads that you can maintain and manage. In the above case where the assistant is about to crash and burn, the best course of action is to tell the composer before it's too late that something may not get completed and while he or she may get disappointed for a moment, the truth will ultimately be appreciated and the composer can reassign the task so that it gets done.

If a mistake is made, which results in a chunk of work having to be done again, the amount of trouble the assistant is in is likely proportional to the amount of hours it will take to correct. Needless to say, you must be careful when doing anything in this type of work, but know that it's impossible to avoid the occasional **big** mistake. It just happens, and composers know this. The best thing is to remain calm and don't become defensive regardless of whether you feel you are at fault. Chances are there was some measure you could have taken to prevent the disaster. Instead, try not to let any harsh reaction or disciplinary action get you down. Take it all in stride and **assist the composer** in devising a plan to correct the error. Don't plan the solution all by yourself. And obviously, be careful while doing the error corrections.

You'll see very quickly that much of your skilled efforts can easily go unnoticed or underappreciated by the composer. It is a reality of the job, however, the attitude with which you approach everything will never go unnoticed. Be a team player and embrace the collaboration by being focused and nailing your first assignments, rather than try to volunteer yourself for too many things and fall short.

7.6 - Dos and Don'ts of Assisting a Composer

DOS

- Remember you are assisting with someone's career and livelihood, there will be opportunities for growth and learning, but your top priority is helping the composer succeed.
- Understand your responsibilities as soon as possible, ask questions to gain clarity, but respect the composer's time.
- Know the appropriate DAW like a master if that applies to you.
- Be on time, be reliable, be professional, and be consistent.
- Dress appropriately for the job.
- Always be ready to learn, and always have a way to log or record what you learned for later reference and be sure that method is acceptable to the composer.
- Be trustworthy, ask yourself in a situation what would the composer prefer? If you don't know, ask or wait to make a more informed determination.
- Protect the composer's interests from anyone who might be using you for information. This is surprisingly more common than you might think.
- Take note of ideas you have to improve the studio or workflows and be ready to present them when it's appropriate (and never when it's not appropriate).

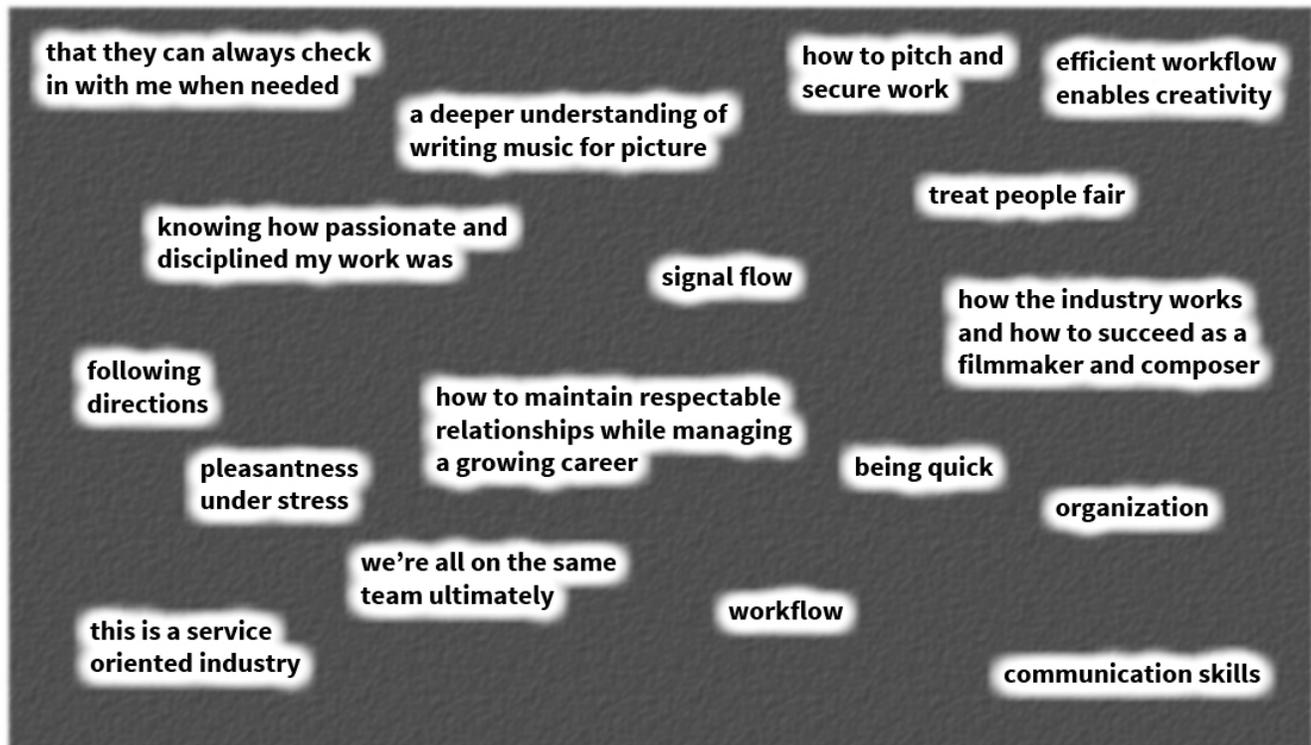
DON'TS

- Don't over-qualify yourself by saying you know things that you really don't. It's better to do the opposite and exceed expectations. Under-promise, over-deliver.
- Don't assume you know all the answers, if you profess something incorrectly, your credibility could take a nosedive.
- Don't add to the composer's stress level by showing stress of your own, try to leave that at home.
- Don't get complacent, always tactfully look for more efficient or better ways of doing things.
- Don't overreach and try to boost your own career using the composer's resources or clients. You must respect that boundary and nurture your own career independently by cultivating your own contacts.
- Don't ever put someone down in an attempt to bring yourself up

7.7 - Composer Poll: I wish my assistants would have learned _____ before working for me.



If my assistants move on from my studio having learned only one thing, I'd want that to be...



7.8 - Assistant Poll: The most valuable experience I gained from assisting was...



7.9 - Assistant Poll: The most humbling lesson I learned while assisting was...

you don't need all the gear in the world to write great music, just great ideas and good relationships with people

we are a tiny cog in a massive machine

you're always learning

that every decision, no matter how small, leaves a vapor trail

under-promise and over-deliver

learning to have more creative openness

you should never make it about your own career

you're never above making a mistake

how to gauge whether you'll be able to finish the task you're currently working on fast enough without additional assistance

putting in real hours and being expected to deliver correctly every time

everyone gets fired... no matter how great the music is

keep communicating, communicating is key

I'm not here to write my own music

that getting fired is a normal rite of passage

I do have skills that are in demand and can help others achieve their goals

acknowledging a mistake I made, apologizing for it, and then iterate based on feedback

a creative idea I fought for did not work out

that composing for TV/Film is HARD work

that what I actually know is very little

just how ingrained this protestant-capitalist "if you're not working, you're failing" mindset is in my own life... it was only through being pushed across too many lines and boundaries that I discovered my own biases and flaws, which has allowed me to correct course and start treating myself as a full human and not just as a "good worker"

proofread and double check everything... it's no fun when a session comes to a halt over a mistake that's your fault

if you're working as somebody's assistant, your only concern should be supporting their career, and making their job easier

clients are customers... even if they're not always right, they ARE paying

the minute you start thinking "what about me?" is when you'll start resenting the privileged positions you're in and start having false hopes from someone who has no responsibility to give you anything other than a paycheck for your time

it takes a team, despite the myth of the lone composer... and when the team falls apart, so does the project

finding a boss who will invest in and champion your career is a blessing and you should be grateful for any bit of guidance and support you can get from them, but be wary of believing that you "deserve it" on that you're owed anything

that a lot of composers don't care at all about your life, health, or career

some composers make millions of dollars and pay their ghostwriters shit

Chapter 8 - Tips and How to Protect Yourself

8.1 - Assistants Serving a Vision

There is a divide between assisting to earn a successful composing career in the future, or assisting to simply perform the work you are being asked to do, with no furtherance of your personal career. As with everything, the key to success of the assistant is through perspective (the point of view, not necessarily the Facebook group), and that perspective will help the assistant best evaluate what works and what doesn't. The assistant should know that with every team, there will always be interpersonal dynamics (office politics). And while it is important to build strong relationships in this industry, the assistant should evaluate things for him or herself as well as each individual relationship, which will have its own dynamic independent from the group (one peer might be inspiring and another may be a letdown). That said, if the group dynamic is positive, you probably are in a good spot and should take advantage of your time there.

As an assistant, no matter your skill level, connections, education, or background, leave your ego at the door. When you're walking into a composer's studio, you're entering a small universe that has taken thousands of hours to cultivate its unique culture and specialty. A healthy way to look at this is that you get to try your hand at serving the vision of another individual, and be a part of that person's community with a little bit of room to make mistakes and learn from them. You may realize that the composer approaches things in a wildly different way than you, but rather than judge a fish's ability to run, you may actually find beauty with how another person expresses his or herself and as a result you will learn something valuable that will stick with you forever. With this perspective, your efforts will be excellent building blocks for collaborating with other creatives in the future as you build your composing career.

8.2 - Signs of a Healthy Composer-Assistant Relationship

- Both sides feel comfortable communicating with each other
- The instructions of the composer are understood and executed correctly and consistently
- The assistant is motivated and brings energy to the job consistently
- At various times, both parties may compliment one another on how well things are going or give constructive comments to fix issues quickly
- There is a positivity in the atmosphere that the team can sense
- There is enough time to take breaks or rests to stay fresh
- The team is in-sync and running smoothly and efficiently
- The composer engages with the assistant(s) during his or her breaks/downtime
- The team, including the composer, aims to elevate one another's performance
- The composer takes time to share experiences and mentor the assistant(s)
- The composer consistently listens and considers input from the assistant(s)
- The composer and assistant(s) admit their faults openly and constructively

8.3 - Signs of an Unhealthy or Toxic Composer-Assistant Relationship

- The assistants are consistently underachieving or unmotivated
- An unresolved issue is lingering
- Important information is withheld from the composer or assistant or given at a bad time
- Contact between composer and assistant is being avoided
- The composer disciplines in a way that's not constructive
- The composer regularly uses abusive conduct or language in a way that makes the assistant intimidated or uncomfortable
- The composer makes hasty or reactionary managerial decisions without explanation (changing course, reassigning tasks, cancelling appointments)
- The composer keeps to him or herself more than usual
- The composer or assistant(s) don't respond in a reliable way to communication attempts
- The composer gives little or no useful guidance/mentorship
- The composer uses intimidation tactics to motivate assistants
- The composer purposely makes terms of agreements unclear so as to later compromise or take away benefits from the assistant(s)

8.4 - For the Assistant Who Wishes to Leave

The realization may come that the assistantship has run its course and there is nothing further to be gained from the working relationship with the composer other than repetition. As stated earlier in this guide, the assistant should try and resolve any issues that might be contributing to this realization and see if there's any remaining value to be gained before leaving. But if indeed it is time to part ways, it is best to give notice. In the corporate world, two weeks is the traditional warning time, but in the music business, it is not as easy to replace someone with the exact same or better qualifications, especially if the individual was a strong assistant. So if possible, the assistant should give 30 days notice (or more) and also try and coincide the departure with the close of a project. It is extremely difficult and basically crippling for the composer to have to immediately fill a vacancy and train a new hire in the middle of a project. If the reasons for quitting are so dire that immediate severance is the only way, then it becomes a situation where the relationship is likely to end and the assistant will have little or no chance of using that connection to the composer as a resource. So the assistant must be prepared for this. That said, no particular situation has only one way to handle it and if the composer understands the reason for leaving, then the relationship can proceed in its own way.

Assistants should **never** feel overwhelmingly pressured to stay with a composer. Their skills and fluency with the job may be difficult to replace, but it is the responsibility of the composer to find and cultivate the future candidates so that the seasoned assistants can continue with their careers as they see fit. It is wrong for a composer to make someone feel trapped. This is sometimes the case for employees from out of town (especially from out of the country) who have few connections and perhaps no safety net of friends or family that can support them if they can't make ends meet after being fired or deciding to quit a studio job. However, in Los Angeles, there are countless opportunities for non-music related jobs that can not only provide financial stability, but also leave enough time for the individual to keep developing as an artist and scout another assisting position. There are also government assisted programs like unemployment benefits that could help for a period of time while the assistant figures out his or her next move. In the case of international workers with visas, it is quite a different scenario, so it's best to have someone (preferably outside of the studio) who can be an additional resource for advice on international work matters. Before resigning though, the assistant should be cautioned that having no job is never an easy thing and because assisting gigs are often difficult to procure, there is no way to anticipate the length of time between the current gig and the next one. So ready-to-leave assistants must carefully consider the options and ultimately decide which course is better for them.

8.5 - Dangerous/Predatory Behaviors and How to Escape Them

As in any industry, the gamut of the working environment runs from incredible opportunities like gifts from the heavens down to the trenches, where predators lie in wait to take advantage of the vulnerable or uninformed worker. Don't be one of these victims and if you think you are at risk, refer back to the signs of an unhealthy or toxic composer-assistant relationship table in the prior **Sections 8.2 and 8.3**. A predatory composer's studio may be guilty of most if not all of those items. But other worse practices can exist too. Beware of any situation that requires the assistant to work for free. This should

immediately raise a red flag and require further investigation. Only students receiving college credit where the studio and university have an existing engagement for internships can work for free and even then there are limits to what is permitted in terms of work (see the Labor subsections in Chapter 4). Some composers will do trial periods to vet their candidates, which can be fine, but be sure it is only for a trial's worth of work. The candidate should not be working on more than 1 or 2 cues of a film or TV show to showcase his or her abilities during an audition period.

Also be aware of scams that lure candidates into paying their own money to be a part of some sort educational program or live-in assistant program where the assistant actually **pays rent** to be there and that ends up being the composer's tactic to not only manipulate the person into essentially paying to do labor, but is also offering experience that ultimately **won't** help the assistant in the long run. If it doesn't seem right, it probably isn't.

If the studio where you work engages in any of the following, you should end your term there and leave immediately, and if severe enough, report to the police or proper authorities:

- Sexual harassment
- Sexual advancement or assault
- Promise of pay, but no pay (excuses or delays made all the time) 45 days is generally the time period after which you can seek legal action for no pay (seek legal counsel or documents to verify)
- Harassment, intimidation, physical abuse
- Assault or threatening of physical harm/damage to your career
- Entrapment or limiting access to other people/resources
- Exposure to dangerous or hazardous chemicals/materials
- Illegal drugs/pressuring you to take them
- Alcoholism
- Any dangerous or detrimental behavior that could affect one's health or safety

8.6 - Where to Turn

If you have nowhere to turn to for advice on a dangerous situation that needs immediate attention, there are people who can help. The admins of Perspective on Facebook are incredible, caring resources and they can direct you to the right people to get you the help and/or advice you need. You can also send an email to assistthecomposer@gmail.com and someone will respond as soon as possible to provide some guidance.

Here are some additional resources that may also be helpful:

California Lawyers for the Arts - www.calawyersforthearts.org

Facebook - [Perspective: A Forum for Film, TV, and Media Composers](#)

Facebook - [Business Skills for Composers](#)

Thanks for reading and best of luck!

Appendix

A.1 - Composer Poll: Looking back on my career path, the worst piece of advice I was ever given was...

An agent can help you find work.

You MUST go to grad school to be successful in this industry.

Can't think of one.

Stay in your lane.

Say no to work that is beneath you.

Assuming that it was all about the music and no mention of simple small business skills.

Just take any gig that comes, no matter what it pays. Bad advice. Find quality people and quality projects.

Lie to get a job.

Every piece of advice has been constructive.

Start with small indie films and study and grow with filmmakers.

If you're not the best, find something else to do.

To be a composer's assistant.

That all assistant gigs start without additional music and not to ask about it.

P.R.O. isn't worth collecting.

To write smaller music.

A.2 - Further reading

[Seeking a Composer Assistant Job or Internship](#)

By Penka Kouneva (from *Penka's Masterclass on Cultivating a Career*)

[How to Get a Job as a Composer's Assistant](#)

By Daniel Ciurlizza (Perspective Forum)

[Being a Composer's Assistant](#)

Spitfire Audio

[The 5 best ways to get and keep a job as a Hollywood Composer Assistant \(or anything else\)](#)

By Michael A. Levine (from *Behind the Audio*)

[Lessons for a Composer's Assistant](#)

By Ryan Leach

[Working as a Composer's Assistant - What You Need to Know](#)

Dorico Blog

[Assistant to the Composer](#)

Berklee College of Music

A.3 - Text Sources

[Hiring Household Employees](#)

Internal Revenue Service

[6 People Metrics Your CEO Cares About](#)

GovDocs

[What is the Cost of Living in Los Angeles?](#)

By Amelia Josephson - SmartAsset

[Poverty and Lower Living Income Level Guidelines](#)

Los Angeles Almanac

[Overtime and Extended Work Shifts, Recent Findings on Illnesses, Injuries, and Health Behaviors](#)

Caruso, Hitchcock, Dick, Russo, Schmidt - CDC Workplace Safety and Health

[Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act](#)

U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division

[Independent Contractor Versus Employee](#)

Labor Commissioner's Office - State of California Department of Industrial Relations

[Yes, You Do Have to Change Jobs to Get Paid What You're Worth](#)

By Liz Ryan - Forbes

[Employees Who Stay in Companies Longer than Two Years get Paid 50% Less](#)

By Cameron Keng - Forbes

A.4 - Unfiltered Thoughts from the Anonymous Surveys

The following passages were taken (in no particular order) directly from general comments by composers and assistants in the March 2019 surveys conducted for this guide. They do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of this guide, but they do reflect the opinions of real, working members of the Los Angeles media music community.

1 The general problem is that being a good composer doesn't mean you'll be a good boss or teacher. It's a similar problem with professors at universities who have to do both fundamental research and teach. The two skill sets are fairly unrelated. The composer has a large number of responsibilities already so it's no surprise that mentoring and managerial duties often come way last, if at all.

2 If a composer can't manage a team or doesn't want to, that's fine. Perhaps bring on someone who can help take care of the project management side of things if your budget allows.

3 For the most part, assistants enter these relationships not as employees. If you want employees, make that clear from the get-go and pay them accordingly. But if you're hiring an inexperienced composer to assist you in a sort of apprenticeship role, you have a responsibility to fulfill your end of the bargain. That means letting them in on the process and participate as they're able and helping them learn. Train them in your ways and it will pay huge dividends down the line.

4 I hope that no one thinks this book has all of the answers, and that by reading it, they now "know everything" and don't need to pay serious attention to everything on the job.

5 There's such a large discrepancy in how and what assistants are paid, and Los Angeles seems to get continually more expensive. If there could be even a rough standard as to pay guidelines or hours for full/part time assistantships, I think it would help a lot of aspiring composers feel more comfortable making the move to L.A. to further their career.

6 I don't think this guide is very useful. I get the impression from the comments that a bunch of millennials complain a bunch and aren't used to how brutal this business is. Guess what? It doesn't get any easier when you're the composer on the credits and paying the assistants. It's much harder and less forgiving. This is one of the most competitive fields--there are probably 300-400 of us working on mainstream commercial projects for film and tv. I love the business, but it's not a gig for the faint of heart. I think most younger assistants need to realize they aren't cut out for my job yet, despite feeling like they are. Pay your dues, spend a decade learning how the business works, how to DELIVER for the producer, director, network, studio.

7 Be personable. You may be the best composer in the world, but if you have a bad attitude and no social skills, people will not want to work with you.

8 I have yet to be able to have an assistantship with any established composer. I look forward to being able to learn anything in the Assistant Guidebook that will better prepare me to go into an assistantship (eventually) with more knowledge.

9 Be early. Be nice to everyone, even if they're mean. Know your shit - technical, music and business. Be willing to listen to others. Be a source of solutions, not problems. Understand that as an assistant, you will not always get the glorious jobs, but if you do those well and with a good thing, then it can lead to good things. Also, there are many ways to success in this industry, the assistant route is simply one of them.

10 For me, it's finding other assistants that you can relate your experiences with. This is something that will help, defining what normal behavior is vs what some would call abusive. One of my most frequent thoughts has been, would this have happened if there was an actual HR dept? And most of the time the answer is no. Finding the support among your peers is the best advice I can give.

11 Because the job is so all-consuming, there's generally very little time to work on your own music. So also losing money being unable to exploit other music streams, unless you eventually get to be an additional music writer.

12 Big composers know they have a business advantage over the young/inexperienced and they'll cast a shadow over you, pressuring or hurrying you to accept a crappy offer.

13 The day I was hired, I was told I was required to help "every now and then" with personal stuff, but I ended up working for less than minimum wage and doing more than 80% Personal Assistant stuff, which I hated it. Pure exploitation.

14 I was treated very well by my boss, but many things (writing and performing opportunities, credit, cue sheet) were not offered to me until I asked for them. It never hurts to ask (respectfully, of course).

15 This industry is abusive and shit but I'm lucky.

16 Before you accept a job, if a place or composer has a reputation, it's probably right. Know what you're getting into and take it as an experience/boot camp, but NEVER see it as the one and only way. Yes it's a gold mine of information and knowledge, so as annoying as it sounds, you have to look at it as getting paid a little bit to learn a lot.

17 The composer I work for is an amazing boss, I love my current job. The literal only downside is the fact that it's part time, that makes the financial aspect difficult. Musically it's rewarding, and I do learn a lot.

18 The psychological toll of being at someone's call is SUPREMELY underestimated. I had nights crying because I felt one mistake would cause me to lose my job and have to move back home.

19 One of the biggest issues in our industry is that all of the power is at the top. The big composers can name a price, even if it is nothing, and tons of eager people are willing to take it because SO many people want to work in this industry. Newcomers need to stop undercutting each other and demand to make at least SOME money. No internship should be unpaid and nothing should ever just be for "credit" only. Even guys who do pay often WAY underpay their employees simply because they can get away with it. I have also witnessed a lot of sexism in our industry. Newcomers need to talk to each other openly about how much they get paid. It wasn't until I talked to another intern that I found out I made more than her even though we got the job at the same time and had the same level of experience.

20 When I was offered the job, I was offered the salary of \$20,000/year. I expressed that it would be impossible for me to make this work, after which the salary was bumped to \$24,000. I've worked my way up to being paid \$35,000, and my employer has expressed to me that it will not go higher than this.

21 The system rewards people (like me) who have a safety net and can afford to work for nothing. It's a deal with the devil. Those who are, on the other hand, financially vulnerable either cannot take these jobs, or afraid to rock the boat with their boss for fear of losing their income source.

22 I'm also lucky that I at least received partial cue sheet. Peers of mine who work on far more reputable (and profitable) TV/movies get 0% cue sheet. Nothing beyond their salary. And they consent to it because they know someone else will happily take their position if they walk.

23 I do about half tech work and half just cleaning, pet sitting, and other personal assistant duties. I don't get to do anything creative unfortunately.

24 Some composers are a bit paranoid about their assistants, other composers etc., and the distrust can create a level of distrust amongst everyone as a result.

25 While it's totally natural to have a sense of self protection, it can make things more and more volatile the more and more it is thrown around as an issue.

26 Composers should know who they are hiring and be transparent about what they are seeking/offering and run their business/draft contracts in accordance to that.

27 I had great amenities and it was only an "internship" (albeit paid)

28 This job was for my "best" boss, personality-wise, but it was still pay-to-play at the end of the day. I went significantly further into debt to keep this job...

29 This job is actually my side gig, ~10 hr/week, so it's not the worst thing that I only get \$20/hr. Couldn't support myself on it if it were full-time though.

30 I previously worked as an assistant to a composer, but I am now a freelance writer for several LA-based composers.

31 I feel like I'm the lucky one. Every single assistant I know is struggling financially and getting sick by working too much.

32 The final project/event I was paid more. Wish that standard was in place for the previous jobs. It was for others involved.

33 I feel lucky that my boss is definitely one of the more generous and opportunistic composers in LA. The hours are almost always difficult but there are still good people in the industry that can make it all worth it. :)

34 I was flown over from a different country with a guarantee of at least 2 years of assistant work. My boss is now a good friend and he looks out for me. I am aware that I am one of the lucky ones.

35 I'm too old and way overqualified for my position. Switching from another musical field though so i expected to eat shit for a while.

36 You've got to be kidding with some of the questions you asked. Have you had any experience with film composers assistants? Many of your questions are so far off the mark as to make me wonder.

37 My offer was a lot higher than normal because I came into this job with a lot of prior experience. I also negotiated on top of that offer because we do not get health insurance OR paid vacation. We do get paid sick days, however.

38 I started this job right out of school, so my lack of experience has made it more challenging. My pay is not amazing, but others who work in the industry have said my pay is fair considering my lack of experience.

39 I honestly thought about every single possibility before taking the job. Actually I was told my by bosses (mostly in a negative way, but also being impressed on how prepared I was to potentially lose a job) that usually assistants just take the job without all the negotiations I've done again because "come on man, you are just starting out, you are just an assistant, we know you need to pay rent like us, but 'you are just an assistant'". I proved them wrong, and gained what I wanted financially. What I would have loved to do is knowing that yes \$4000 a month are not bad for a beginner assistant, but in LA might not be enough or I should have considered more the fact that it is a stable job only for 7-8 months a year.

40 Save up as much as possible or take a loan out so you can do the job without having to be stressed out financially. The job is hard enough, the additional stresses just make the experience worse. At the time, I was finishing up classes and working, so I felt buried by the responsibilities and financial burdens of school and work was not compensating me close to enough.

41 Create an LLC and business account immediately. Even if you work for another composer, there will occasionally be freelance gigs/additional 1099 income which roll in and it can be hard to manage your finances when everything is coming into one account. This also simplifies balancing your expenses with any freelance income. When you're an assistant and also attempting to take on outside work, there is little time to stay organized, and the last thing you want is to lose track of your money.