

Aerial Day Prep Checklist

A friendly starting point for planning a shoot with aircraft or drones. Every production is different, so use this alongside conversations with your aerial coordinator.

01 Pre-production

- ☐ Share scripts, boards, previs or reference clips early
- ☐ Bring in your aerial coordinator before locking the schedule
- ☐ Agree on platform(s): helicopter, airplane, jet, drone or a mix
- ☐ Build a shot list with priorities, so the must-haves fly first
- ☐ Confirm camera, lens and gimbal package with the aerial DP
- ☐ Plan ground units, picture vehicles and stunt rehearsals

02 Permits & authorities

- ☐ Allow lead time for approvals, waivers and filming permits
- ☐ Permits coordinated with the appropriate aviation authorities
- ☐ Local film office, landowner and municipal permissions in hand
- ☐ Notify neighbors, police or fire as the location requires
- ☐ Keep copies of all approvals on set and with the aerial team

03 Locations & airspace

- ☐ Scout with the aerial team; note wires, towers, trees and terrain
- ☐ Identify nearby airports, restricted areas and flight paths
- ☐ Choose base, fuel and landing zones; secure and mark them
- ☐ Plan crowd control and keep non-essential people clear
- ☐ Check sun position and time of day for each setup

04 Weather days

- ☐ Build at least one weather contingency into the schedule
- ☐ Agree go / no-go criteria and who makes the call, and when
- ☐ Watch wind, visibility, ceilings, heat and marine layer
- ☐ Have an alternate ground schedule ready if aircraft stand down

05 Comms & radio

- ☐ Assign channels: air-to-ground, ground units and production
- ☐ One clear voice to the aircraft; agree call signs and cues
- ☐ Radio check with every unit before the first flight
- ☐ Backup comms plan if radios or cell coverage drop
- ☐ Simple, shared language for "cut," "hold" and "abort"

06 Video village & downlink

- ☐ Confirm live downlink needs (e.g. Starlink-connected video)
- ☐ Set up video village with sightlines, shade and power
- ☐ Decide who views live and who gives notes to the air
- ☐ Plan media handling, playback and on-set backups

07 Safety briefing

- ☐ Full cast and crew briefing led by the aerial coordinator
- ☐ Walk through each shot, flight path and safe zones
- ☐ Rules around rotors, props, landing zones and approach
- ☐ Anyone can call a stop; questions are always welcome
- ☐ Medical, fire and emergency contacts posted and known

08 Contingencies

- ☐ Backup shots and alternate setups for each sequence
- ☐ Plan for aircraft or equipment swaps if something is down
- ☐ Buffer time for rehearsals, resets and fuel turns
- ☐ Wrap check: debrief, note what to repeat or improve

Planning an aerial day? We are always happy to talk through your shots and help you build a safe, practical plan.

General guidance only. Requirements vary by location, aircraft and production; always follow your aerial coordinator's direction.