



What is...

An Assistant Engineer

An assistant (sound) engineer plays a pivotal role in supporting the rest of the production team. Often seen as an entry-level position, the assistant takes on tasks delegated by the sound engineer, producer, or artist to ease the pressure of the session or live show. This enables the rest of the personnel to focus on critical decision-making and the performance itself.

Responsibilities for assistants may include setting up microphones, patching cables, line checking, and session preparation. They're often responsible for software setup and basic troubleshooting as well. The assistant is usually the first to arrive and the last to leave. Beyond engineering tasks, the assistant engineer may also be required to run errands such as getting lyrics or charts printed, ordering food and drinks, and making tea and coffee.

From a skills perspective, assistant engineers require much of the same technical know-how as lead engineers, albeit often with less experience. Strong communication skills are particularly important for assistant engineers, as they need to understand and execute instructions from multiple team members. Additionally, they often possess specialised knowledge in certain domains, such as the quirks and patching of a specific recording studio. Freelance engineers, who may only hire a certain studio from time to time, often rely on the in-house assistant to navigate these nuances.

Assistant engineers typically work out of a studio or venue with which they become very familiar. This familiarity often makes them invaluable, especially when troubleshooting issues. However, they can also develop a strong rapport with producers and engineers, and may be asked to travel with them to various facilities they've never worked at before.

Career-wise, assistant engineers generally outgrow the role and ascend to positions as lead engineers or producers. During their time as assistants, they will likely be running their own, smaller sessions and acting as lead engineers for emerging talent.

While the role of assistant engineer has become less common due to shrinking budgets, the energy and focus an assistant brings are well worth the investment. Assistants allow everyone else in the session or at the event to be more present, ultimately resulting in a better outcome for all. The assistant engineer can be considered the unsung hero of the studio or live show, ensuring that everything runs smoothly.

