



Drone Exploring: Career Spotlights

Cinematography — Post

Overview: This session takes a serious look at drone cinematography as a career: what aerial cinematographers and drone videographers do, the FAA Part 107 certification required for paid work (available starting at age 16), typical industry roles and pay, and how to start building a portfolio. Explorers plan a mock client shot list and map out the concrete steps toward this career path.

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the qualifications, certifications, and skills needed for a career in drone cinematography.
- Learn what the FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate is, who needs it, and the minimum age (16) to hold it.
- Identify entry points into the industry (real estate, events, commercial production, film) and realistic pay ranges.
- Practice planning a professional aerial shot list for a mock client project.

SUPPLIES

- Laptop and projector to show sample professional aerial demo reels
- Printed handouts: Career Pathway — Drone Cinematographer and Shot List Planning Template
- Whiteboard or flip chart and markers
- Optional: an actual camera drone for a supervised outdoor flight demo, flown only by a Part 107-certified pilot
- Optional: printed or digital copy of FAA's free Part 107 study guide (faa.gov/uas)

ADVISOR NOTES

- This session is career-focused: use real pay ranges, real certification requirements, and real portfolio expectations rather than a hobbyist framing.
- Any live drone flight demo must be conducted by a Part 107-certified pilot, following FAA rules and council aviation or tower policies.
- Encourage Explorers who are 16 or older and interested to look at the FAA Part 107 study guide as a concrete next step after this session.
- Consider inviting a guest speaker who works professionally in aerial cinematography or videography (local production company, real estate photographer, news station drone operator) — see Optional Extensions.
- If no guest speaker is available, Advisors can run the entire session using this outline, the Career Pathway handout, and the resource links below.

SESSION OUTLINE

- **Welcome and Icebreaker** (10 min)
 - “If you could film anything from the air, what would it be and why?”
- **Safety and Regulatory Moment: FAA Part 107** (10–15 min)
 - Who needs a Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate: anyone flying a drone commercially or for compensation.
 - Minimum age to hold the certificate is 16.
 - The knowledge test covers airspace, regulations, weather, loading, and emergency procedures.
 - Discuss airspace authorization (LAANC), no-fly zones, and why insurance matters for paid work.
- **Mini-Lesson: The Business of Drone Cinematography** (15–20 min)
 - Industry roles: aerial cinematographer, freelance drone pilot, real estate social media content creator, second-unit film crew.
 - Typical pay: entry-level commercial work around \$500-\$1,500/day; established freelancers often earn \$10,000-\$30,000/year part-time, with full-time professionals reaching \$60,000-\$100,000+ once they have a client base.

- Equipment costs and required software (video editing tools such as Premiere Pro or DaVinci Resolve).
- **Activity: Build a Shot List** (20–25 min)
 - Small groups act as a production company pitching aerial coverage for a mock client (a wedding, a real estate listing, or a sports event).
 - Use the Shot List Planning Template to plan 5–8 shots, noting camera angle and movement, purpose, and estimated time for each.
- **Activity: Portfolio Planning** (15 min)
 - Each Explorer sketches a plan for the first 3 clips of their own portfolio or demo reel, using safe, legal, local locations.
- **Wrap-Up Discussion** (10 min)
 - Groups present their shot lists.
 - Discuss the concrete steps (certification, gear, practice) needed to pursue this as a career or side income.

REFLECTION SECTION

Advisor Note: Some sample questions are below. They are designed to help the participants apply what they have learned to their own interests. You are welcome to use these questions or develop your own.

Focusing Questions

- What surprised you about the business side of drone cinematography?
- Which industry — film, real estate, sports, or events — sounds most interesting to you?

Analysis Questions

- Why is the FAA Part 107 certification required for paid drone work?
- What skills beyond flying does a drone cinematographer need?

Generalization Questions

- How could you start building experience or a portfolio now, even before you're certified?
- What other careers combine a technical certification with a creative skill, the way this one does?

Challenge: This week, research one FAA Part 107 test-prep resource and identify a realistic study timeline to test at 16 or as soon as you're eligible.

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Guest Speaker: Invite a working aerial cinematographer, drone-certified real estate photographer, or local news station drone operator to speak about their career path and take questions, in person or by video call.

Advisor-Led Option: If no guest speaker is available, Advisors can run the full session using this outline, the Career Pathway handout, and the resource links below — no outside expert is required.

Resource Links: FAA Part 107 overview (faa.gov/uas/commercial_operators); FAA's free Remote Pilot study guide; sample demo reels from professional aerial cinematographers.

Extension Project: Explorers who are 16 or older can begin studying for the actual Part 107 knowledge test using the FAA's free study guide.

Handout: Career Pathway — Drone Cinematographer

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A typical path into this career looks like this:

1. Interest and Hobby Flying

Learn to fly recreationally; practice basic camera composition and editing.

2. Practice and Portfolio Building

Shoot free or low-cost local projects to build a short highlight reel of your best shots.

3. FAA Part 107 Certification (Age 16+)

Pass the FAA knowledge test to legally fly for pay; learn airspace rules and authorization.

4. Entry-Level Paid Work

Real estate listings, local events, and small commercial jobs are common starting points.

5. Building a Client Base or Full-Time Career

Freelance income often ranges \$10,000-\$30,000/year part-time; full-time professionals with an established client base can reach \$60,000-\$100,000+.

Handout: Shot List Planning Template

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Use this template to plan aerial coverage for your mock client project.

Shot #	Description	Angle and Movement	Purpose	Est. Time
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				