

ACCESS

so much fun, **so little time**

EVER WONDER HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN TV SHOW? *MARY-KATE AND ASHLEY* SHOWS YOU WHAT (AND WHO) IS AT WORK BEHIND THE SCENES ON A NEW TV SERIES.

In the beginning, there was an idea — Mary-Kate and Ashley and their creative team approached the Fox Family Channel to bring Mary-Kate and Ashley back to weekly television. The girls' movies are wildly popular, as were the reruns of "Two of a Kind" and other shows featuring Mary-Kate and Ashley. The timing seemed perfect: It had been two years since their last series.

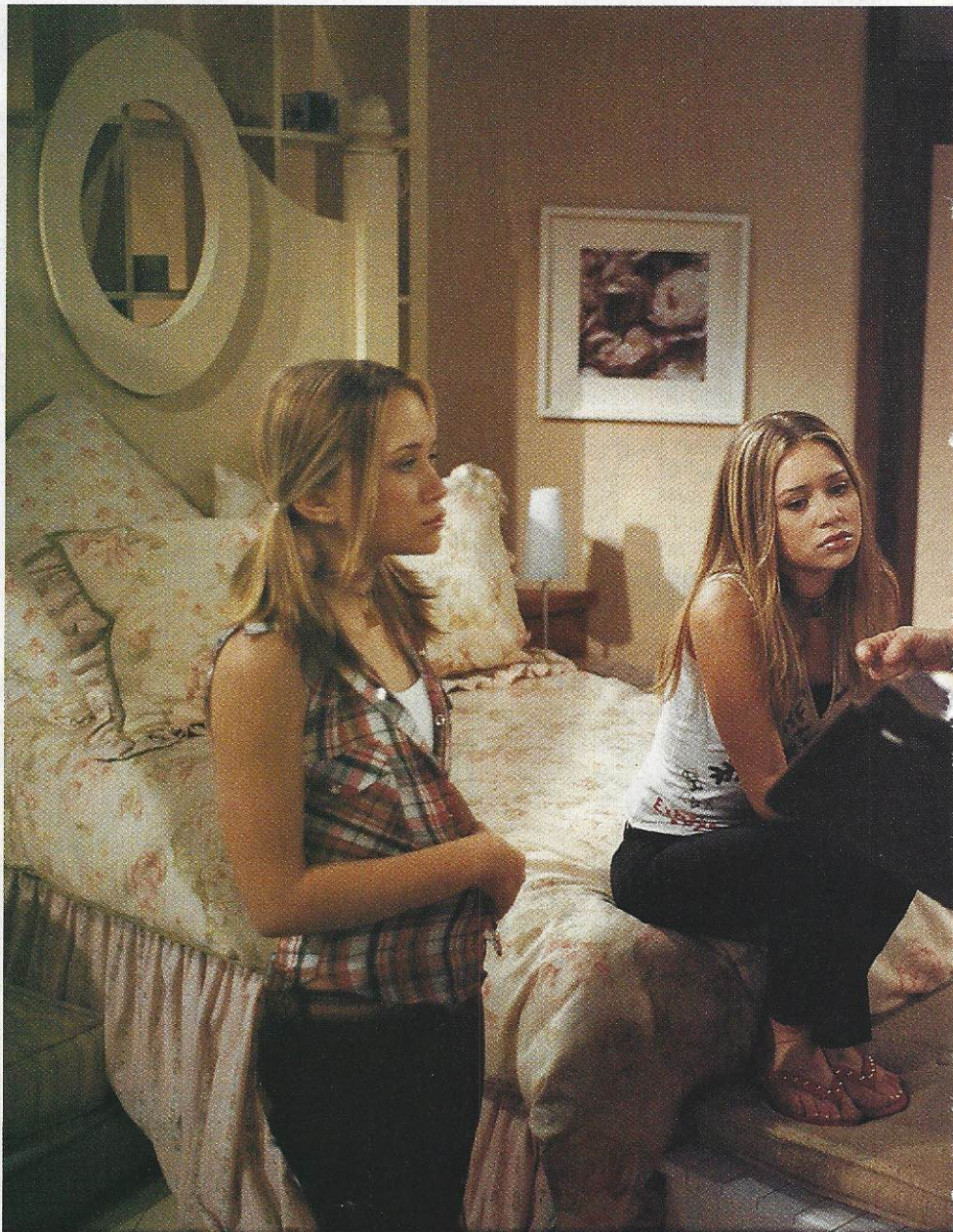
So how did they get from idea to telecast?

Pretty quickly, actually. Going on the theory you can't get enough of a good thing (potato chips, cute shoes, Mary-Kate and Ashley — see how it works?), network execs took very seriously the proposal from Mary-Kate and Ashley, their and their production company.

And the verdict? The series "So Little Time" was born.

As easy as all that sounds, a lot more was involved in bringing the show from the idea stage to what you'll watch — and a lot more people, too. There are producers, directors, casting directors, hair, makeup and fashion-advisors, camera men, editors, set designers, sound engineers, supporting cast, crew, caterers... the list goes on and on.

Mary-Kate and Ashley wanted to give you more than just a sneak peek at their new show — they wanted to show you all the hard work it takes to make an episode, just one of 26 episodes. That way, when you tune in for the first episode — and the 25 others that follow this season alone — you can appreciate the incredible effort and teamwork that goes into putting together a TV show. Usually, only a single episode - called a pilot - is ordered by the network. From the very start, 26 episodes were ordered of "So Little Time."





STEP 1: Laying the Foundation

Before a single line of script can be written, before a director can ever yell “roll ‘em,” writers/creators establish the show’s basic premise. That’s the who, what, where, when, how and why that will be the basis for all future plots, and the tone and feel of the show, too.

Once the writers/creators come up with the basic premise, it’s taken to the production team/stars (in this case, Mary-Kate and Ashley and their creative team), as well as the network. Everyone provides feedback and ideas (Mary-Kate and Ashley were very actively involved); lots of rewrites are done, and the result is a final outline, although the final outline evolves with plenty of rewrites once scripts are actually written. Here’s a look at the outline for “So Little Time”:

► **WHO:** Riley and Chloe Carlson, 14-year-old sisters. Though they look alike, their personalities are different. If their names sound familiar, you probably saw “Winning London” (Mary-Kate and Ashley played Riley and Chloe Lawrence). But just to keep viewers on their toes, the series has Mary-Kate playing the sister named Riley (she was Chloe in the movie) and Ashley playing the sister named Chloe (she was Riley). Mary-Kate and Ashley thought change would be fun.

The girls interact with a few regular characters every week: their parents (Mom and Dad have now separated but still share a fashion design business and spend lots of time together.); Manueto the housekeeper/nanny (he’s been with the girls since they were born and has become a member of the family); Larry — a guy who’s head-over-heels into Riley, yet not at all interested in Chloe (creating some comical tension); and Teddy, a gorgeous supermodel evolving from the fear of breaking a nail to being the confidant of Mary-Kate and Ashley.

► **WHAT:** Family life — with all its complex relationships — and the joys, trials and tribulations of being teenage girls. In a nutshell, real girls dealing with real issues.

► **WHERE:** Malibu, California. Mom has a spectacular-view beach house; Dad lives in a trailer. The girls share the two residences.

► **WHEN:** Here and now — the show is set in 2001.

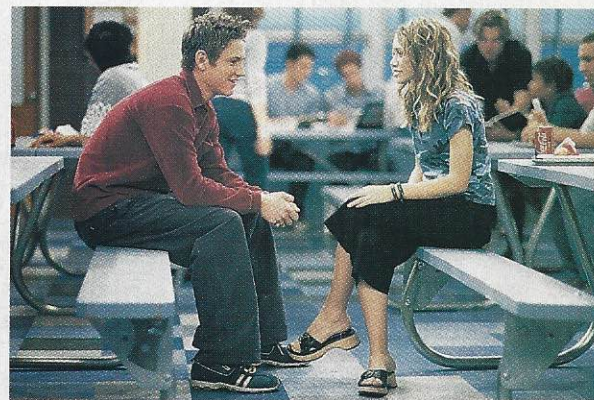
► **HOW:** Will this become a fresh and fun TV series? The show’s first episode must serve as the basic building block for the episodes that follow. The characters and

situations have to be interesting enough to generate endless plot possibilities in the future. This one certainly has potential: boys and boy trouble, parents behaving more like kids than grown-ups and even growing up themselves, sibling rivalry, high school, Malibu-living, the heartfelt fun of a lifelong domestic servant, the life of a supermodel, the world of fashion design...

STEP 2: Picking the Perfect Players

A casting director is hired to bring all the characters to life. Los Angeles is full of actors; the casting director has her hands full finding just the right ones. First, she contacts all the agents in town and announces what the show is looking for (for example, “WANTED: athletic 14-17-year-old boy to play a school jock”). Agents then send photos and resumes of clients they think fit the bill — and the casting director often has to interview hundreds of kids before paring it down to a few super-talented finalists. She then has to prepare them exhaustively for the audition.

At that point, Mary-Kate and Ashley and the show’s creative team sit in on the auditions and vote for their favorites. Mary-Kate and Ashley were at every casting audition for the key roles, casting the final vote.



Top: Ashley and Manueto
Bottom: Mary-Kate and Ashley
discuss direction on the set of
their new show.

Right, top: Ashley chats with
Larry, her onscreen friend.
Right, bottom: The “So Little
Time” characters on the
Malibu house set.

STEP 3: The Dream Team

Once the “principals” (the regular starring roles) are cast, it’s time to hire the people behind the cameras. A director will call the shots — literally — and work with the actors on everything from motivation (what is the character thinking or feeling?) to where they should stand on the soundstage. (But Mary-Kate and Ashley and their team are often directing the directors.) Set and prop designers will literally build the soundstage and decorate it so it looks exactly like the inside of a teenager’s bedroom, an ocean-view living room, a classroom, a lifeguard station, a trailer — whatever the scene calls for.

A costume designer works with the girls on their cool wardrobes (fashion is an integral part of the show. Mary-Kate and Ashley have their own costume designer); cameramen, hair and makeup artists, production assistants, even a caterer come on board. All the jobs vary, but the goal is the same: to turn out an episode of “So Little Time” in so little time — four days to shoot 1 and 1/3 episodes.

STEP 4: Table Talk

The four executive producers — Robert Thorne, Mary-Kate, Ashley and Eric Cohen — have a table read where they sit down with the writers, director and cast as they read the script from Act 1 to End — this is called a “table reading.” A production assistant (or P.A.) times it with a stop watch to see if it’s too long or too short for the half-hour time slot (if it is, sometimes rewrites will need to be done ASAP).

A production meeting follows where the script is read once again, but this time with the wardrobe and prop people who evaluate what the characters will need to be wearing and doing. For example, if the script calls for Chloe to be having a slice of pizza with her dad, then someone has to make sure a pizza (possibly two or three!) is on set for the scene.

STEP 5: Practice Makes Perfect

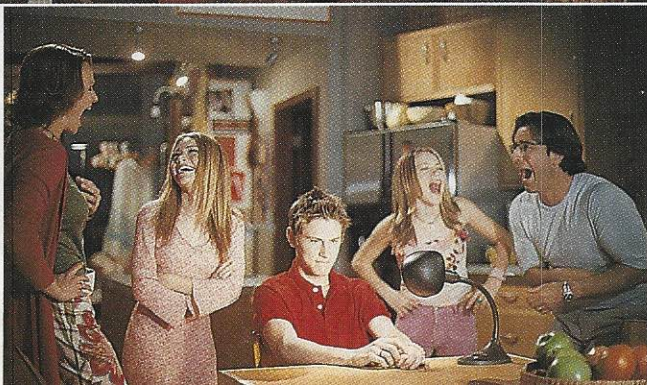
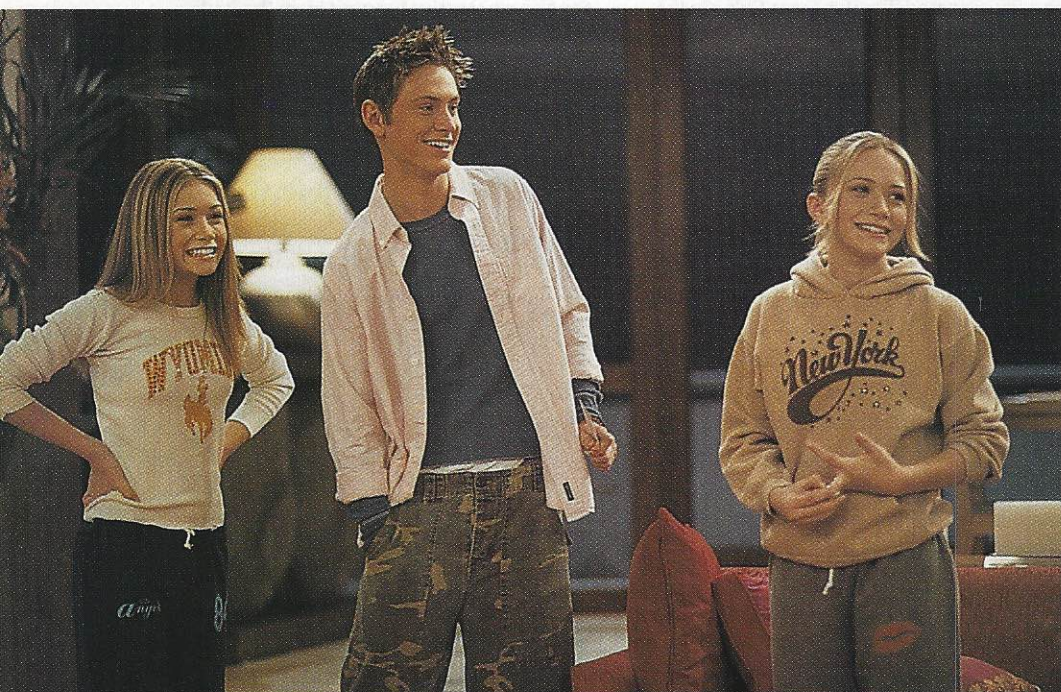
The countdown starts on Monday: That’s Day 1 in the life of an episode. The cast reports to the set and will rehearse the scenes while still “on book” (this means they carry their scripts around and read from them). During the day, Mary-Kate and Ashley must also spend three to four hours with their teachers studying (the law says that all teens under 18 have to go to school—even if they’re on TV). So on top of memorizing all their lines, they also have to know their algebra equations and master French (and you thought it was all glam and games).

At the end of the first day, around 4 p.m., the writers and producers watch a run-through (the whole episode is rehearsed). Based on that, they may need another round of rewrites (usually to make things funnier, shorter and snappier — better, that is). Yes, it might seem like a lot of revisions, but the script needs to be polished as much as possible — everyone wants it to be perfect.

Day 2 kicks off early in the morning. The girls go to school for a few hours and then rehearse. For the next run-through, the network execs are invited in and (again) some rewrites are made.

Day 3 is Camera Day — that’s when the cameras roll in and map out where they need to be to get their shots (for example, if Riley is walking through the door in Scene 3, the camera has to be aimed on the door — not somewhere else in the room). The process is called blocking and taping — and it takes all day. By now, the cast knows their lines by heart and is also expected to “be on their marks.” This means the director has told them to stand in a specific spot when they say a line — and that is where the camera will be pointing.

Each shot usually requires three or four cameras each recording a different angle. For example, if Chloe and Riley are talking, one camera shoots a closeup of Mary-Kate, one shoots a close-up of Ashley, and the other shoots a wider angle of them together. Later on, an editor will choose the angle that works best.



Top: Mary-Kate and Ashley hang out on the set with Larry. Bottom: The cast of “So Little Time” puts the comedy in sitcom(edy).

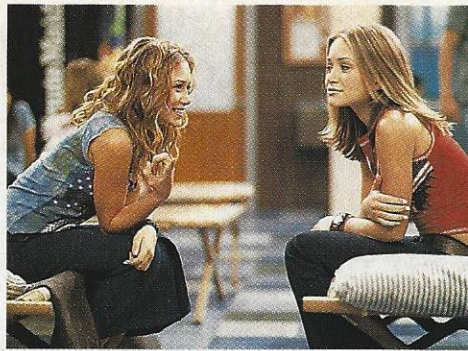
Mary-Kate and Ashley, in a downtime moment on the set.

STEP 6: Live from Universal Studios...

The morning and afternoon of Day 4 is the last time the cast has to rehearse. Then it's time to let the audience in and tape the show for TV.

At 4 p.m., a few hundred eager Mary-Kate and Ashley fans pile into the soundstage at Universal Studios. Microphones are hanging everywhere to capture their laughter on the show's audio track. Backstage, everyone understandably has a little case of the butterflies — this is the first time the cast and crew will be performing the episode live in front of a studio audience.

The wardrobe, hair and makeup people make sure everyone looks great. The director and producers are on hand to ensure the taping runs like clockwork. The scenes will each be shot twice (Take 1 and Take 2) and between them, the cast will have to switch clothes, hairstyles and props and quickly move between sets. There's little room for mistakes — especially since hundreds of eyes are now watching! But just in case there are a few bloopers, post-production and editing will fix them, or the prior-day taping can sometimes be used.



STEP 7: Cut and Paste

Once the show is taped, editors put together a rough assembly of the episode (he might choose half a scene from Take 1 and the other half from Take 2). Music (the show's theme song and some incidental tunes between scenes) is added as well as any sound effects, exterior shots (Mom's house, the school, Dad's trailer) in post-production. The episode is also cut to exact time (allowing for commercials). Once all the tinkering is complete, everyone on the creative team (including Mary-Kate and Ashley) sees it, requests changes and then signs off before it goes to the network — and direct to your TV screen.

STEP 8: Start all over again!

Once the episode is wrapped, it's time to begin the whole process again on Monday. Just think: Only 25 more episodes to go and then another 26 next season. ■

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW IT ALL

PHEW! CREATING A TV SHOW TAKES A LOT OF HARD WORK, ENERGY AND CREATIVITY. HERE ARE SOME LESSER KNOWN ASPECTS OF TV PRODUCTION.

Licensing a theme song: A TV show isn't complete without a catchy tune opening it. An already published song is either licensed for use or theme song writers (yes, they exist) are hired to write a song.

The "So Little Time" theme song originally appeared in "Winning London." It is performed by the British group Arcana and is fun, upbeat and has good spirit. It inspired the TV series name.

Title logo: That cool graphic design doesn't just pop onto a TV screen. Usually an art director and graphic design team create the show's logo.

There were originally 60 versions of the "So Little Time" logo before Mary-Kate and Ashley and the other producers selected the one that was "modern, clean and elegant."

Selecting a studio/soundstage: A studio contains a soundstage which houses the show's set. To find a soundstage, the show's production company either looks for an appropriate setting or a location scout (yet another cool job hardly anyone knows exists) looks for a cool and appropriate outdoor set for the show.

The show's producers have a long-standing relationship with Universal Studios, which is why they chose that location. Also, the studio is located fairly near Mary-Kate and Ashley's school. Even though the girls attend school on the set while they work, they attend their real school at least 8-10 days a month, often much more and they can still participate in after-school activities there, too.

Finding a network: Usually a sitcom is developed and pitched to studios and networks. Here the heads of Dualstar Productions (Mary-Kate and Ashley's production company) originally approached Fox Family with the idea of creating Mary-Kate and Ashley specials, but Fox Family and Dualstar decided instead on a sitcom. Dualstar acts as its own studio and handpicked all the writers, cast, directors and others. Dualstar feels it's a perfect marriage since the network appeals to kids and teens and produces quality programming, and really loves working with Mary-Kate and Ashley.

