



The free guides

The Craft *Trilogy.*

Three guides, 46 pages.
Setup, performance and assembly.

Written by Ace
Filmmaker and Creative Director

CONTENTS

Read them in *this order*.

Each one starts where the last one stops. The first gets the camera in the right place, the second is what happens once it is rolling, the third is what you do with the footage.

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01	The First Frame	Where to put the camera, how to light it, and five scenes to shoot.	3
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YOUR FIRST THREE SESSIONS

One scene, *three passes*.

The fastest way to get value from these is to use all three on the same short piece, one session each, instead of reading everything first.

SESSION	READ	THEN DO THIS
1	The First Frame	Set up one of its five scenes and film it. The Sit-Down is the easiest place to start.
2	The Take	Film the same scene again, using the delivery drills. Keep both versions.
3	The Cut	Edit the better take using its passes, in order. Then watch it on your phone, muted and unmuted.

After that, keep the relevant guide open beside you whenever you film or edit. Nobody needs to apply all of it in a week.

Every guide ends on the same honest page: this is the craft, and what to say is a different job. When you want that half, the last page of each guide shows you the two ways in.



A Filmmaker's Craft Guide

The First *Frame*

How to shoot yourself on the phone you already own.
Angle, framing, light, and five scenes you can film this week.

Written by Ace
Filmmaker and Creative Director

START HERE

Craft is the half you can learn from a document.

This one gives you all of it. Where to put the camera, how high, how far, how to light your face with a window and nothing else, and five scenes you can go and shoot before the week is out.

What this is

Most people trying to build a brand on camera are held back by two separate problems and treat them as one. The first is that the work looks wrong: bad angle, flat light, a frame that makes them look smaller than they are. The second is that the work says nothing worth staying for.

This guide solves the first one completely. It is the craft layer, written down, with no gear to buy and nothing to sign up for. Read it once, then keep it open next to you the first few times you shoot.

What it deliberately leaves out

Nothing in here tells you what to say. No hooks, no structure, no posting plan, no positioning. That is not an oversight and it is not a tease. Better looking content with nothing to say is still nothing, and the part that decides what you say is a different job with its own system. It is not in a craft guide. There is an honest page at the end about where the line sits.

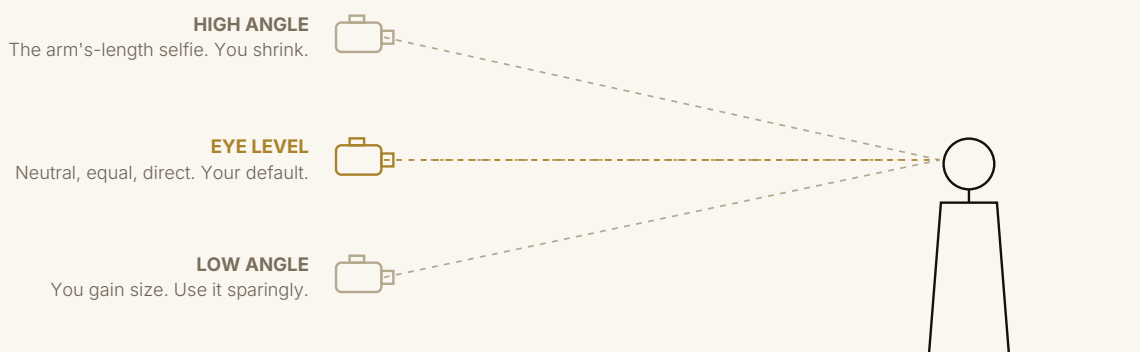
Three rules before anything else

- 01** Do not buy a camera.
The phone in your pocket out-resolves the cameras most films you love were shot on. Gear adds cost, a learning curve, and one more reason to delay. You will know when a camera earns its place, and it is not now.
- 02** Fix light before you fix anything else.
A well lit phone shot beats a badly lit cinema camera every single time, and it is not close. If you only change one thing after reading this, change where you stand relative to the window.
- 03** One setup, repeated, beats five setups attempted.
The people who post consistently are not more disciplined. They have one setup they can build in ten minutes without thinking. Build yours, then vary from it.

PART ONE · THE CAMERA

Height decides how big you look. Nothing else.

Before framing, before light, before a word is said, the camera's height has already made a statement about you. Most people get this wrong in the same direction, and it costs them more than anything else in this guide.



CAMERA HEIGHT, SEEN FROM THE SIDE

Put the lens at the height of your own eyes. Not your chest, not your chin, not held up in front of your face. Eye level is the angle of a conversation between equals, and it is the correct default for anyone trying to be taken seriously.

Above eye level shrinks you. It is the angle of every arm's-length selfie video ever recorded, and it reads as slightly apologetic no matter how confident the words are. Below eye level does the opposite: you gain height and presence. A very slight low angle, five to ten degrees, adds authority to a seated setup. Push it further and you are showing the ceiling and the underside of a chin, which reads as posturing rather than presence.

Keep the phone plumb

Height is one thing, tilt is another. A phone propped at eye height but leaned back on its stand bends the vertical lines of the room and adds weight under the jaw. Stand the phone up straight and raise the whole thing instead. Books work. So does a shelf, a windowsill, or a stack of anything flat.

PART ONE · THE CAMERA

How far back you stand changes the shape of your face.

Distance is doing two jobs at once. It decides how your features sit, and it decides whether the room behind you falls away or sticks to the back of your head.

The lens you use

Close to a wide lens pushes the nose forward and pulls the ears back. Standing further away and using a longer lens flattens those distortions out. Your phone has two or three actual lenses in it and they are not interchangeable.

LENS	USE IT FOR	WHY
Ultra-wide (0.5x)	Rooms, spaces, movement. Never faces.	It bends everything near the edge of the frame, including you.
Main (1x)	Your default for everything.	Best sensor on the phone. Stand back at least 1.5 metres.
Tele (2x or 3x)	The flattering close-up.	Stand 2 to 3 metres back. This is the most cinematic face lens you own.

Never use the digital zoom. If the number on screen goes past what your phone's actual lenses offer, it is cropping and guessing, and it looks like it.

What is behind you

Depth beats decoration. Standing thirty centimetres in front of a wall gives you a passport photo, and no amount of tidying the shelf behind you fixes it. Move two or three metres away from whatever is behind you and the background falls softly out of focus on its own, with no setting changed. That separation is most of what people mean when they say footage looks cinematic.

It compounds with the lens. Standing further back on the 2x, with the wall further back again, gives you the most flattering face and the softest background available on the phone, at the same time, for free.

Then check the frame for anything growing out of your head. A lamp, a plant, the corner of a doorway. Once you see it you cannot unsee it, and neither can anyone else.

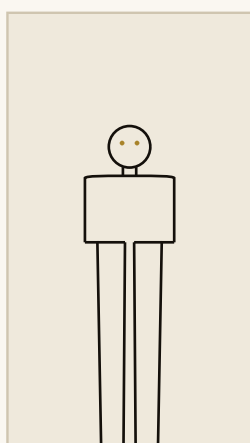
The room you shoot in is a choice

Most people film in the room they happen to be sitting in. Walk your home or office once, deliberately, and find the spot with a window on one side and three metres of depth behind it. That spot is now your studio. It took ten minutes and it costs nothing.

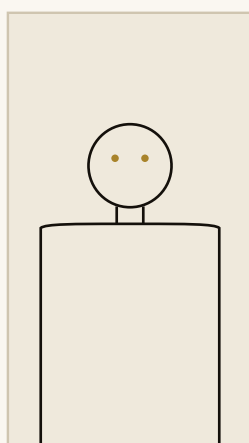
PART ONE · THE CAMERA

Three sizes. Learn what each one does to a viewer.

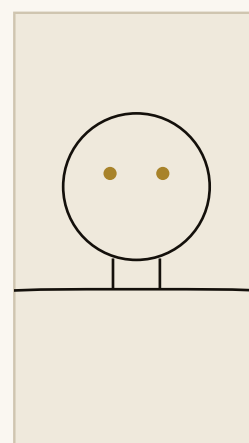
A shot size is not a preference. It is a decision about how close you are asking someone to stand to you, and viewers feel it whether or not they can name it.

**WIDE**

Room, context, movement.

**MEDIUM**

The workhorse. Hands read.

**CLOSE**

Pressure. The line that matters.

SIZE	WHERE IT CUTS	WHAT IT DOES	USE IT FOR
Wide	Full body plus room around you	Establishes where you are. Reads as production value.	Openings, movement, showing the space you work in
Medium	Waist to just above the head	Close enough to connect, wide enough for hands to read.	Your default talking shot. Most of everything.
Close	Chest to just above the head	Applies pressure. The viewer cannot look away politely.	The single most important line you will say

The one move that changes everything

Do not shoot a whole video at one size. A talking head held on a single frame for forty seconds has nothing happening in it visually, and attention leaks out from about eight seconds in regardless of how good the words are.

The fix costs you nothing. Shoot the same take twice, once medium and once close, then cut between them in the edit. You now have a change of size every time you want one, the cut hides any stumble, and it reads as deliberate rather than as an edit made to hide a mistake. Two takes of the same thing is the cheapest production value available to you.

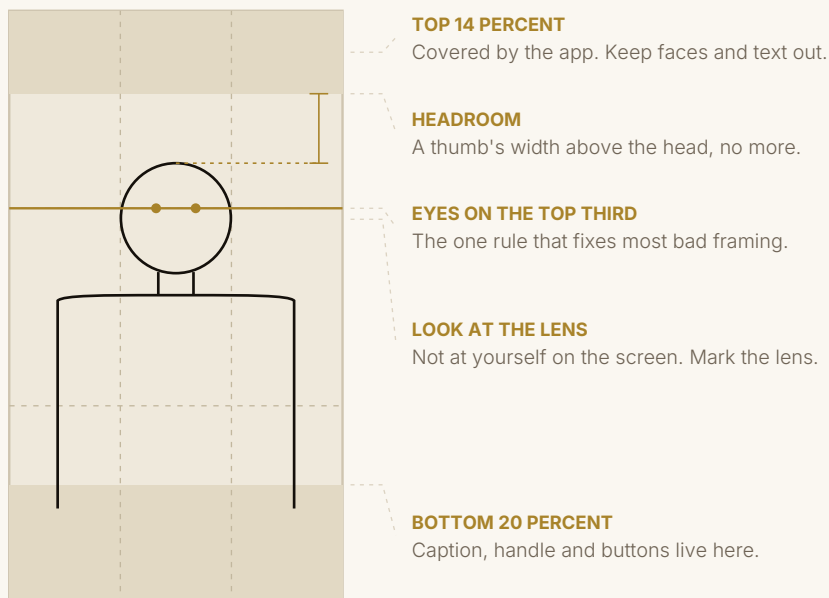
Give yourself an out

Shoot ten seconds of yourself doing nothing at the start and end of every setup. Just sitting, or looking away, or getting up. It costs twenty seconds and it means you always have something to cut to when a sentence goes wrong. Every filmmaker does this. Almost nobody shooting on a phone does.

PART ONE · THE CAMERA

Where you sit in the frame.

Vertical video gives you a tall, narrow rectangle and takes a third of it away before you have started. Knowing exactly what you have left is most of the job.



The four things to check

CHECK	GET IT RIGHT BY
Eyeline	Turn the camera grid on and put your eyes on the upper horizontal line. This single adjustment fixes most badly framed video.
Headroom	A thumb's width of space above your head on a medium shot. Most people leave a third of the frame empty above them and crop their own hands off the bottom.
Eye contact	Look at the lens, not at your own image on the screen. The difference is a few degrees and the viewer reads it instantly as looking away. Stick a small dot next to the lens and talk to that.
Safe zones	The app covers the top of the frame with its own interface and the bottom with your caption, handle and buttons. Keep your face, and anything you want read, in the middle band.

If you turn your body, leave room in front of you

Sitting square on is fine. Angled slightly is often better. But if you are facing left, put yourself right of centre so there is space in the direction you are looking. A person pressed against the edge of the frame they are facing feels cornered, and the viewer feels it without knowing why.

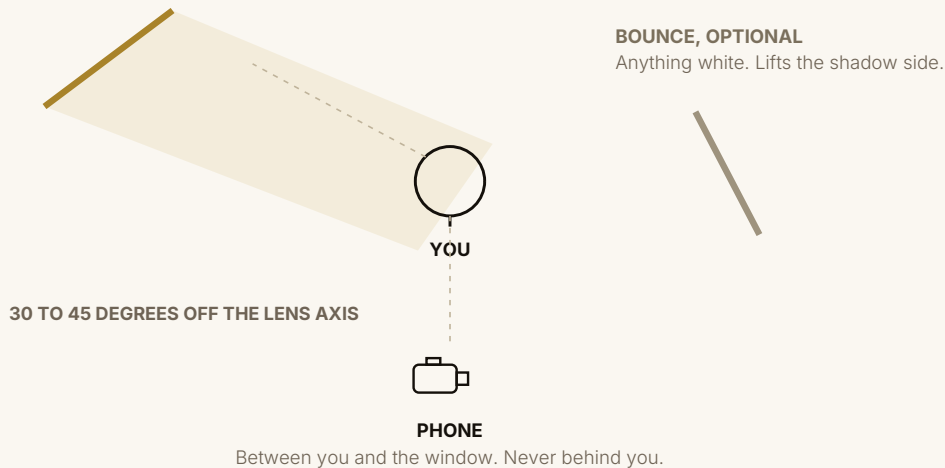
PART TWO · LIGHT

One source. In front of you. Bigger than your head.

That is the entire rule. Everything below is either an explanation of it or a way of achieving it in a room you did not choose.

WINDOW

Your only light. Stand 1 to 2 metres back.



THE WINDOW KEY, SEEN FROM ABOVE

Direction

Light coming from directly in front flattens your face into a mask. Light from behind turns you into a silhouette. Light from above, which is what a ceiling light is, drops your eye sockets into shadow, and eyes in shadow is the fastest way to lose a viewer's attention. There is a reason interrogation rooms are lit from above.

The angle you want is roughly thirty to forty-five degrees off the lens axis and slightly above your eyeline. That is enough to put a shadow down one side of the nose and one side of the jaw, which is what gives a face shape on a flat screen.

Quality

Soft light comes from a large source close to you: a window, an overcast sky, light bounced off a white wall. Shadow edges are gradual and it forgives everything. Hard light comes from a small source: a bare bulb, a phone torch, direct midday sun. It gives sharp-edged shadows and shows every texture on the skin. Soft is your default. Hard is not wrong, it is a choice, and it should be made on purpose.

The two second check: look at the eyes

Point the camera at yourself and look for the reflection of your light source in your eyes. If it is there, the light is in front of you and in the right place. If the eyes are flat and dark, move, and keep moving until it appears. This one check will save you more bad footage than any setting on the phone.

PART TWO · LIGHT

Three setups that work in almost any room.

01

The Window Key

Face a window. Stand one to two metres back from it, with your back to the room and the phone between you and the glass. Turn every other light in the room off. That is it, and it is a genuinely good-looking shot.

WHEN TO USE IT Any room with a window. Best two hours after sunrise or before sunset, or any time on an overcast day.

02

Window plus Bounce

The same setup, plus something white on your shadow side, about a metre away and angled back at you. A sheet of foam board, a white door, a bedsheet over a chair. It lifts the dark half of your face so the contrast stops fighting the camera.

WHEN TO USE IT When one side of your face is going too dark, which happens most on bright days.

03

Open Shade

Outdoors, standing just inside a doorway or under an awning, facing out. You get the huge soft light of the open sky without direct sun on your face, and a real background behind you instead of a wall.

WHEN TO USE IT When you want the shot to look like it happened somewhere rather than in a room.

Five ways people ruin good light

THE MISTAKE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	THE FIX
Window behind you	Your face goes dark, the window blows out white	Turn around. Face it.
Ceiling light only	Shadows under the eyes, brow, nose and chin	Turn it off, use the window.
Mixing daylight and lamps	One side of the face orange, the other blue	Pick one. Kill the other.
Direct midday sun	Hard black shadows, squinting, sweat	Step into open shade.
The phone torch	Flat, hard, and unmistakably filmed in a hurry	Never. Wait for daylight.

PART THREE · THE PHONE

Set it once. Never think about it again.

Ten minutes in the camera settings buys you every shoot after this one. The defaults your phone shipped with were chosen for holiday snaps, not for you talking to a lens.

SETTING	SET IT TO	WHY IT MATTERS
Camera	The rear one, always	The front camera is a smaller sensor behind a wider, more distorting lens. Prop the phone, use the timer, and stop filming yourself with the worse camera.
Resolution	4K	It gives your editor room to crop in and create a second shot size out of one take without losing quality.
Frame rate	24 or 30fps	24 is the frame rate of film and it is why footage reads as cinematic. 30 is safe. 60 only if you plan to slow it down.
Focus and exposure	Locked, every take	Press and hold on your face until the lock indicator appears. Unlocked, the phone will refocus and change brightness mid-sentence, and the take is gone.
Brightness	Slightly under	After locking, drag down a touch. A blown-out highlight has no information in it and can never be recovered. Slightly dark can always be lifted.
Grid	On	It is how you put your eyes on the top third without guessing.
The lens glass	Wiped, every time	A fingerprint smear is why footage looks hazy and low contrast. It lives in your pocket. Shirt corner, ten seconds, every single shoot.

Check storage and battery before, not after

4K eats both. Running out halfway through the one take that finally worked is a specific kind of pain, and it is entirely avoidable.

PART THREE · THE PHONE

Sound, stillness, and what is behind you.

Sound matters more than picture

People will watch a slightly soft image for a minute. They will not tolerate five seconds of echo and traffic. If you have to choose where to put your effort, put it here.

OPTION	WHAT IT COSTS	HOW IT SOUNDS
Get closer to the phone	Nothing	Fine, if you are within about 1.5 metres and the room is soft.
Voice memo in your shirt pocket	A second phone	Surprisingly good. Clap once at the start so you can line it up.
A clip-on microphone	The one purchase worth making	Clean and close, in any room, every time. Buy this before a camera.

Rooms with hard floors, glass and bare walls echo, and echo cannot be removed afterwards. Soften the room with a rug, curtains, a sofa, or move to a smaller one. Never set up near a fridge, an air conditioning unit or a road. Your ears filter that hum out in the moment. The microphone does not.

Holding the phone still

Handheld talking-head footage looks like a video call. Put the phone on something: a stack of books, a windowsill, a shelf, wedged upright in a mug. A cheap mini tripod is worth having and even that can wait a few weeks.

Moving the camera

Most of the time, do not. A locked-off frame reads as composed and it is the correct default. If you do move, move slowly and for a reason. A slow push toward someone speaking adds tension because it mirrors leaning in. A drift with no purpose just tells the viewer that nobody was in control of the shot.

Twenty seconds before you hit record

Lens wiped · rear camera · light in front of you · reflection visible in your eyes · eyes on the top third · exposure locked and pulled down slightly · nothing growing out of your head · nothing humming in the room.

PART FOUR · FIVE SCENES

Five setups you can shoot this week.

These are craft, not content. Each one is a way of pointing a camera that does a specific job. What you say inside them is yours.

01

The Sit-Down

YOUR ANCHOR SCENE

One repeatable setup you can build in ten minutes without a single decision. This is the shot you will use more than every other shot combined, so build it once, properly, and stop rebuilding it.

- SETUP** Seated, facing a window, phone on a stack of books at your eye height, two to three metres of space behind you.
- FRAMING** Medium. Waist to a thumb's width above the head. Eyes on the top third.
- LIGHT** Window key, everything else off. Bounce on your shadow side if you have one.
- LENS** Main lens at about two metres, or the 2x if you can get further back.
- MOVEMENT** None. Locked off. The stillness is the point.

The mistake everyone makes: Sitting further from the window than your background is, which lights the wall better than it lights you.

SHOOT IT IN 10 MINUTES

02

The Walk-In

MOTION IN THE FIRST SECOND

You enter an empty frame, walk toward the camera and stop. Something is happening before a word lands, which buys you the opening seconds that a static face has to earn the hard way.

- SETUP** Phone static and low on a surface, you starting four metres back.
- FRAMING** Starts wide, ends medium as you reach your mark.
- LIGHT** Open shade or a large window ahead of you, so you walk into the light.
- LENS** Main lens. Ultra-wide only if the space itself is worth showing.
- MOVEMENT** Yours, not the camera's. Mark your stopping point on the floor with tape.

The mistake everyone makes: Walking past the mark, so you drift out of focus at exactly the moment you start talking.

SHOOT IT IN 15 MINUTES

PART FOUR · FIVE SCENES

03

The Working Shot

THE ONLY ONE THAT PROVES

You, doing the actual thing you do. Hands first, face later. Every other scene in this guide is you saying something. This one is the only one where the camera shows rather than tells, which is why it is worth more than the rest of them.

- SETUP** Wherever the work actually happens. Do not tidy it into a showroom.
- FRAMING** Two sizes, always. A close on the hands, and a wide of you in the space.
- LIGHT** Whatever is already there, as long as it is in front of the work.
- LENS** Close on the main lens. Wide can go to ultra-wide for the room.
- MOVEMENT** Let the work move. Keep the camera still.

The mistake everyone makes: Performing the work instead of doing it. Hands move faster when someone is filming, and it reads as fake instantly.

SHOOT IT IN 20 MINUTES, WHILE YOU WERE WORKING ANYWAY

04

The Window Portrait

FOR ONE LINE A MONTH

A single close-up, side-lit by a window, almost nothing in the background. It is the most intimate shot available to you on a phone, and its power comes entirely from how rarely you use it.

- SETUP** Standing or seated close to a window, turned about forty-five degrees to it.
- FRAMING** Close. Chest to just above the head. Nothing else in frame.
- LIGHT** Window from the side. Let the far side of the face fall into shadow.
- LENS** 2x or 3x from two to three metres back. Never the wide lens this close.
- MOVEMENT** None at all. Not even a slow push.

The mistake everyone makes: Using it for everything. A close-up that appears in every video stops meaning anything and just looks like you own one lens.

SHOOT IT IN 10 MINUTES

PART FOUR · FIVE SCENES

05

The Threshold

DEPTH WITHOUT A LOCATION

Shot in a doorway, at the edge of shade, with the world visible behind you. It gives a shot somewhere to be without renting anywhere, and the doorway does the lighting work for you by cutting the sky down to one clean direction.

SETUP You standing just inside a doorway or under an awning, facing out.

FRAMING Medium, with yourself off centre and the space beside you left open.

LIGHT Open sky in front, roof or frame above cutting the top off. Free and soft.

LENS Main lens from two metres.

MOVEMENT Optional slow step forward into the light at the start.

The mistake everyone makes: Standing just past the doorway rather than just inside it, which puts direct sun on your face and undoes the whole setup.

SHOOT IT IN 15 MINUTES

How to use these together

Shoot the Sit-Down first and get it repeatable. That is your foundation and you should be able to build it half asleep. Then add one more scene a week. Five weeks from now you have five setups you can execute without thinking, which is the whole point: the reason people stop posting is almost never that they have nothing to say, it is that shooting it feels like a production every time.

Batch them. One afternoon, one setup, several pieces of content shot back to back while the light is still where you left it. Changing clothes between takes costs you two minutes and makes four videos look like four days.

Shoot everything twice

Once at the size you planned, once one size tighter. It doubles nothing about your effort and it doubles what the edit can do. This is the single habit that separates footage that cuts together from footage that sits there.

WHERE THIS STOPS

What this guide cannot do for you.

Worth being straight about, because the gap between the two halves is where most people stall, and no amount of craft closes it.

Everything in these pages is repeatable and teachable. Camera height is a fact. The window rule is a fact. You can read them tonight, apply them tomorrow, and see the difference in your own footage. That part is yours to keep.

What none of it decides is what belongs in the frame. Which parts of your business are worth showing a stranger. Which of your opinions is the one people will actually stop for. What you should be known for, out of the ten things you are good at. In what order any of it should arrive so it builds rather than scatters.

That work is specific to you, because it depends on answers only you can give. It needs a system for finding those answers, and ideally someone building it with you and telling you the truth about it, for long enough that the pattern holds without them.

The Cinematic Authority System

That second half is the program. Ninety days, one to one, thirteen calls, with a maximum of four clients at any time. It starts with two weeks of positioning before a single thing is filmed, builds the system that removes the blank page, then holds you to shooting it every week until the rhythm is yours rather than mine.

It is by application, and it is not for everyone. It is for people who already have a business worth being visible for, five to eight hours a week to give it, and no interest in being talked out of doing the work.

In the meantime, everything in this guide works whether you ever speak to me or not. Go and shoot the Sit-Down.



Two ways in

The craft is yours now.

The rest is the system.

If you want the other half, there are two ways in.

The **Feature** is the whole system without me: positioning, planning, filming, carousels and an AI setup. It opens soon, and because you downloaded this, you will hear first.

The ninety day mentorship is that system built with me, one to one: my eye on your work, my hands on the build, and someone holding you to it for ninety days. Four clients at a time, by application, at cinematicauthoritysystem.com

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A Director's Guide to Being On Camera

The *Take*

Where to look, what to do with your hands, and how to tell
a usable take from a stiff one. Nothing about what to say.

Written by Ace
Filmmaker and Creative Director

START HERE

The gap nobody teaches.

You can frame a shot properly and light it properly and still produce something nobody watches, because the person in it looks like they would rather be somewhere else.

Everything in here happens between pressing record and pressing stop. It is the part a director handles on a set, and it is the part almost nobody covers, because it is not marketing and it is not gear. It is performance, and performance is a craft with rules.

The good news is that being watchable is mostly mechanical. Eye line, hands, pace, stillness and knowing when to stop. Five things, each of which can be fixed deliberately. None of them require confidence, which is fortunate, because confidence is the output and not the input.

WHAT THIS GUIDE WILL NOT DO

It will not tell you what to say. Not a hook, not a structure, not a subject. That is a different problem with its own system, and it is not in a craft guide. Everything here works regardless of the words, which is exactly why it can be given away.

The five things

In the order they are worth fixing. The first one is worth more than the other four together.

WHAT	THE PROBLEM	HOW LONG TO FIX
Eye line	You watch yourself, so you read as looking down	One session
The start	The keeper take begins cold, because you began cold	One session
Hands	Held still, or held each other, both read as braced	A few sessions
Pace	Room energy arrives on camera as flat	A few sessions
Nerves	Adrenaline reaches the recording	Repetition, mostly

Who it is for

Anybody who has to be the person on screen. It assumes you are filming yourself, alone, with nobody behind the camera to tell you that your shoulders are up around your ears. That absence is the whole difficulty: on a set, somebody would simply say so.

How to use it

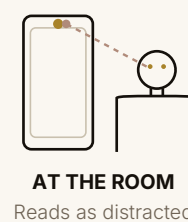
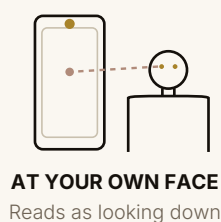
Read it once, then keep it open beside you for the first few sessions. The five drills at the back are the useful part. Each takes under ten minutes and fixes one specific thing, and none of them are meant to be posted.

ONE OF FIVE · EYE LINE

Look at the lens, not at yourself.

This is the fastest single improvement available to you, and almost everyone gets it wrong for the same reason.

When you film yourself, your own face appears on the screen. The screen sits below the lens. So you watch yourself, your eyes settle an inch or two low, and every video you make reads as very slightly downcast. Nobody watching can name it. They just trust you a little less.



Three eye lines, and what each one reads as to somebody watching.

The gap is worse on a phone than on a camera, because the screen is large and close and your own face is on it, moving. A camera gives you nothing to look at but the lens. A phone gives you the single most distracting thing in the room and puts it two inches below the place you are supposed to be looking.

Distance changes the maths. At arm's length the angle between lens and screen is wide enough to be obvious. Three metres away, the same physical gap is a fraction of a degree and nobody could see it even if they were looking for it. If you can get the phone further away and still be framed properly, most of this problem solves itself.

EYE LINE

Making it automatic

Willpower does not fix this, because the pull to check yourself is stronger than the intention not to. Remove the temptation instead.

- Put a mark by the lens. A small sticker or a dot of tape beside the front camera. You are not looking at a black dot on a phone, you are looking at the mark.
- Turn the preview off, or cover it. If your camera app allows it, hide the preview. If not, a strip of paper taped over the lower two thirds of the screen works and costs nothing.
- Move the phone further away. At arm's length the gap between lens and screen is a large angle. At two metres it is a small one. Distance forgives a lot.
- Use the rear camera. Better glass, and there is no preview to look at. Frame it once, then leave it.

Which setup, and what each one costs

SETUP	EYE LINE	THE TRADE
Handheld, arm's length	Worst. Wide angle between lens and screen.	Fastest to set up, and the shot moves with you
Propped, one metre	Better. The angle halves.	You have to frame it once and stay in frame
Tripod, two to three metres	Best. The gap is negligible.	Needs space, and the audio needs thought
Rear camera, any distance	Solved. There is no preview to look at.	You cannot check framing while recording

THE ONE EXCEPTION

Looking away is not always wrong. People genuinely look away when they are thinking, and holding the lens without a single break for ninety seconds reads as intense rather than warm. Break the gaze when you are recalling something, then come back. What you are avoiding is looking away out of discomfort, which is a different thing and looks like it.

If you are on a laptop

The same problem, worse. The camera sits at the top of a large screen and whatever you are looking at is somewhere in the middle of it, which is a long way down. Move the window you are reading to the very top of the display, directly under the camera, and the error shrinks to almost nothing. If you are on a call and want to look at the person, accept that you cannot do both and pick one.

TWO OF FIVE · THE START

Start in motion.

Most unusable takes are unusable because of the first two seconds, not the content.

The standard sequence is: press record, walk back, settle, compose your face, take a breath, begin. All of that is on the recording, and all of it has to be cut. Worse, the beginning that survives is the one where you are still arriving.

The fix

Be talking before you are ready. Press record, then say the first line two or three times over, as though rehearsing it. Keep going into the take. The version you keep will be the third or fourth attempt, by which point your face has caught up with you and the energy is already running.

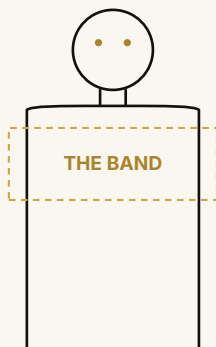
INSTEAD OF	DO THIS	WHY
Record, settle, begin	Record, say the line three times, keep going	The keeper is a warm start, not a cold one
A held breath before the first word	Breathe out, then speak	An inheld breath tightens the voice
Starting with your mouth closed	Start mid gesture, already moving	Motion at the cut hides the join
Deciding the first line on camera	Know the first line only, then improvise	One memorised line removes the worst hesitation

Four swaps at the top of a take. Each removes one thing you would have had to fix later.

THREE OF FIVE · HANDS

Hands, and the band they live in.

The instruction to relax your hands is useless. The instruction to keep them in a specific rectangle is not.



- **INSIDE THIS BAND**
Gestures read as natural emphasis.
- **ABOVE THE SHOULDERS**
Reads as frantic. It also leaves frame.
- **BELOW THE WAIST**
Invisible. You look stiff for no reason.
- **GRIPPING EACH OTHER**
The tell everyone recognises.

Between the sternum and the waist, roughly shoulder width. Inside this band, gesture freely.

You do not need to plan gestures. You need to remove the ones that read as nervous, and gesturing inside the band is what your hands do naturally the moment they are not being held still.

The band is not arbitrary. It is the area a mid shot actually contains, so anything inside it is visible and anything outside it is either cropped off or halfway out of frame. It also happens to be where hands sit when the shoulders are relaxed, which is why it looks natural: you are not being asked to hold a position, you are being asked to stop holding one.

IF YOU ARE HOLDING SOMETHING

A pen, a mug, a notebook. This is a legitimate fix and not a crutch, because it gives the grip reflex somewhere to go. Two rules: hold it loosely, and do not fiddle with it. A pen being clicked is worse than nothing at all.

HANDS

The three habits that read as nervous

THE HABIT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	THE REPLACEMENT
Hands clasped together	Braced, as though waiting for bad news	Hold a pen loosely in one hand. It occupies the grip.
Touching your face or neck	Self soothing, and viewers read it instantly	Sit slightly forward. It is harder to reach up.
Repeating one gesture	Metronomic, and it starts to distract	Rest between points. Stillness is a gesture too.

If you are standing

Weight on both feet, not on one hip. Standing on one leg reads as casual for about four seconds and as unsteady after that. If you drift, put a mark on the floor and return to it.

If you are sitting

Sit forward of the backrest. Leaning back opens a gap between you and the camera that reads as disinterest, and it collapses your chest, which takes the support out of your voice. Forward, feet down, shoulders loose.

If one hand is holding the phone

This is the hardest case, because you have one hand available and it will feel conspicuous on its own. Two options that both work. Either commit to one hand and gesture with it normally, which looks fine and is more common than people think. Or put the phone down and take the constraint away, which is almost always the better answer and is the reason a ten pound tripod improves a lot of people's footage more than any app.

A NOTE ON MIRRORING

Most front cameras show you a mirrored preview and then save the file unmirrored, so the version you watch back has your gestures on the opposite side from the one you rehearsed. This is disorienting the first few times and it is not a fault. Nobody else will ever see the mirrored version, so the unmirrored one is the truth.

FOUR OF FIVE · PACE

Slightly too much is about right.

A camera flattens energy. The level that feels natural in a quiet room arrives on screen as flat, and the level that feels slightly excessive arrives as normal.



This is not an instruction to shout or to perform enthusiasm you do not have. It is an instruction to add roughly fifteen per cent to whatever feels natural, and to accept that it will feel wrong while you are doing it and look right when you watch it back. Almost everyone finds this uncomfortable for the first few sessions, and almost everyone stops noticing after that.

Speed is a separate dial

Energy up does not mean fast. Nervousness makes people speed up, and speeding up makes them harder to follow. Raise the energy and keep the tempo, then put deliberate stops at the end of sentences. A full stop you actually land on is worth more than any amount of pace.

THE PAUSE NOBODY TAKES

Silence feels much longer to the person in it than to the person watching. A pause that feels like an awkward eternity to you reads as composure to a viewer. If you are not sure, hold it one beat longer than is comfortable, then continue.

Volume is not energy either

Getting louder is the most common wrong turn, and it is the one that makes people sound like they are selling something. Energy lives in variation: where you put emphasis, where you speed up slightly, where you drop to almost nothing because the point deserves it. A line delivered quietly can carry more energy than a line delivered loudly, and it will always sound more like you.

On smiling

Do not hold one. A held smile decays into something strained within about four seconds and everybody can see it happening. Smile when there is a reason to, and let your face rest the remainder of the time. A neutral face is not an unfriendly face, and it reads far better than a maintained one.

FIVE OF FIVE · NERVES

What nerves actually are.

Being nervous on camera is not a character flaw and it does not go away by being told to relax. It is a physical response, so it responds to physical things.

Adrenaline does three specific things that matter here. It shortens your breath, which thins the voice. It speeds you up, which makes you harder to follow. And it pushes blood away from your hands, which is why they feel like they belong to someone else. Each of those has a mechanical answer.

WHAT IT DOES	WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT
Shortens the breath, thins the voice	Breathe out fully before the first word, not in. An empty exhale resets the tension.
Speeds up your delivery	Land the full stops deliberately. Pace follows punctuation more than intention.
Makes your hands feel foreign	Give them one job. A pen, or a gesture you make on purpose at the first point.
Raises your shoulders	Roll them back once before you record. It also opens the chest, which supports the voice.
Makes the room feel like an audience	Talk to one person you know, by name, in your head. Not to a camera and not to everyone.

None of this removes the nerves. It stops the nerves from reaching the recording, which is the only part that matters. Confidence on camera is almost entirely a function of how many takes you have shot, and the people who look natural are people who have done it a great many times.

The thing nobody says out loud

Most of the discomfort is not fear of the camera. It is watching yourself back afterwards, which almost everybody finds unpleasant the first several times. You are seeing a version of your face and voice you have never had to look at directly, and the instinct is to conclude that something is wrong with it. Nothing is wrong with it. It is unfamiliarity, and it fades with repetition faster than you would expect.

If you take one thing from this page: the discomfort is not a signal that you should not be doing this. It is the ordinary cost of the first few dozen takes, and it is charged to everybody.

THE TAKE

How many, and which one.

Two takes is not enough to get a good one. Fifteen is enough to lose the thing that made the first one worth watching.

There is a curve. The first take is stiff. Somewhere around the third to fifth, you stop performing and start talking, and that is the zone worth keeping. Past about the eighth, you begin reciting, and reciting is obvious to everybody watching even when the words are identical.

SHOOT

Four to six takes. Stop there. If none of them work, the problem is not the performance, it is that you have not worked out what you are saying. Stop recording and go and sort that out instead.

DO NOT

Review between takes. It breaks the run and moves you from talking to judging. Shoot the set, then watch them all at once. You will pick better and you will pick faster.

The curve

TAKE	WHAT IT USUALLY IS	KEEP IT?
First	Stiff. You are still finding the shape of it.	Rarely
Second	Better, usually still careful.	Sometimes
Third to fifth	You stop performing and start talking.	Usually the one
Sixth to eighth	Tightening up. Sometimes sharper, sometimes flatter.	Occasionally
Ninth onward	Reciting. Word perfect and visibly dead.	Almost never

The curve moves earlier as you get more practised. It does not go away.

Choosing the keeper

Watch them with the sound off first. The one that holds your attention with no audio is almost always the right one, because you are seeing presence rather than judging your own wording. Then check it against these.

- Did the first three seconds start already moving, or did they start cold?
- Are the eyes on the lens for most of it, with breaks that look like thinking?
- Do the hands move inside the band, or are they gripping each other?
- Does it end on a landed full stop, or does it trail off and then stop?
- Would you keep watching if it were not you?

The last one is the only test that reliably matters, and it is the hardest to answer honestly about your own face. Give it a day if you can.

REFERENCE

The tells, and what they are really telling you.

Symptoms on the left, cause in the middle. The cause is almost never the thing you notice.

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IS ACTUALLY WRONG	THE FIX
You look tired	Light is above and behind, not in front	Face the window. See The First Frame.
You look shift	Eyes on the preview, not the lens	Mark the lens, cover the screen
You sound flat	Room energy, not camera energy	Add fifteen per cent, keep the tempo
You sound rushed	Full stops are not landing	Stop properly at each one
You look stiff	Hands are held below frame	Bring them into the band
It feels like a recital	Too many takes, or a memorised script	Memorise the first line only
The ending is weak	You stopped rather than finished	Decide the last line before recording
You look braced	Hands clasped, or shoulders raised	Roll the shoulders back once before recording
You look uninterested	Sitting back against the chair	Sit forward of the backrest
The smile looks forced	It is being held rather than happening	Let the face rest between reasons to smile
You sound thin	Breath held, chest collapsed	Exhale fully, sit up, then speak
You keep restarting	You have not decided the first line	Memorise the opening sentence only

IF ONLY ONE THING IS WRONG, CHECK THESE FIRST

Eye line, then light, then hands. In that order. Those three account for most of the difference between footage that looks amateur and footage that does not, and all three are free to fix. Nothing on this page requires equipment you do not already own.

PRACTICE

Five drills.

None of these are for posting. They are for building the habit somewhere the stakes are zero.

01

The lens drill

EYE LINE • 5 MINUTES

Talk about what you did yesterday for sixty seconds, eyes on the lens the whole time. Boring on purpose: the subject does not matter, the eye line does.

SETUP Phone at eye height, screen covered or preview off

LENGTH Three takes of sixty seconds

WATCH FOR How often you want to look at yourself

YOU HAVE IT WHEN You forget the screen is there at all

The mistake everyone makes: Uncovering the screen to check how you look, which restarts the habit you are trying to break.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING

02

The warm start

THE FIRST THREE SECONDS • 5 MINUTES

Press record and say the same opening line five times in a row without stopping. Watch it back and find the take where your face caught up with your voice.

SETUP Any framing, it does not matter here

LENGTH One recording, five repeats

WATCH FOR The moment the delivery stops being careful

YOU HAVE IT WHEN Repeat three sounds like repeat five

The mistake everyone makes: Stopping between repeats, which resets you to cold every time and defeats the whole exercise.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING

03

Hands in the band

HANDS · 10 MINUTES

Explain something you know well and gesture deliberately at every point you make. Overdo it. Then watch it back and see how little of it reads as too much.

SETUP Mid shot, waist up, so hands are in frame

LENGTH Two takes of ninety seconds

WATCH FOR Gestures leaving the top of the frame

YOU HAVE IT WHEN Hands move without you deciding to move them

The mistake everyone makes: Planning specific gestures for specific words, which reads as choreography and is worse than stillness.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING

04

The fifteen per cent

PACE · 10 MINUTES

Record the same forty seconds three times: once at normal energy, once slightly raised, once at a level that feels absurd. Watch all three back and pick the one that reads as normal.

SETUP Anything, framing is irrelevant

LENGTH Three takes of forty seconds

WATCH FOR How wrong the correct one felt to record

YOU HAVE IT WHEN You can find that level on the first take

The mistake everyone makes: Confusing energy with speed, and simply talking faster in each take.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING

05

Sound off

CHOOSING · 10 MINUTES

Take any five takes you have already shot and watch them muted. Rank them. Then watch with sound and see whether the ranking holds.

SETUP Footage you already have

LENGTH As long as the takes

WATCH FOR Which one you keep watching without meaning to

YOU HAVE IT WHEN The muted pick and the sound pick agree

The mistake everyone makes: Judging your own wording instead of your presence, which is the thing the mute is there to prevent.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING



The line this guide will not cross

This is how to say it.

Not what to say.

Everything in this guide works no matter what comes out of your mouth. Eye line, hands, pace and takes are mechanics, and mechanics can be written down and handed over, which is why they have been.

What to actually say is the other half, and it does not fit in a craft guide. It depends on what you have built, who you are trying to reach, and what you have earned the right to claim. That part needs a system for working it out, and ideally somebody building it with you and telling you the truth about it.

There are two ways to get it. The Feature is the whole system without me: positioning, planning, filming, carousels and an AI setup, in one playbook and a Notion workspace. It opens soon, and because you downloaded this, you will hear first.

The ninety day mentorship is that system built with me, one to one. A filmmaker and creative director in your corner for ninety days: shaping your positioning with you, building your content with you, reviewing your work before it goes out, holding you to the standard and the schedule, answering whatever comes up, and changing course with you when the numbers say so. It is at cinematicauthoritysystem.com. If you want neither, everything above still works.



The Take

Guide two of three.

The First Frame comes before it. The Cut comes after.

cinematicauthoritysystem.com/guides

[@acethetics.29](#)



An Editor's Guide to Pacing

The *Cut*

Where to cut, how to pace it, and how to know when it is finished. What to do with the footage once you have it.

Written by Ace
Filmmaker and Creative Director

START HERE

Editing is removal.

Almost every piece of advice about editing treats it as a place to add things. It is not. It is the place where you take things away until only the part worth watching is left.

A talking head is the hardest thing to edit well, because there is nothing to hide behind. No cutaways, no B roll, no location. Just a person and whatever rhythm you give them. That rhythm is the whole job, and it is made almost entirely of decisions about what to delete.

WHAT THIS GUIDE WILL NOT DO

It will not tell you what the piece should be about, or whether it was worth making. Editing cannot rescue a video that had nothing to say, and no amount of pacing will fix it. That is a different problem with its own system, and it is not in a craft guide.

The order to work in

Do these in sequence. Doing them out of order is the single biggest waste of time in editing, because you end up polishing material you are about to delete.

PASS	WHAT YOU ARE DOING	DO NOT YET
1. Select	Pick the take. Watch them muted, choose one.	Cut anything
2. Strip	Remove the top, the tail and the dead air.	Think about rhythm
3. Tighten	Cut inside sentences. Find the pace.	Add music or captions
4. Sound	Levels, then music if it earns its place.	Add captions
5. Captions	Burn them in, check the safe area.	Re-cut anything
6. Watch	On a phone, with sound off, then on.	Post it the same hour

ONE OF FIVE · THE STRIP

Cut the first three seconds. Always.

There is a version of your video hiding inside the file, and it starts later than the one you recorded.

Everybody records a runway: settling, a breath, a small adjustment, then the actual first word. All of it has to go. Find the first syllable that carries meaning and cut immediately before it, not a beat before it. A beat before it is still runway.

What to remove, in order

REMOVE	WHY	TYPICAL SAVING
The runway at the top	It is you arriving, not you talking	2 to 5 seconds
The tail after the last word	You reaching for the phone	1 to 3 seconds
Gaps between sentences	Felt right while speaking, reads as slow	Several seconds
Every 'so', 'basically', 'you know'	They carry nothing and they stack up	Often 10 per cent
Restarts and false starts	You already said it better later	Varies
The sentence explaining the next sentence	Almost always unnecessary	Varies

A ninety second recording usually contains sixty seconds of video. That is not a sign you spoke badly. It is what the medium costs, and every practised person you have watched has paid it.

TWO OF FIVE · THE JOIN

Cut on the movement.

Two cuts can remove exactly the same words and one of them will be invisible while the other makes the viewer flinch.

CUT IN THE STILL PATCH

The join is visible

**CUT ON THE MOVEMENT**

The join disappears



The line is how much you are moving. Peaks are gestures, flats are stillness.

The difference is what your body was doing at the moment of the join. Cut while you are still and the jump in position is the most interesting thing on screen. Cut while your hand is mid gesture and the eye is already following motion, so it absorbs the change without registering it. This is the oldest trick in editing and it costs nothing to use.

What a bad cut actually looks like

The viewer does not see a cut. They see you teleport. Your head was here and now it is two inches left, your shoulders dropped, and the light on your face changed slightly. None of that registers as an edit. It registers as something being wrong, and the response is to stop watching without ever knowing why.

This is why the fix is placement rather than decoration. You are not trying to make the cut prettier. You are trying to put it somewhere the eye is too busy to notice it.

JUMP CUTS ARE NOT THE ENEMY

A visible jump cut is an accepted convention now, and a video full of them does not look broken to anyone under about forty. The problem is never that a cut is visible. It is that a cut is jarring, which is a different thing. Placed on motion, you can make fifty of them and the piece still flows.

THE JOIN

Three ways to hide a cut

METHOD	HOW	WHEN TO USE IT
Cut on motion	Join while a hand or the head is moving	The default. Works most of the time.
Cut on the breath	Join on the inhale before a new sentence	When nothing is moving
Punch in	Scale the second clip up 10 to 15 per cent	When the join refuses to hide

On the punch in

Scaling up slightly at a cut turns a jump into an apparent change of shot, and it reads as deliberate. Two warnings. Keep it under about fifteen per cent or it becomes obvious, and do not do it at every cut, because a video that creeps closer all the way through ends up somewhere absurd. Alternate in and out, or use it only where you need it.

THE ONE THING NOT TO DO

Do not reach for a transition. A cross dissolve, a whip, a zoom blur or anything that came free with the app announces that a cut happened, which is the exact opposite of what you want. A hard cut placed well is invisible. A transition placed well is still a transition.

THREE OF FIVE · RHYTHM

Vary the lengths.

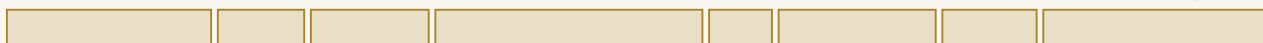
A cut every two seconds is not pacing. It is a metronome, and the brain tunes it out in about fifteen seconds.

EVERY CLIP THE SAME LENGTH

Reads as a metronome

**CLIPS OF DIFFERENT LENGTHS**

Reads as somebody talking



Speech is naturally uneven. Some thoughts take four seconds and some take one, and an edit that respects that sounds like a person while an edit that imposes a fixed interval sounds like a machine. If your timeline looks like a row of identical bricks, you have been cutting to a rhythm instead of to the meaning.

Where to put the long one

Give the most important sentence in the piece the longest uninterrupted run. Cutting into it chops it up and signals that you were bored of your own point. Let it breathe, then cut tightly either side of it so the contrast does the work.

How long is too long

There is no correct number, but there is a useful signal: if you find yourself watching your own hands rather than listening, the clip has run past its usefulness. That moment tends to arrive somewhere between six and ten seconds on a static talking head, and later if you are moving or if the point genuinely needs the room.

IF THE PIECE IS	TYPICAL SHAPE	WATCH OUT FOR
Under 30 seconds	Few cuts. Often one or two.	Cutting out of nervousness rather than need
30 to 90 seconds	Varied, with one long run in the middle	The metronome. This is where it appears.
Over 90 seconds	Needs a change of shot or setting	One unbroken angle for two minutes

The pause you should keep

One. Somewhere in the piece, leave a real silence after a sentence that deserves one. It is the clearest signal available that you meant what you just said, and it is the first thing an over enthusiastic edit removes.

FOUR OF FIVE • SOUND

Sound is most of it.

People will forgive footage that looks average. They will not forgive audio that is hard to listen to, and they leave without being able to say why.

The three that matter

PROBLEM	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE	THE FIX
Room echo	Hollow, like a bathroom	Soft things in the room. A bed, curtains, a rug.
Uneven level	Loud, then suddenly quiet	Compression, then one master level pass
Background hum	A constant layer under the voice	Noise reduction, gently. Too much sounds underwater.

Cut the sound and the picture separately

This is the single technique that separates edits that feel professional from edits that do not. Let the audio from the next clip start a fraction before the picture changes, or let the previous audio run a moment past the visual cut. The join stops landing in one place and the whole thing smooths out. Most editing apps let you drag the audio and video edges independently once you unlink them.

ON MUSIC

Music underneath a talking head is optional and usually makes things worse. If you use it, put it far enough down that you would not notice it was there until it stopped, and choose something without a strong beat, because a beat fights your speech rhythm and your speech loses. If the video only works with music, the problem is the video.

FIVE OF FIVE · CAPTIONS

Captions, and where they can live.

Most people will meet your video on mute. Captions are not an accessibility extra, they are the primary text of the piece.



- **MIDDLE BAND ONLY**
Everything outside it gets covered by the app.
- **LOW, NOT CENTRED**
Centre sits on your face. Lower third is clear.
- **TWO LINES MAXIMUM**
Three lines is a paragraph and nobody reads it.
- **BURN THEM IN**
Auto captions are not guaranteed to be on.
- **CHECK ON A PHONE**
Not on the laptop you edited it on.

The frame you export is not the frame anyone sees. Every platform lays its own interface over the top: a caption, your handle, a row of buttons down one side, and a progress bar along the bottom. Anything you place under that furniture is gone, and you will not discover it in your editing app because your editing app shows none of it.

ROUGHLY WHERE	WHAT SITS THERE	SO
Top eighth	Status bar, and sometimes a header	Keep it empty
Bottom fifth	Caption text, handle, progress bar	Keep it empty
Right edge	The column of buttons	Nothing important there
The middle	Yours	Captions low inside it

Approximate on purpose. The exact zones move whenever an app is updated, so build in margin rather than measuring to the pixel.

CAPTIONS

Making them readable

- Two lines, never three. Three lines is a paragraph, and a paragraph on a moving image does not get read.
- Match the spoken word. Captions that paraphrase are distracting, because the viewer hears one thing and reads another.
- Plain and heavy. A bold sans face with a solid backing or a hard outline. Thin type over a moving image is unreadable.
- No animation per word. Words popping in one at a time force the eye to chase them, which is fine for a novelty and exhausting for anything longer than a few seconds.
- Correct the auto captions. They will misspell names and anything technical, and those are exactly the words that matter.

How long each card should stay up

Long enough to read twice at a glance. In practice that means roughly a second and a half for a short line and around three for a full two line card. Captions that change on every few words are the most common fault, and they are exhausting in a way viewers experience as the video being tiring rather than the captions being wrong.

CARD	HOLD IT FOR	THE FAULT
Three or four words	About 1.5 seconds	Flicking past before it is read
One full line	About 2 seconds	Changing mid sentence for no reason
Two full lines	About 3 seconds	Holding it after the speech has moved on

The mute test

Watch the finished piece on a phone with the sound off and read only the captions. If you cannot follow it, neither can the large share of people who will never turn the sound on. This takes ninety seconds and catches more problems than any other single check in this guide.

KNOWING WHEN TO STOP

The signs you have gone too far.

There is a point past which every further cut makes the piece slightly worse, and it arrives earlier than most people think.

Over-editing does not look like a mess. It looks slick and feels airless. Every pause is gone, every breath is gone, and the person on screen sounds like they never stopped to think, which is not a compliment. Watch for these.

- There is no silence anywhere in it.
- You cannot hear a single breath in ninety seconds.
- The cuts have started arriving at a regular interval.
- You have watched it so many times you can no longer tell.
- You are now cutting things because you can, not because they are dead.

THE TEST

Leave it overnight and watch it once in the morning, start to finish, without touching anything. Almost every problem worth fixing announces itself in that single viewing, and almost everything you were agonising over at midnight turns out not to matter.

THE RULE

Finished is when removing one more thing would take something out that the piece needs. Not when it is perfect. Perfect is not available, and chasing it is the main reason people stop posting.

When you are stuck

Being stuck in an edit is almost always one of three things, and none of them are solved by continuing to fiddle with it.

IT FEELS LIKE	IT USUALLY IS	WHAT TO DO
Something is off and I cannot find it	You have watched it too many times	Stop. Come back tomorrow.
It will not tighten any further	It is already finished	Export it and move on
No edit makes this work	The take was not good enough	Reshoot it. It is faster.

The third is the one people resist most and it is the cheapest of the three. Reshooting ninety seconds takes ten minutes. Trying to rescue a flat take can absorb an entire evening and still not work.

REFERENCE

What it looks like, and what caused it.

Symptom on the left. The cause is almost never where you were looking.

WHAT YOU NOTICE	WHAT IS ACTUALLY WRONG	THE FIX
It drags	Gaps between sentences are still there	Strip the dead air first
The cuts are jarring	Joined during stillness	Move the cut onto a gesture
It feels relentless	Every clip is the same length	Vary them. Let one run long.
It starts slowly	The runway is still attached	Cut to the first meaningful syllable
It sounds amateur	Audio, not picture	Level pass, then gentle noise reduction
It ends abruptly	You cut on the last word	Leave a short beat after it
Nobody watches past the start	Usually the first two seconds	Start already talking. See The Take.
It feels airless	Over-edited. Every pause removed.	Put two breaths back in
Captions get cut off	They sit outside the safe band	Move them into the middle third

IN THE APP

The passes, in CapCut.

Everything so far works in any editor. This is the same order of work done in CapCut, the editor I use, on the phone and on a computer.

PASS	ON THE PHONE	ON A COMPUTER
Select	New project, add every take. Watch them with the phone on silent and keep one.	Media, then Import, then drag the take you keep onto the timeline.
Strip and tighten	Move the playhead to the cut, tap the scissors (or long-press, then Split), select the piece you do not want and delete it.	Playhead on the cut, then Ctrl+B (Windows) or Cmd+B (Mac) to split. Delete the piece.
Sound	Tap the clip, swipe the toolbar to Extract audio. The voice becomes its own track. Then Volume for level and Reduce noise for hum.	Select the clip, open the Audio tab on the right, switch on Reduce noise and keep the intensity low.
Captions	Text, then Auto captions, choose the audio source. To fix words, tap a caption, then Edit captions.	Text, then Auto captions, choose the language, then Recognize. Double-click a caption to correct it. Styling is in the Style tab.
Punch in	Select the second clip and spread two fingers on the preview to scale it up 10 to 15 per cent.	Select the clip, open Basic, raise Scale by 10 to 15 per cent.
Export	Tap the resolution label next to Export and choose 1080P, then Export.	Export, top right. 1080p and 30 fps is what CapCut recommends for Reels.

Checked against CapCut's own help pages in September 2026. Button names move between updates, and some features differ between the free and paid versions and between countries. If a button is not where this says, select the clip and look along the toolbar underneath it.

Five habits that save the most time

- Extract the audio before adding B roll. The voice then runs straight through underneath the footage, and you can let the sound lead the picture at a cut, as on the sound page.
- Fix captions as a list. Edit captions shows every line together. Read it once, top to bottom, and correct names and technical words.
- Split a caption that runs long at its natural pause, exactly as you would a clip. It is the quickest way to two lines per card.
- Reduce noise only where you hear hum. On a clean recording it just thins the voice.
- Export at 1080p, not 4K. It is the size CapCut recommends for Reels, and it uploads faster. Then watch it on your phone before posting.

WHAT NOT TO TOUCH

Effects, transitions, templates and animated caption styles. The table above is the whole toolkit. If you are scrolling the effects menu, go back to the rhythm page instead.

PRACTICE

Five drills.

Use footage you already have. None of these are for posting.

01

The strip

DEAD AIR · 10 MINUTES

Take one unedited take and remove only the runway, the tail and the gaps between sentences. Change nothing else. Note the duration before and after.

START WITH One take, straight off the phone

DO Top, tail, and gaps only

DO NOT Cut inside a sentence yet

YOU HAVE IT WHEN It is at least twenty per cent shorter

The mistake everyone makes: Tightening inside sentences on the same pass, which makes it impossible to tell what the stripping alone achieved.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING

02

Same cut, two places

THE JOIN · 10 MINUTES

Find a cut you have already made. Make a copy and move the join onto the nearest gesture. Watch both. The difference is the whole lesson.

START WITH Any edit with a visible jump

DO Two versions, same words removed

WATCH FOR Which one you notice the cut in

YOU HAVE IT WHEN You can predict it before watching

The mistake everyone makes: Moving the cut so far that the words change, which makes the two versions no longer comparable.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING

03

Look at the bricks

RHYTHM • 5 MINUTES

Open a finished edit and just look at the timeline. Do not play it. If the clips are all roughly the same width, you cut to a rhythm rather than to the meaning.

START WITH Anything you have already finished

DO Look only at the shape of the timeline

WATCH FOR A row of identical blocks

YOU HAVE IT WHEN You can spot it without playing anything

The mistake everyone makes: Fixing it immediately. Look at three finished edits first, so you learn to see the pattern rather than one instance of it.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING

04

Split the audio

SOUND • 10 MINUTES

Take three cuts and pull the audio edge a few frames earlier than the picture edge on each. Watch it back and try to hear what changed.

START WITH A short edit with three or more cuts

DO Unlink audio and video, then offset

WATCH FOR The joins stopping being noticeable

YOU HAVE IT WHEN You do it without thinking about it

The mistake everyone makes: Offsetting so far that lips and voice separate, which is a different and much worse problem.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING

05

The mute test

CAPTIONS • 5 MINUTES

Send a finished piece to your own phone. Watch it muted, reading only the captions. Then watch with sound and see what you missed.

START WITH Something you consider finished

DO Watch on a phone, not the machine you edited on

WATCH FOR Captions covered by the app's own interface

YOU HAVE IT WHEN Muted and unmuted tell the same story

The mistake everyone makes: Testing it in the editing app's preview window, which shows none of the interface that will sit on top of it.

RUN IT IN ONE SITTING



The line this guide will not cross

This is how to assemble it. *Not whether it was worth making.*

Everything in this guide is mechanics. Where a cut belongs, how long a clip should run, what to do with sound and captions, and when to stop. All of it can be written down, so all of it has been.

None of it will save a piece that had nothing to say. Editing makes a good idea watchable and makes an empty one shorter, and no amount of pacing changes which of those you are holding. Working out what is worth making, and for whom, needs a system for deciding, and ideally somebody building it with you and being honest about it.

There are two ways to get it. The Feature is the whole system without me: positioning, planning, filming, carousels and an AI setup, in one playbook and a Notion workspace. It opens soon, and because you downloaded this, you will hear first.

The ninety day mentorship is that system built with me, one to one. A filmmaker and creative director in your corner for ninety days: shaping your positioning with you, building your content with you, reviewing your work before it goes out, holding you to the standard and the schedule, answering whatever comes up, and changing course with you when the numbers say so. It is at cinematicauthoritysystem.com. If you want neither, everything above still works.



The Cut

Guide three of three.

The First Frame is the setup. The Take is the performance.

This one is the assembly.

cinematicauthoritysystem.com/guides

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