



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 cannot be handed over in a PDF. It needs someone watching your specific work, in your specific market, and telling you the truth about it. There is an honest page at the end about where the line sits.

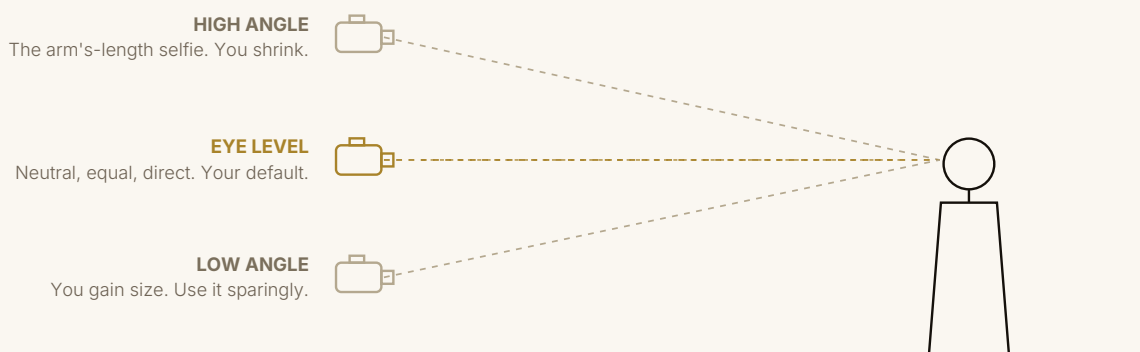
Three rules before anything else

- 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.

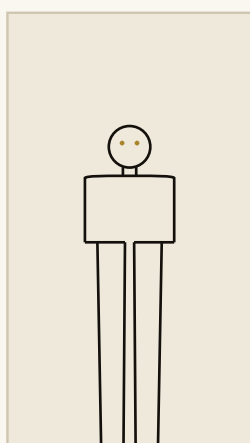
The room you shoot in is a choice

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.

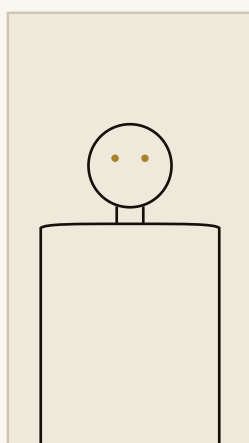
PART ONE · THE CAMERA

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

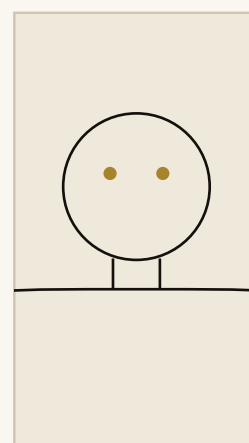
A shot size is not a preference. It is a decision about how close you are asking someone to stand to you, and viewers feel it whether or not they can name it.

**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.

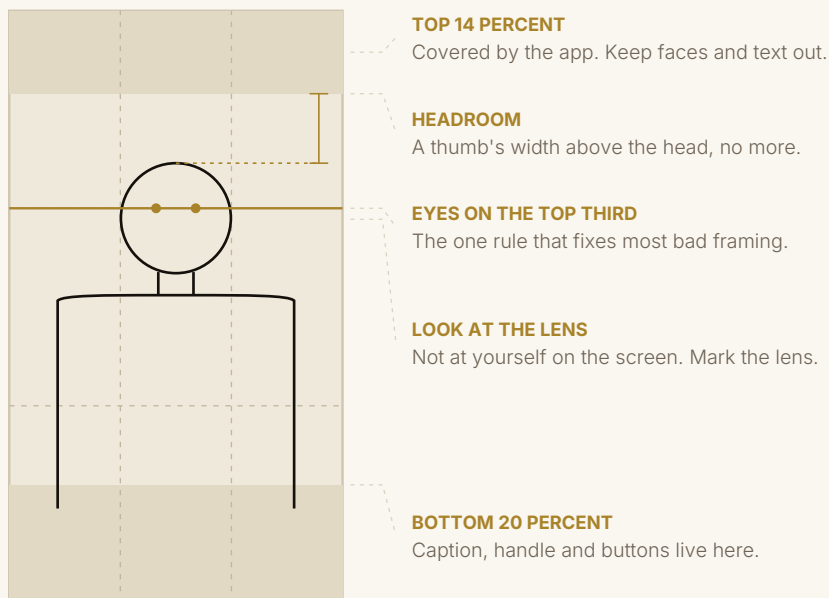
Give yourself an out

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.

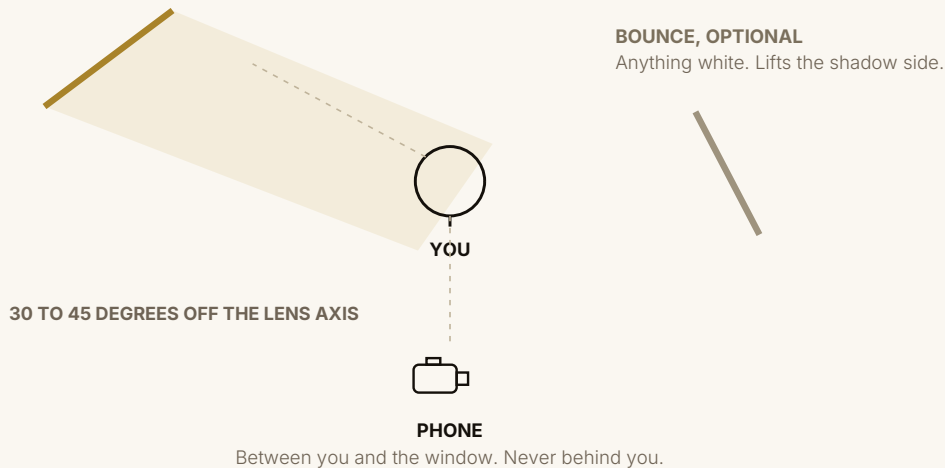
PART TWO · LIGHT

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 actual unlock: 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, apply them tomorrow, and your work will look measurably better by the end of the week. That is a real result and it 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, and it cannot be written down in advance because it depends on answers nobody has yet. It needs someone watching your particular work in your particular market and telling you the truth about it, repeatedly, 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.



Maximum four clients at a time

The craft is yours now.
The rest is a conversation.

If you want the other half, the ninety day mentorship is at
cinematicauthoritysystem.com

Four clients at a time, by application. The application takes three minutes and tells you straight away whether it is a fit.

Ace · Filmmaker and Creative Director
[@acethetics.29](https://www.instagram.com/acethetics.29)