

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

FILMING ON YOUR PHONE

You don't need expensive specialist camera gear to record great video content. Your smartphone is more than capable enough - if you are thoughtful and creative in your approach to filming! This guide includes some best practice tips on how to get professional filming results using your smartphone.

Planning and preparation

Whether you're recording a short research summary or explainer video or something more in-depth, start by thinking about the objectives of your video – what are you hoping it will achieve? The focus should always be clarity, credibility and engagement. Then think about your audience:

- o who will be watching it?
- o what will they want to hear about, what will engage them?
- o is there an action you want the viewer to take once they've watched your film?

Create a **detailed outline or script** beforehand and think about the beginning, middle and end of your video. Think carefully about **timing** – especially for the channels you want to post your video on - and time your segments to avoid overly long recordings.

When deciding on a **filming location**, consider finding somewhere with an interesting background. Depth and colour are more visually engaging than standing against a plain wall. Are there any backgrounds that will help convey your video's message? For example, if your research is lab-based, consider using your facility as the background.

Equipment

If you are going to be shooting video regularly, you might want to invest in a tripod for your phone or phone mount for stable footage as shaky handheld filming appears unprofessional. A ring light can be useful for indoor filming. Consider investing in a wireless microphone as phone audio is often inadequate, and a phone gimbal for smooth movement shots.

Framing and composition

Follow these tips to help you create better framing and compositions in your videos.

Gridlines and the 'rule of thirds'

Gridlines divide an image into nine equal parts, split by two equally spaced horizontal and vertical lines. You can access this feature either in settings or within the camera app itself, depending on your phone.

By placing the subject – whether it's a person or an object – along one of these gridlines instead of directly in the centre of the frame, you draw the eye to it.

Using the rule of thirds is a reliable way to create visually appealing images.



Gridlines can also help you follow the rule of thirds, which places the subject in the left or right third of a video/image, leaving the other two thirds more open. This draws the viewer's eye into the image and places more emphasis on the subject. Tip: the subject's eyes should be in line with the point where the far right vertical line meets the top horizontal line.

Headroom and space

When filming an interview or a piece to camera, try to leave a moderate amount of space in the frame around the speaker's head. Too much can make the shot feel vacant; too little can seem cramped. In your positioning, make sure your head and shoulders are in the shot. Position the camera at eye level. Avoid looking down or up.

Move in, don't zoom in

If you want a close up, it's better to physically move closer to your subject instead of using the digital zoom on your phone, which lowers the quality of the image.

Orient your camera

If filming for social media, shoot in portrait (vertical) as this is the preferred format and will look better on viewers' devices. Landscape (horizontal) is better for YouTube, website use, broadcast or presentations. Make sure you know what purpose you are filming for before you start recording.

Stabilise your shot

Use a tripod to secure your phone in place and make your shots stable and balanced. This also makes it easier for you to film yourself using the front camera. Keep your shot level throughout the film – using gridlines will help you do this. Don't hold your phone unless it's for casual content, like Instagram Stories.

Focus

Before recording your video, tapping on your phone's screen (on the point you want to focus on) will lock the focus in place on Google/Android devices. To lock focus on an iPhone you can hold your finger in place.

In low light, your phone's camera will hunt for focus which makes it look less professional.

Lighting

Film in an environment that is well-lit and consistent and wherever possible, try to use natural light. Try not to use fluorescent or overhead lights as they can cast unflattering shadows.

Position your subject so that the brightest light is shining on them head on, not from behind. If you're outside, this means you want the sun to be behind the camera so that it illuminates the subject. If filming indoors, your subject could stand facing or beside a window or lamp. Be aware that too much light can cause your subject to squint. A ring light can also work well in an indoors environment.

Test the lighting by recording yourself in position for a few seconds and watch it back.

Exposure

Exposure is how much light is allowed into the lens, resulting in a lighter or darker image. Smartphone cameras will automatically adjust to the right level, but for more control you can manually increase (lighten) or decrease (darken) the exposure level.

For more information, please contact: research@reading.ac.uk

Recording audio

Clean, clear audio is essential for watchability, as viewers are typically much less forgiving of bad sound than bad visuals.

- Try to find a quiet place to film where you won't be disturbed.
- Some background noise is expected, so acquiring using a small mic which you pin onto your clothes and plugs into your phone can improve sound quality but is not essential.
- Ensure you are not covering the microphone when holding it.
- Record away from noise sources like building work, roads or crowds, or outside on windy days.
- If using an external microphone, clip it on the speaker's collar or neckline, and point the microphone towards their mouth. Take care that it isn't being muffled by clothing or knocked by jewellery.
- Ask subjects to speak clearly, not too quickly and as if they were explaining the concept to a friend outside of their field.
- Do a sound check by recording a short test clip and listening back to it.

Captions should be added to any video with speech in to ensure accessibility. If you are creating video for social media, keep in mind that audiences often watch videos without sound. Social media apps often have autogenerated captions, but these aren't always accurate.

Filming B-roll

B-roll is supplemental footage that is relevant to the topic and that adds variety, interest and emphasis. It can be useful to break up talking-head footage. For example, if you're discussing conservation of pollinators, including B-roll footage of bees and flowers illustrates and emphasises the point. Tips for recording B-roll:

- Record footage of the subject in their environment to make things more visually interesting and help connect your audience with your subject further.
- Close-up shots of relevant objects can illustrate important details in an environment or situation that can help you tell the story.
- Entrances and exits of the location such as a building or facility can be a good opener.
- You can also use still photographs or stock images which can be found on the University's image bank or on royalty-free image websites such as [Pixabay](#) and [Unsplash](#). If using stock images, ensure you have the correct permissions to use them in your video.

Editing

If you want to edit together multiple clips into a sequence with music and/or captions and other more advanced functions, there are numerous apps available such as:

- CapCut
- Apple iMovie (iOS only)
- Adobe Premiere Rush
- KineMaster
- Canva

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You can also edit videos natively in social media apps like Instagram and TikTok but only to post directly on these platforms. If you plan to use your films across multiple channels, using a third-party app would be recommended.

Some apps may have paid options with more features or offer in-app purchases, and each will have its own advantages and limitations. Weigh up your options and choose the right one for your editing needs, experience and budget.

Recording tips

Here are some tips to make your life easier when filming:

- **Practice and review:** do a few test runs, watch the video back and adjust accordingly.
- **Charge your phone** to at least 80%, clear up some storage space and have a backup power source ready.
- **Clean your camera lens** thoroughly with a microfibre cloth.
- **Put your phone on 'Do Not Disturb'** or Airplane Mode to stop notifications distracting you and conserve battery.
- **Record multiple takes** to refine your speech, eliminate any 'ums' and 'ahs' and give yourself options when editing.
- **Avoid distracting text and/or images** on clothing, posters, signs etc. in your shots. This can draw attention away from the intended subject.
- **Don't wear striped clothes.** The close parallel lines create an optical illusion that you can't see in real life but is very distracting on camera.
- **Don't film screens;** the difference in frame rates between the monitor and your camera causes an unpleasant flickering effect.
- **Background music** can make your video more engaging, but you need to be aware of copyright issues and only use audio that you have permission for or royalty-free stock music.
- **Include a clear title slide,** clear opening and credits/ contact details at the end (with University logo).

Consent and permission

For members of the public, you'll need to get written consent to use their image. At events such as a conference or seminar where it is reasonable to expect that there will be recording, a blanket announcement that allows participants to opt out is acceptable.

You *must* get written consent from parents/guardians of any children (including teenagers).

You can find consent forms [here](#).