

“Vlog Style” Video Tips

Setting up a Successful Shoot | Coauthors Ryan Frey and Carly Bartman

You’re using your home equipment to shoot a video, and need guidance on how to create high-quality footage. Look no further than the following tips.

How to Set Up Your Equipment

With all the settings and options in your camera, and all the possible ways to record yourself, the options can be daunting. Start by selecting your highest quality recording device, whether that’s your phone, tablet, digital camera, or webcam, and then use these guidelines to determine how best to set it up.

Device Settings

- Look for the best quality recording settings, usually labelled “best” or “biggest,” or choose the largest of a set of numbers.
- If possible, disable “auto-exposure” or “auto-contrast” settings to ensure your video looks the same throughout recording.
- If you’re using a digital camera or mobile device, make sure there is room on your device for more videos before recording. Save any existing video to your computer and delete it from your device before shooting to ensure the device will not stop recording in the middle of a great take.
- Charge your device fully before recording. Video recording drains battery quickly, so if you begin with half power, you could find yourself running out during your shoot.

Where to Put Your Camera

- Turn your device on its side before recording.
- If you are using a mobile device or tablet, do not use the front-facing or “selfie” camera to record. The rear-facing camera will always produce higher quality video.
- Make sure your device will be steady throughout the recording without shaking or falling.
- Place the phone at your eye level or slightly above to record. This will be the best angle to make sure you look natural on camera.
- If recording on a computer, set it up so that you cannot see yourself on screen during recording. It is important to remove the temptation to look away from the camera.

How to Set Up the Shot

The setting of your video can make or break your footage. How should you set the stage?

Background

Make sure the background is interesting without distracting from you. To create an interesting background that doesn’t steal the show, here are a few options:

- in front of a bookcase
- on a couch that is not against the wall
- in front of a colored wall with a decorative object behind you
- in a quiet backyard with interesting landscaping or foliage

Lighting

How you light the scene can completely change the way you look. For best results, make sure you

- position the light source behind the camera, facing you.
- make it bright enough to light up all of your features, but not so bright that your background is as light as you are.
- use soft light, such as a shaded lamp, or sunlight coming in from a window. This will shine light on you without casting distracting shadows.
- do not place a light source behind you, or sit with a window behind you. The light source will cause the camera to darken your features, making it hard to see your face while you speak.

Audio

The way you sound on camera will change depending on your equipment, your location, and other noisy objects around you.

- Test your device's microphone. If the audio coming from the device is poor, consider using another device or an external microphone if possible.
- Try not to run heat or air conditioning, fans, or household appliances while shooting. The sound will add a "buzz" to your video, and distract the audience from your words.
- Avoid shooting somewhere that is usually loud, such as offices with intercoms, busy hallways or rooms, and outdoors near a busy street.
- If you are at home and you live on a busy street, close all windows before shooting. Keep an ear out for other neighborhood sounds, such as lawnmowers or backyard barbeques, as that audio may show up in your recording.
- Make sure to turn off all phones before shooting. If you're using a phone to shoot the video, put it in airplane mode. This way the sound won't disrupt your audio, the call won't halt your recording, and your attention won't be taken away from the shoot.

Where to Sit

You should be the focus of the shot; you want you to be the part of the shot that draws people's eyes.

- Position yourself in or near the center of the frame, and at least two feet away from the background so the camera focuses on you.
- The camera should be placed so that you can either look straight or slightly up at it to give you the most natural and flattering angle.
- It should also be close enough that the audience can see you from your waist up to your head. Leave a little space between your head and the top of the frame.

What to Wear

Your clothes should look good, make you feel comfortable, and not distract from the content of the video.

- Wear simple clothes with solid colors. This can be something like a suit, blouse, or a button-down with a simple tie.
- The colors you choose should contrast the background to keep you from blending in. If the background is dark, wear light colors, and vice versa.
- You should feel good in your clothes. If what you're wearing makes you uncomfortable in any way, it will affect how you act and speak on camera.

How to Record the Best Footage

When shooting the footage, follow these guidelines to ensure that you provide the best work that you can.

Prepare, but Don't Read

Know what you're going to say ahead of time, but if possible, do not rely on reading a script. The more conversational your tone, the better the video will be. Additionally, the audience will be able to see you reading, as your eyes will move visibly. If you need cues to remind you of what you're going to say, consider preparing bullet points or keywords to remind you of your next point.

Test Everything

Make sure all of your equipment is working. Record yourself sitting where you're going to sit, wearing what you're going to wear, with the lighting and camera where they're going to be. Watch and listen to the footage and make sure it looks and sounds as good on camera as it does in person before recording your first take.

Get Comfortable

Spend some time in front of the camera. Talk to it a bit, perhaps practice your lines. Being on camera can feel strange, so the first thing you should do when shooting is get used to it. Speak to the camera like you're talking to another person, and try to maintain comfortable eye contact with your audience.

Record Several Takes

To have as much to work with as possible in postproduction, record 3-4 takes of your full video. This will make it possible to create a video using all your best footage. Recording several takes also gives you time to get comfortable with what you're saying and with being on camera.

Tips for the Shoot

Keep the following in mind when you're shooting to make sure all of your footage is great.

- Pause uncomfortably before you start. After you push record, look into the camera and count to 5 in your head before speaking.
- Pause uncomfortably when you have to start something over. If you stumble in your speech or want to say something a second time, pause, look into the camera, and count to 5 in your head before speaking. It's going to feel strange, but it is important to give the video editor some wiggle room.
- Pause uncomfortably when you finish speaking. Before you stop the recording or move from your spot, or "break character," look into the camera and count to 5 in your head.
- Quiet on set. If you have other people in the room helping you record, make sure they are quiet throughout the recording. A cough or laugh behind the camera can ruin a great take.

Don't Be Afraid to Make Mistakes

Speaking to the camera can feel very strange, and you may trip over your words or say something wrong. Power through and finish the sentence or thought anyway. The more footage you create, the more comfortable you will get on camera, and the better at shooting you will become.