

Tips and Tricks for Filming with a Smartphone

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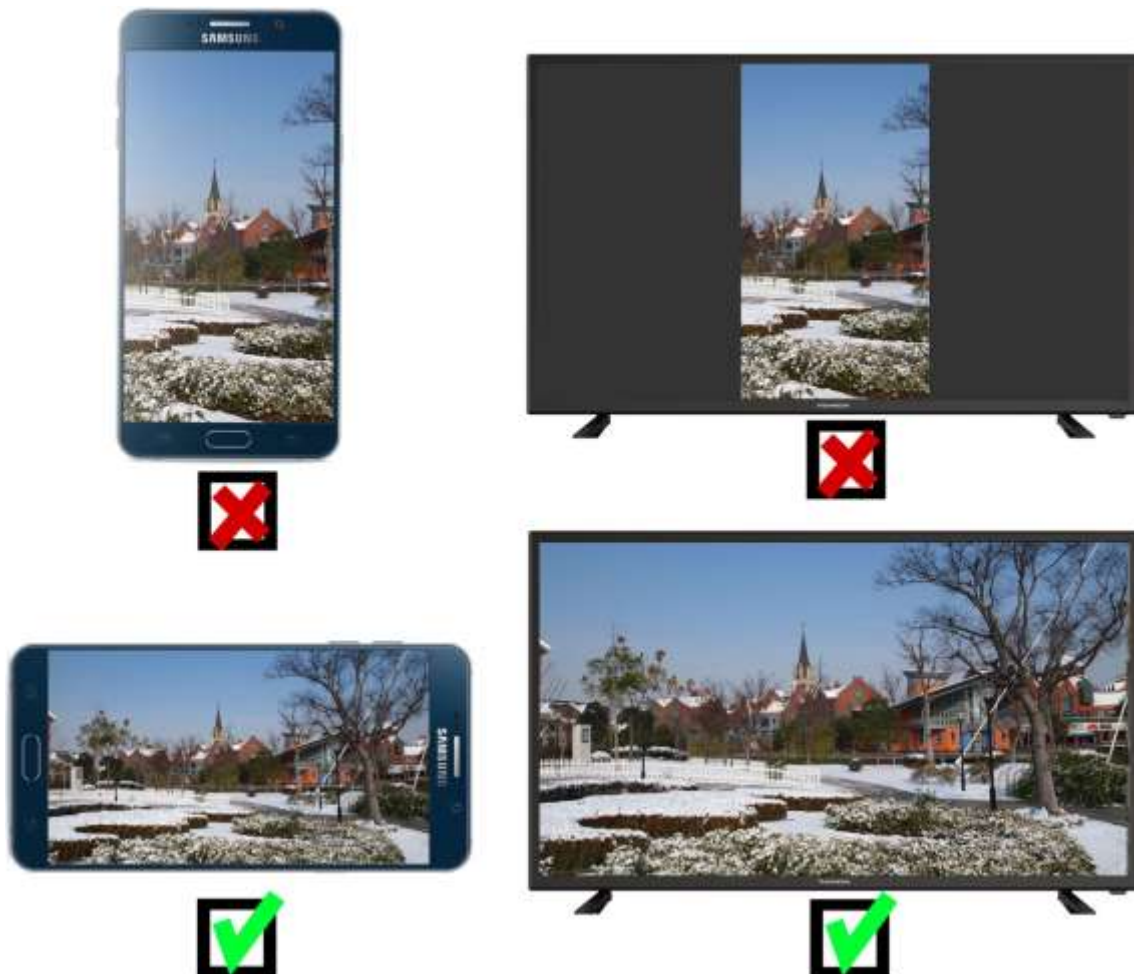
This guide is for those who occasionally use a smartphone camera to take video footage, whether raw beginners or those with a little experience. Rather than hard and fast rules, It includes suggestions for everyday situations. It also includes additional suggestions for wheelchair users. Many of these tips also relate to taking still photographs and using compact cameras.

Picture Quality

The “sweet spot” for video which is to be viewed on TVs and computer monitors is “Full High Definition” (FHD), also known as “1080p”, or “1920 x 1080”. You will find this in the settings of most late model smartphone cameras.

Aspect Ratio

For TV and computer monitor viewing, it is better to film in landscape (horizontal) mode than portrait (vertical) mode. This provides better picture quality, and in most cases shows more relevant information (picture area) on the screen.



Stability

Whether filming with or without moving the camera, smoothness and stability are among the main differences between professional and amateur footage.

- If filming without any stability aids (see Appendix A below), hold the smartphone at each corner using thumbs and fore-fingers.
- Hold your elbows firmly against your body.

Camera Movement

- For horizontal movement (panning), rotate your body (slowly) from your waist.
- For vertical movements (tilting), bend from your waist.
- You should move the camera in one direction only (do not hose)
- If you cannot capture the whole scene in one shot, it is better to take a series of shots
- Without aids, avoiding “bounce” when filming while walking is very difficult
- The latest top-end smartphones have improved in-built stabilisation, but are still far from perfect.

Zooming

Professionals mainly use zoom to frame a shot before filming. Where they occasionally use zoom, it is usually for a small degree and very slow. This is more often achieved in editing. Using zoom while actively filming on smartphone cameras is extremely difficult, and is not recommended.

Framing

The framing or composition of a shot is very important.

- For a head-shot of a subject, their eyes should be about a third of the way down from the top of the frame..
- If they are looking away from the camera, they should be about a third of the way to one side, with them looking across the frame.
- If they are looking at the camera, place them either to one side or in the centre.

Length of Shot

Unless you are filming an on-going action, or a “talking head”, seven seconds is an appropriate length of shot.

Lighting

- Avoid harsh lighting, whether indoors or outdoors.
- Avoid framing a person against a bright window. You will most likely only see a dark silhouette.

Sound

- Listen for and if possible eliminate unwanted sounds.
- Place your body (or the subject) between the microphone and the source of unavoidable sounds.
- For speech, the microphone (whether in-built or external) should be as close as practical to the subject.

The “Vlog” shot

- “Vlogging” (derived from “video blogging”) is where a person records themselves talking to the camera.
- Most smartphones provide for this in “selfie” mode where the subject can see the screen as it records.
- For the best sound using the device’s microphone, you should be about 1.5m from the camera.

Appendix A - Aids and Techniques for Stability

The simplest aid to stability is to hold the camera against a solid surface such as a wall or table top.

A small zip-lock bag half-filled with rice or sugar can make this easier and more comfortable.

A Large bulldog clip fixed to one side of your smartphone will hold it in an upright position when placed on a suitable flat surface.



Alternatively, for a “volg” shot, you could hang a wide belt over a door and close the door, or hang it from a hook on a wall. Using a large and strong rubber band, secure the camera to the belt, with the screen pointing to the subject. Adjust for height and level.



A “string pod” is a piece of string secured to or around the camera, and held under tension at the other end. This can be by standing on the string and pulling upward. In all cases you will need to adjust the length of string to suit.

A “selfie” stick be held against a solid surface, such as a table, or up against an overhanging branch for a higher angle shot..

A monopod can serve the same purposes, and can be used extended with its base on the ground.



You can also create your own “rig” from inexpensive separate parts.



Pocket sized tripod - Small ball-head - Camera clamp

These are quite cheap to buy on line (but avoid the very cheapest tripods).. The rig can be used on a table top, or with the ball-head set at an angle, it can be held against a wall or post. With the legs closed, it can be “hand-held” using one hand.



Gyroscopic stabilizers can be effective for both stationary and moving shots. However, they can be expensive, costing from about \$100 and upwards.



Small to medium photo or video tripods (combined with a camera clamp) can also be used, but require extra effort in carrying and setting up.



Video Tips for Wheelchair Users

Wheelchairs can be excellent platforms for video. Those with upper body function should be able to film hand-held. Extra stability can be achieved when resting the elbows on the armrests, if fitted. To allow for other activities (eg pushing), securing the device with a neck strap may be appropriate.

Some wheelchairs already have mounts to attach a smartphone, and some of those can be aligned for video. For others, there are various add-on clamps, which, depending on the configuration of the chair, and combined with a phone clamp, can accommodate a smartphone. Either of these arrangements may be able to work well for people with some limited arm movement.



Apps

For those with very limited arm/hand movement, there are apps that allow smartphone cameras to be controlled remotely.

Apple's iOS 13 (compatible with iPhone 6S, 6S Plus and later), supports a comprehensive range of voice commands that includes just about everything the iPhone is capable of doing. This includes all of the controls available for setting up and taking video (other than moving the smartphone itself).

For navigating a menu, it uses numbers; the user can say a number and it selects that item. For tasks such as setting a focus point, it uses a numbered grid. Saying a number will enlarge the nominated grid square. The user can then say "tap" or for more pin-point accuracy, call for a further grid within that grid square.

So far, Android cameras have only a limited range of voice commands. Most of these are restricted to taking a photo or starting (but not stopping) a video recording. Hopefully, a greater range of useful voice commands are in development.

For those able to tap and swipe a smartphone in a fixed position where it cannot be used as a camera, apps such as **Teamviewer for Remote** (see below) may allow them to control a second smartphone (the camera) held in a separate clamp.

Using *TeamViewer for Remote* and TeamViewer Quick Support to use one Mobile Device to Control the Camera (and many other apps) on Another.

TeamViewer is a free app that allows one mobile device to fully control another, including the camera. It is claimed to work on and across Android and iOS devices. Note: This is not an endorsement of the Teamviewer applications.

On Device 2 (the device acting as the camera):

Install the TeamViewer Quick Support App

Tap: **Activate**

Note the ID given

On Device 1 (the device acting as the controller):

Install the TeamViewer for Remote App

Enter the Partner ID (see below)

Tap: **Remote Control**

On Device 2:

When prompted to allow remote support, tap: **Allow**

If prompted, tap: **Start Now** (the screen on Device 1 should now mirror Device 2 and allow full control of that device).

On Device 1:

Tap: **Camera app**.

Use the camera controls to adjust settings and take video on Device 2.

When finished, close the camera app.

Close the Quick Support App (the screen on Device 1 (it should revert to normal)).

Close the TeamViewer for Remote Apps