

THE GUILD · HOME STUDIO GUIDE

Your studio, simplified.

The least gear you need to look and sound credible on camera, and how to set it up.

Hey,

Most home studio guides are written by gear obsessives, for gear obsessives. This one is the opposite. The goal is to get you on camera fast, looking and sounding credible, with the least amount of equipment we can get away with.

Here's the good news: you already own most of what you need. Your phone is a better camera than the ones most channels launched on, and a simple wireless clip-on mic is all the microphone you'll need for a long time.

So treat this as two things. First, a setup you can run today with what's already in the house. Then a short shopping list for the few pieces worth buying, split into a budget version and a nicer version for when the channel is rolling.

Everything here is what working creators actually use right now, not theory. Read it once, set up once, and after that it's a five minute routine before you hit record.

Carlos

 carlosmagno

The setup you can run today

Before you buy a single thing, you can shoot a clean video this afternoon with what you already have. Here's the whole setup.

- ☐ Stand your phone on something solid at **eye level**. Use the back camera, not the selfie camera. It's sharper.
- ☐ Sit facing a window, with the **window in front of you**, never behind. Free and flattering light.
- ☐ Clip on your **wireless mic** (a DJI Mic or similar), about a hand's width below your chin. This one step matters more than any camera upgrade.
- ☐ Put **three to six feet** between you and the wall behind you. Depth alone makes the shot look intentional.
- ☐ Pick a **quiet room with soft things in it** (rugs, a couch, curtains). Hard empty rooms echo.
- ☐ Record a **15 second test**. Watch it back with the sound on. Fix anything obvious, then record for real.

If today is all you ever do, you'll already be ahead of most channels in your space.

Choosing your background

Your background does quiet work. It tells people you're a professional before you say a word. You don't need a set, you need a little depth and a couple of intentional choices.

DO THIS

- ✓ Leave space behind you. Three to six feet of depth blurs the background naturally, even on a phone.
- ✓ Show one or two things that signal who you are: a shelf with books, a plant, a single framed piece.
- ✓ Keep it simple, and a touch darker than you are, so you stand out from it.

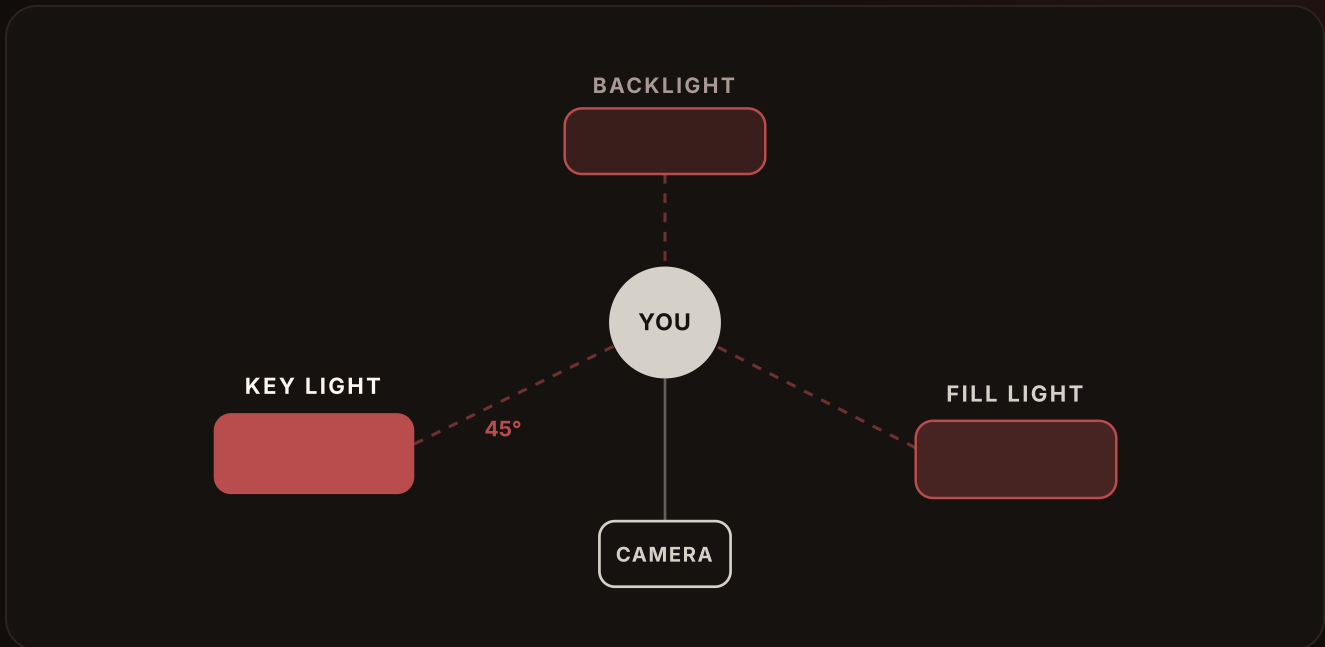
AVOID

- ✗ Sitting right up against a blank wall. It reads flat and amateur.
- ✗ A window behind you. The camera exposes for the bright window and turns you into a shadow.
- ✗ Clutter, an unmade bed, or a busy kitchen. Eyes wander to everything in the frame.

Budget version: use a wall or bookshelf you already have, just add depth. **Step-up version:** style one shelf with a few objects and add a small light behind you, which is the next page.

One or two lights, placed right

Good light is the biggest difference between "phone video" and "real channel." One good light in the right place does more than three lights in the wrong place.



- **Key light:** your main light. In front of you and off to one side, about 45 degrees, a little above eye level so it angles down on you.
- **Fill:** a softer, dimmer light on the other side to lift the shadows. A window or a white wall does this for free.
- **Backlight (optional):** a small light behind you, pointing at the wall, to separate you from the background.
- **Softer is kinder:** a diffused panel or wand light beats a bare bulb. Never light yourself from the ceiling, it casts shadows under your eyes.

Start with just the key light. Add the fill and backlight only if you want them. Keep every light the same color (all daylight, or all warm), never mixed.

Getting the most from your phone

Your phone shoots better video than the cameras most big channels started on. You just need to lock a few settings so it stops "helping" you mid-take.

- 1 Use the **back camera** (the main 1x lens), not the selfie camera. Record in **4K at 30fps**.
- 2 **Lock focus and exposure:** in the Camera app, press and hold on your face until you see AE/AF Lock. Now the picture won't drift while you talk.
- 3 **Frame yourself** with your eyes about a third of the way down the screen, with a little room above your head.
- 4 Turn on **Airplane Mode and Do Not Disturb** so a call never ruins a take. Check you have storage free, since 4K eats space.
- 5 **Wipe the lens.** Seriously. It's the cheapest upgrade there is.

Want a more cinematic image with manual control, still free? Record with the [Blackmagic Camera](#) app. Start in auto and grow into it.

OPTIONAL · WHEN YOU'RE READY FOR A REAL CAMERA

The [Sony ZV-E10 II](#) is the camera most creators name for talking head, and a [DJI Osmo Pocket 3](#) is great for shooting on the go. Neither is needed to start. Your phone is genuinely fine.

Sound matters more than video

People will forgive a soft-focus picture. They will click away from bad audio in seconds. A simple wireless clip-on mic solves this, so let's use it well.

YOUR CLIP-ON MIC

A DJI MIC OR SIMILAR

- Clip the little transmitter on your shirt, about a hand's width below your chin, centered on your chest.
- Use the fuzzy windscreen if the room echoes or a fan is running.
- Do a quick level check: talk normally and make sure it isn't peaking into the red.
- If your mic records a backup onto itself (the DJI Mic 2 does), leave that on. Free insurance against a bad file.

TREAT THE ROOM (ONLY IF IT ECHOES)

- Record where there are soft things: rugs, a couch, curtains, a full bookshelf. They soak up echo.
- If you clap and the room rings, the mic hears that too. The cheapest fix is hanging a couple of moving blankets behind and beside you.

Budget: a wireless clip-on mic (a DJI Mic or similar). **Step-up:** a Shure MV7 desk mic if you ever want a richer, broadcast sound on sitting-down videos. Honestly, the clip-on is enough for a long time.

Recording a remote guest

For any interview format, the golden rule: never trust the call itself for your recording. Each person records their own clean track locally, then you stitch them together. [Zencastr](#) does this for free.

- 1 Go to [zencastr.com](#), create a free account, and start a new recording. Open it in Chrome.
- 2 Send your guest the **invite link**. They join in their browser, with nothing to install.
- 3 **Both of you wear headphones** (your AirPods are fine). This stops their voice leaking into your mic and causing echo.
- 4 Hit record. Zencastr captures **each of you on a separate track** in full quality, even if the internet hiccups.

LOOKING YOUR BEST ON THE CALL

- On a Mac, use your iPhone as the webcam with **Continuity Camera** (built in, free, far better than a laptop camera). Just pick it from the camera menu.
- On Windows, the [Camo](#) app does the same thing, and the free version is fine to start.
- Keep your clip-on mic on for your own audio, exactly like a solo video.

What records what

Keep this simple. You only need two recipes, and almost everything is free.

RECORDING SOLO

- Your phone records the video and your clip-on mic records the audio at the same time. That's the whole thing.
- Want more control over the image? Record with the free [Blackmagic Camera](#) app instead.
- Hand the raw video and audio straight to your editor. The audio polish happens in post, not here.

RECORDING AN INTERVIEW

- Zencastr records both people locally and hands you separate tracks.
- Keep your own iPhone rolling as a backup video of your side. Always have a backup.
- Edit later in [CapCut](#) (free), or hand the raw files straight to your editor.

Your free toolkit: Blackmagic Camera (record), Zencastr (interviews), Continuity Camera (iPhone as webcam), CapCut (edit).

The budget starter kit

The short list worth buying first. Everything else, you already own. Prices are ballparks as of June 2026, so tap a name for today's price.

ALREADY IN YOUR KIT · \$0

Your phone (your camera) · **any earbuds** (for interviews) · **a wireless clip-on mic** if you own one (a DJI Mic or similar; if not, it is the one purchase that matters most)

CAMERA SUPPORT

Phone tripod with mount and remote

~\$25

Holds your phone steady at eye level. Get one tall enough to stand or sit at.

LIGHTING · PICK WHAT FITS YOUR SPACE

Neewer NL-192AI slim panel kit (2-pack)

~\$100

The compact panel kit creators keep recommending for budget YouTube lighting. Two slim 13-inch panels (a key and a fill) on small stands, nothing like a bulky softbox. Even slimmer for a tight corner: a Nanlite PavoTube wand light.

OPTIONAL · ONLY IF YOUR ROOM ECHOES

Moving blankets

~\$30

Hang a couple behind and beside you to kill echo in a bare room. Skip if your room is already soft.

CORE KIT TOTAL

about \$125

When you're ready to level up

None of this is required. It's the next tier for when the channel is rolling and you want a cleaner look and sound. Still nothing technical.

LIGHTING

~\$90

Elgato Key Light Neo

A clean, app-controlled light you dim from your phone. Buy one as your key, add a second later as a fill. (It replaced the Key Light Air, which Elgato discontinued.)

BACKGROUND

~\$80

Nanlite PavoTube II 6C

The creator-favorite small color tube. Place it behind you for separation and a bit of mood on the wall.

AUDIO · OPTIONAL

~\$200

Shure MV7

The creator-standard desk mic, for a richer broadcast sound on sitting-down videos. Only if you want it, your clip-on mic is already great.

OPTIONAL · A REAL CAMERA, ONLY WHEN YOU WANT ONE

- Sony ZV-E10 II (~\$999 body): the camera most creators name for studio talking head. Real autofocus, flip screen.
- DJI Osmo Pocket 3 (around \$500, price swings): pocket-sized and stabilized, great for shooting on location and travel.
- Your iPhone stays perfectly good until then, so there's no rush.

Your five minute checklist

The first setup takes about an hour. The second takes fifteen minutes. Once it's dialed in, this is the five minute routine you run before you hit record.

- ☐ Phone at **eye level**, back camera, 4K. Lens wiped.
- ☐ **Airplane Mode and Do Not Disturb** on. Storage free.
- ☐ **Mic** clipped on, charged, levels checked.
- ☐ **Key light** on. Window light helping you, not behind you.
- ☐ Background tidy, with a little **depth** behind you.
- ☐ Record **15 seconds**, watch it back with sound, then go.

The goal is a recorded video you're happy with, not a perfect one. Then hit record.

Now go hit record.

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