



INTRODUCTION

The following guidelines apply to both social media and standard video formats, providing a foundation for producing quality content regardless of your available resources or technical expertise. While these best practices will significantly improve your video production, they represent general guidance only. For project-specific requirements, detailed technical specifications, or assistance with complex productions, please reach out to Communications at Communications@marylandtaxes.gov

PLATFORM SPECIFICATIONS

Vertical Video (Social Media: Instagram, TikTok, Facebook Stories)

- Aspect ratio: 9:16
- Hold phone vertically
- Frame subject from mid-chest up for talking head shots
- Keep key information in the center "safe zone" (avoiding top/bottom where platform UI appears)

Horizontal Video (YouTube, Website)

- Aspect ratio: 16:9
- Hold phone horizontally or use camera in landscape mode
- Apply rule of thirds for subject placement
- Allow appropriate headroom (space between top of head and frame edge)

CORE PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

AUDIO

Audio quality often matters more than video quality for viewer retention.

Filming Yourself:

- Position yourself 3-4 feet from your phone/camera
- Use wired or wireless earbuds as a basic microphone (significant improvement over built-in mic)

- Choose quiet locations; turn off HVAC, close windows
- Test audio levels before recording

Working with Crew/Subject:

- Use lavalier microphones when available
- Position wireless mics 6-8 inches below chin, centered on chest
- Monitor audio through headphones during recording

LIGHTING

Proper lighting creates professional-looking footage regardless of camera quality.

Filming Yourself:

- Face a window for natural light (avoid direct sunlight)
- Position yourself so light source is in front, slightly to the side
- Avoid overhead lighting that creates shadows under eyes
- Film during consistent lighting conditions (overcast days provide even, flattering light)

Working with Crew/Subject:

- Use professional lighting when equipment available
- Use diffusion to soften harsh light sources

FRAMING

- Proper framing directs viewer attention and appears professional.

Filming Yourself:

- Position camera at eye level (stack books under phone if needed)
- Look directly at camera lens, not at your preview image
- Center yourself in vertical video; position on left or right third in horizontal
- Ensure background is tidy and relevant (avoid clutter or distracting elements)

Working with Crew/Subject:

- Maintain consistent framing throughout multi-shot sequences
- Allow appropriate "looking room" (space in direction subject is facing)
- Keep horizon lines level
- Check for distracting background elements (objects appearing to emerge from head, bright windows, movement)

CLOTHING AND APPEARANCE

- What you wear significantly impacts video quality and viewer focus.

General Guidelines:

- Avoid small patterns (stripes, checks, herringbone) that create moiré effects on camera
- Choose solid, muted colors in blues, grays, or earth tones
- Avoid pure white or pure black, which are difficult for cameras to expose correctly
- Ensure clothing is appropriate for your agency's professional standards

For On-Camera Talent:

- Minimal, matte makeup reduces shine (even for male subjects in professional productions)
- Remove or minimize reflective jewelry
- Ensure clothing is wrinkle-free and properly fitted
- Keep branding subtle unless specifically featured

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Stability: Use a tripod or stable surface. Handheld footage appears unprofessional unless intentionally documentary-style.

Focus and Exposure: Tap your subject on smartphone screen to lock focus and exposure. Don't rely on auto-settings during recording.

File Management: Film horizontally for maximum flexibility. Vertical crops can be created from horizontal footage, but not vice versa. If you need both formats, film horizontal and reframe for vertical in editing.

Recording Length: Capture 5-10 seconds before and after your primary content for editing flexibility.

Questions about specific equipment, techniques, or platform requirements should be directed to the multimedia production team.