

Camera operator cheat sheet

CHEAT SHEET

You are invisible. The shot serves the message, not the operator. Frame it well, hold it still, and stay out of the way. Nobody at home should ever notice the camera. They should just see the person clearly.

Framing

Eyes on the top third
Put the eyes on the upper third of the frame, not dead centre. Centre the person left to right, but let their eyes ride high.

A little headroom
Leave a small gap above the head. Too much and they sink to the bottom. Too little and they look cramped against the top.

Looking room
Leave space in the direction they face or move. A person looking right needs room on the right, not their nose against the edge.

Level and eyeline
Keep the horizon straight and the camera near the speaker's eye level. Shooting up their nose or down at their head both feel wrong.

Shot sizes, and when to use them

SHOT	WHAT IT SHOWS	REACH FOR IT WHEN
Wide	The whole scene, the room, the stage.	Establishing, worship, the response. Your safe fallback when in doubt.
Medium	Waist or chest up, one person.	The workhorse. A speaker, the notices, most of the service.
Close	Head and shoulders.	Emotion and emphasis, used sparingly. Never in a tender or private moment.

When you don't know what to do, go wide and hold. A steady wide shot is never wrong. A restless close-up usually is.

Holding the shot

A still, steady shot beats a moving one almost every time. Most of the job is holding, not moving.

- 1

Lock it off
On a tripod, lock the head so it can't drift. Handheld, brace your elbows in, plant your feet, and breathe slowly. A shaky shot is the fastest way to look amateur.
- 2

Move slowly, or not at all
If you move, make it slow and motivated, and only during something that covers it. Never zoom in and out restlessly. A zoom mid-shot pulls all the attention onto the camera.
- 3

Don't chase
Let the subject move within the frame. Reframe gently and early, don't jerk the camera after them. Anticipate where they'll go and be there first.

Following the service

THE MOMENT	SHOOT	AVOID
Worship	A steady wide, plus the person leading. Some of the band.	Hunting for close-ups and missing the leader.
Preaching	A steady medium on the speaker, held. The occasional wide.	Zooming, drifting, or cutting off their hands when they gesture.
Response and prayer	Wide and gentle. Dignity before drama.	Close-ups on faces. Intruding on a private, tender moment.

Frame, lock, breathe. When the urge to fiddle comes, that's usually the moment to hold still. The best operators look like they're doing very little.

Focus, light, and the mistakes everyone makes

Focus and light, quickly

- **Keep the subject sharp.** Set focus on where the speaker stands and check it's crisp before you go live.
- **Watch for backlight.** A bright window or stage light behind a person throws their face into shadow. If the face is dark, the light is behind them, so light them from the front.

The mistakes everyone makes once

- Too much headroom, the person sunk low
- Cutting off hands when they gesture
- Chasing focus in and out
- Restless zooming with no reason

- A close-up at exactly the wrong moment
- Wobble from an unlocked head
- A blown-out face against a bright window
- A dead, empty frame while waiting for a cue

Before the service

- ☐ Powered, framed, lens clean
- ☐ Card has space to record
- ☐ Mount and head locked

- ☐ Focus set on the speaker's spot
- ☐ Wide shot set as your fallback
- ☐ You know the shots this service needs

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