

FIELD GUIDE

You're on the team. Here's the desk.

This is for the person who got asked to help with media and said yes before asking what that meant. You do not need to be technical. You need to know what each job is, what good looks like, and what to do when something goes quiet. That is the whole guide.

What this covers

The five jobs at a media desk, a calm walk through a Sunday, a checklist for before the doors open, and what to do when the stream drops. Plain words, no gear worship.

How to use it

Read it once this week. Skim the checklist every Sunday. Keep it near the desk. When someone new joins, hand them this instead of a rushed five minutes before service.

Every Sunday reaches further than the room.

Free to copy for your church

A field guide for media volunteers • Edition 1

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One rule above the rest

None of this is really about gear. It is about the person in the back row and the person watching from home. Serve those two, and most of the settings sort themselves out.

PART 1 • BEFORE SUNDAY

1 What this is

A short, honest guide to helping at a church media desk. Not a manual for your exact gear, and not a course. The version you keep near the desk.

Who this is for

You, if you're new to the media team and not sure what half the buttons do. Also you, if you run the rota and you're tired of explaining the same things in the five minutes before service. Hand this over instead.

What good looks like here

Good media on a Sunday is invisible. Nobody says "the sound was great" when it's right. They just hear the message and forget you were there. Your win is that nobody notices you. Aim for boring, on purpose.

What this guide is not

- ❑ **Not a manual for your specific gear.** Every church's desk, cameras and software are different. This teaches the jobs, not the buttons. Someone still needs to show you your actual setup once.
- ❑ **Not a deep audio course.** Sound alone could fill its own guide. This is the volunteer version: enough to keep a service clean, not enough to become an engineer overnight.
- ❑ **Not a rulebook to obey.** Your team may do things differently for good reasons. Where they do, follow them. This is a sensible default, not the law.

The fastest way to learn this job: stand next to whoever does it now for two Sundays, hands off, just watching. Then do it with them beside you. This guide fills the gaps between those Sundays.

2 The shape of a Sunday

Most of a service is predictable. Once you know the shape, you're never caught out by what comes next, and you can look ahead instead of reacting.

STAGE	WHAT'S HAPPENING, AND WHAT THE DESK DOES	WATCH FOR
Doors open	Walk-in music, a holding slide, people arriving. The stream is not live yet. DESK Run the pre-service checklist now, while there's time to fix things.	Skipped checklist lines
Countdown	A countdown on screen, the room filling. DESK Go live on the stream now, not at the first word. People arrive online early too, then confirm it's actually up.	Stream up, with sound
Worship	Band and vocals, lyrics on screen. DESK Ride levels gently, advance lyrics on time, keep a steady wide shot and a shot of whoever's leading.	Late lyrics, harsh levels
Welcome and notices	One person talking. DESK Their mic up, music all the way down and out, a lower third with their name. Cameras on them, calm.	Music left under a voice
The message	The reason everyone came, in the room and at home. DESK Record it clean, hold a steady shot, keep the mic level rock solid, and stop fiddling.	The recording and its sound
Response	Prayer, ministry, quieter and often personal. DESK Pull cameras wide, be gentle, keep the sound soft and clear. This is not the moment for a close-up.	Dignity over drama
Close	A final song or word, then a holding slide. DESK Keep the stream up until the room clears, then end it, stop the recording, and save the file.	Stream ended too early

The message is the one part you cannot re-run. If you protect a single thing all service, protect that recording and its sound. Everything else can have an off moment. That cannot.

3 The five jobs

A media desk has up to five jobs. A big team splits them across five people. A small team stacks them onto one or two. Before service, know which ones are yours today.

THE JOB	WHAT IT IS	THE ONE THING THAT MATTERS
Sound	The mix the room hears through the speakers, and the separate mix the stream hears.	Voices clear, nothing too loud, one voice up at a time.
Camera	What the room screens and the stream see. Framing people and cutting calmly.	A steady shot beats a clever one, every time.
Lyrics and slides	The words people sing and the points they follow, on the screen.	On time, spelt right, and black when in doubt.
The stream	Getting the service online and keeping it there for the people at home.	Live early, with sound, and someone watching it.
Capture	Recording the message cleanly so it can live past Sunday.	Clean sound and a steady frame on the message.

If you're alone today, do the jobs in this order of care: capture the message, keep the sound clean, keep the stream up. Cameras and slide polish come after those three are safe. You cannot do everything perfectly solo, so protect the things you can't redo first.

How the jobs talk to each other

These jobs are not separate islands. The sound person feeds clean audio to both the stream and the recording. The camera and the slides both land on the same screens and the same stream. When one job drifts, the others feel it. A good desk is a few people watching different things and trusting each other to call it when something's off.

PART 2 · THE JOBS, ONE AT A TIME

4 Sound

Two mixes come off one desk: the one the room hears through the speakers, and the one the stream hears. They are not the same, and that trips up every new volunteer.

The two mixes, and why they differ

The room already hears some things loudly on their own: the drums, an amp on stage, a strong voice near the front. So the room mix often needs less of those. The stream hears only what you send it, nothing from the actual air, so it needs everything, balanced. If you mix the stream by ear off the room speakers, the stream comes out thin and wrong. Trust the stream's own meters and, when you can, a set of headphones on that mix.

What to actually watch

- ✓ Levels sit in the healthy middle of the meter, **not pinned at the top**. Red means too loud and distorting.
- ✓ **One voice up at a time**. Everything not in use is muted or pulled down.
- ✓ When someone stops talking, **bring them down**. An open mic that isn't being used only adds noise and risk.
- ✓ Music comes down and out **before** someone speaks, never after they've started.

The one skill worth learning first: gain before volume

Set the gain first, then use the fader. Gain is how hard a channel listens at the top of the chain; the fader is how loud it sits in the mix. A quiet mic is usually a gain problem, not a fader problem. Get the gain healthy so the meter looks right, then ride the fader from there. Fixing everything with the fader alone is how you end up with noise and feedback.

Do

- Mute channels that aren't in use.
- Label your channels so you're not guessing.
- Check the speaker's mic before they walk up.
- Keep a spare mic ready and tested.

Don't

- Ride the fader nervously through the sermon.
- Turn up a squealing mic. That's feedback.
- Leave every channel open "just in case."
- Touch the desk during a quiet prayer unless something's genuinely wrong.

Feedback is a mic hearing its own speaker in a loop. That's the squeal. The fix is to lower that channel, or move the mic further from the speakers, never to turn it up. Turning it up makes the loop louder.

5 Camera

A camera's job is to show the right thing, steadily, and get out of the way. Fancy moves are how everyone spots a nervous operator. Still and correct beats busy and clever.

Framing, the parts that matter

- **Headroom.** A little space above the head, not a gap, not a haircut at the top of the frame.
- **Lead room.** Space in front of where a person is looking or moving, so they aren't crammed against the edge.
- **Eyes on the upper third.** Put the eyes a little above the middle of the frame, not dead centre.
- **Off the edges.** Keep the important thing away from the very edge, where some screens crop it off.

Movement

Move slowly, or don't move at all. A locked-off wide shot that's steady beats a shaky zoom every single time. If you're unsure whether to move, hold the shot. Nobody at home ever complained that a camera was too steady.

The few shots you actually need

- ✓ **A safe wide of the stage.** This is home base. When in doubt, you return here.
- ✓ **A medium of whoever's speaking,** roughly chest up.
- ✓ **The screen or the band** when it's their moment.

That's enough to cover most services well. More shots is not better. Fewer, clean shots is better.

Do

Start on the wide, and return to it when unsure.
Frame the shot before you cut to it live.
Follow the speaker gently and slowly.

Don't

Zoom during the sermon.
Chase people around the stage.
Punch in on someone crying during ministry.

During prayer, response or any emotional moment, go wider, not closer. A wide shot gives people room and dignity. A close-up on a private moment takes something that wasn't yours to take.

6 Lyrics and slides

The screen carries the words people sing and the points they follow. Late or wrong words pull everyone out of the moment, and they're the easiest thing to get right with a little prep.

Before service

- ✓ Get the song list and the sermon slides **early**, not at the last minute.
- ✓ **Spellcheck every song and every name.** A typo on the big screen is the one mistake everyone sees.
- ✓ Run through the order once, so you know what comes next without hunting for it.

During worship

Advance on the **last word** of the current line, so the next line is up before people need it. Too early is better than too late. Singers can wait a beat on a line that's already there; they can't sing a line that hasn't appeared. Watch the room, not just your screen.

The black screen is a tool, not a mistake

Going to black is a choice you make on purpose. Between songs, during prayer, or when you've lost your place, a black or clean holding screen is calm and quiet. A wrong slide is loud and pulls focus. When in doubt, black beats the wrong thing every time.

Do

- Keep the next slide cued and ready.
- Use black between moments.
- Match the screen to what's happening right now.

Don't

- Leave last week's notices up.
- Show the sermon's final point before the speaker reaches it.
- Scroll frantically for a slide with the whole room watching.

7 The stream

The stream is the person at home, the parent in the crèche, the member who's travelling. Treat them like a real part of the congregation, because they are.

Go live early

Start the stream during the countdown, not at the first word. People arrive online before a service the same way they arrive in the room. An empty countdown screen tells them they're in the right place and it's about to begin. A stream that starts halfway through the first song tells them they missed it.

Trust nothing until you've seen it

The desk saying "live" is not proof. Take out a phone, off the church wifi, on cellular data, and watch the actual stream. That is the only real proof that it's up and the sound is going out. Everything else is a guess.

Watch the two things that break

- **Sound.** Streams love to go live in total silence: a muted channel, or the sound routed to the room but not to the stream. Silence looks completely fine to you and dead to them.
- **Connection.** A struggling connection shows up as freezing or spinning. Have someone glance at the stream through the service, not only at the start.

Do

Go live early, during the countdown.
Check it on cellular, off the church wifi.
Keep half an eye on the online chat for "no sound."
Know how to restart the stream calmly.

Don't

Assume it's fine because it was fine last week.
Rely on the desk's own preview as proof.
End the stream the second the pastor says amen.

A silent stream is worse than a stream that's down. A dead stream is obvious and someone fixes it. A silent one looks perfect to you and gives the people at home a frozen, wordless service. Confirm sound first, every single time.

8 Capture for later

Sunday is one hour. The message can serve people all week as clips, quotes and audio, but only if it was recorded cleanly in the first place. Capture is the quiet job that pays off on Tuesday.

Record the message clean

- ✓ **Record from the source**, the camera or the desk, not a phone pointed at a screen.
- ✓ **Get clean sound**. A feed from the sound desk beats a camera's built-in mic by a mile.
- ✓ **Hold the framing steady** during the message, so a future clip isn't chasing a moving shot.

Make it easy to find later

- ☐ **Note where the message starts and ends** in the recording, so nobody has to scrub through worship to find it.
- ☐ **Name the file** with the date and the title. "Sunday" is not a filename you'll thank yourself for.
- ☐ **Keep the original file**, not just the stream copy. A stream is squeezed and has your on-screen graphics burned into it. The original is cleaner and far more useful.

Next week's best clip is already inside this week's recording. Your job today is simply to make sure it's in there cleanly, so whoever edits it later isn't fighting bad sound and a shaky frame to rescue a good moment.

The file is the asset

Back up the recording before you wipe the card. A service you can find and reuse next week is worth more than a flawless Sunday that nobody kept. The card fills up; the good moments shouldn't disappear with it.

PART 3 • WHEN IT GOES WRONG

9 The pre-service checklist

Run this every Sunday before the doors open. Most on-air disasters are just a skipped line on a list like this. Print it, laminate it, and tick it properly.

Sound

- ✓ Mics on, tested, batteries fresh or wired
- ✓ Speaker's mic checked at the podium
- ✓ Music source playing and audible
- ✓ Nothing left muted that shouldn't be

Screens

- ✓ Song list loaded and spellchecked
- ✓ Sermon slides in, and in order
- ✓ Last week's notices cleared out
- ✓ A black or holding screen ready

Cameras

- ✓ Powered, framed, lenses clean
- ✓ Cards have space to record
- ✓ Home wide shot set and steady
- ✓ Mounts locked, not loose

Stream

- ✓ Platform ready and titled for today
- ✓ Sound routed to the stream, not just the room
- ✓ A test viewer on cellular ready to check
- ✓ Someone owns watching it all service

Capture

- ✓ Recording set to the right source
- ✓ Clean sound feed to the recording confirmed
- ✓ Enough space on the card for the whole service
- ✓ You know how to start and stop it without hunting

One person calls "we're go" only when every box is ticked. If a box can't be ticked, say so out loud now, while there's still time, not at the first word of the service.

10 When something breaks

Things break mid-service. Calm and a plan beat panic. Here's the first move for the failures you'll actually meet, so you're deciding, not freezing.

1 No sound on the stream

Check the channel isn't muted, and that the sound is routed to the stream and not only the room. Confirm on the cellular phone. Remember it looks fine to you and is dead to them, so check this even when nothing seems wrong.

2 No sound in the room

Check the speaker's mic is on and up, and the main output isn't muted. If it squeals instead, that's feedback: pull that channel down, don't push it up.

3 A camera froze or dropped out

Cut to your safe wide shot and leave it there. A steady wide is fine for as long as you need. Sort the other camera out off air, with no rush.

4 The slide won't advance

Go to black. Breathe. Find your place. Come back. Black is calm and buys you time. A stuck wrong slide is loud and makes it worse.

5 The stream dropped

Restart it calmly. Don't announce it in the room, the room is completely fine. Get it back and rejoin where the online congregation is now.

6 A feedback squeal

Find the open mic nearest a speaker and pull it down. Don't turn other things up to cover it. The squeal is a loop, and lowering the mic breaks the loop.

7 You've lost your place entirely

Go to the wide shot and the black screen. Take a breath. Rejoin at the next clear moment. Neutral is always a safe place to stand while you recover.

Whatever breaks, you have two safe places to retreat to: the wide camera shot, and the black screen. When it all goes sideways, go to both, and sort the actual problem out from there. Neutral and steady is never the wrong answer.

PART 4 · THE WORDS

11 Glossary

The words people say around the desk, in plain terms. You don't need all of these on day one. Come back when you hear one you don't know yet.

Sound

WORD	WHAT IT MEANS
Gain	How hard a channel listens to its input, set at the top of the chain. You set this first, before the fader.
Fader	The slider that sets how loud a channel sits in the mix. Your main live control.
FOH	Front of house: the main mix the room hears through the speakers, and the desk that controls it.
Foldback / monitors	The sound sent back to the people on stage so they can hear themselves. Separate from what the room hears.
IEMs	In-ear monitors: earpieces that give each person on stage their own personal monitor mix.
Feedback	The squeal when a mic picks up its own speaker in a loop. Lower the mic, never raise it.
Ducking	Automatically dipping the music when someone speaks, so the voice sits cleanly on top.
Clipping	Pushing a signal past its limit so it distorts. It shows as red on the meter. Keep out of the red.
LUFS	A way of measuring how loud something feels over time. Used to keep a stream's loudness consistent, not spiking and dipping.

Screens, cameras and streaming

WORD	WHAT IT MEANS
Lower third	The name-and-title graphic that sits across the lower part of the screen.
Holding slide	A still screen shown before, between or after moments, like a logo or a welcome.
Headroom	The space between the top of someone's head and the top of the frame.
Lead room	The space left in front of where a person is looking or moving.
Safe area	The part of the frame that always shows, whatever screen it's viewed on. Keep the important things inside it.
Locked off	A camera left still on its mount, not being moved. Your most reliable shot.
Switcher	The device or software that chooses which camera or source is on screen right now.
Keying	Laying text or graphics over video so the background still shows through cleanly, as with lyrics over a camera shot.
Tally	The little light that tells a camera operator theirs is the shot currently live.
Bitrate	How much data the stream sends each second. Higher looks better but needs a stronger, steadier connection.
Encoder	The software or box that turns your video and sound into a stream the platform can accept.
Dropped frames	Bits of video lost when the connection can't keep up. You see them as stutter or freezing.
Latency	The delay between something happening in the room and it appearing on the stream.
Source / feed	The signal you're recording or streaming from, such as a camera or the sound desk.
DAW	A digital audio workstation: software for recording and mixing audio. Some teams record the message through one.
NDI	A way of sending video between devices over the church network instead of running cables.
SDI and HDMI	The two common cable types that carry video between cameras, screens and switchers.

If you remember nothing else

Serve the person in the back row and the person watching from home. Protect the message and its sound above everything else. When something breaks, retreat to the wide shot and the black screen. Run the checklist every week. Nobody should notice you, and when nobody does, you've done the job well.

A word to the volunteer

You showed up on a Sunday to make it easier for someone else to meet God, and most weeks nobody will thank you for it. It matters anyway. The back row heard clearly because of you. The member at home wasn't left out because of you. That's real work, and it counts.

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When you're ready to turn a Sunday message into a week of clips, that's the one part we make easy. The recording you captured today is all it needs.
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Real moments, put to use.