

How to Film A Cappella Grid Videos

Making a grid (or “heads-in-boxes”) video is a quick and easy way to make music with your ensemble. Here are some guidelines to make the video editor’s job a little easier, and so the project looks like it was done with the same vision in mind! These instructions are for filming to a pre-recorded audio track (essentially lip-syncing, with a little extra).

A. You will need:

1. A device that can record video (smartphone, laptop, etc)
 - Make sure your device can record video with **at least** these settings:
 - a. Dimensions: 720p (1280x720 pixels). Larger dimensions (1080p, 4k) are welcome!
 - b. Frame Rate: 24 fps - Most devices will record at 30 or 60 fps, those are also acceptable.
2. A device that can playback audio (a different smartphone, etc)
3. A tripod, shelf, or object that you can put at **eye level**
4. Good lighting (lamps, sunlight through a window)
5. Yourself
6. **to have fun!**

B. What the director or ensemble needs to decide beforehand:

1. What’s everyone wearing? Uniforms, tshirts, pjs... onesies!?
2. Is everyone sitting or standing when they sing?
3. Should everyone have a blank wall behind them, or are mixed backgrounds ok?

C. Setup:

1. Take a shower, brush your teeth, look nice!
2. If your ensemble has an agreed upon shirt or look, wear that. Otherwise, wear something you think looks appropriate for the song you’re performing.
3. Place your recording device on something stable (tripod, shelf, stack of books, etc). Be sure to film **landscape (horizontally) and not portrait (vertically)**. Preferably near where you can light your face well, and there are no bright lights behind you.
4. Have your playback device nearby, and **do not use headphones!** It helps the editor sync your video to the audio track if they can hear what you can hear.
5. Position yourself facing the recording device **straight on at eye level**. Frame yourself so we can see from your shoulders to a few inches over your head. If you can’t see what your device can see, do a test recording, and watch it to see your framing. If filming in front of a wall, stand about 1 ft away from it.

D. Recording:

1. Press record on your recording device. Position yourself and **wait 10 seconds** before you...
2. Start the audio on your playback device.
3. Sing (or vocally percuss) along to your part. **Important: Actually sing!** Don't just mouth along to your part. This helps the editor, and makes the video look more authentic. Extra tips to help sell your video:
 - a. Use your hands to highlight downbeats, moments, or rhythms that you're singing.
 - b. Move your body/shoulders/head up and down if your part moves up and down, or if you have long held notes that change.
 - c. Emote the feeling of the song! Smile if the song calls for it, smize if you can! Watching someone sit/stand still and move only their mouth is boooooooring!
 - d. If you can't full-voice your part (due to location, etc), then when you sing high notes, remember to *look like* you're singing high notes. Nobody flexes the top of their range looking chill.
4. When the song finishes, look directly at your recording device with a great sense of accomplishment and pride, and **wait there 10 seconds** before you stop the recording.

E. Final Steps:

1. Upload/send your video recording to the agreed upon location/digital cloud/actual cloud.
2. Celebrate cuz you've done something productive with your ensemble without having to be in the same room!

F. FAQs:

1. Q: *My device can't record at those settings. Is that ok?*
A: That's ok. Your video might look a little potato-y, but not everyone has access to the newest iPhone. Make the best of what you can.
2. Q: *I don't have anything that can hold my device at eye level, what do I do?*
A: Worse comes to worst: hold your device directly in front of you and film selfie style.
3. Q: *Can we all film vertically?*
A: Absolutely! Stylistic changes like this are always welcome, and help your grid video stand out! Make sure to discuss this with your editor, and they'll let you know of any technical limitations.

For any more questions, email me at berko.andrewitz@gmail.com