

INSOMNIATIC MEDIA

FIELD NOTES · NO. 1

Documenting real moments, on camera.

Media that documents real moments.

A short playbook for direct-to-camera storytelling — built from the shoots we actually run, the way we run them.

[DOWNLOAD THE FIELD GUIDE \(PDF\)](#)



NO. 1 Healing Grounds opening — November 2023. Photo: Insomniatic Media.

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NO. 1

Plan the person, then the shot

The camera is easier than the relationship. Spend your preparation time on the person you are recording: why they agreed to talk, what they want someone to understand, and what they are nervous about.

☐ **Ask before you record.**

Three questions before the interview that have nothing to do with what you will record.

☐ **Find the quiet story.**

Learn the one story they always tell that makes the room go quiet.

☐ **Nothing surprises them.**

Tell them exactly what will happen on the day, including the boring parts.



PERSON FIRST A field session, October 2022. Photo: Insomniatic Media.

TAKE AWAY

Knowing their why is half the production. The interview is already written before the camera is switched on.

Make the room quiet first

Nothing ruins a witness statement faster than a humming fridge behind the shoulders. Set the camera, then sit in the room and listen for 60 seconds before you record anything.

☐ **Kill the hum.**

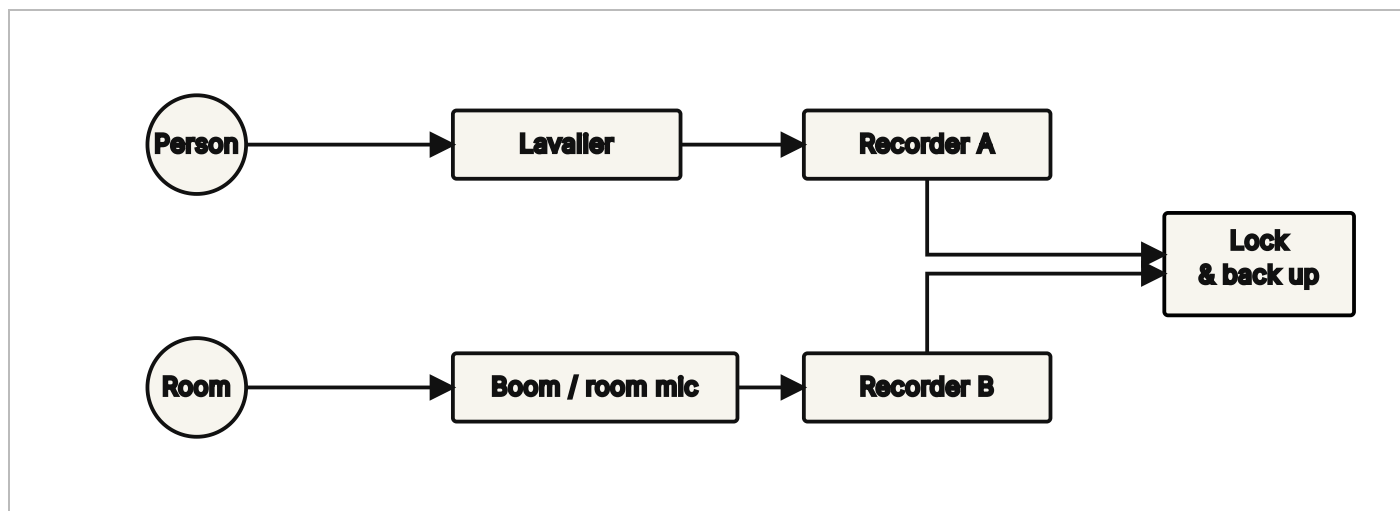
Turn off or unplug compressors, fans, and anything with an LED transformer.

☐ **Record the room.**

Thirty seconds of room tone with the mic close to the subject's position.

☐ **Two audio paths.**

One on the person (lavalier), one on the room (boom or recorder). Garbage audio is the #1 thing that gets a scene cut.



One on the person, one on the room. They join in the lockup, not in a rescue.



SOUND BEFORE PICTURE Bishop Dexter B. Lamar — 4 Kings, Atlanta, May 2025. Photo: Insomniatic Media.

TAKE AWAY

Audio is the first cut. If the track is bad, nothing saves the scene.

Light the face like you respect the person

You are not shooting a model on a headshot day. Use soft, forgiving light that keeps their eyes alive and does not flatten the room.

☐ **The window is the key.**

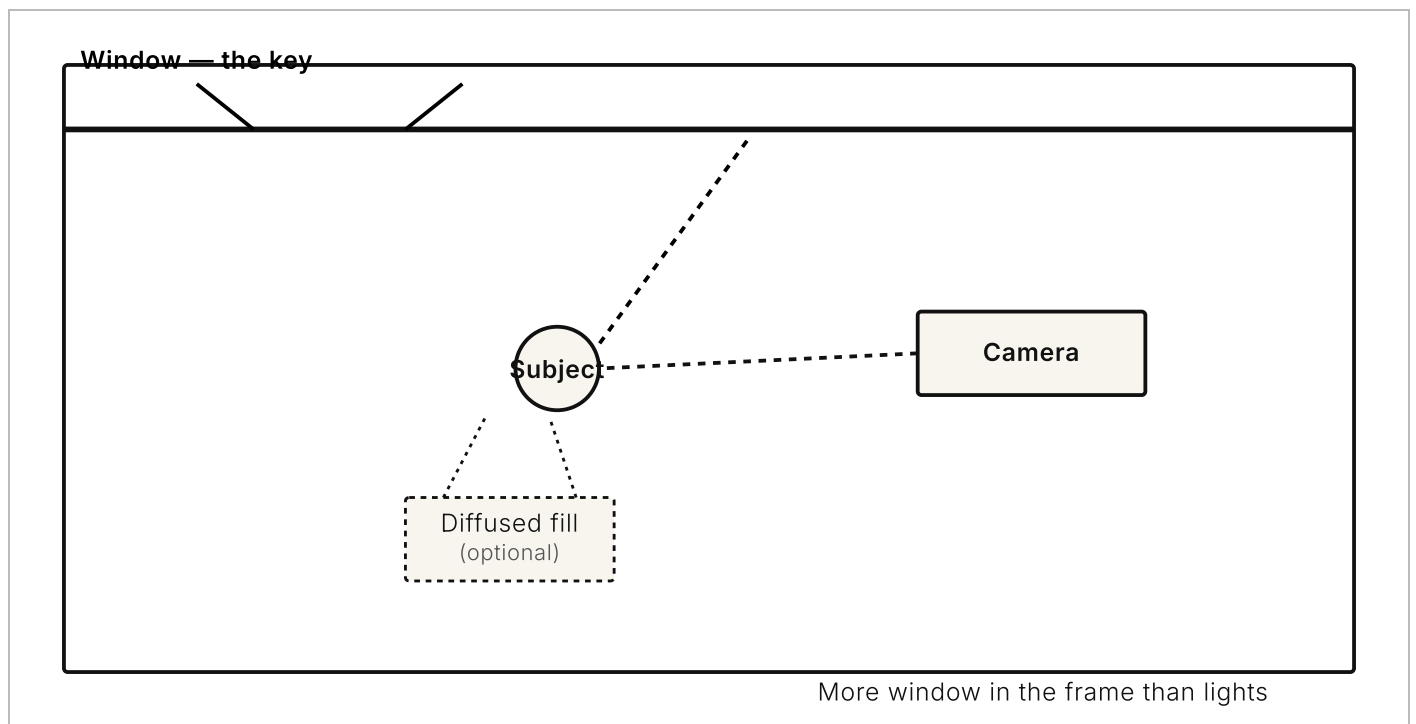
A window is a free, beautiful key light — sit them close to it at an angle, never flat against it.

☐ **Diffuse what you add.**

If you bring lamps, diffuse them.

☐ **Respect their skin tone.**

Watch for the subject's own skin tone; correct in camera, not in a weekend of grading.



Subject angled toward the window; camera follows the eyes, not the lamps.



ONE LIGHT Bishop Dexter B. Lamar — 4 Kings, Atlanta, May 2025. Photo: Insomniatic Media.

TAKE AWAY

Window light is a decision, not a default. Place the subject first, then the camera.

Direct-to-camera is a conversation, not a reading

Put the frame slightly wide, keep the eyeline just above the lens, and let them talk. The best takes are the ones where you stop directing and start listening.

☐ **Start like a human.**

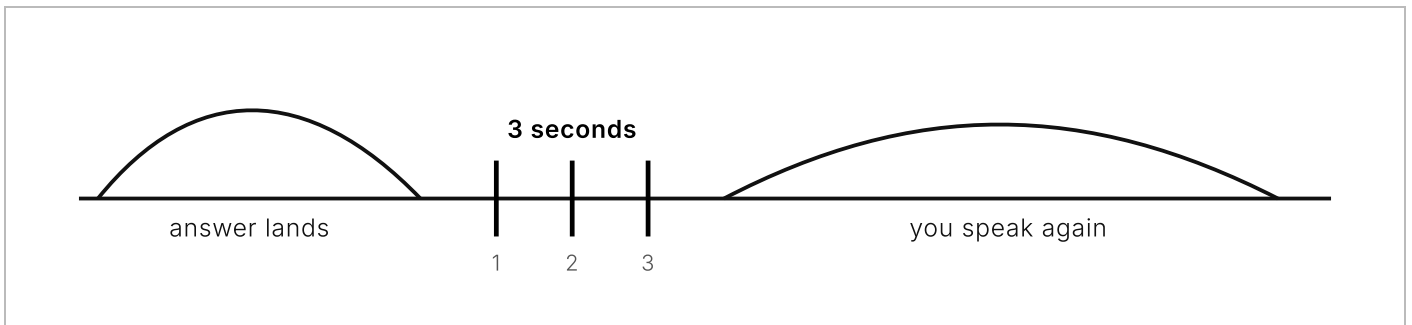
Give the mic check like a human being, then ask a real opening question.

☐ **Wait three full seconds**

after they finish talking before you speak.

☐ **Let silence sit.**

People reveal things in the space after the answer.



The pause is part of the take. The subject does the real work in the quiet after the answer.

“The best takes are the ones where you stop directing and start listening.”

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THE CONVERSATION Paris & Brianna Drayton — November 2023. Photo: Insomniatic Media.

TAKE AWAY

The three-second pause is the shot. Give the answer room to land.

What you deliver should outlive the day

A client should be able to point to the finished piece — the film, the episode, the gallery — and say “that is what happened.” Back up on the day, hand over assembled selects, and tell the client what each file is for.

☐ **Back up before you sleep.**

Two drives during production, one off-site backup before you sleep.

☐ **Name it for them.**

Deliver a naming structure that makes sense to the client, not just to you.

☐ **Close the loop.**

End with a short list: what was captured, what was delivered, what comes next.



DELIVERY Dom's birthday — January 2024. Photo: Insomniatic Media.

TAKE AWAY

Deliver like it is years later — named, backed up, and the next step said plainly.

FIELD NOTES · NO. 1

Want your own story documented?

Same process, your people, your moment. We run direct-to-camera field work for families, brands, schools, and communities — in Atlanta and on the road.

WRITE TO US → ([MAILTO:INFO@INSOMNIATICMEDIA.COM](mailto:info@insomniaticmedia.com))

The work is the proof — insomniaticmedia.com/work

Field Notes, No. 2 — next: what a two-day documentary build actually looks like.

INSOMNIATIC MEDIA

Media that documents real moments.

Atlanta, GA. Documentary, podcast, brand storytelling, live production, and photography.

info@insomniaticmedia.com (<mailto:info@insomniaticmedia.com>) · (470) 543-1228

Instagram [@insomniatic_media](https://www.instagram.com/insomniatic_media) · Facebook [@InsomniaticMedia](https://www.facebook.com/InsomniaticMedia) · insomniaticmedia.com

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