

Leading worship online

You've just read my article on the Labs Learning blog by the Church of England digital team, and now you want to get deeper into the technical aspects of producing worship videos for online worship. These are some of the ideas and details that I've learnt over the last few months, mixed in with suggestions from other worship leaders I've been speaking to.

Level One – Solo videos

Start with using a smartphone placed in front of you and record a video as you play and sing. To make this work well you will need:

- a. A smartphone.
- b. A phone tripod.
- c. A quiet room (and maybe also a quiet helper).

Top tips:

1. Use the camera on the back of your phone, not the selfie one on the front. The back camera is usually much better quality. This means you'll need to set up the tripod with the camera on it pointing at where you plan to be without you being there, so maybe get someone to stand/sit in place for you. This will allow you to check the positioning and the lighting.
2. Make sure you will be well lit – if you can, use a lamp or two in front of you, not too close, to provide some fill-in lighting. This will help remove shadows on your face. Don't position yourself in front of a sunlight window – ideally, be facing the window so you benefit from the light coming in.
3. Don't sit too far away from the phone. The more the distance, the greater the sound of echo on your voice and instrument. I've found a good distance is about 1-1.5metres.
4. Rotate the camera to portrait if you're going live on Instagram. Otherwise, rotate it to landscape for Facebook/YouTube Live or recording.
5. Make sure all possible ambient noise is blocked out – TV noise from another room, outdoor sounds like traffic or dogs barking, etc.
6. Have someone there to help with you pressing record/Go live.

Level Two – Getting a better sound

Take it up a level by using an audio interface to record your voice and/or instrument directly to a laptop or tablet. We've found the [Focusrite Scarlett Solo Studio](#) unit to be very good quality (others are available) as it comes with a microphone, leads, headphones and free audio software (Ableton Lite). Use a video editing app to combine the video from the phone and audio: iMovie (Mac) or [Davinci Resolve](#) (Mac and PC) are both free. You'll also need a microphone stand.

Top tips:

1. All of the top tips from Level One, plus
2. Position the microphone slightly to one side, so that it isn't blocking your mouth from being seen. It does look weird when the mouth is hidden on a video.
3. Some audio recording apps have a companion app for tablets/smartphones giving you basic control over the use the audio app – eg. Playing the tracks, recording, stopping, volume control, etc. This is very useful if you are filming a distance from the computer you're recording on. Sync the control app up with your computer, have the audio software ready to go, then use the app to press record when you're in position and ready to go.
4. You will need to play to a click or metronome. These can be set up quite easily in the audio software you're recording to. Make sure the track you create the click on is monitor enabled, meaning you can hear it in your headphones while you're recording the song.
5. You're still recording the video for this on your phone, which means you'll need to sync the separately recorded audio with the video at some point. One handy way to help you do this is to do four claps in time with the click, then leave a short pause, then record your song. You can then use the audio of the clap to line up with the video of your hands connecting.
6. The audio interface will usually enable you to record a vocal and an instrument at the same time – depending on how many inputs it has. It will also allow you to hear your inputs as you're recording, along with any previously recorded audio. Make sure you monitor enable your recording tracks too, so you can hear them in the headphones.
7. Once you've recorded a first version you can easily re-record the same song to fix any mistakes, or record onto new tracks some extra elements, like a second instrument or a harmony vocal. The audio software can then be used to mix these together later. You'll need to create new audio tracks for each thing you record.
8. There are lots of training videos on YouTube explain how to mix audio well. Some are easy to follow, some are pro-level. But some essential effects to add to each track are: compression (which will help boost the volume), limiter (which will keep the audio level from going above a certain point and avoiding distortion), maybe a soft noise gate, and very subtle reverb on the final mix. DO NOT go overboard with the reverb, otherwise it'll sound very unrealistic.
9. With some audio software (ie. Garageband, which is free on Macs, and Logic Pro X) you have the ability to add 'live' drum/percussion tracks created in certain styles. I've used these on videos we've created to add a simple percussive rhythm to the song. Don't overdo this, and take the time to go through the song and match the dynamic of the percussion with the dynamic of the song as you're playing it – heavy percussion in a really soft moment can kill the feel of the song.
10. Add a simple pad underneath everything. A pad is a synth sound in the key of the song. Don't let it become too loud, it just needs to sit underneath everything.

Level Three – Virtual Worship Team videos

Virtual worship team videos require a degree of technical expertise, pro software and good administration:

Top tips:

1. Create a guide for all participants that contains a click track set to the tempo of the song, vocal cues to guide people through the song, a melody guide and an instrument (either keys or acoustic guitar).
2. Send the guide out and give clear instructions on how to use it and how you want their video to be recorded. Landscape videos are more flexible than portrait.
3. You're looking to capture people worshipping. Avoid the things we'll often do in church meetings to engage people, they don't come across very well on digital. What you do toward the camera must be warm and friendly, but don't let it be the focus of your attention. This is where authenticity is so important.
4. Create the audio mix using the tips from Level Two above – [Ableton Live](#) or [Garageband](#) are good, but you might want to invest in something like [Logic Pro](#) if you have the finance and a Mac. Use compressors, EQ and limiters on each track. Be very careful with using reverb. Add a pad in the key of the song to fill out the sound. Pads are synthesised sounds that can be [bought](#) or [created](#).
5. Align each video with the mixed audio track If you've suggested to everyone that they do the four-clap thing at the start of their video then this should be fairly easy to. Otherwise you'll need to look for significant moments in the audio track – the first chord played on a piano, for instance – with that same significant moment on the video – the pianist fingers push the key down (so you're looking for the moment when the key is down, not before). Once you have these moments aligned on the video timeline you can usually tweak the video a frame or two either way to get a good sync. Take time over this – it affects people watching when they see something happen and then the sound of it occurring a short moment later, even if the time difference is very small.
6. Layer, crop and spread each video across the X and Y axis to create the montage effect. Not everyone needs to be on screen the whole time, but vocalists need to be seen when they're singing. [Logic Pro X](#), [Davinci Resolve](#), even [iMovie](#) or [Adobe Rush](#). I created some positioning guides in [Photoshop](#) to help me do this. Create a new image, with transparent background, sized at 1920x1080 (same as the video size). Use the New Guides setting to create equidistant guides across the width. Then draw black lines down the guides. You can create all kinds of guides this way, depending on how many singers and musicians you want seen at one time. Export as a PNG file with transparency. Bring that into the video app and put it on a layer above everything else. Use it as a guide to scale, position and crop each video.
7. Don't forget to overlay lyrics. Keep the font simple, use a sans-serif one ideally (easier to read on a screen). Make the font white, and put a stripe of colour beneath the lyrics, at about 85-90% opacity, to make sure the lyrics don't get lost in the video.
8. If you have the capability, add someone signing the lyrics. You'll need to film this with your signer in front of a green screen – a large green-coloured piece of fabric. You can get green screen backgrounds, including stands to hold them up, quite easily

online. Use lots of lighting to make sure there is as little shadow on the green fabric from the signer. Once filmed, use your video software to key out the green colour – this is where eliminating shadow will have been very important. Then position the video of your signer above everything else, shifting the lyrics over to make room.

9. Make sure you include CCLI information somewhere in the video. This is a legal requirement. You should display, along with the title of the song, the author(s), and the copyright year and administration details. You should also display your church's CCLI Streaming Licence number.

I hope this helps. Feel free to contact me and ask any questions. If I don't know the answers, I know a few people who may be able to help!

Matt Lockwood

Matt.lockwood73@gmail.com

Instagram: @mattjlockwood73

YouTube: [youtube.com/mattlockwood73](https://www.youtube.com/mattlockwood73)