

# ELEVEN STEPS TO A STEADY SHOT

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When you're running solo with a DSLR, mirrorless camera or small video camera keeping shots steady can be a nightmare. This guide will show you eleven practical steps to steadier shots.

I have 15 years of filmmaking experience in all genres - feature films and short films, corporate videos, commercials and documentaries. Trust me when I say: It takes time and practice to get good steady shots – but not because it's difficult, but because steady shots are a result of *good habits*.

Let's get the obvious solution out of the way first:

## Step 1: Image Stabilization

When you don't have money for a Steadicam ([Amazon](#), [B&H](#)), 3-axis Gimbal ([Amazon](#), [B&H](#)) or a

full shoulder rig ([Amazon](#), [B&H](#)) you can still rely on the camera and lenses.

Some cameras like the Sony a7S II, a7R II, Olympus EM-1 II, etc., have internal 5-axis image stabilization, and the results are surprisingly good. Shoot with these cameras if you can. On the other hand, you can also get image-stabilized lenses. Canon lenses with stabilization are marked with an 'IS', Nikon with a 'VR', Sigma with a 'VC', and so on.

An image-stabilized camera or lens can go a long way in improving your shots.

## Step 2: Stand right

You must stand in the most stable way possible. This is how your feet should be positioned:



Bend your knees a bit (not a lot, just slightly). When you walk, cross your legs and walk – this is how soldiers are trained to walk with their guns. It keeps you steady.

Also, you need to keep your back straight (if you value it at all), and *don't lean* forwards or backwards:



# Step 3: Be compact

The idea is to become as small as possible so your center of gravity is deep within. How do you do this?

Easy, tuck in your elbows and keep them as close to your ribs as possible. If your entire upper arm is touching the side of the chest that's great.

The closer everything is to your body the better:



## Step 4: Breathe well

Take even breaths. You don't need to breathe too deeply. What happens if you breathe too fast (even if it is deep) is you tend to exhale strongly, and that shakes you.

It's much better to just breathe evenly and steadily. To do this you need to be healthy, and you need to learn how to relax. So before a shot, make sure you're well fed (not stuffed), and take some time out to breathe and relax.

## Step 5: Use Hips well

When you walk, keep your hips straight (as explained in tip 2).

But when you want to pan, use your hips to turn. Don't use your hands or feet.

To make a 180° turn, stand straight and look forward. Then turn your hips 90° to one side and then complete the move at a 90° angle at the other side.

To make a 90° turn, stand straight and look forward. Then turn your hips 90° to one side and then complete the move till you are straight again.

The takeaway is: It's better to start turned (twisted, in tension) and ease into stability than the other way around.

## Step 6: Sit properly

To take low shots don't kneel. Ever.

Either sit down completely with your legs crossed, or if you want greater mobility, learn to squat completely:



To get up all you need to is stand up straight using your quad muscles. This will also keep your back straight, and you can actually shoot while getting up!

Doing this with your knee is asking for trouble.

## Step 7: Points of support

It's always a great idea to support any unstable thing with the most number of contact points possible.

When it comes to handheld camerawork, there are two unsteady things:

1. Your camera
2. You

To increase the number of points on the camera, use both hands to hold the camera. If you tuck your elbows in it's great too.

To add a third point of contact, touch the viewfinder to your eye. If you're shooting on a DSLR or mirrorless camera, you can get an LCD viewfinder ([Amazon](#), [B&H](#)) and frame through it. This will increase stability drastically:



What about you? You are kept steady with the right stance. In addition to this, you can lean against a wall, post, car, or whatever you have available to add a third point of contact (unless you have three legs!):



Also, check out step 9 for another option.

## Step 8: Keep it loose

Don't hold the camera too tightly. The tension in your muscles will lead to it getting fatigued quicker. Have a looser grip.

This has the added benefit of using your hands like a spring that will absorb some of the shakiness. See how the small things matter?

One additional accessory you can use is a wrist strap ([Amazon](#), [B&H](#)). This will reduce the strain on your wrist.



# Step 9: Use a monopod

When you can't carry a tripod get a monopod. A cheap monopod ([Amazon](#), [B&H](#)) is so light you won't notice the weight, and it provides the all-important third point of contact for your body as well as the camera:



Important note: If you have internal camera stabilization or a lens with stabilization, it might fight the monopod and might result in weird motion artifacts. Test and see how it works out for you.

## Step 10: Use your camera bag

When you want to get low, you can use your camera bag to support the camera.

It also helps if you have a ledge, car, table, parapet or some other kind of support where you can place the bag and the camera over it.

I love cloth bags like the Thinktank Retrospective series ([Amazon](#), [B&H](#)) for this. I own the 30.

## Step 11: Shoot wide angle

Wide-angle shots tend to hide shaky camera work a lot better than telephoto shots. So this one is a no brainer.

Go as wide as you can without distorting faces and you'll be fine.

That's it! Some of the steps I've mentioned have to do with inexpensive gear that will make your shots a lot steadier. But on the other hand, many of the tips I've shared are just good habits that you can incorporate right away.

If you still need help, please feel free to send me an email and I'll be happy to help if I can.

Now go film something steady!