

MOBILE PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE

Bookstore

Shoot your own product photos
with just a smartphone.

Pages, lamplight, quiet discovery — twenty photos for a shop made for slow camera moves and warm light.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- **Phone photo basics for total beginners**
Wipe, lock, light — the cheat sheet.
- **Free editing apps that pros actually use**
Snapseed, Lightroom Mobile, VSCO. All free.
- **Cheap gear that triples your photo quality**
Lights under \$40, lenses, props, backdrops.
- **20 scenarios × 3 angles each, drawn**
Eye-level, top-down, low — copy them on set.

PHONE PHOTO BASICS · READ THIS FIRST

10 things pros do that amateurs skip — for stills.

Photos are different from video: every frame counts. One sharp, well-lit still beats a hundred half-baked ones. These ten habits become muscle memory after a couple of shoots.

01 Wipe the lens. Every. Single. Time.

Phones live in pockets. Fingerprints look fine to your eye, terrible in the photo. Microfibre cloth in your apron.

03 Use natural light, kill the ceiling lights.

Window 90° from subject = magazine cover light. Yellow ceiling LEDs poison everything.

05 Get close, but use the 2× lens for objects.

Phone macro under 30 cm distorts. For tight product shots, switch to 2× and stand 50–80 cm back.

07 Use the 2-second self-timer.

Pressing the shutter shakes the phone. Timer + tripod = pin-sharp every time, even at low light.

09 Fill the frame deliberately.

Decide what's the hero. Then put it on a third — never dead-centre unless the composition is symmetrical on purpose.

02 Shoot at the highest resolution.

iPhone: Settings → Camera → Formats → Most Compatible (or Apple ProRAW).

Samsung: Camera → Pro → RAW. JPEG is

04 Tap to focus. Tap-and-hold to lock.

fine for casual; RAW for product photos. iPhone shows yellow box → "AE/AF Lock". Slide the sun icon to fine-tune brightness. Keep it locked between shots.

06 Use a tripod (or stack of books).

Sharpness drops the moment your hand shakes. Brace on a counter, or invest \$25 in a mini-tripod. Game over.

08 Shoot at eye-level of the product.

Hip-height phone snaps look amateur. Get the lens at the same height as the focal point of the subject.

10 Shoot 5 takes minimum.

Tiny shifts in angle change everything. First take is rehearsal, fourth is usually the keeper. Free to retake.

CAMERA SETTINGS

Best photo settings for your phone.

Set these once, forget about them. They turn a snapshot into a product shot — without you doing anything different on set.

iPhone

- **Photo format: Most Compatible (JPEG).**
Settings → Camera → Formats → Most Compatible. Easier to share. Use "High Efficiency" only if storage is tight.
- **Apple ProRAW (Pro models).**
Settings → Camera → Formats → Apple ProRAW & Resolution → ON. Then tap RAW button in the Camera app. Edit-friendly, larger files.
- **Grid + Mirror Front Camera + Level: ON.**
Settings → Camera → Composition → Grid + Mirror Front Camera + Level. Three free upgrades.
- **Live Photos: OFF for product work.**
The yellow icon at the top — tap it OFF. Live photos burn battery and storage. Off for product, on for people.
- **HDR: AUTO.**
Default. Phone decides. Works 95% of the time. Manually disable only when shooting backlit silhouettes.
- **Tap-and-hold to lock AE/AF.**
Yellow box says "AE/AF Lock". Slide the sun icon to fine-tune brightness. Re-lock if you move the camera.

Samsung Galaxy

- **Photo size: highest available (3:4).**
Camera → Settings (gear) → Picture format → JPEG. Picture size: maximum. Use 3:4 for product (more frame to crop later).
- **RAW (Pro mode).**
Camera → MORE → Pro → tap RAW icon. Saves a DNG + JPEG. Edit-friendly, bigger files.
- **Grid + Vertical/Horizontal Guides: ON.**
Camera Settings → Grid lines → 3×3. Settings → Composition → Auto guide. Free upgrades.
- **Scene Optimizer: OFF for product.**
Auto-modes oversaturate food and skin. Camera Settings → Scene Optimizer → OFF for shoots, ON for casual.
- **Pro mode for hard light.**
Camera → MORE → Pro. Manual ISO (100 in daylight, 400 indoors), shutter, white balance. Beats auto when lighting is tricky.
- **Tap-and-hold to lock focus & exposure.**
Yellow circle appears. Slide the sun icon to brighten/darken.

LIGHTING

The cheapest setup that still looks pro.

Lighting is 80% of why pro photos look pro. The good news: you can fake a \$1,000 setup with \$40 of gear and one window. Here's the fastest path.

THE FREE SETUP — WINDOW + WHITE WALL

Place the subject 1 m from a window so the light hits at 90° from the side. Stand a sheet of white foam-core (or a folded white sheet) on the opposite side to bounce light back into the shadows. That's it — same setup magazines use for ten thousand-dollar product shoots, and it costs nothing.

FOUR LIGHTS WORTH KNOWING

LED panel

The product photographer's workhorse. Best for flat-lays, product, B-roll. \$30–60.

Tape parchment paper over the front for instant softbox effect.

Softbox kit

Big, soft, magazine-look. Best for portraits, food, garments. \$40–80.

Get the biggest one you can afford. Bigger softbox = softer light.

Ring light

Even, beauty-friendly. Best for face/portrait/closeup work. \$25–60.

Don't use for products — ring shape reflects in shiny surfaces.

Clip-on phone light

Tiny LED that snaps onto your phone. Best for venues, markets, outdoor. \$15–30.

Use as fill, never as the main light. Cheap clip-ons make skin look plastic.

WHAT TO BUY (AMAZON)

- **Neewer 660 LED Panel** · ~\$45
Adjustable brightness + colour temperature. Bicolour. Search "Neewer 660 LED".
- **Ulanzi VL49 mini LED** · ~\$15
Pocket light. Magnetic. Perfect for top-down product shots. Search "Ulanzi VL49".
- **Westcott Ice Light** · ~\$80 (alt)
Tube light, soft & wraparound. Ideal for jewellery, glass, eyewear.
- **Foldable softbox 24" + LED** · ~\$60
All-in-one starter kit. Search "24 inch softbox LED kit".
- **Free version: a north-facing window.**
North windows are nature's softbox. No direct sun + soft, even light all day.

MOBILE LENSES & ACCESSORIES

The cheap kit that turns a phone into a real camera.

Most of these clip onto your phone, cost less than a dinner, and will outlast three phone upgrades. Buy the right ones up front.

CLIP-ON LENSES (ESSENTIAL)

- **Macro clip-on** · ~\$25
10×–20× zoom. For jewellery, food close-ups, fabric texture, watches. Best one-purchase upgrade. Search "Apexel macro".
- **Wide-angle clip-on** · ~\$25
0.45×–0.6× wide. For interiors, real estate, group shots. Eliminates 'cramped' look in small spaces.
- **Telephoto clip-on** · ~\$30
2× zoom. For phones without a real telephoto. Skip if you have a Pro/Ultra phone.
- **Filter kit (CPL + ND)** · ~\$30
CPL kills glass reflections (shop windows, screens). ND blocks light for outdoor portraits. Search "phone CPL ND filter".

TRIPODS & RIGS

- **Ulanzi MT-08 mini tripod** · ~\$25
Extends to 90 cm. Best \$25 tripod on the market. Use as tabletop or floor stand.
- **Joby GorillaPod Mobile** · ~\$35
Bendy legs wrap around chairs, railings, branches. Most versatile \$35 you'll spend.
- **Top-down tripod arm** · ~\$30
Horizontal extension for flat-lay food and product shots. Search "overhead phone arm".
- **Phone clamp + cold shoe** · ~\$15
Mounts your phone to any standard tripod. Sometimes the only thing missing.

ALSO WORTH HAVING

- **Bluetooth shutter** · ~\$8
Press a button instead of the screen. Eliminates shake. Single-best photography accessory under \$10.
- **Microfibre cloth × 5** · ~\$5
One in your apron, one in your bag, one near the till.
- **Reflector (5-in-1)** · ~\$20
Silver, gold, white, black, diffuser. Folds into a 30 cm disc. Search "5 in 1 reflector 32 inch".

EDITING APPS

Free apps that pros actually use.

Most professional Instagram photographers edit on their phone. The apps below are free or near-free — and they're the ones the pros use, not student-grade alternatives.

FREE — START HERE

- **Snapseed (Google)**
Best free editor on any phone. Selective tool, brushes, healing, perspective. Used by pros for years.
- **Lightroom Mobile**
Free tier covers 95% of needs. Apply presets, sync across devices, RAW editing. Free with an Adobe ID.
- **VSCO (free filters)**
Iconic film-look presets. Free filters are some of the best out there. Skip the paid subscription.
- **Photoshop Express (free)**
Quick fixes, blemish removal, cropping. Free version is plenty for product photos.

WORTH PAYING FOR

- **Lightroom Mobile Premium** · ~\$5/mo
Unlocks all features, syncs presets, auto-cloud backup. Best \$5 in mobile photography.
- **Tezza** · ~\$3/mo
Trendy filters + collage maker. Big with fashion and lifestyle creators.
- **Afterlight** · ~\$3/mo
Beautiful film looks + dust/light leaks. For brands going for a vintage feel.
- **Picsart Pro** · ~\$5/mo
AI background remover, sky replacement, magic effects. Use when you need to fake stock-photo backgrounds.

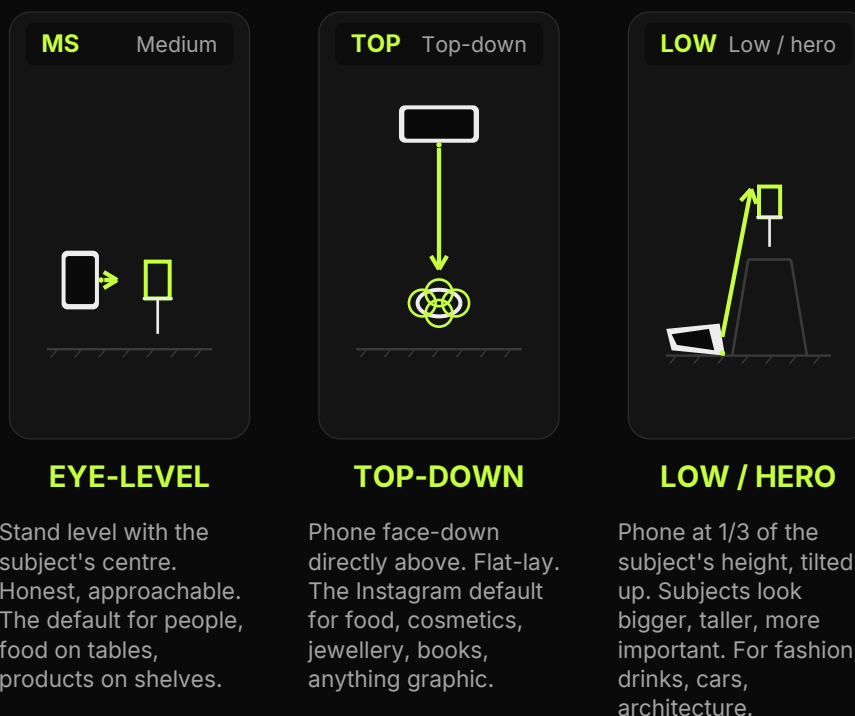
THE 60-SECOND EDIT (SNAPSEED OR LIGHTROOM)

- **01 · Crop & straighten.**
Rule of thirds. Horizon level. Trim distracting edges.
- **02 · Exposure +0.3 to +0.7.**
Lift the whole image one notch. Phones underexpose product shots by default.
- **03 · Shadows up, highlights down.**
Recover detail in dark and bright areas. Photo looks instantly professional.
- **04 · Whites up, blacks down.**
Increases contrast where it matters. Less murky.
- **05 · Vibrance, not saturation.**
Vibrance boosts dull colours. Saturation neon-fries faces.
- **06 · Sharpen +20.**
Adds bite. Phones soften by default. Don't go higher than 30.

COMPOSITION & ANGLES

The three angles that work for almost any product.

Every scenario in this guide uses these three. Memorise them once and you can shoot anything — coffee, jewellery, dogs, furniture. The same three angles. Always.



FIVE COMPOSITION RULES

- **Rule of thirds.**
Put the main subject on a third-line, not in the centre. Phone Camera grid helps you see the lines.
- **Negative space sells.**
Empty space around a product reads as 'expensive'. Crowded frames feel like clutter, not style.
- **Leading lines.**
Counters, shelves, tile edges, road lines — let them point at your subject. Lines lead the eye like an arrow.
- **Frame within a frame.**
Door frames, windows, arches around the subject. Adds depth, focus, and a 'documentary' feel.
- **Odd numbers feel right.**
Three plates, five candles. Three. Always three. Even-number compositions feel symmetrical and boring.

PROPS & BACKDROPS

The styling kit you can buy at the dollar store.

Background and styling decide whether your photo looks 'made for Instagram' or 'taken on the kitchen table'. Most of these cost less than a coffee.

BACKDROPS — WHAT TO BUY

- **Roll of white seamless paper** · ~\$15
53" wide, no-seam, infinite background. Tape to wall, drape over a table. The pro-photo backdrop.
- **Linen tablecloths × 3** · ~\$10 each
White, beige, charcoal. Wrinkle-friendly textures. Drape over anything; instant warm flat-lay surface.
- **PVC tile boards** · ~\$15 each
Marble, oak, slate-print boards. Two boards = floor + wall corner. Cheaper than the real thing.
- **Black foam-core × 3** · ~\$5 each
Black backdrop, light absorber, light blocker. Most-used cheap photo tool.
- **Free version: a clean white wall.**
If your shop has one, you have a backdrop. Photograph against it. Done.

PROPS — DOLLAR-STORE STYLING KIT

- **Linen napkins, kraft paper, twine.**
For food, packaging, gift shots. Natural textures photograph better than glossy plastic.
- **Small dried bouquets / eucalyptus.**
\$5 at any florist. Adds life to flat-lays. Doesn't wilt under hot lights.
- **Wooden trays, marble cheese boards.**
Elevates plate flat-lays. Hides ugly tables. Buy two sizes.
- **Glass jars, ceramic bowls (matte, not glossy).**
Glossy reflects ceiling lights. Matte absorbs them. Always buy matte for photo props.
- **Two acrylic ice cubes.**
\$3 on Amazon. Drinks photograph 10× better. Real ice melts; acrylic doesn't.
- **Black velvet cloth (1 m).**
Background for jewellery and dark products. \$5 at a fabric store. Eats reflections.

PRO TRICKS

The things pros do that you won't read on YouTube.

These are real production secrets — most cost nothing. Use one and you'll see the difference; use all of them and your photos will look like a magazine shot them.

- 01 Wipe the lens before every shot.**
Phones gather oil. Two-second wipe with a cloth between shots is the difference between haze and bite.
- 02 Lock exposure on the brightest important thing.**
Tap-and-hold on the lit subject — not the dark background. Phones try to balance everything; you have to overrule it.
- 03 Use the 2× telephoto for product close-ups.**
Stand 50–80 cm back. The 1× lens distorts close-up; 2× flattens it like a portrait lens.
- 04 Shoot 5+ angles. Pick later.**
Same scene, eye-level, top-down, 45°, low, macro detail. You'll know which is the keeper only when editing.
- 05 Wipe the product, too.**
Lint, fingerprints, flour smudges all photograph 10× more visibly than they look. Wipe the product. Then wipe again.
- 06 Light from 45°, never head-on.**
Side-light reveals texture. Head-on light flattens everything. Move the subject 90° to the window.
- 07 Bounce, don't add lights.**
More light isn't the answer. Bounce existing light into shadows with white card. Cheaper, faster, looks pro.
- 08 Shoot through something.**
A pane of glass, a leafy branch, a stack of books in soft focus in the foreground. Adds depth instantly.
- 09 Shoot one stop underexposed for moody.**
Slide the sun icon down by half a stop. Slightly darker = more cinematic = better Instagram.
- 10 Dirty plates beat clean ones.**
Crumbs, drips, fingerprints in food photos read as 'real'. Spotless = ad. Lived-in = wanted.
- 11 Symmetry only on purpose.**
If a photo isn't deliberately symmetrical, push the subject off-centre. Boring rules: centred subjects feel amateur.
- 12 Steam, mist, droplets.**
Boil a kettle next to a hot drink. Spray a vegetable with water. Visible texture = 10× more clicks.
- 13 White-balance manually for warm scenes.**
Auto white-balance kills the warm light of cafes/bakeries. In Pro mode, set WB to 4500–5500 K to keep the glow.
- 14 Shoot vertical 4:5 — not square.**
Instagram crops 1:1 from feed but shows full 4:5 in posts. 4:5 takes more screen, more attention.
- 15 Crop in post, not on the phone.**
Phone digital zoom = quality loss. Always shoot wider; crop tight in Snapseed/Lightroom later.

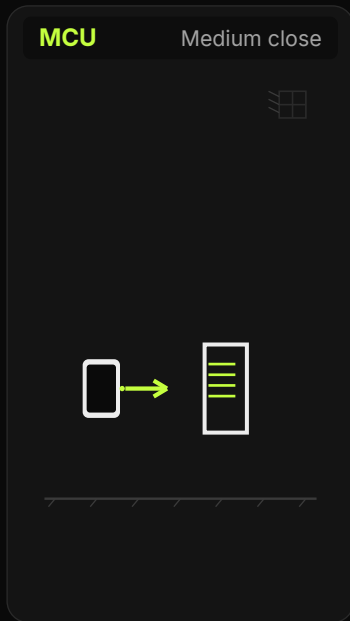
BOOKSTORE

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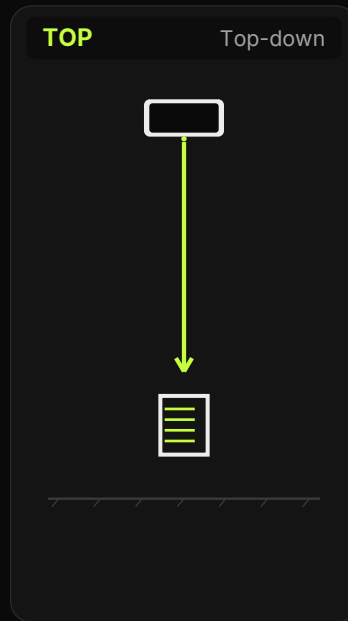
SCENARIO 01

Stack on a chair

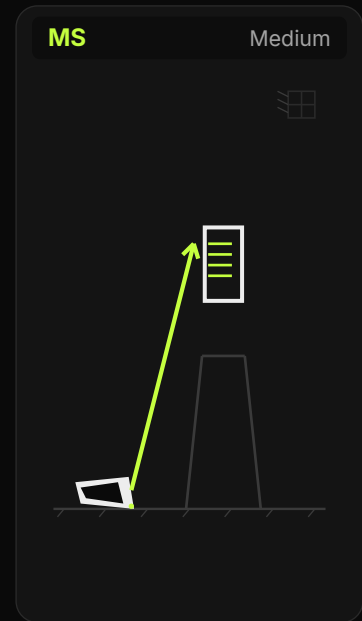
A leaning stack of books on a leather chair.



Phone level with top of stack.



Phone above stack.



Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Use 5 or 7 books, never an even number.

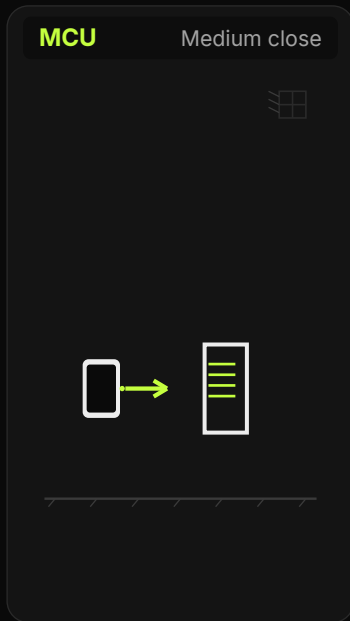
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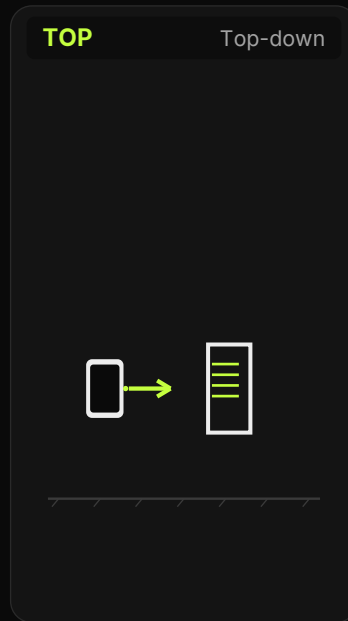
SCENARIO 02

Open book in hand

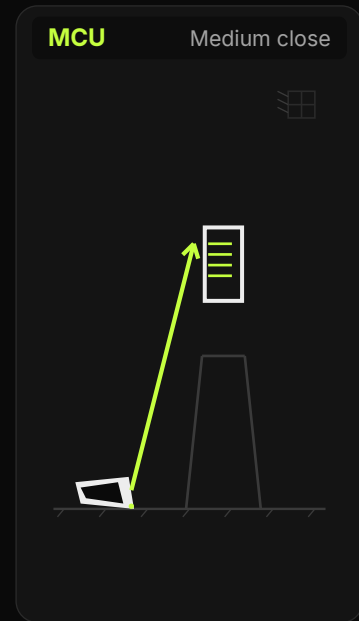
Pages spread, fingers holding the spine.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with pages.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone below book.

STYLING TIP

Mist pages slightly. Crisp dry pages glare; soft pages photograph richer.

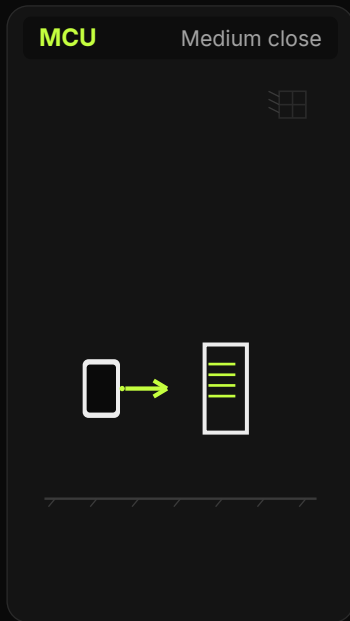
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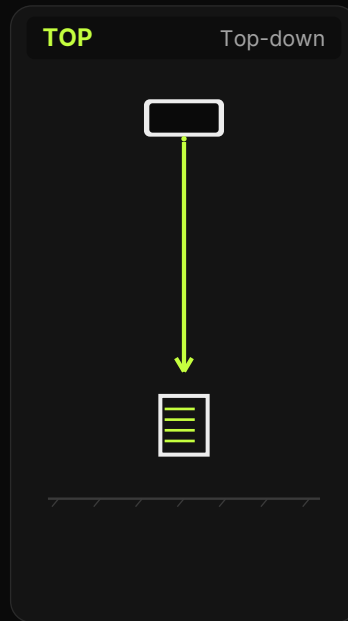
SCENARIO 03

Hero front cover

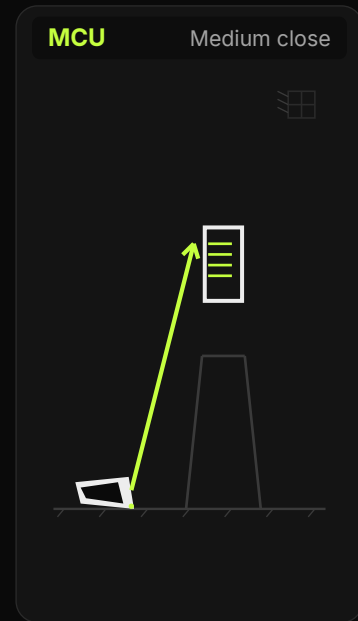
A new release on display.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with book.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above. Book + flower.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Add a small dried-flower stem to the side. Single book photographs as catalogue.

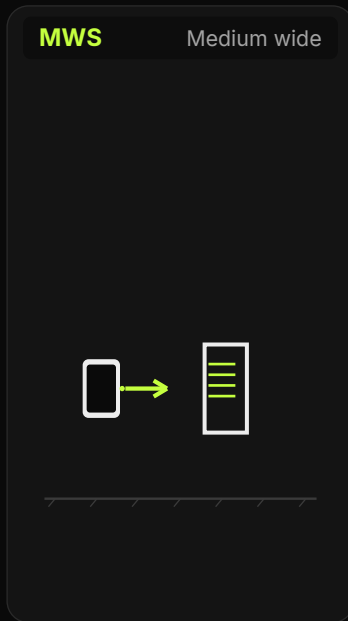
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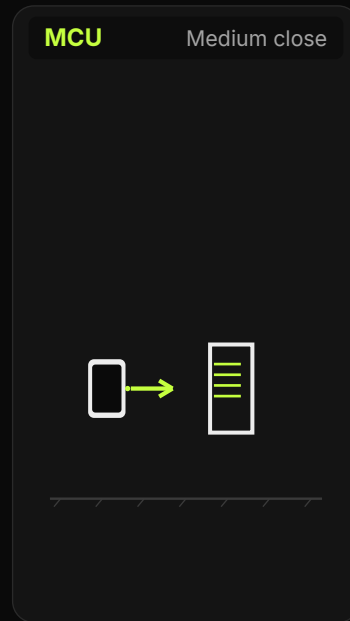
SCENARIO 04

Bookshelf row

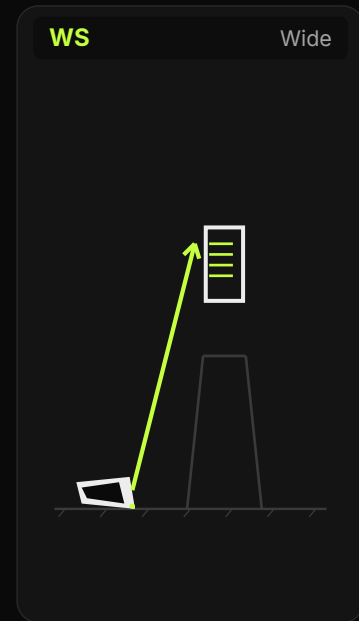
A row of books on a shelf, organized by colour.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with shelf middle.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — use a detail of one shelf section.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Group by spine colour. Reads as 'curated'.

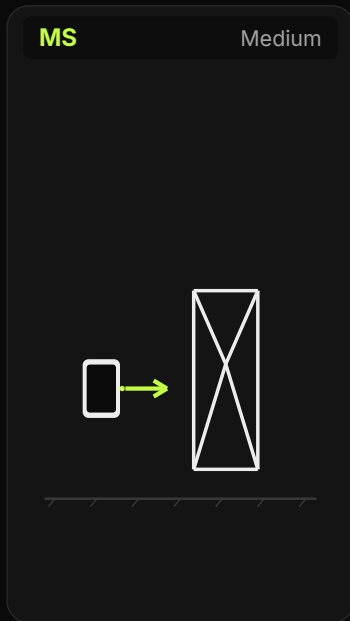
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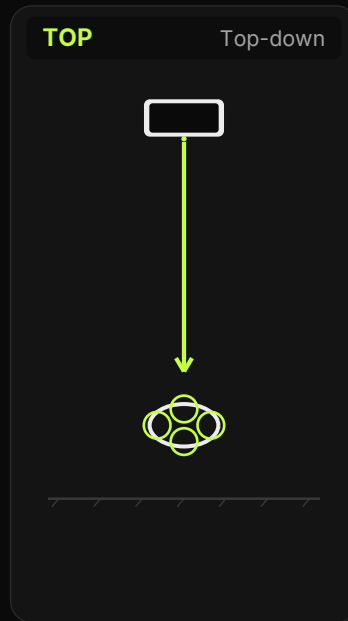
SCENARIO 05

Reading nook

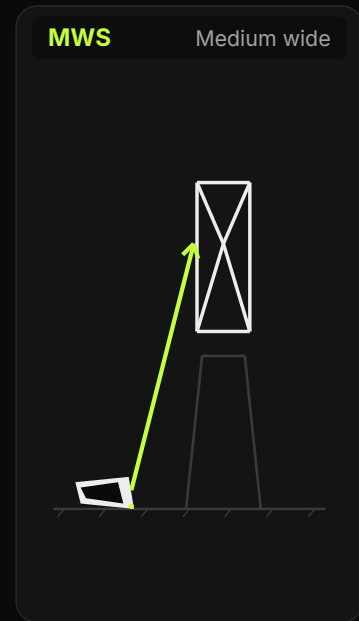
Armchair, small lamp, side table with cup.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with chair.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above table.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Underexpose by half a stop. Cosy reads dusk-mood.

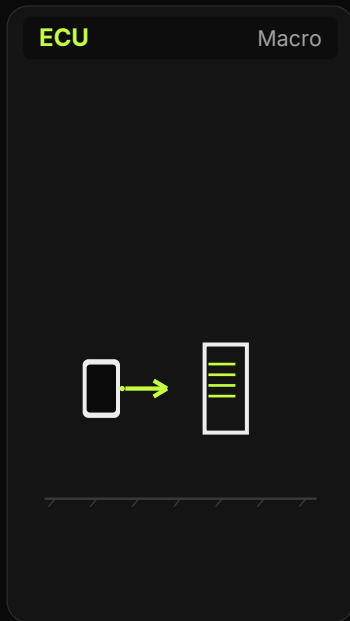
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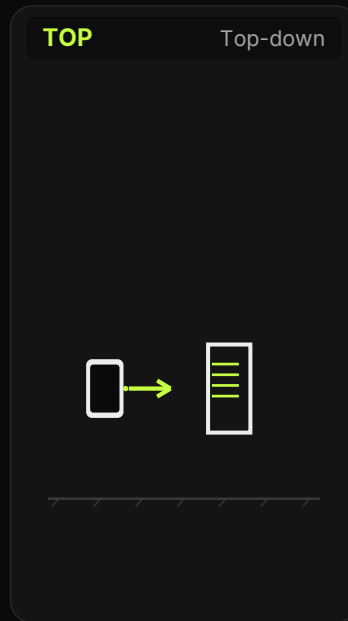
SCENARIO 06

Bookmark in book

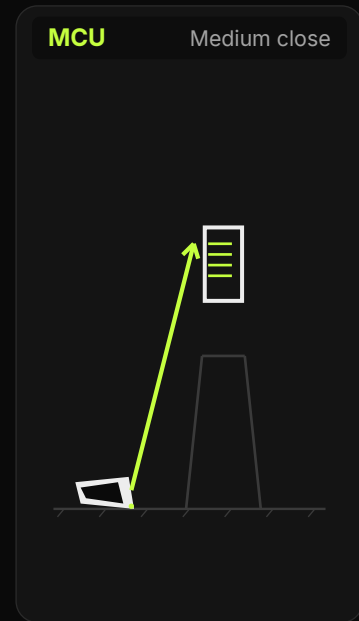
A ribbon or paper bookmark peeking from pages.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with book.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Use real ribbon, not paper. Texture differs in macro.

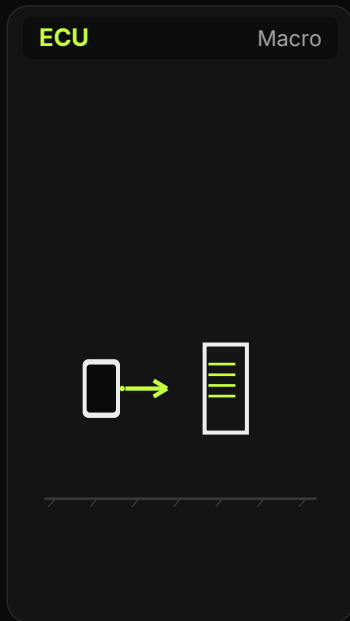
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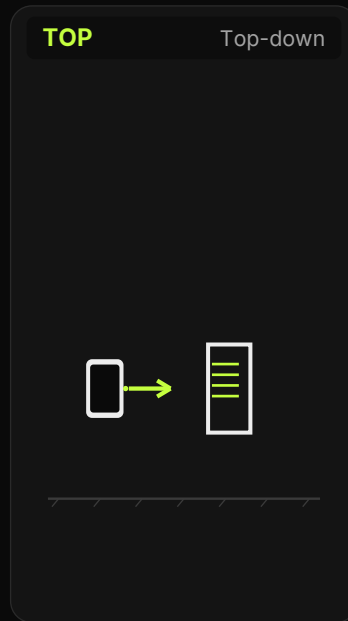
SCENARIO 07

Antique tome detail

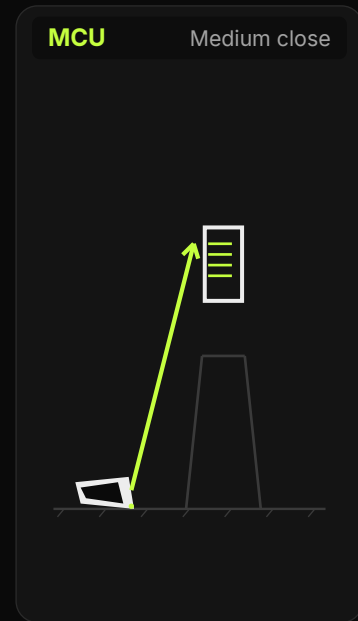
Worn leather cover, gold-leaf title.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with book.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Brush off dust. Macro reveals every speck.

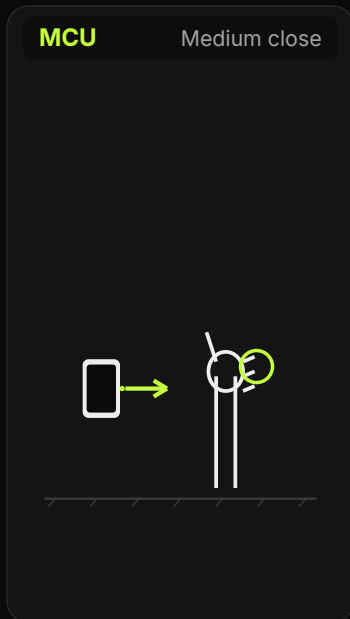
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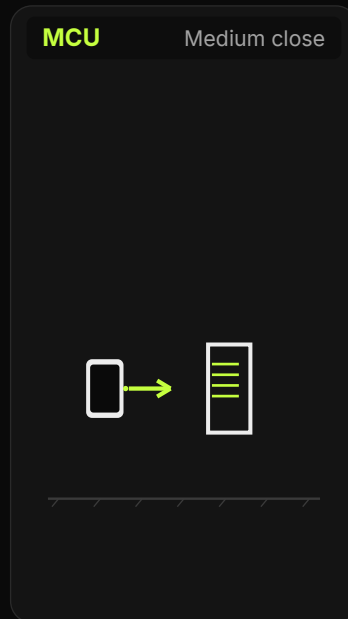
SCENARIO 08

Customer browsing

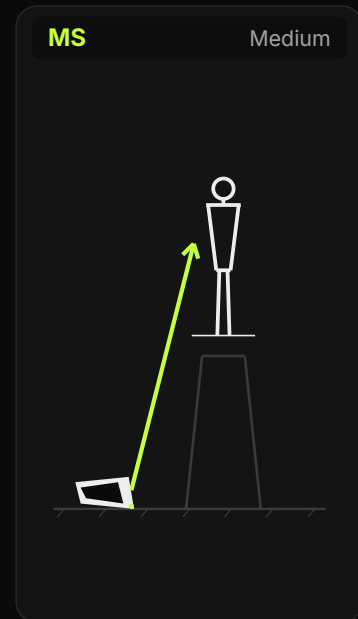
Hand pulling a book from a shelf.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with shelf.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — use detail of just the spines.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Photograph mid-pull. Static reads as posed.

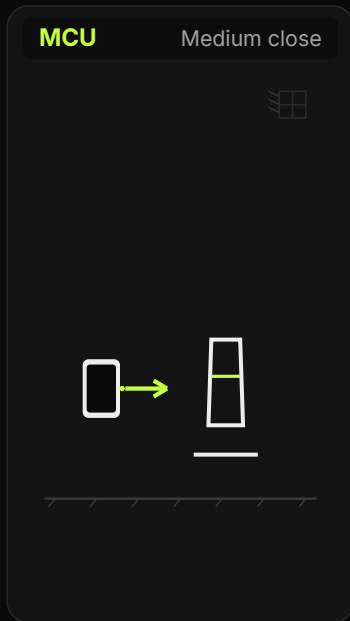
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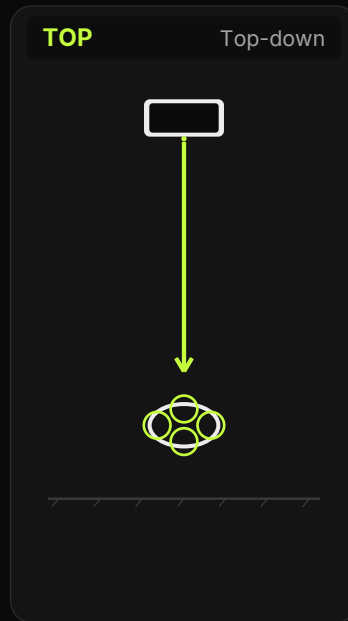
SCENARIO 09

Coffee + book

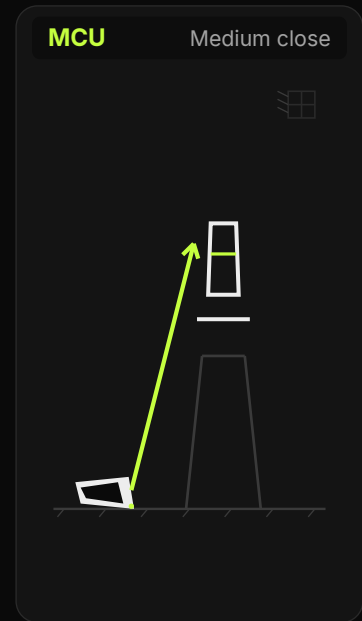
Cup of coffee resting on an open book.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with cup.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above. Cup + book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Use real coffee, not prop. Steam reads as morning.

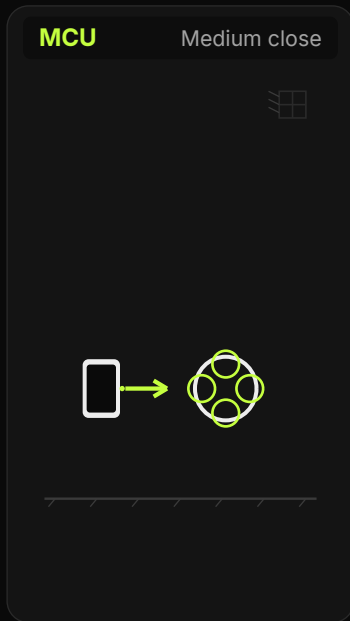
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SCENARIO 10 OF 20

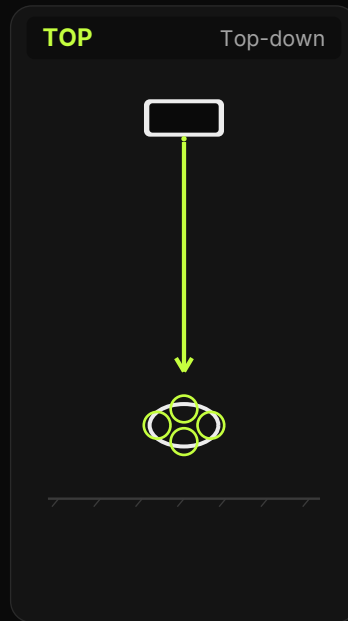
SCENARIO 10

Display table by entrance

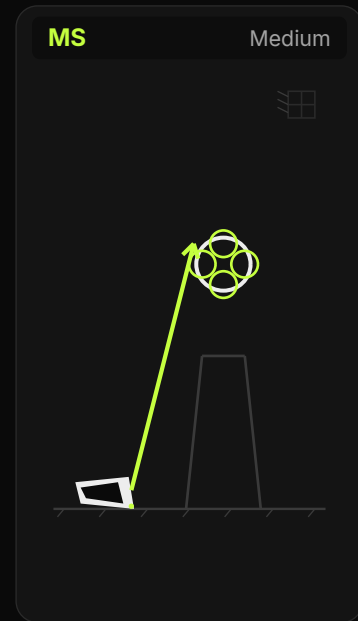
Three new releases curated together.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with table.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above table.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

One genre per table; readers scan by genre.

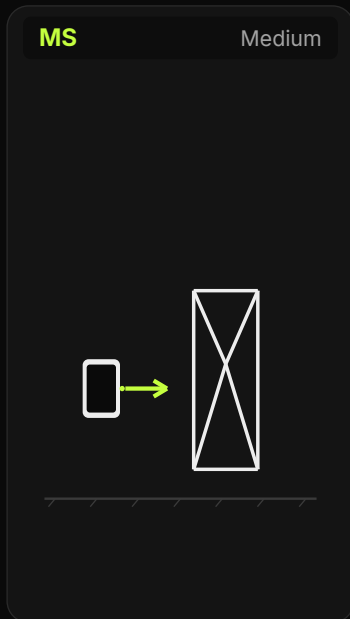
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SCENARIO 11 OF 20

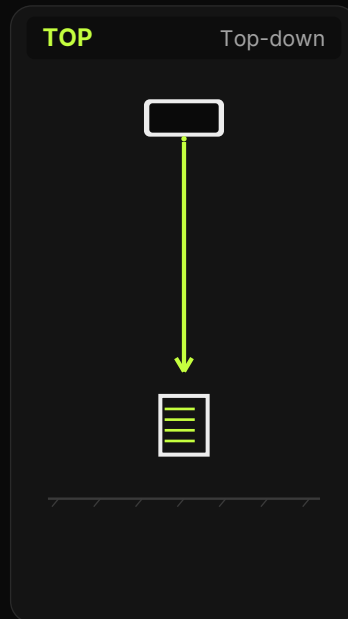
SCENARIO 11

Children's section

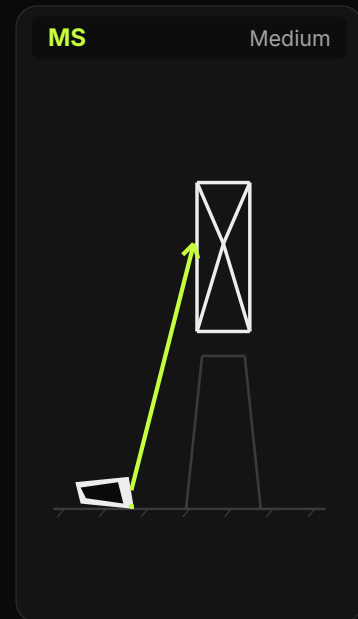
Picture books arranged on a low shelf.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone at child seated height.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above one shelf.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Sit at child height. Adult-eye-level reads as adult content.

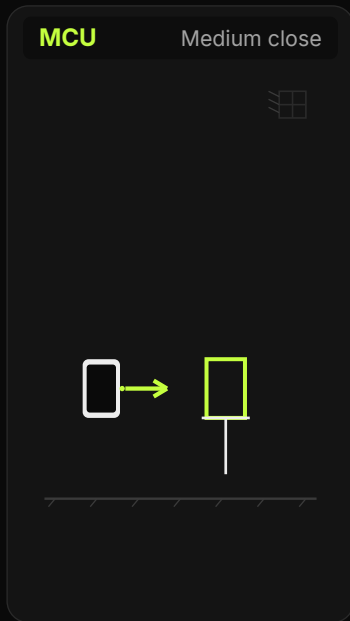
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 12 OF 20

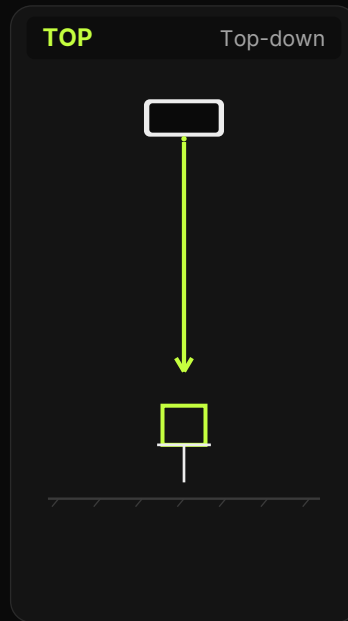
SCENARIO 12

Receipt + paper bag

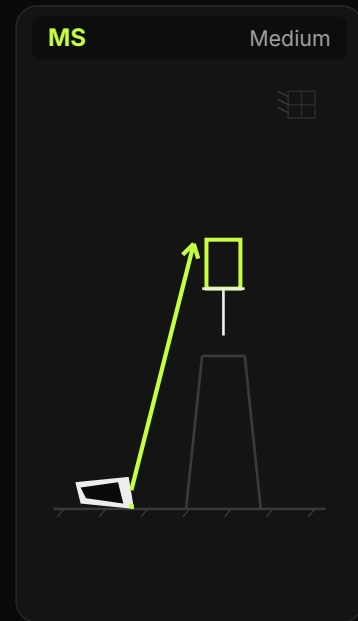
Branded paper bag with a book peeking out.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with bag.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above. Bag + book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at counter edge.

STYLING TIP

Cuff the bag once. Folded photographs richer than open.

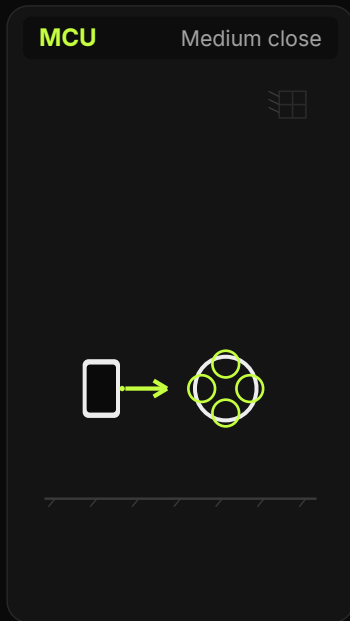
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 13 OF 20

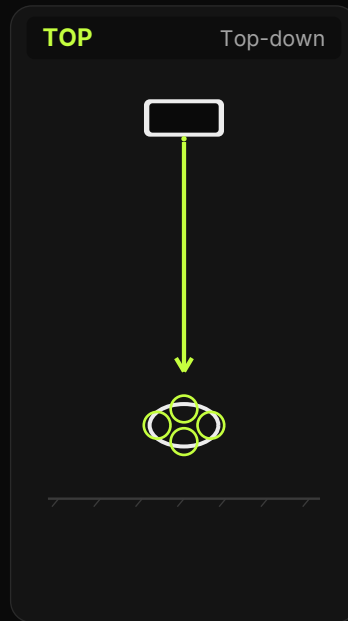
SCENARIO 13

Window with sun on books

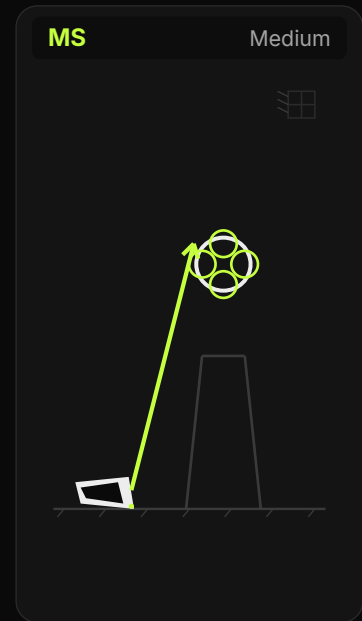
Books on a window-side table, sun pattern across them.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with table.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above table.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Best window: 9 AM. Sun at 30°.

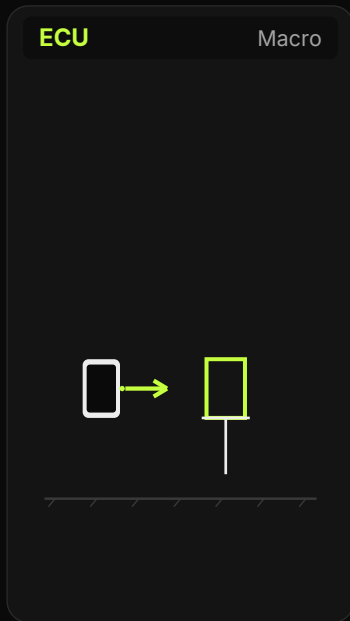
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 14 OF 20

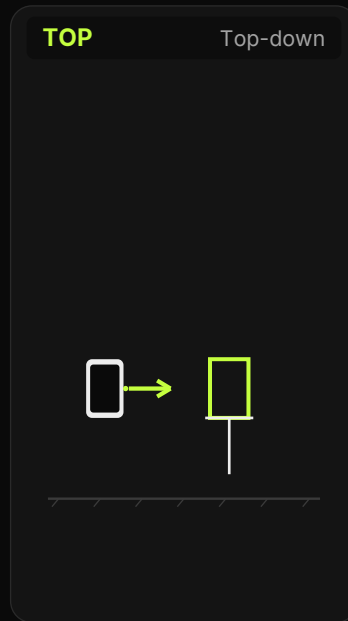
SCENARIO 14

Hand-written staff pick card

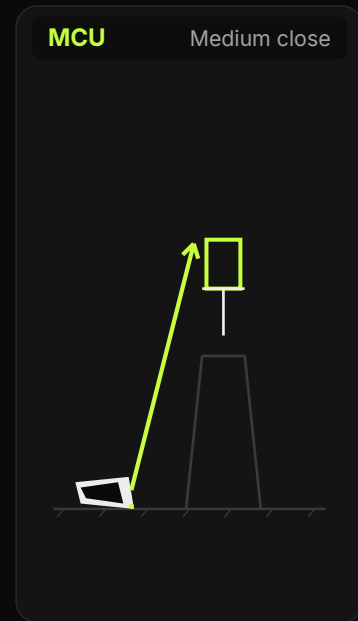
Hand-written 'staff pick' tag on a book.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with card.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above. Card + book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Hand-write. Printed cards read as corporate.

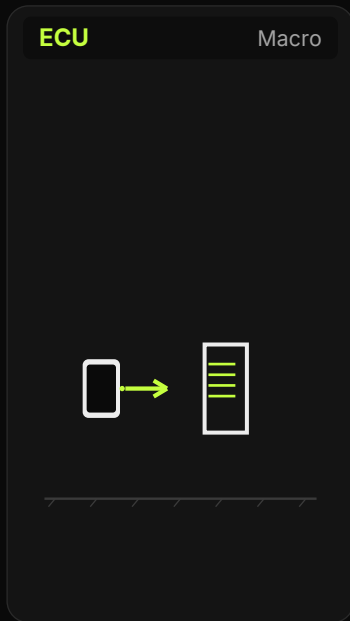
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 15 OF 20

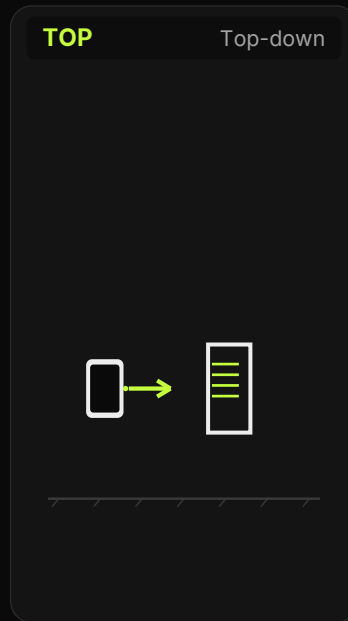
SCENARIO 15

Stamp on first page

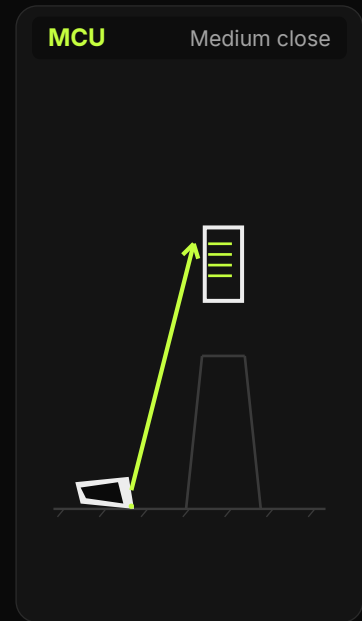
Branded shop stamp inside a book.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with book.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Stamp slightly off-centre. Centre stamps look stiff.

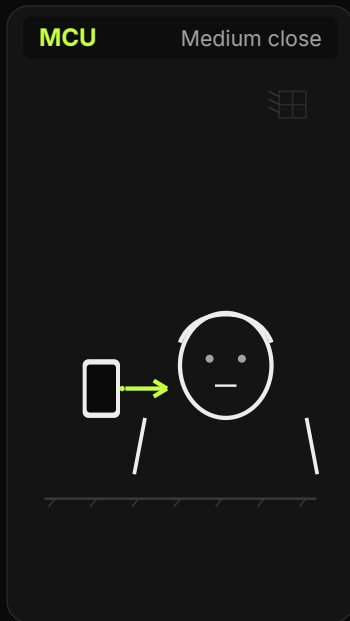
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 16 OF 20

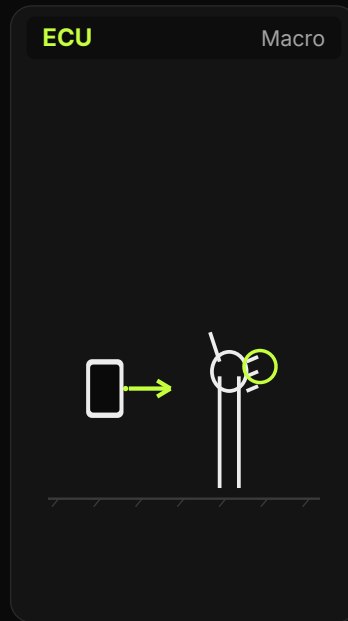
SCENARIO 16

Owner / staff portrait

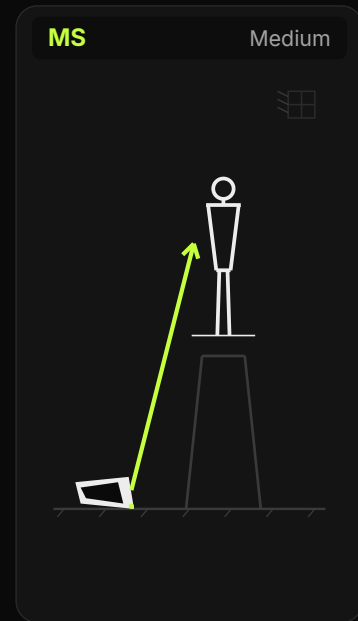
Owner with their favourite book.

**EYE-LEVEL**

2x zoom, 1.5 m back.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — use detail of hands holding book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at counter edge.

STYLING TIP

Eye contact + soft smile. Big grins read fake.

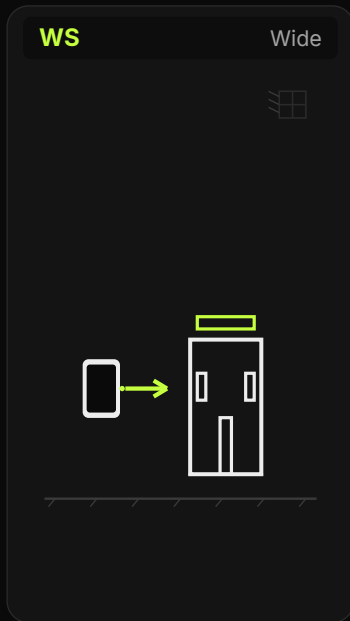
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 17 OF 20

SCENARIO 17

Storefront facade

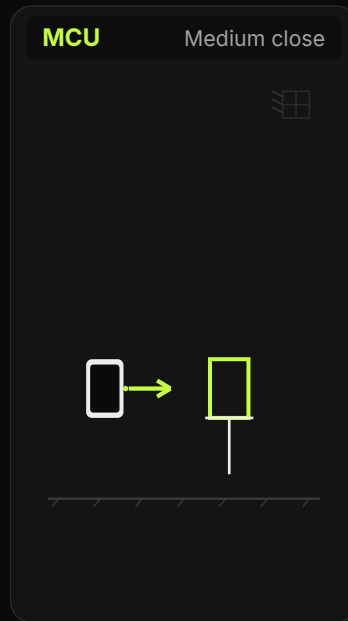
The shop exterior at golden hour.

**WS**

Wide

EYE-LEVEL

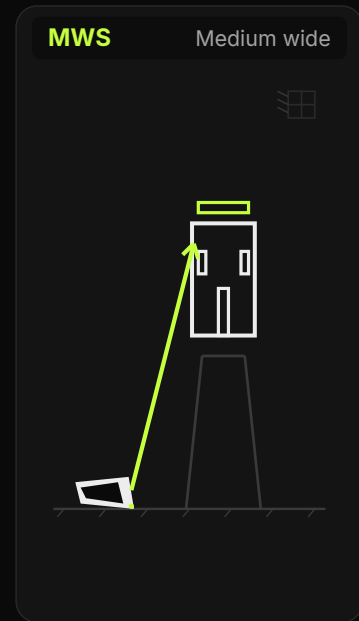
Phone vertical, 4 m back.

**MCU**

Medium close

TOP-DOWN

Skip — use detail of door handle.

**MWS**

Medium wide

LOW HERO

Crouch by entry.

STYLING TIP

Photograph 30 minutes before sunset.

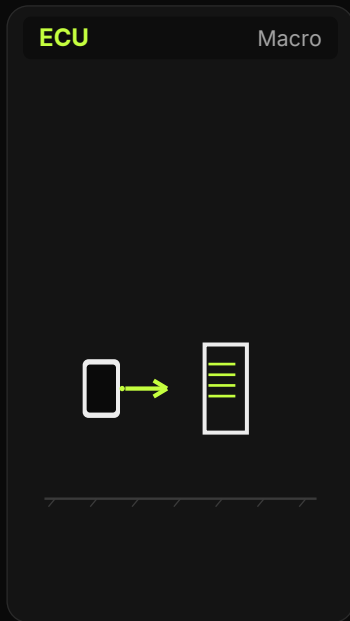
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 18 OF 20

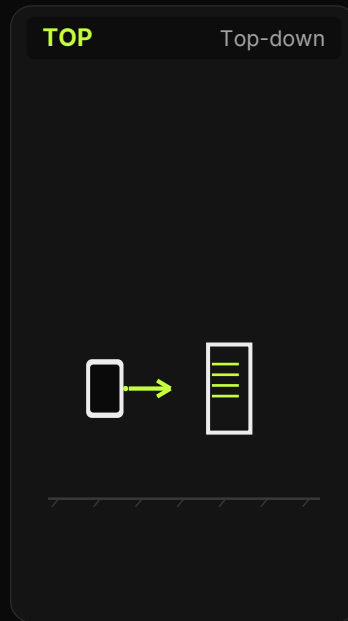
SCENARIO 18

Stack texture macro

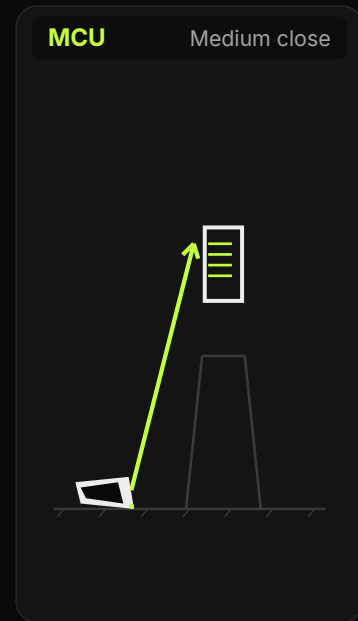
Macro of book spines stacked.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with stack.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above stack.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Light at 45°. Spine texture reads as 'old' in soft side-light.

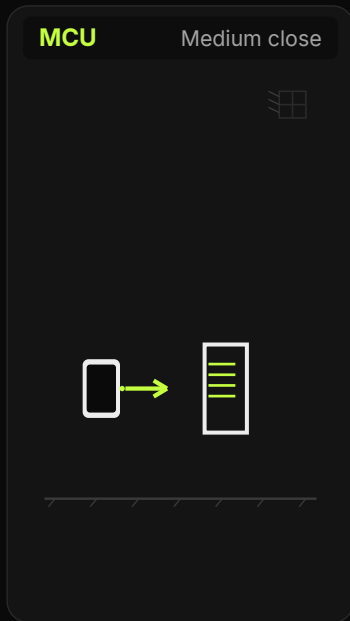
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 19 OF 20

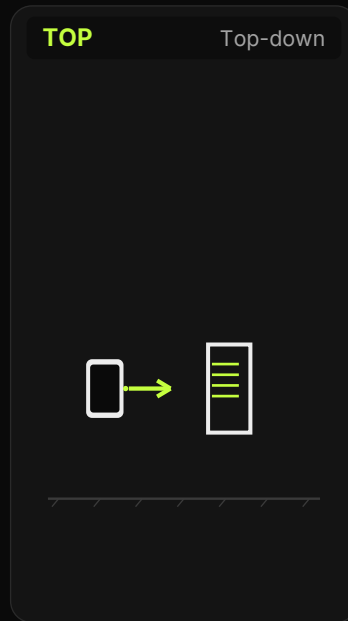
SCENARIO 19

Pages catching light

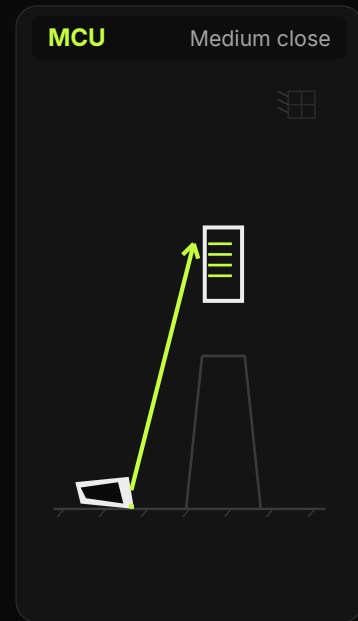
Open book, light spilling across pages.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with book.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above book.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Mist water on pages just before. Light photograph richer on damp.

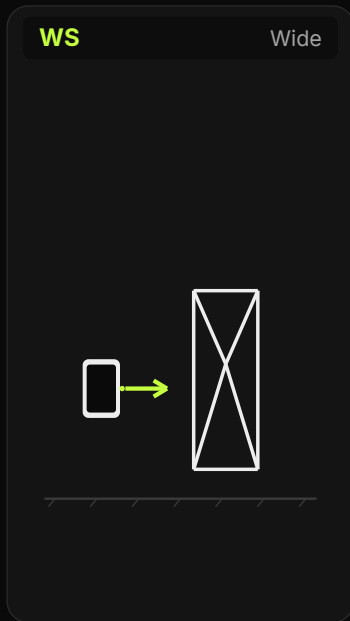
BOOKSTORE

SCENARIO 20 OF 20

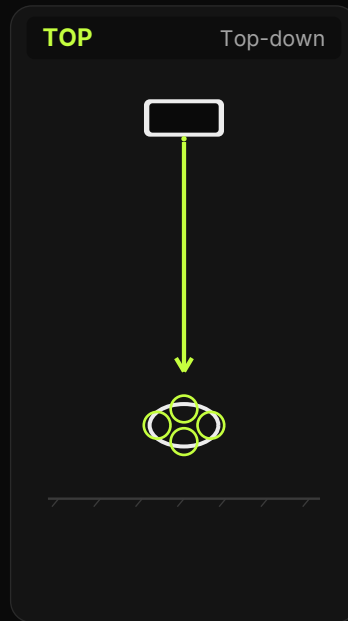
SCENARIO 20

Closing — empty store

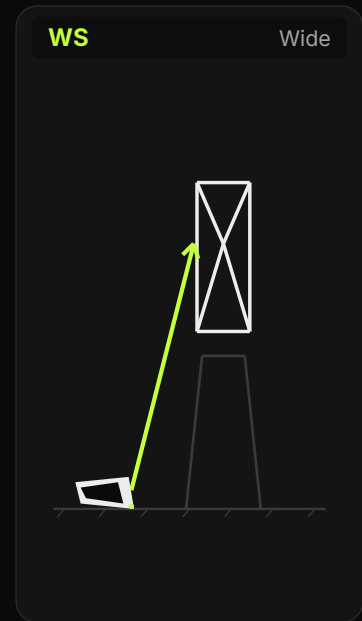
Lights low, books neat, day done.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone vertical at far end.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above one display table.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Leave one book on the table. Last reader detail.

YOU'VE GOT THE PLAYBOOK.

Now go shoot.

This guide was built specifically for bookstores. Every scenario in it works on a phone you already own. The only missing ingredient is press-the-button, ten times in a row, until one of them is the keeper.

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