

What Are Some Essential Video Editing Tips for Beginners Who are Just Getting Started?

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1. Choose the Right Software for Your Level

Don't start with the most complex tool available. Match the software to your current skill level:

- Beginner: DaVinci Resolve (free, industry-grade), iMovie (Mac), CapCut (mobile/desktop)
- Intermediate: Adobe Premiere Pro, Final Cut Pro (Mac)
- Simple online edits: Clipchamp, Adobe Express

DaVinci Resolve is the strongest free option - it's used by professionals and has no meaningful feature lock behind a paywall.

2. Organise Your Footage Before You Edit

Jumping straight into the timeline without organising your files is the single biggest mistake beginners make. Before editing:

1. Create a dedicated project folder with subfolders: 'Footage', 'Audio', 'Graphics', 'Exports'
2. Rename raw clips with meaningful names (e.g., 'interview_take3.mp4' instead of 'MVI_0042.mp4')
3. Watch all your clips before placing anything on the timeline - mark the good takes

3. Learn the Rough Cut First

Your first pass should focus only on structure - not colour, not music, not effects. Place all your clips in order, cut out obvious mistakes and dead air, and get the story or message right. Fine-tuning comes after the rough cut is solid.

Quote: Rule of thumb: If a clip doesn't serve the story, cut it - even if the footage looks great.

4. Cut on Action and Use J-Cuts / L-Cuts

Hard cuts (where both video and audio switch simultaneously) feel jarring. Two techniques that make edits feel natural:

- Cut on action: Make your edit mid-movement (e.g., cut while someone is sitting down) - the motion carries the viewer's eye across the cut seamlessly
- J-Cut: The audio from the next clip starts before its video appears
- L-Cut: The audio from the current clip continues over the first frames of the next clip

These two cuts alone will make your editing feel significantly more professional.

5. Use Keyboard Shortcuts

Reaching for the mouse for every action slows you down dramatically. Learn these core shortcuts in whatever software you use:

- Spacebar - Play/pause
- I / O - Set in point / out point
- C - Razor/blade tool (cut)
- V - Selection tool
- Ctrl+Z / Cmd+Z - Undo
- Ctrl+S / Cmd+S - Save (do this constantly)

6. Get Your Audio Right

Viewers will tolerate mediocre video quality, but poor audio drives them away immediately. Prioritise audio from the start:

1. Normalise dialogue audio to around -12 dB to -6 dB peak
2. Use a noise reduction filter on any ambient hiss (DaVinci Resolve and Premiere both have built-in tools)
3. Keep background music noticeably lower than dialogue - typically -20 dB to -25 dB when speech is present
4. Fade audio in and out at cut points instead of hard-cutting it

7. Don't Overuse Transitions and Effects

New editors tend to use flashy transitions on every cut. In professional editing, the straight cut (no transition) is used 90% of the time. Use transitions sparingly and only when they serve a purpose:

- Cross dissolve - passage of time, mood shift
- Cut to black - scene ending, dramatic pause
- Wipe/slide - only in specific stylistic contexts

If you're adding a transition to hide a bad cut, fix the cut instead.

8. Apply Basic Colour Correction Before Colour Grading

There's a difference between correction and grading - do them in this order:

1. Colour correction: Fix exposure, white balance, and contrast so all clips look consistent and natural
2. Colour grade: Apply a creative look (warm tones, cinematic teal-and-orange, etc.) after correction is done

In DaVinci Resolve, use the Colour Wheels and Curves in the Colour page. In Premiere Pro, use Lumetri Colour.

9. Always Edit to a Backup

Hard drives fail. Projects get corrupted. Set up a simple backup habit from day one:

- Enable auto-save in your editing software (every 5 minutes)
- Keep a copy of your project folder on an external drive or cloud storage
- Never delete raw footage until the final export is confirmed and backed up

10. Export at the Correct Settings

A common beginner mistake is exporting with wrong settings, resulting in huge file sizes or quality loss. For most use cases:

- Format: MP4 (H.264 or H.265)
- Resolution: Match your source (typically 1920x1080 for HD, 3840x2160 for 4K)
- Frame rate: Match the frame rate you shot in (24fps, 30fps, or 60fps)

- Bitrate: 10-20 Mbps for 1080p; 35-50 Mbps for 4K
- For YouTube: Use YouTube's recommended export settings, or use their direct upload presets in Premiere/DaVinci

11. Watch Your Edit on a Different Screen

After finishing, watch the full video on a different device - your phone, a TV, or a laptop. Issues with audio balance, colour, and pacing become obvious on unfamiliar screens. Make corrections, then export your final version.

Why These Habits Matter Early

The editors who improve fastest are not the ones who learn the most effects - they're the ones who build disciplined habits around file management, audio, and clean cutting from the very beginning. These fundamentals apply regardless of what software you use or what type of content you make. Get these right first; everything else builds on top of them.