

How to Use Your Laptop as a Teleprompter to Make Videos on a Budget

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If you're trying to make videos on a budget, the thought of a free teleprompter (or fairly low-cost one) is certainly appealing. Teleprompters are the way to go if you're trying to create a scripted video.

You've probably seen teleprompters used by professional newscasters or politicians who read a prepared script from a monitor. The teleprompter is mounted to the camera pedestal in front of and just below the camera lens. Text from the teleprompter's video monitor is reflected onto a specialized glass called *beam splitter glass*. The system has its own software, computer setup and often needs a person to scroll the text at the desired rate for the speaker.

As you can imagine, the teleprompter systems used by professional studios can cost up to several thousands of dollars. This tip shows you how you can create your own free teleprompter that has the functionality of an expensive system. Simply use a device that most of us already own or have ready access to — a laptop.

Getting Started: Items You'll Need to Use Your Laptop as a Teleprompter

To get started, you'll need the following:

- **Laptop loaded with a word processing program.** We use Microsoft Word for our scripted videos.
- **A wireless mouse.**
- **Your video camera, preferably on a tripod.** For scripted videos, it's better to use a tripod for a stable shot and to adjust the camera height as needed.
- **A stable surface** — such as a table, stand or bookcase — to place your laptop on. For our videos, we've been using a bookcase because the shelves allow us to adjust the laptop's placement, giving us just the right angle for our speaker who is reading the script. This is useful since this gives us the option of having the speaker stand or sit and still give the appearance that they are staring right at the camera.

Setting Your Laptop Up to Work as a Teleprompter in 4 Simple Steps!

1. **Prepare your script in your word processing program.** First things first — you need to write your video's script! Once you've polished your writing and are happy with the script, increase the point size of the text and adjust the margins so that you can easily read the text from a distance.



Here I've increased the font size of my scripted text so that I can easily read it from a distance.

We use Microsoft Word to format our scripts. We set the font to Arial Bold, 36 points. We use Print Layout view and 1/2-inch margins all the way around. Depending on how far away your speaker will be from the laptop, you may need to adjust your margins and font size accordingly.

2. **Set up your video camera on your tripod.** Determine whether your speaker will be sitting or standing when reading the script. You want to set up your tripod at just the right height and angle so that your subject appears to be looking straight into the camera's lens.
3. **Set up your laptop on a stable surface next to your camera.** This step can be a little tricky, so be prepared to try a few setups before you get the right angle and height. Once you've powered up your laptop, you'll need to open up your script to the opening text. Then you'll need to position your laptop next to your video camera.

One option is to place the laptop at the same height as the video camera either to the left or right side of the camera. The laptop needs to be close to the camera so that your speaker still appears to be looking directly at the camera while reading the script.

Another option is to place the laptop behind the camera at a height slightly above the top edge of the camera. This allows the speaker to read the laptop screen without the camera blocking the view. This is where our bookcase with adjustable shelves comes in handy.

The effect you're going for is that when your speaker is reading the script from the laptop, it appears that he or she is looking right at the camera and not reading at all. What you don't want is for your speaker to appear looking at a point beside the camera or well above the camera as this will give your speaker a distracted, unnatural look.

4. **Practice before filming.** There are a couple things you'll need to practice doing and decide upon before filming. First, decide who will be using the wireless mouse to scroll the script during the filming.

Ideally, the speaker should be the one to scroll the script so that he can match the speed of the scroll to his reading. You'll find with a wireless mouse that the speaker does not need to have the mouse on a surface for the scroll feature to work. With a little practice, the speaker can hold the mouse to his side and operate the scroll wheel to move through the script from beginning to end.

We suggest you frame the shot so that you see the speaker from the chest up. This way the mouse is not in the shot and it keeps the illusion going that the speaker is just talking naturally and not actually reading from a prepared script.

If you have problems with the wireless mouse operating correctly, check the batteries and put in fresh ones if needed. Also, you might want to reduce the distance between the laptop and the mouse if it's beyond your mouse's range. We tested our wireless mouse and were surprised to find it controlled the laptop scroll for a good 25 feet without any performance issues.



Use the scroll wheel on your wireless mouse to control your script on your laptop. Set up your laptop next to your video camera and you have your very own teleprompter!

Next, you'll need to do one last confirmation that your camera and laptop setup are correct. Shoot a minute's worth of test footage with your speaker reading from the laptop and operating the mouse scroll.

Play back the footage and see if it looks natural. If not, keep adjusting the camera height and the placement of the laptop until you get the effect you want.

If you enjoyed this free teleprompter tip, be sure to check out our Camera Tips section on [GroovyVideos.com](https://groovyvideos.com) for more ideas on how to make videos on a budget that look professional and attract an audience.