

The Editing Library

Pacing, overlays, and the things that get an ad rejected

This is not a guide to your editing software. It is the list of decisions that change whether an ad works, and the list of mistakes that got real ads sent back by real clients.

The second list is the more valuable one.

Part 1 — Pacing

The clock

Timestamp	What must have happened
0.0–0.8s	A face, a hand, or a number is on screen. Not a logo. Not a title card.
0.8–3.0s	The hook has been <i>both</i> spoken and written. Assume sound-off.
3.0s	First cut. If you haven't cut by three seconds, you have made a video, not an ad.
3–8s	The specific problem, stated in the viewer's language, not yours.
8–15s	The mechanism. Why this works when the obvious thing didn't.
15–25s	Proof. One piece. Not three.
25s+	The ask. Exactly one.

Cut rhythm

- **Top of funnel:** cut every 1.5–2.5 seconds. Motion is the retention mechanism.
- **Mechanism sections:** slow down deliberately — 4–6 second holds. This is the only place

in the edit where slowness reads as confidence rather than as dead air.

- **Never** cut on a rhythm the whole way through. A consistent cut interval becomes invisible within eight seconds, which is exactly the same as not cutting at all.

Duration by placement

Shoot once, deliver three lengths from the same footage:

Length	Use
6s	Hook test only. The purpose is to find out if the first three seconds hold.
15s	The workhorse. Most spend should live here.
30–45s	Mechanism and proof. Warm audiences only.

Do not run a 45-second ad to a cold broad audience and then conclude the angle failed. You tested the wrong length.

Part 2 — On-screen text

Rules

1. **Every ad must work with the sound off.** Not "should" — must. Write the caption first, then record the audio to match it.
 1. **Lowercase for native placements.** Sentence case reads as a brand. Lowercase reads as a person. This is not a style preference; it changes who gets ignored.
 1. **Never use the platform's built-in auto-caption styling.** It is the most reliable visual signal that a post is an ad, because everyone who is not a creator uses it.
1. **One idea per card.** If the overlay has a comma and an "and", split it.
2. **Bottom third is dead space.** The UI covers it on most placements. Anything you put there, you have not shown anyone.

The four overlay patterns that shipped

Taken from a production batch. Each was selected over alternatives, with the reason recorded.

Pattern	Example	Why it was chosen
contrast	what my grocery bill looked like before vs after joining [brand]	"Strong price-comparison angle, immediate contrast, broadest commercial appeal."
confessional	I don't even remember the last time I went to [competitor]	"Native confession format with clear anti-incumbent positioning."
pov	POV: your neighbour brought you fresh tomatoes again	"Leans into local/community identity without sounding corporate."
transformation	Day 1: 'this is weird' Day 30: my whole street is in	"Captures the network effect, which is more differentiated than generic category ads."

Notice that none of the four mention a feature.

Caption placement

- **Centred, word-by-word or short chunks** — native, reads fast, survives a mute scroll.
- **Upper third** for hooks. Eye lands there first and the UI doesn't cover it.
- **Never** overlay text on a face. You will cover the single most engaging object on screen with a sentence they can read in half a second.

Part 3 — Shot order

The default order, which is right about 80% of the time:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----------|---|
| 1. Face or hand | (0–3s) | – a human, immediately |
| 2. The problem, shown | (3–8s) | – demonstrated, not described |
| 3. The product, entering | (8–12s) | – as the response to what you just showed |
| 4. The mechanism, close | (12–20s) | – macro, slow, labelled |
| 5. The proof | (20–26s) | – one piece |
| 6. The ask | (26s+) | – one action |

The one reliable exception: comparison angles. Put both objects on screen in the first frame. The whole value of a comparison is that it is instant; building up to it throws away the only advantage the format has.

Part 4 — The rejection checklist

This is the highest-value page in this document. Every item below is drawn from real feedback on real batches — things that were shipped, rejected, and had to be remade.

Run this list before you send anything to a client or a platform.

Brand accuracy

- ☐ **Is the brand name spelled correctly on screen, every time?**

A real batch was rejected for rendering "Needle-less" instead of "NeedleFree".

- ☐ **Is it pronounced correctly in the audio?**

A separate batch was rejected because the voice said "Box Djubby" instead of "Box Div-ee". If the name is unusual, write the phonetic spelling in the brief.

- ☐ **Are numbers pronounced the way the client says them?**

"0.1" was flagged in a real review. Ask.

Talent and handling

- ☐ **Is the lip sync correct?** The single most common rejection reason across every

batch reviewed. If it drifts by more than about two frames, it reads as fake and poisons the whole ad.

- ☐ **Is the product being held the way it's actually used?** "Device holding" was flagged

repeatedly. Someone who owns the product will spot this in one frame.

Client-specific prohibitions

Every client has a list like this. Get it *before* you film, not after. A real one:

- ☐ No visible plastic crates, tubs, bags, cling film or plastic-wrapped product.
- ☐ Do not *claim* "zero plastic" in the script either — even when the visuals comply,

the claim may not be true of the real product.

- ☐ No operations shown on a day the business doesn't operate.
- ☐ No packing shown in a kitchen — use a carport, garage, porch or covered outdoor area.
- ☐ "One day a week", never "flexible hours".

- ☐ "Side-gig", never "side hustle".

That last pair looks trivial. It is not — it is the difference between the client's actual positioning and the generic version of it, and the client will notice immediately.

Audience separation

- ☐ **One audience per script.** A real batch was returned for mixing customer-acquisition

and supplier/partner-acquisition messaging inside a single video. If two different people would take two different actions, that is two ads.

Regional and regulatory

- ☐ **Do a full visual pass before running creative in a new region** — copy, audio, *and*

on-screen text read from the actual rendered frames. Automated text extraction misses text baked into video.

- ☐ **In regulated categories** (health, cosmetic, financial), a named timeline is a claim.

"Day 1 / Day 30" is fine for behaviour, never for outcomes.

- ☐ Never state a regulatory status — clearance, registration, approval — that you have

not personally verified against the register. This is the fastest way to lose an account, and it has happened.

Part 5 — The version log

Keep one row per creative. Not optional — without this, you will re-make the same rejected video twice, and you will not be able to tell a client why a change was made.

Field	Why
hook_id	Ties the edit back to the angle it came from
version	v1 → feedback → v2 → approved/rejected
audience	Which of the client's audiences it was written for
prompt / brief used	The exact brief, so a re-make is reproducible
feedback tags	Mapped to the specific asset, not to the batch
status	pending / approved / rejected / live

The single most useful column is **feedback tags mapped to asset**. Batch-level feedback ("some of these had issues") is unactionable and guarantees you remake the wrong ones.

Feisty Agency — feistyagency.com. The rejection checklist is drawn from real client feedback on real production batches. It is short because it only contains things that actually happened.