



THE VISUAL STANDARD

Before evaluating whether an image looks artificial, you must first define what realism looks like. The Visual Standard establishes the boundaries that protect credibility when AI tools are used in visual work.

Without a defined standard, small adjustments in contrast, saturation, lighting, and sharpening can accumulate and gradually push images beyond what feels believable.

Next, download The Visual Spine, the operational layer to build your reusable prompt.

Name: _____ Brand: _____

Date: _____

1 — REALISM BAR

Choose Your Realism Bar

Select one realism category for your work. Do not mix categories within the same visual system.

☐ Natural / believable photography

☐ Clean editorial realism

☐ Stylized illustration

☐ Graphic flat design

Notes on my realism bar:

2 — LIGHTING LOGIC

Define Your Lighting Logic

How does light behave in your visual world?

Describe light behavior:

Behavior under different conditions:

Example lighting options (circle or highlight those that fit):

- Soft window light
- Overcast daylight
- Neutral studio side-light
- Flat graphic tone

Notes on lighting consistency:

3 — POLISH CEILING

Define Your Polish Ceiling

Complete the sentence:

My images should feel _____, not

_____.

(prompt: natural, calm, editorial, documentary, restrained, etc.)

Where is my “too much” line?

At what point does “improved” become artificial?

Signs I’ve gone past my ceiling:

4 — EMOTIONAL TEMPERATURE

Define Your Emotional Temperature

My work should feel (choose one or two):

☐ Warm and human

☐ Calm and neutral

☐ Cool and technical

☐ Soft and understated

Describe the emotional tone you want to keep consistent:

Avoided tones (what it should NOT feel like):

5 — CREDIBILITY GUARDRAILS

Define Your Credibility Guardrails

What visual signals are not allowed in your work?

Examples: excessive contrast, heavy sharpening, glowing skin, plastic textures, surreal proportion, obvious AI artifacts, etc.

• First restricted signal:

• Second restricted signal:

• Third restricted signal:

Other guardrails (list as many as you need):

Final check:

If you have to push to impress, it doesn't belong.

SUMMARY: MY VISUAL STANDARD

In one short paragraph, summarize your Visual Standard:
