

# DRAFT

# Bridging the Gap: Creating Plain Language Summary Videos



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# Draft



Comments on this document are welcomed. Please send comments to [dayewale@uoguelph.ca](mailto:dayewale@uoguelph.ca) by May 15.

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# Background

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This resource was developed through the Connecting the Dots initiative. This initiative focused on mobilizing rural research to reach community leaders, organizations, businesses, all levels of government, and researchers. In partnership with knowledge creators, the Connecting the Dots initiative co-constructed research focused on rural people, rural environments, and rural places into impactful plain language summaries and brief videos. Through a strategic communication plan, these outputs were shared through social media and newsletters among rural organizations across Ontario and Canada.

The Connecting the Dots initiative was funded by the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph. Learn more about the Connecting the Dots initiative at <https://ruraldev.ca/connecting-the-dots-mobilizing-rural-knowledge-to-knowledge-users/>

# Purpose of the Guide

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Research findings are most impactful when they reach the people who can act on them. Plain language summary videos offer a dynamic and accessible way to communicate key findings to diverse audiences, including community members, practitioners, and policy makers, who may engage more readily with audio-visual content than written materials.

This guide walks you through the process of creating a plain language summary video, from planning and scripting to recording and having your final output ready for knowledge sharing through social media and newsletters.

To illustrate each step, a fictitious working example has been used throughout, resulting in a 55-second video.

## About the 55-second example

Research on social media video engagement shows a sharp drop-off after 60 seconds. A focused 55-second video forces you to keep only the most essential messages. Short videos are more likely to be watched to the end, shared, and remembered. The working example in this manual uses 5 slides at 11 seconds each = 55 seconds. Your video may use a different number of slides depending on your content.

# Before You Begin, What You Need

## What tools does this manual cover?

<b>Canva Free</b>	The primary tool for designing and producing the video. All slides, footage, graphics, captions, voiceover, and music are handled inside Canva. No paid subscription needed.
<b>Canva voiceover</b>	Canva Free includes a built-in voiceover recorder. You can also use Canva's text-to-speech or upload a pre-recorded audio file — all options are covered in Step 7.
<b>Stock footage &amp; images</b>	Canva Free includes a large library of photos, videos, and graphics. If your own research images are limited and you have access to Canva Pro, the Pro library offers additional options, but this is not required.
<b>Background music</b>	Canva Free includes a royalty-free audio library. All music used in this manual comes from the free tier.

## Before You Begin, What You Need

Before opening Canva, have everything below ready. Trying to find content mid-session disrupts your workflow and wastes time.

### What you need

- A Canva Free account, sign up at [canva.com](https://canva.com), no payment details required
- A computer with a reliable internet connection
- Your plain language summary, written, reviewed, and finalized before you start. Please refer to the CTD guide on How-to create a Plain Language Summary

# Section 1: Preparing Your Content

Before building your video, map your content to your slides and write your voiceover script. Doing this before opening Canva means you build with purpose – no guessing, no rewriting mid-session.

## Video structure and timing

The working example in this manual is a 55-second video across 5 slides, with each slide lasting 11 seconds. Your video may have a different number of slides depending on your content. At a natural speaking pace of approximately 2.5 words per second, each 11-second slide's voiceover should be 25–28 words. No more. Every word must earn its place.

Slide	Section	Content	Time	Words
1	Title	Study title only	0:00–0:11	25–28 words
2	Overview	What the study was about	0:11–0:22	25–28 words
3	Findings	1–2 key findings only	0:22–0:33	25–28 words
4	Implications	1–2 implications	0:33–0:44	25–28 words
5	Closing	QR code to full article + funder acknowledgment	0:44–0:55	25–28 words

- The study title and funder name, these appear on the closing slide
- The URL or DOI link to the full published article, you will generate a QR code from this
- Any research photos or images your team has, these make the video personal and authentic
- A quiet space to record your voiceover, if you choose to record your own voice

## Working Example

<b>Study title</b>	Left Behind or Leaning In? How Rural Older Adults Navigate Digital Health Tools
<b>Authors</b> <b>What tools does this manual cover?</b>	Dr. Simone Maguire & Dr. Thomas Bellefleur, University of Northern Plains
<b>Published in</b>	Journal of Rural Health Studies, Vol. 18, 2024
<b>Funder</b>	Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
<b>Target video length</b>	55 seconds across 5 slides (11 seconds per slide)
<b>Full article URL / DOI</b>	Needed for Slide 5 to generate a QR code from this link

### Before you open Canva

Close all unnecessary browser tabs and applications.

Have your plain language summary document open and ready on screen.

Have your research photos saved and easy to find – you will upload them in Step 3.

Have the full article URL or DOI ready – you will generate a QR code from it in Step 5.

Have your funder logo saved as an image file if you are permitted and want to display it on the closing slide.

Silence your phone and disable pop-up notifications for the full session.

# Section 2: Building Your Video in Canva

## Step 1 — Open Canva and choose your template

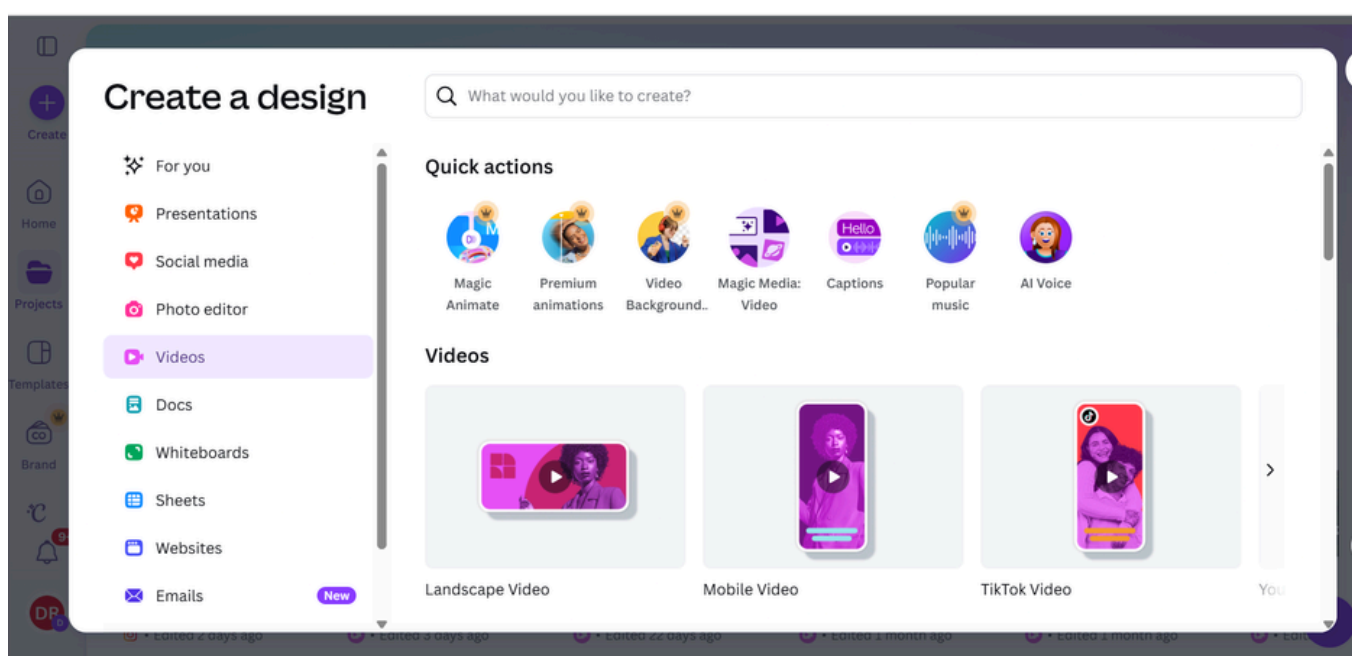
1. The working example in this manual is a 55-second video across 5 slides, with each slide lasting 11 seconds. Your video may have a different number of slides depending on your content. At a natural speaking pace of approximately 2.5 words per second, each 11-second slide's voiceover should be 28 words. No more. Every word must earn its place.

2. Click 'Create' in the top left corner.

3. In the search bar, type 'Video (16:9)' and select the 1920 x 1080 px format. This is the correct format for video.

4. Choose a template from the free library or use the top search bar to describe your ideal design.

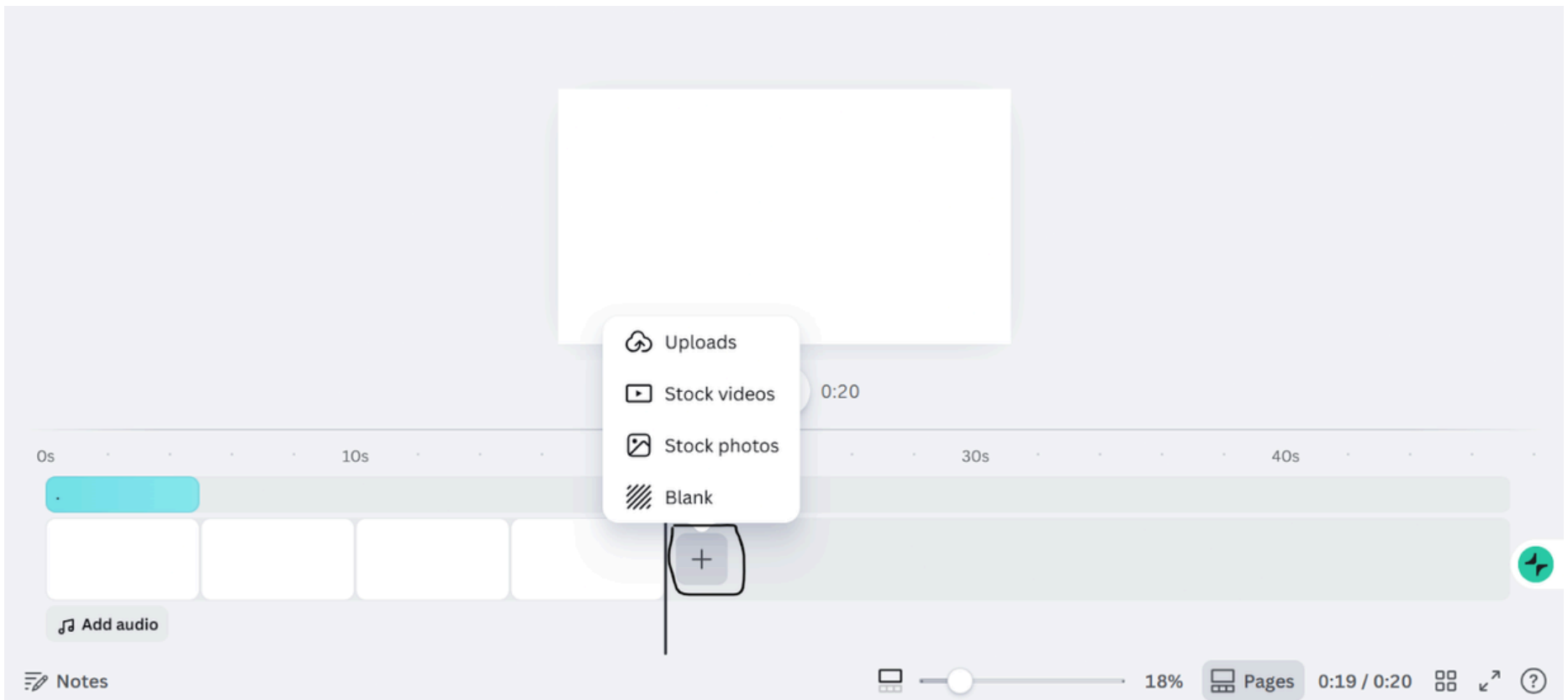
28 words. No more. Every word must earn its place.



### What to look for in a free template

- Dark or deep background – research videos need contrast for legibility
- Minimal decorative elements – your images and footage do the visual work
- Bold, readable heading typography
- A layout with space on the right side where you will place images or footage

## Step 2 — Set up your slides



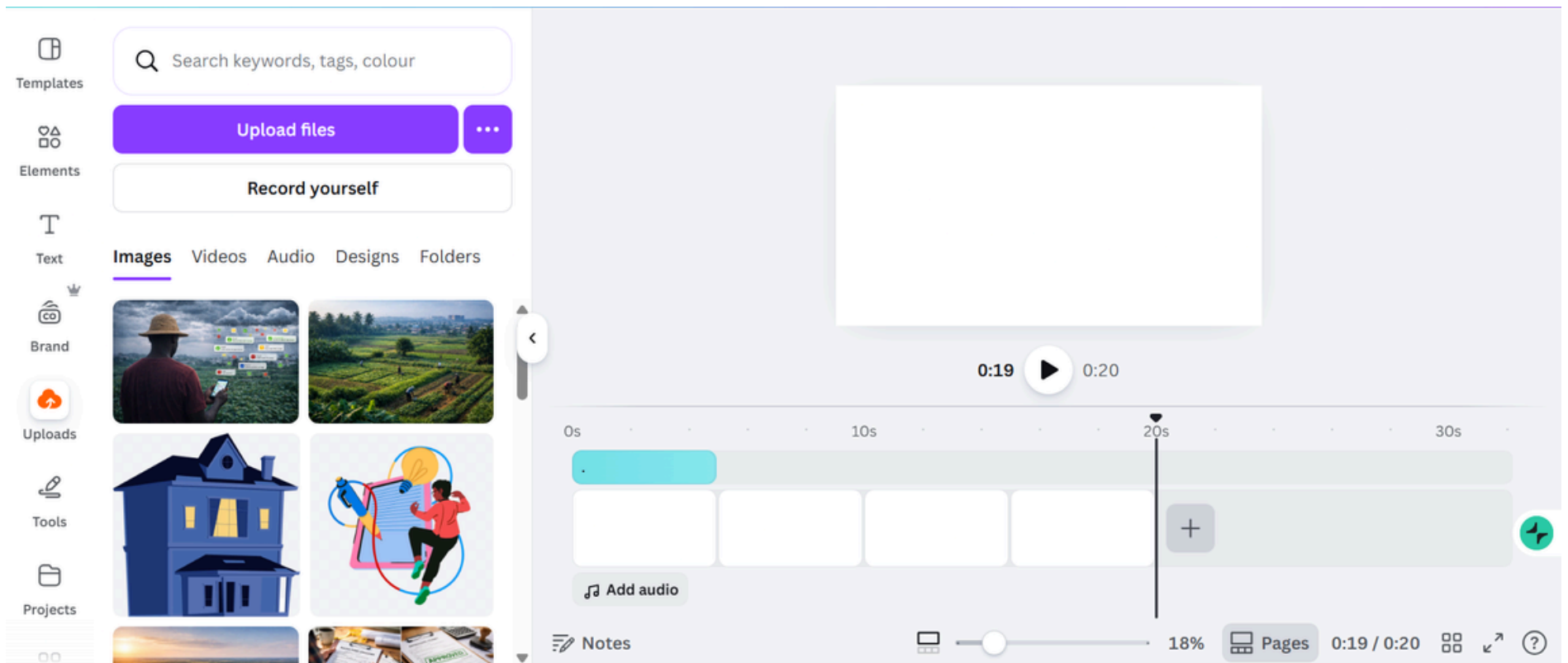
5. Delete any extra template slides. The working example uses 5 slides – add or remove slides to match your own content.
6. Set each slide's duration to 11 seconds: right-click the slide thumbnail in the left panel, select 'Set page duration', and enter 11 seconds.
7. Repeat for all your slides. If using the 5-slide example, total video duration will be 55 seconds.
8. Do not add any content yet – set up all 5 timed slides before building.

## Step 3 — Add stock footage and images

Images and footage bring your research to life. Use your own research photos first — they are the most authentic and personal connection to your work. If you need additional visuals, Canva Free includes a large library of photos and short video clips.

### Using your own research photos (recommended first)

9. Click 'Uploads' in the left sidebar.
10. Click 'Upload files' and select your research photos from your computer.
11. Drag your uploaded photo onto the slide and resize it to fit the right half.
12. Use photos that show people, places, or activities directly related to your research topic.



Images and footage bring your research to life. Use your own research photos first – they are the most authentic and personal connection to your work. If you need additional visuals, Canva Free includes a large library of photos and short video clips.

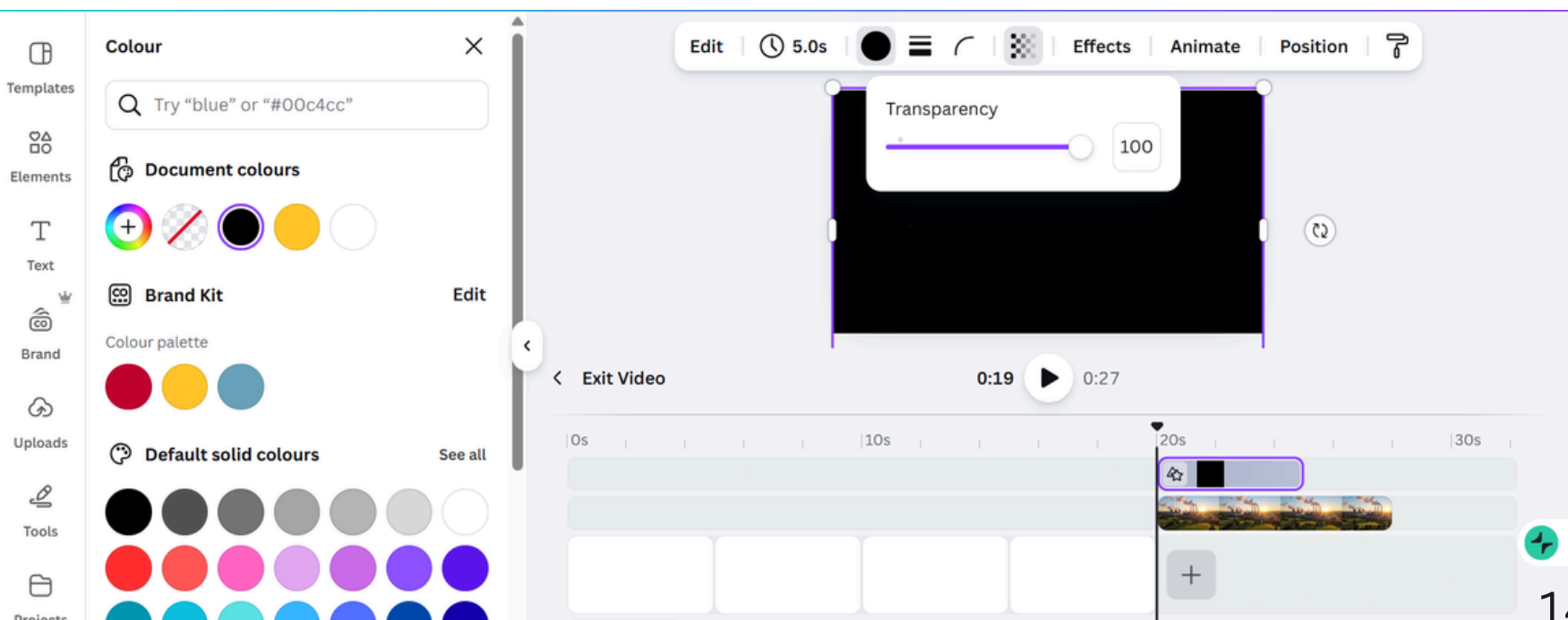
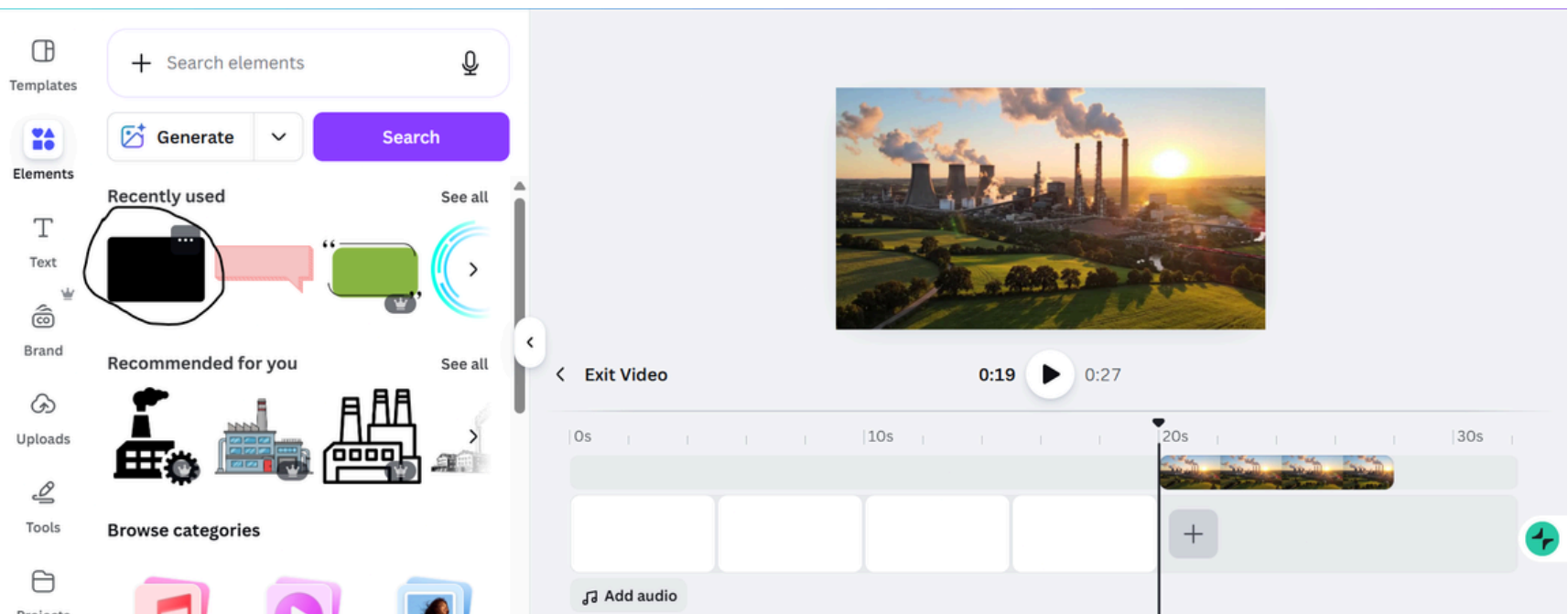
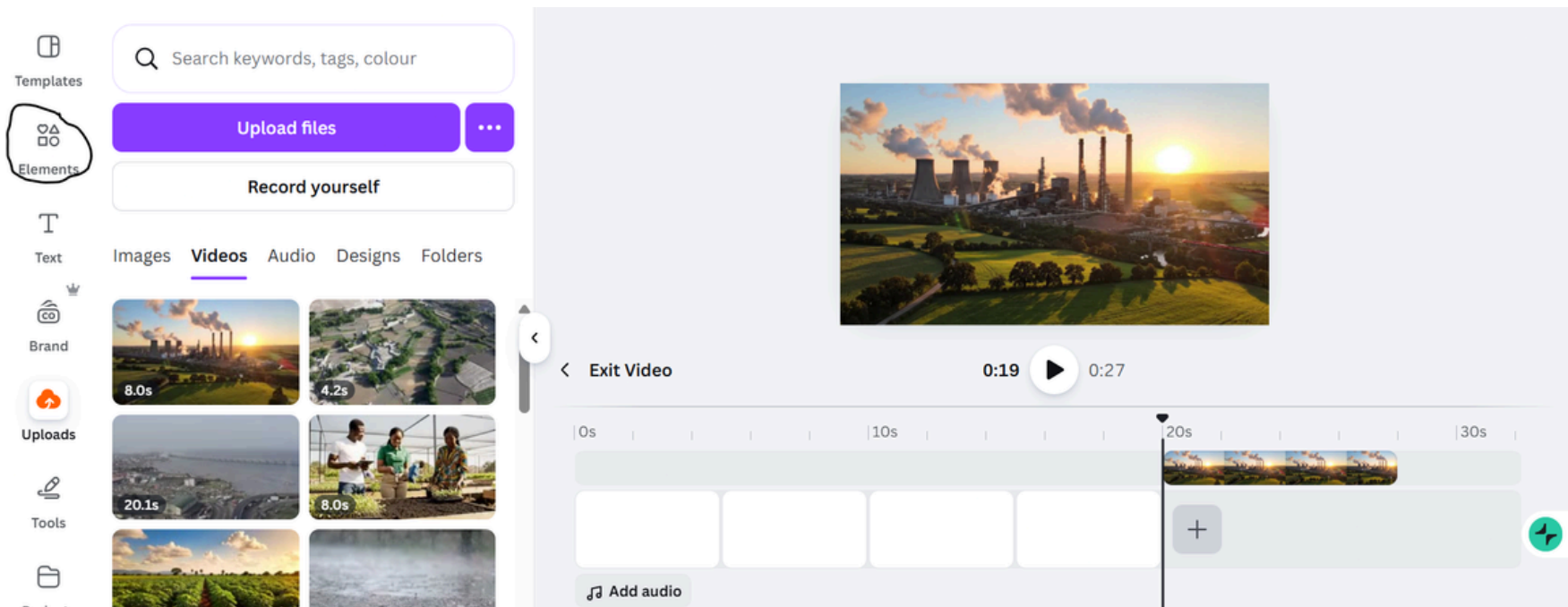
## Using Canva Free stock footage and photos

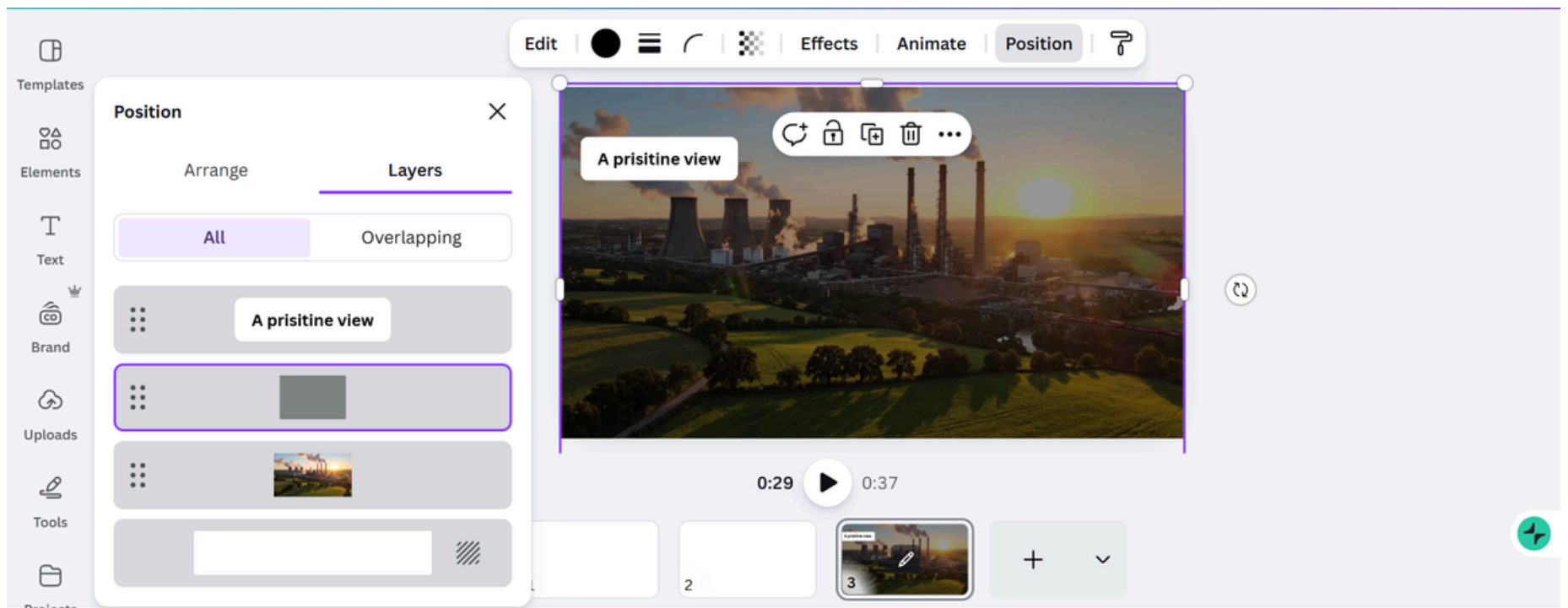
13. Click 'Elements' in the left sidebar, then click 'Videos' or 'Photos'.

14. Search for visuals relevant to your slide topic. Use these searches for the working example:

Slide	Search term	Notes
1 – Title	rural road landscape	Right side, reduce opacity to 50%
2 – Overview	elderly person phone home	Right side, kenburns zoom effect
3 – Findings	phone signal rural	Corner, 30% opacity behind text
4 – Implications	community people helping	Right side, complement text
5 – Closing	open field sky wide	Full bleed, dark teal overlay

15. Once placed, add a rectangular overlay above the footage, reduce footage opacity to 40–60% then place the text above the overlay so text stays readable: click the element, then use the opacity slider in the toolbar.





### A note on Canva Pro footage

Canva Free includes a large and useful photo and video library – this is sufficient for most plain language summary videos. If your research photos are limited and you have access to Canva Pro through your institution, the Pro library offers additional stock footage options. Canva Pro is not required for this workflow. Do not pay for it specifically for this purpose.

## Step 4 — Add animated graphics / motion elements

Animated graphics add visual energy without needing extra footage. Canva Free includes a good selection of animated elements. Use 1 per slide maximum – keep them subtle.

16. Click 'Elements' in the left sidebar.

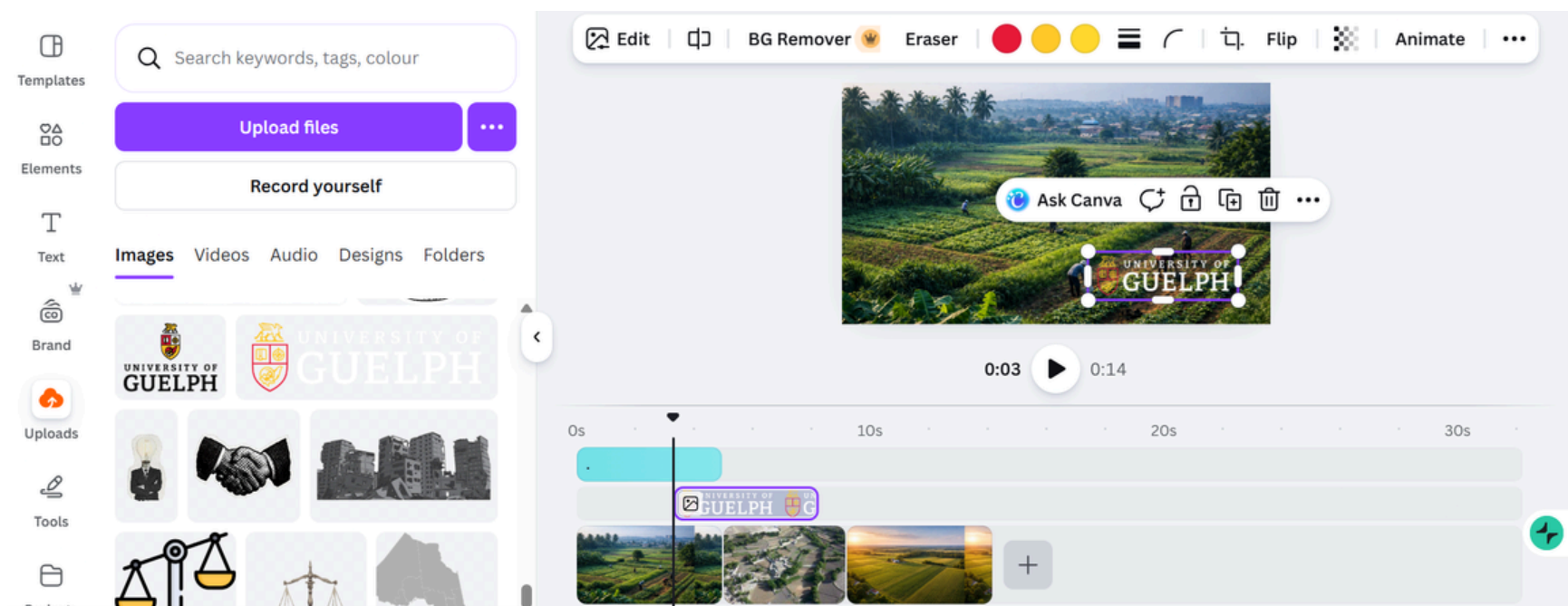
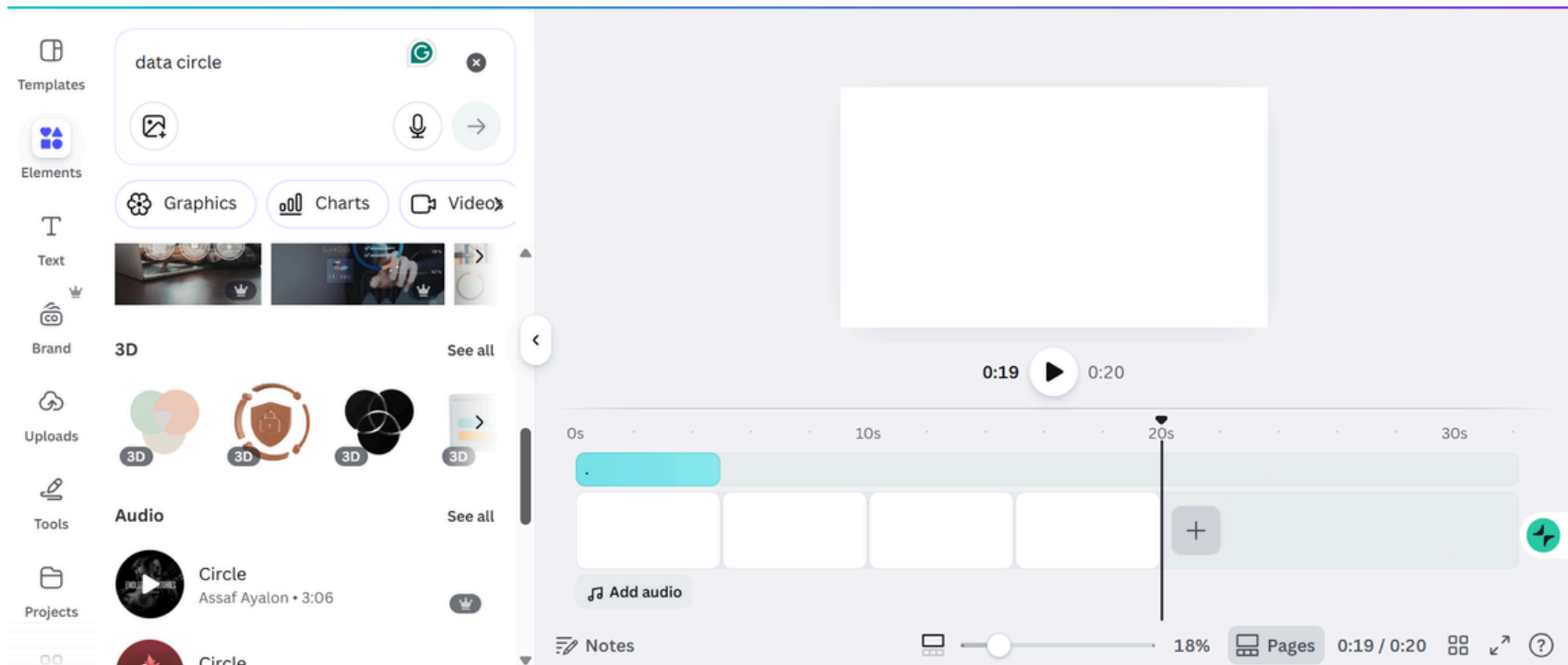
17. Search for a concept related to your slide – e.g. 'data circle', 'network', 'community rings', 'arrow growth'.

18. Filter results by clicking 'Animated' to see motion graphics only. All animated elements marked without a crown icon are free.

19. Drag the element onto your slide. Position it in a corner or over the footage area – away from your main text.

20. Reduce opacity to 40–60%. It should feel like background atmosphere, not a focal point.

21. Preview by clicking the play button at the bottom of the editor.



19. Drag the element onto your slide. Position it in a corner or over the footage area — away from your main text.
20. Reduce opacity to 40–60%. It should feel like background atmosphere, not a focal point.
21. Preview by clicking the play button at the bottom of the editor.

## **Step 5 — Add your callout points**

Callout points are short, bold text boxes placed at the top of the screen — top left, top centre, or top right. They highlight the single most important message of the slide. They are not titles. They are punchy key messages, 6–12 words maximum.

### Rules for callout points

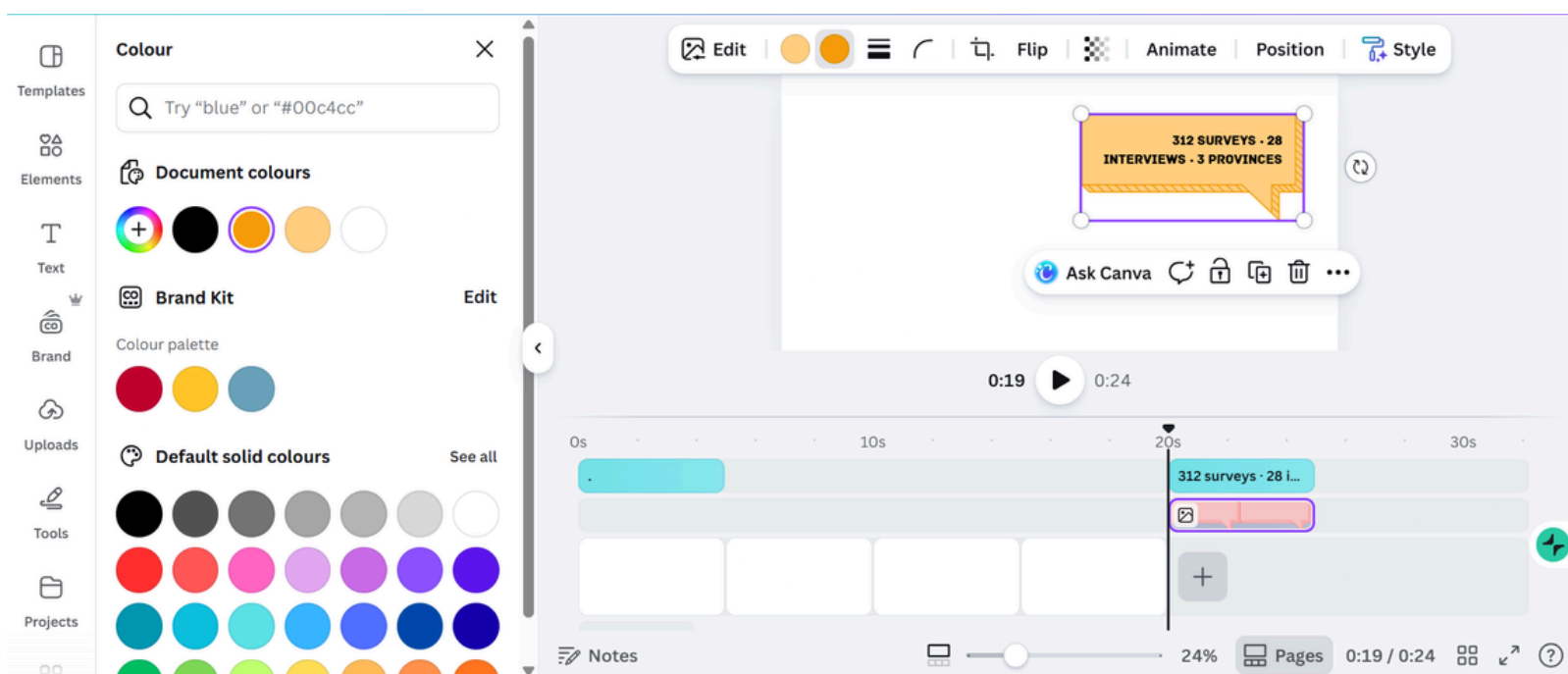
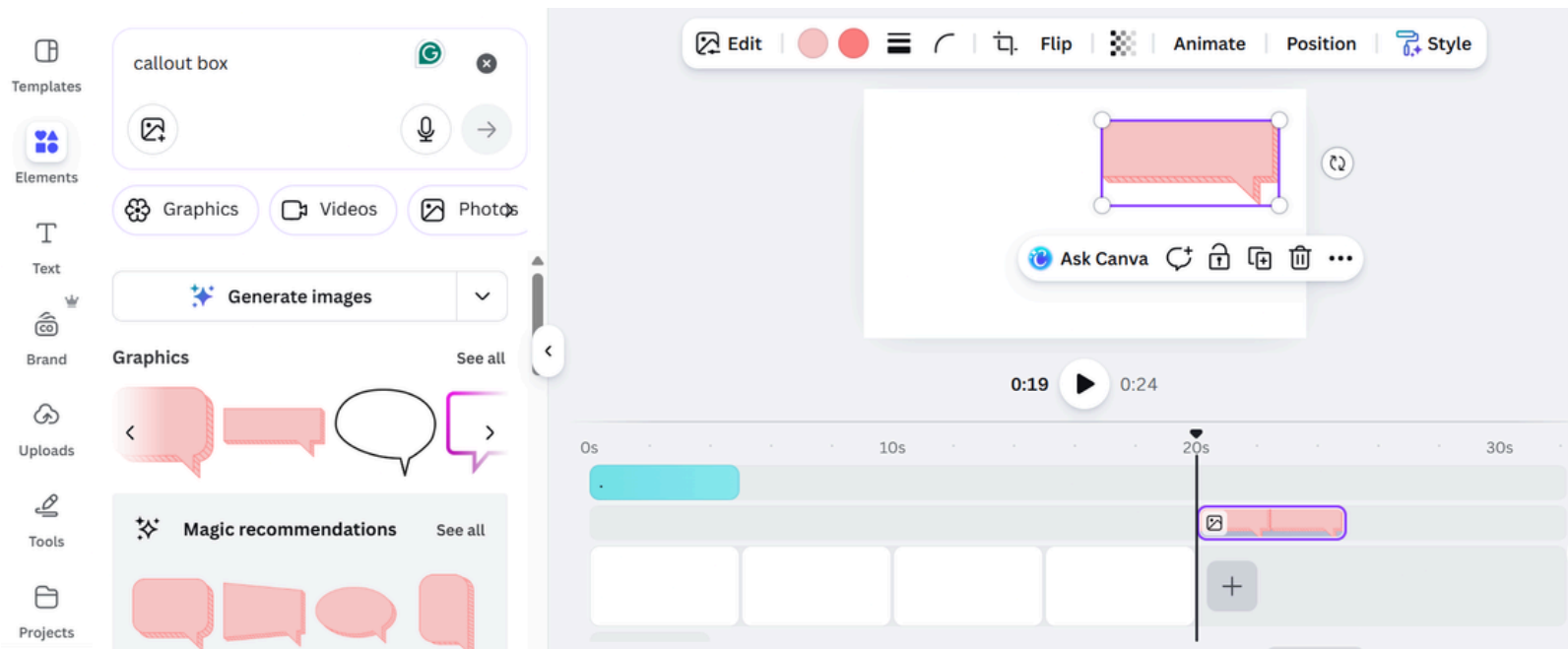
- Maximum 12 words — more than that is a sentence, not a callout
- One callout per slide only — do not stack multiple callouts
- Position varies: use top left for context, top centre for headline stats, top right for supporting points
- For example you could use an amber/yellow background (#F59E0B) with near-black text — high contrast against dark slides
- Bold typeface, readable at a glance.

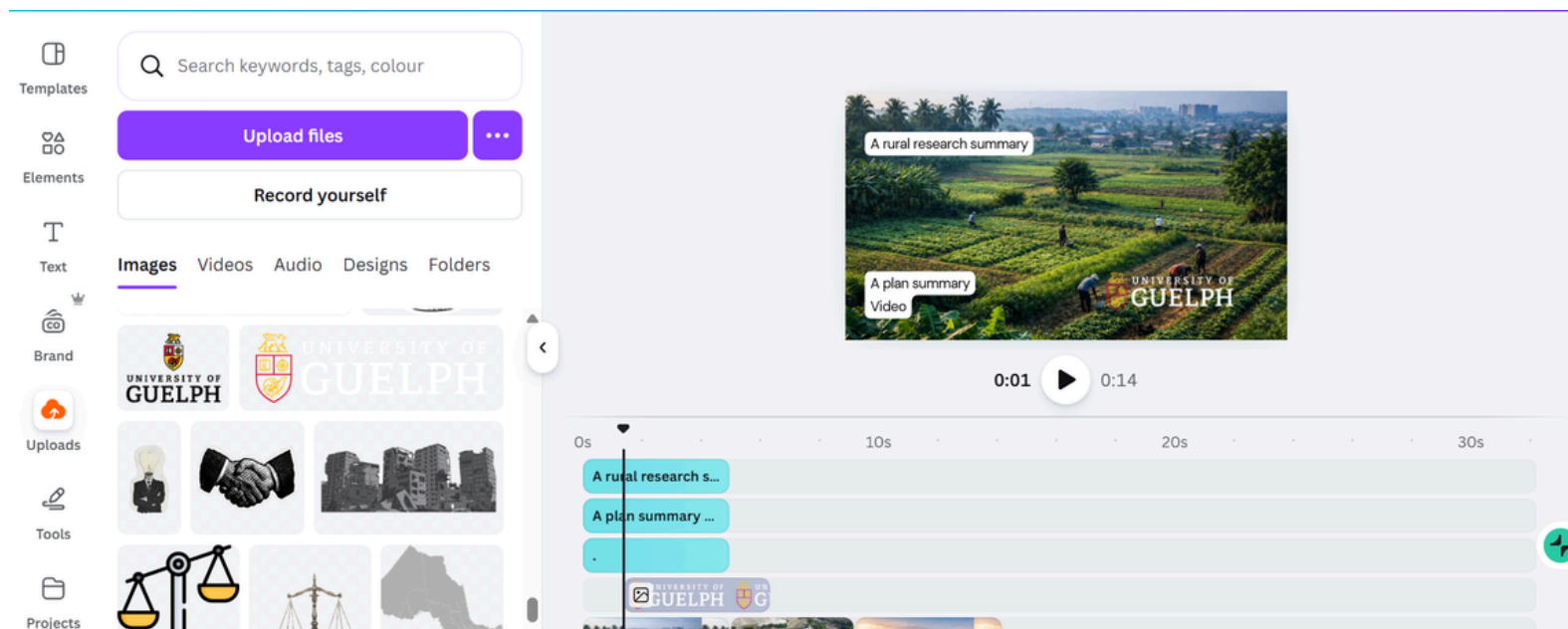
22. Click 'Elements', search 'label box' or 'badge'. Select a simple rectangle badge from the free results.

23. Type your callout text – sentence case, not all caps.

24. Position in one of the three top zones.

25. For example, set background colour to amber (#F59E0B) and text colour to near-black (#1A1A1A).





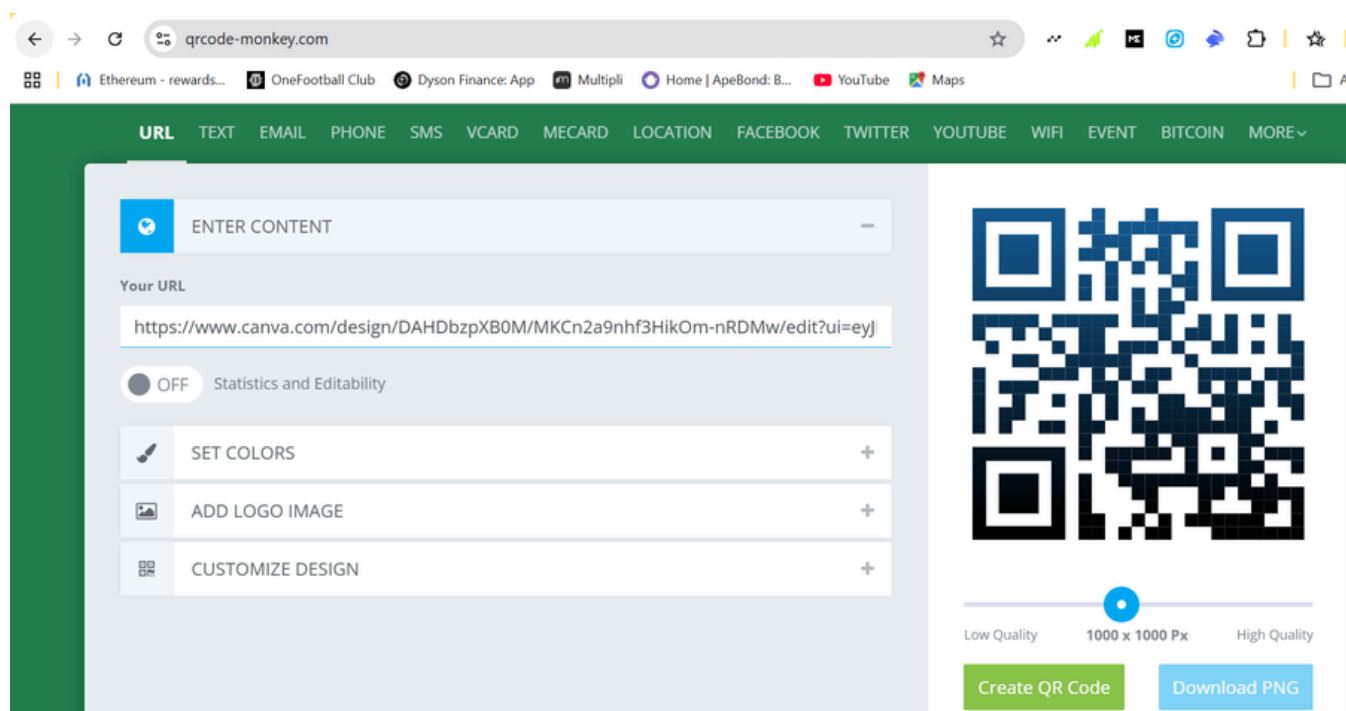
<b>Slide 1 – Title</b>	NO CALLOUT on the title slide – the study title is the only content on screen
<b>Slide 2 – Overview</b>	TOP LEFT: "312 surveys · 28 interviews · 3 provinces"
<b>Slide 3 – Findings</b>	TOP RIGHT: "74% willing – but internet let them down"
<b>Slide 4 – Implications</b>	TOP LEFT: "3 actions for policymakers and designers"
<b>Slide 5 – Closing</b>	NO CALLOUT on the closing slide – the QR code and funder acknowledgment are the only content on screen

## Step 5b — Build the closing slide: QR code and funder acknowledgment

The closing slide has two elements only: a QR code that links to the full published article, and the funder acknowledgment. There is no callout point and no caption text on this slide — the visuals speak for themselves.

### Generating your QR code

26. Go to a free QR code generator — [qr-code-generator.com](https://qr-code-generator.com) or [qrcode-monkey.com](https://qrcode-monkey.com) both work well and are free.
27. Paste the full URL or DOI link to your published research article into the generator.
28. Download the QR code as a PNG file (transparent background if available).
29. Test it — open your phone camera, point it at the QR code on screen, and confirm it takes you to the correct article page.



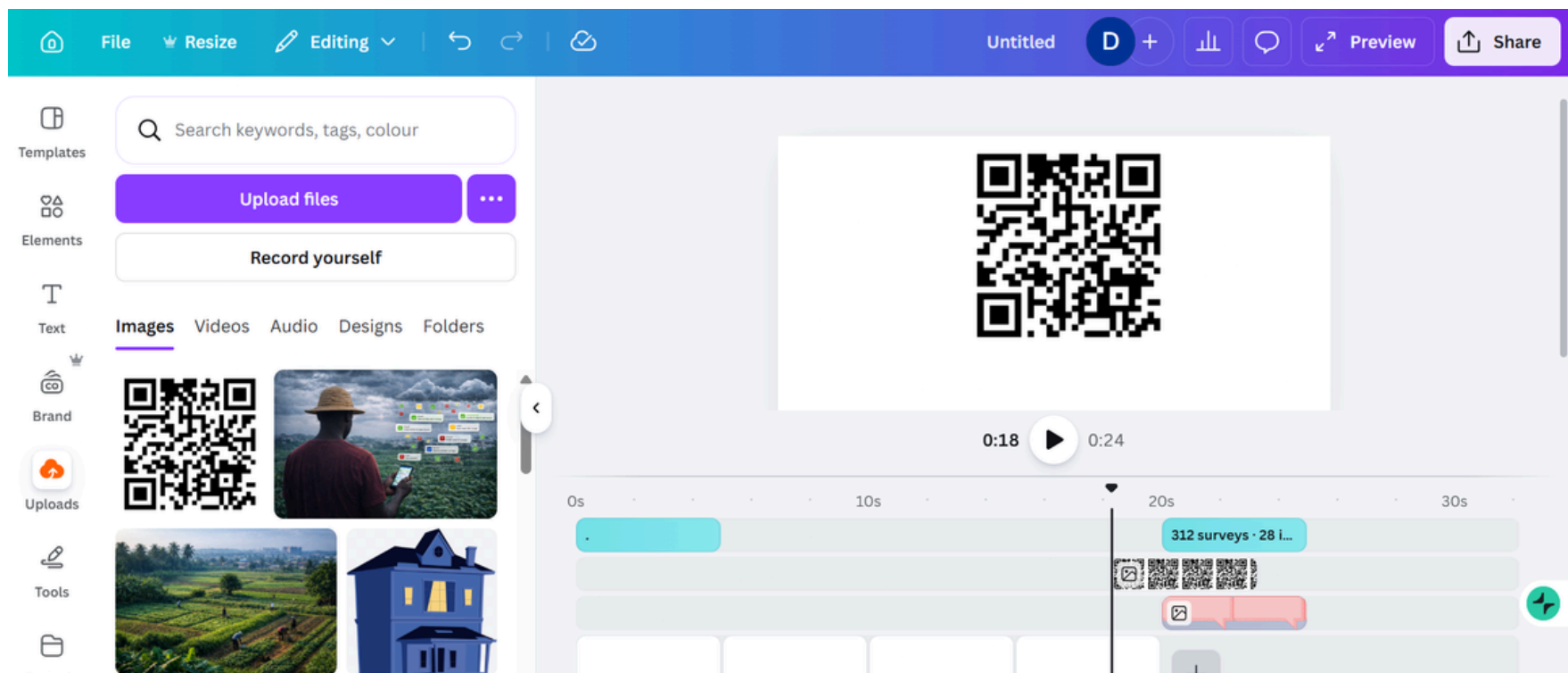
## Adding the QR code to Canva

30. In Canva, navigate to Slide 5 (Closing).

31. Click 'Uploads' in the left sidebar, then 'Upload files'. Select the QR code PNG you just downloaded.

32. Drag the QR code onto the slide. Position it prominently — centre of slide or centre-right. Make it large enough to scan easily, at least 30% of the slide height.

33. Add a short text label beneath the QR code: 'Scan to read the full article'. Keep it small and clean.



## Adding the funder acknowledgment

34. If you have your funder's logo as an image file, upload it via 'Uploads' (if funder has permitted the use of logo) and place it at the bottom of the slide, smaller than the QR code.
35. If you do not have the logo, add a simple text line: 'Funded by [Funder Name]'. Use a small, clean font — this is acknowledgment, not a headline.
36. Keep the closing slide clean and uncluttered. QR code + funder only. No other text, no callout.

### Closing slide layout guide

Centre of slide: QR code — large and scannable

Below QR code: 'Scan to read the full article' in small white text

Bottom of slide: Funder logo or funder name in small text

Background: keep the same dark background as the rest of the video

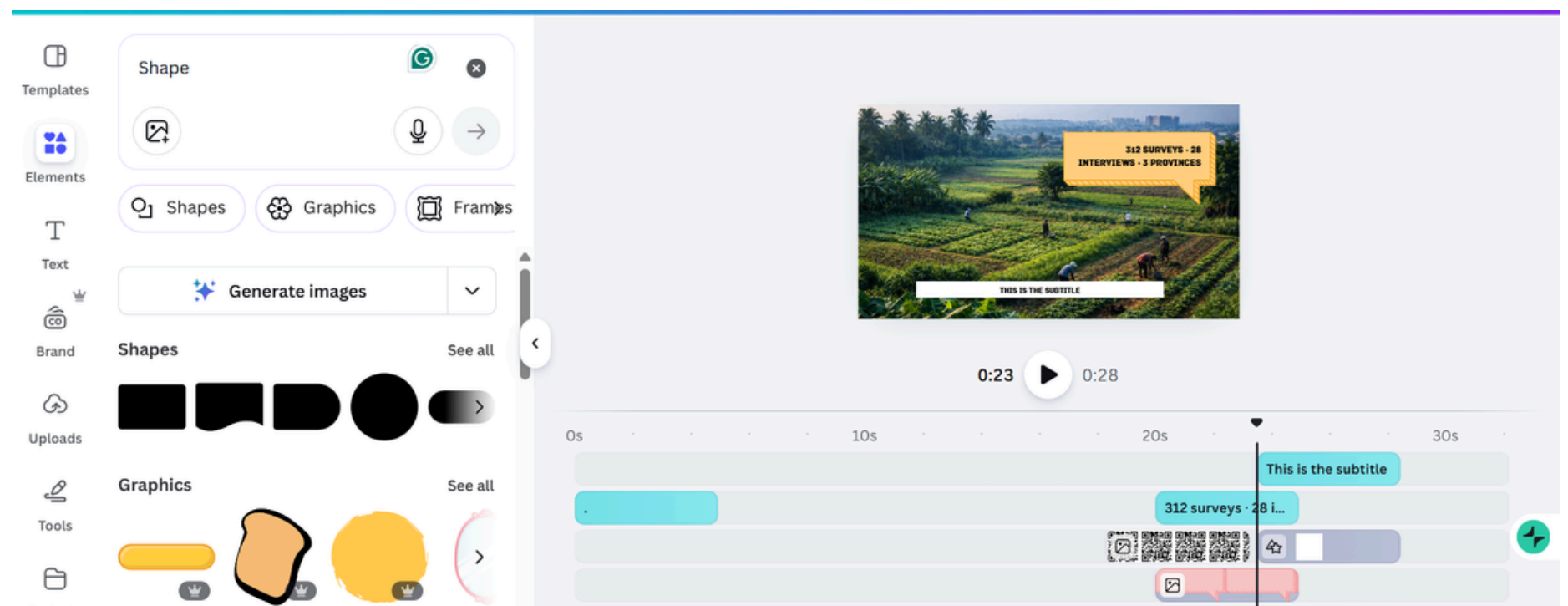
No callout point. No caption bar. No author names. Clean and simple.

## Step 6 — Add subtitles and captions

Captions make your video accessible to people watching without sound. In Canva Free, you create captions manually as a styled text bar at the bottom of each slide.

37. Add a full-width rectangle at the bottom of the slide. Set fill colour to near-black (#0A0A0C) at 85% opacity.

37. Add a thin teal line (2px height rectangle) at the very top of this rectangle as an accent bar.
38. Add a text box inside the dark rectangle. Use black text in a white background or white text in a dark background, 18–20pt, centred.
39. Type the caption text. It should match your voiceover script for that slide as exact as possible.
40. Repeat on all 5 slides.



## Caption best practices

- Keep each caption to 1–2 lines — more is too much to read in 11 seconds
- White text on dark background is the most legible combination
- Highlight key terms in teal to draw the eye
- Caption text should mirror the voiceover word for word

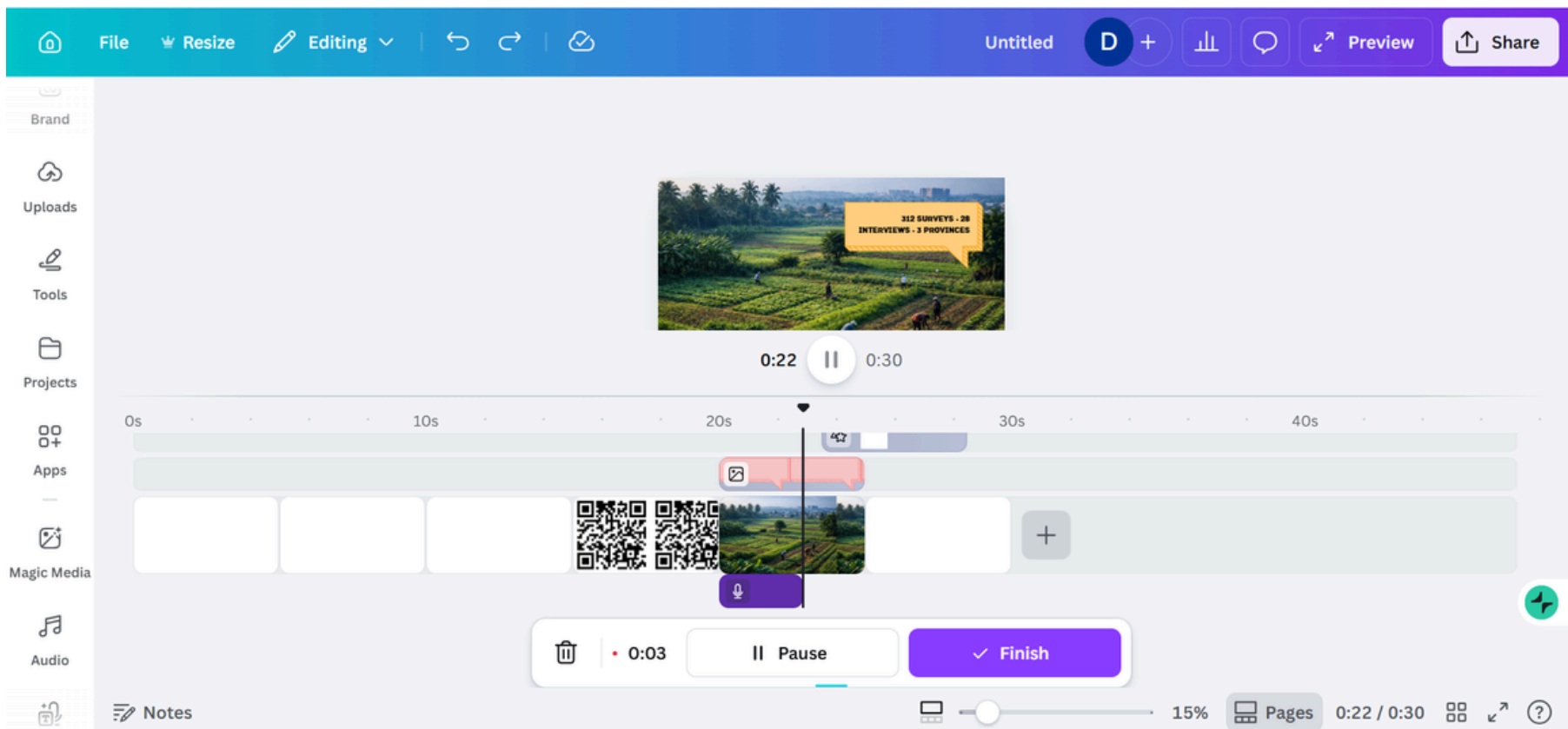
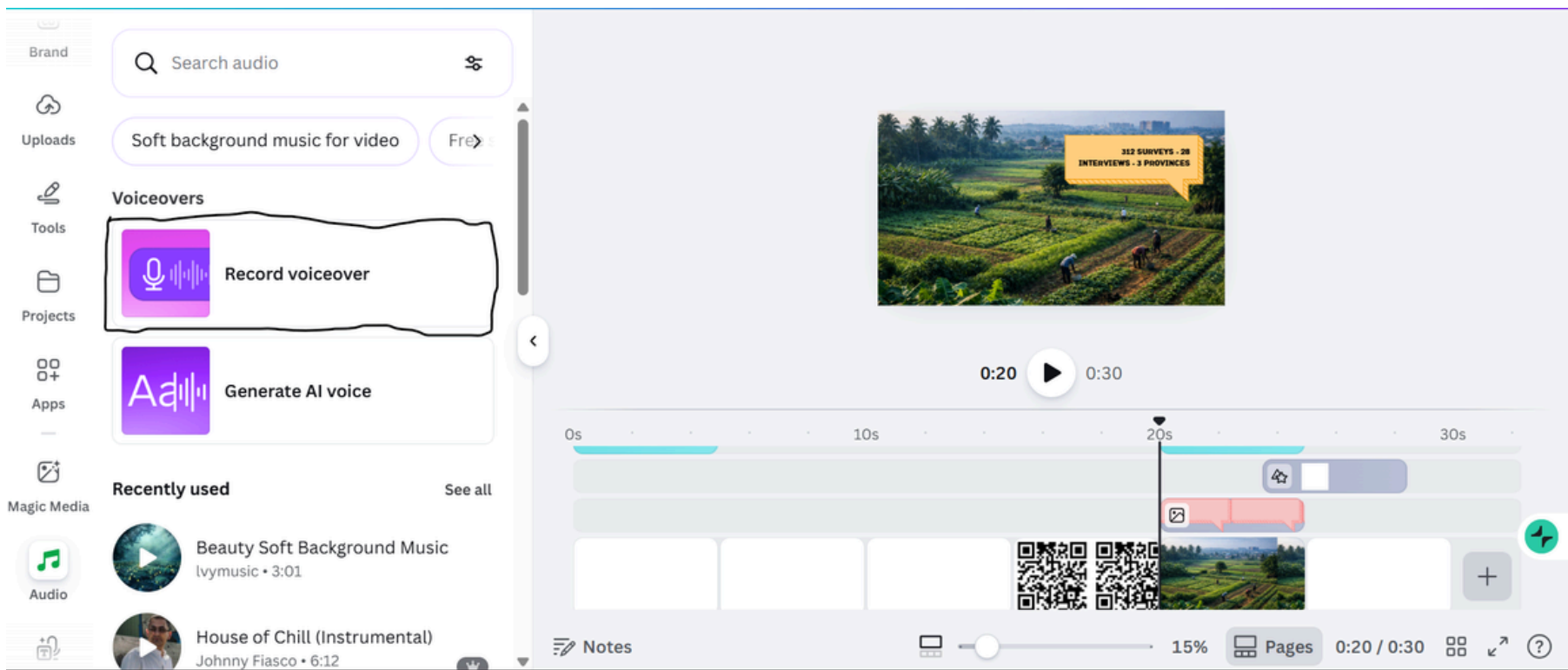
## **Step 7 — Add your voiceover**

Canva Free gives you three ways to add a voiceover to your video. Choose the option that works best for you — you do not need any external software for any of them.

### **Option 1: Record your own voice in Canva (most personal)**

This is the most authentic option. Your own voice creates a direct connection with the audience and feels most human.

41. Click 'Present and record' in the top right toolbar.
42. Select 'Record narration'. A recording window opens showing your slides.
43. Do a short test first — say a sentence, play it back, check your voice is clear.
44. Click the red Record button and read your script for Slide 1. You have 11 seconds.
45. Click the arrow to advance to Slide 2. Your recording continues.
46. Complete all 5 slides in one session — keeps your voice tone and volume consistent.
47. Click 'Done'. Your voiceover saves automatically.



## Tips for recording your own voice

Record in a quiet room. A wardrobe with clothes works well as sound dampening.

Drink water first – a dry mouth causes clicks.

Speak slightly slower than conversation. You have exactly 11 seconds per slide.

If you stumble, pause and start the sentence again from the beginning.

Warm and conversational – not formal or broadcast-style.

## **Option 2: Use Canva's text-to-speech AI voice (quick and easy)**

Canva Free includes a text-to-speech feature that converts your written script into a professional-sounding AI voiceover. No microphone or recording needed.

48. Click on the slide you want to add a voiceover to.

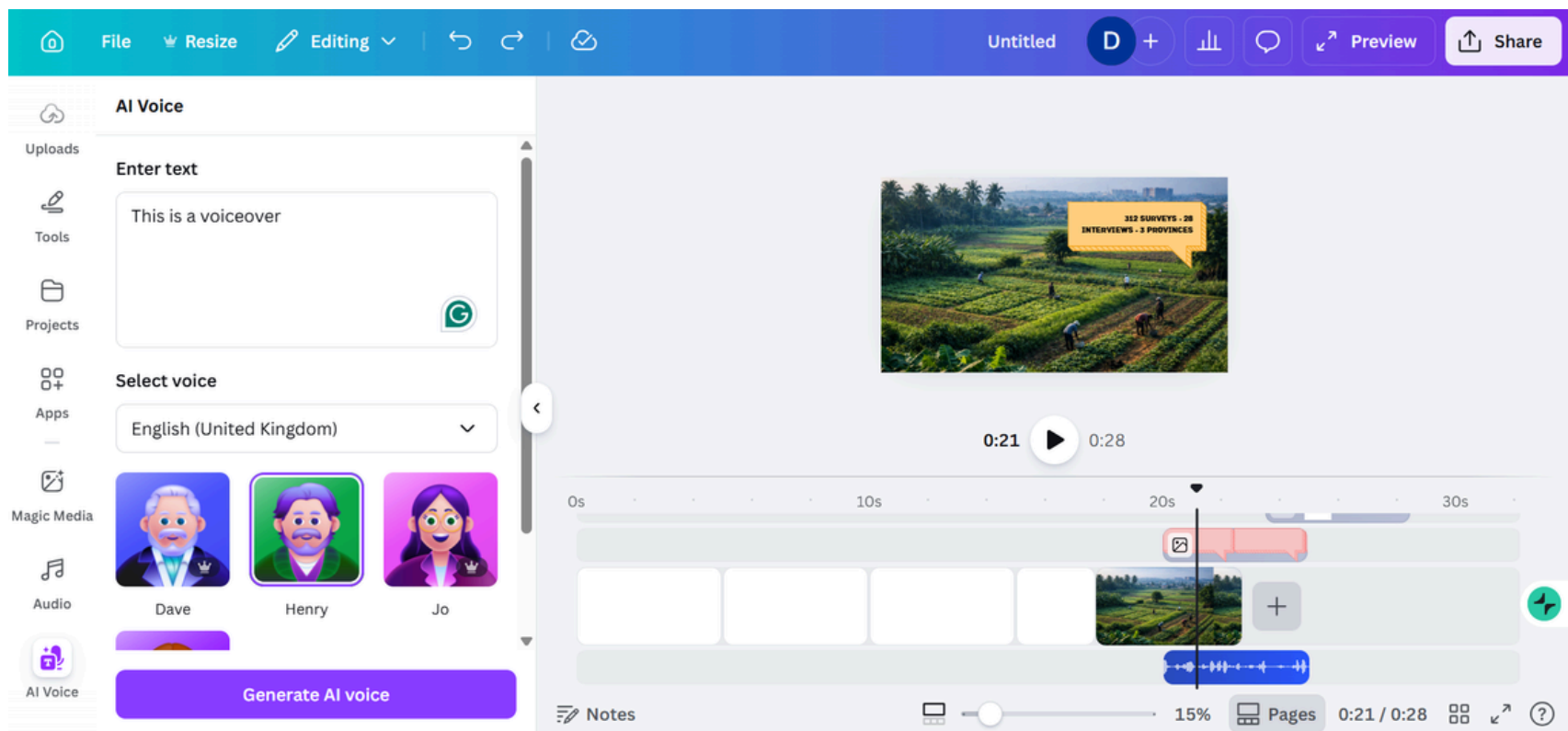
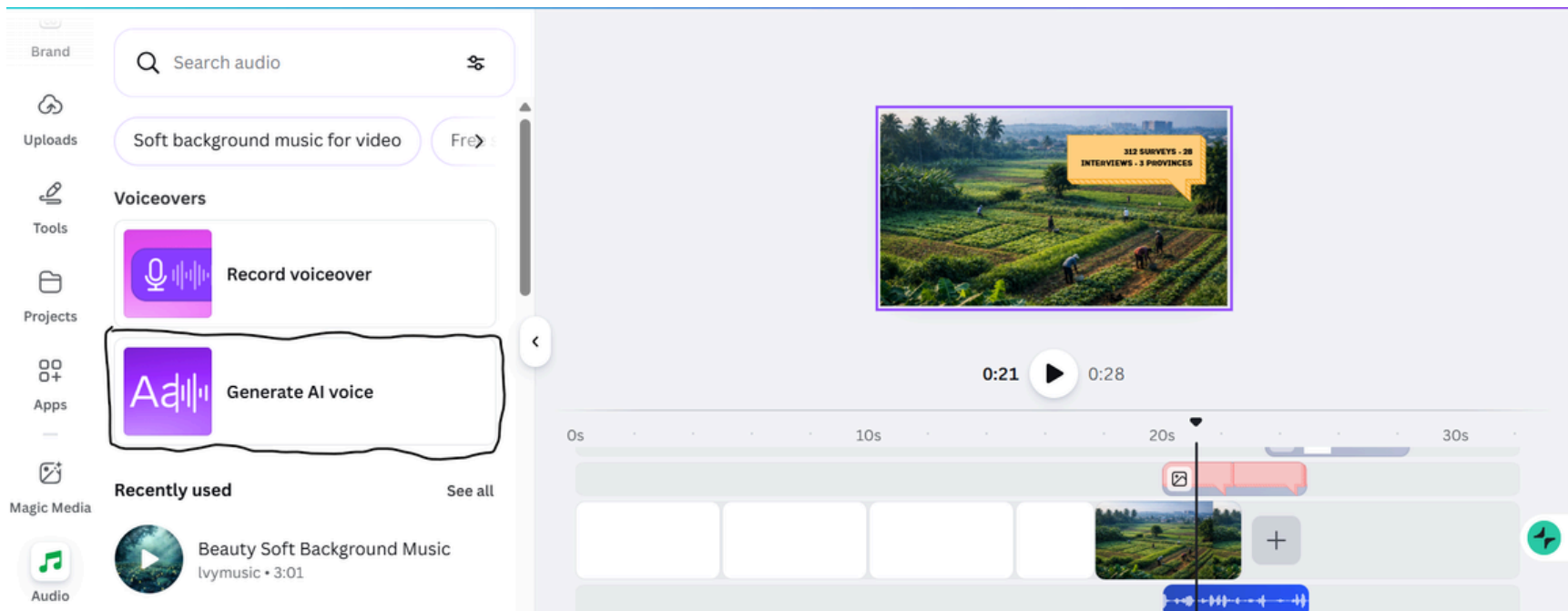
49. In the left sidebar, click 'Audio', then select 'Text to speech'.

50. Paste your voiceover script for that slide into the text box.

51. Choose a voice – Canva Free offers several English voices in different tones. Listen to the previews and choose one that fits the tone of your research.

52. Click 'Generate'. The audio clip is created and added to your slide automatically.

53. Repeat for each slide.



## Text-to-speech tips

Read your script out loud before generating – if it sounds unnatural spoken, rewrite it first. Choose a voice that feels warm and clear, not robotic. Preview several options before deciding. Add a comma in your script where you want the voice to pause – this controls pacing. Check the generated clip is close to 11 seconds. If too long, shorten your script.

### **Option 3: Upload a pre-recorded audio file**

If you have recorded your voiceover separately — using your phone's voice memo app, for example — you can upload the audio file directly into Canva.

54. Record your voiceover externally. Save it as an MP3 or WAV file. Each slide should be a separate file, or one continuous file for all 5 slides.
55. In Canva, click 'Uploads' in the left sidebar, then 'Upload files'. Select your audio file.
56. Once uploaded, drag the audio file from your uploads panel onto the relevant slide.
57. Adjust the start time and trim the clip if needed using the audio timeline at the bottom of the editor.

#### **Recording on your phone**

The Voice Memos app (iPhone) or Recorder app (Android) both produce good quality audio for this purpose. Record in a quiet room. Hold the phone 15–20cm from your mouth. Record each slide's script as a separate voice memo — this makes uploading and syncing easier.

## Step 8 — Add background music

Background music fills silence and creates atmosphere. At 55 seconds, your music should feel like a gentle presence — not a distraction. Canva Free includes a royalty-free audio library with suitable tracks.

59. Click 'Audio' in the left sidebar.

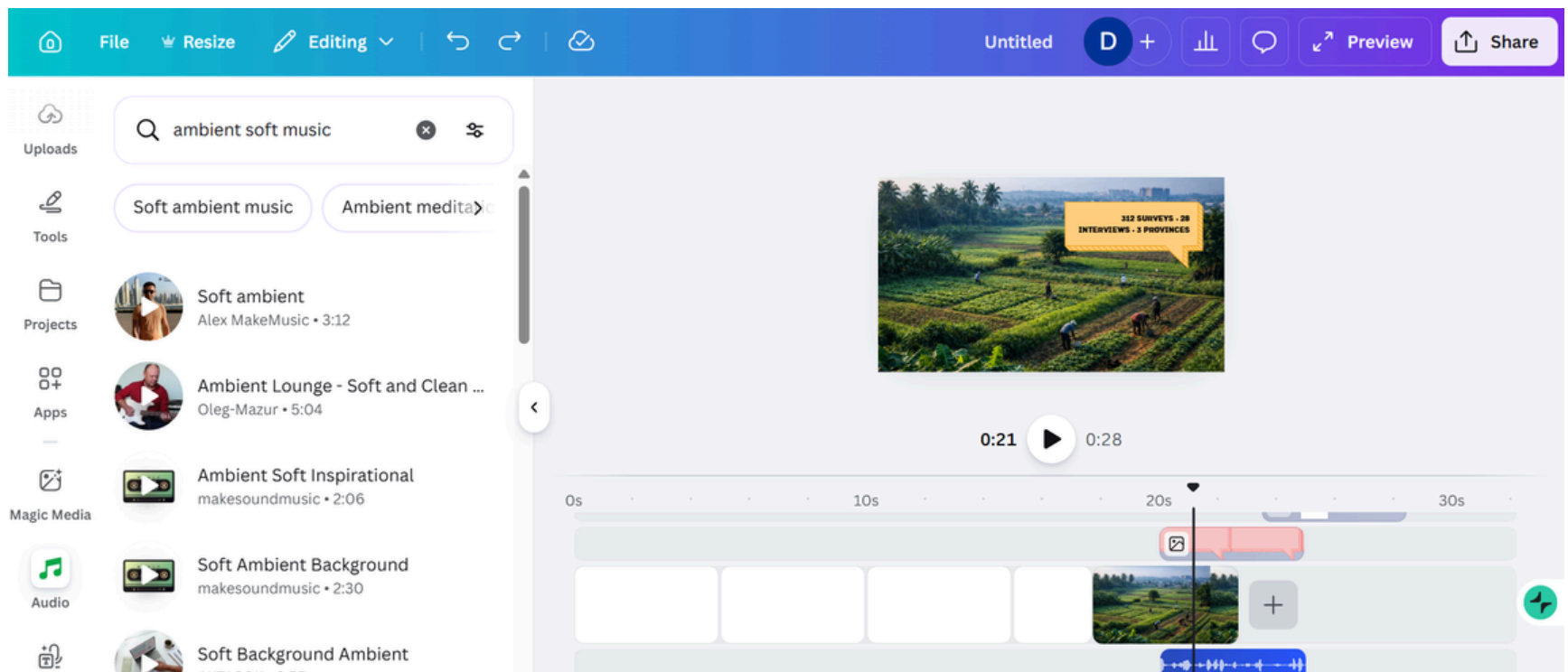
60. Browse or search for a track. All tracks without a crown icon are free. Try searching: 'calm', 'warm acoustic', 'gentle', or 'hopeful'.

61. Preview tracks by hovering and clicking the play icon. Choose something slow and instrumental.

62. Click the track to add it. It will apply across all slides.

63. Reduce the volume to 10–15%. Click the audio element in the timeline and use the volume control. The music should barely be noticeable — it fills silence, it does not compete with your voice.

64. Add a 0.5-second fade-in at the start and a 1-second fade-out at the end.

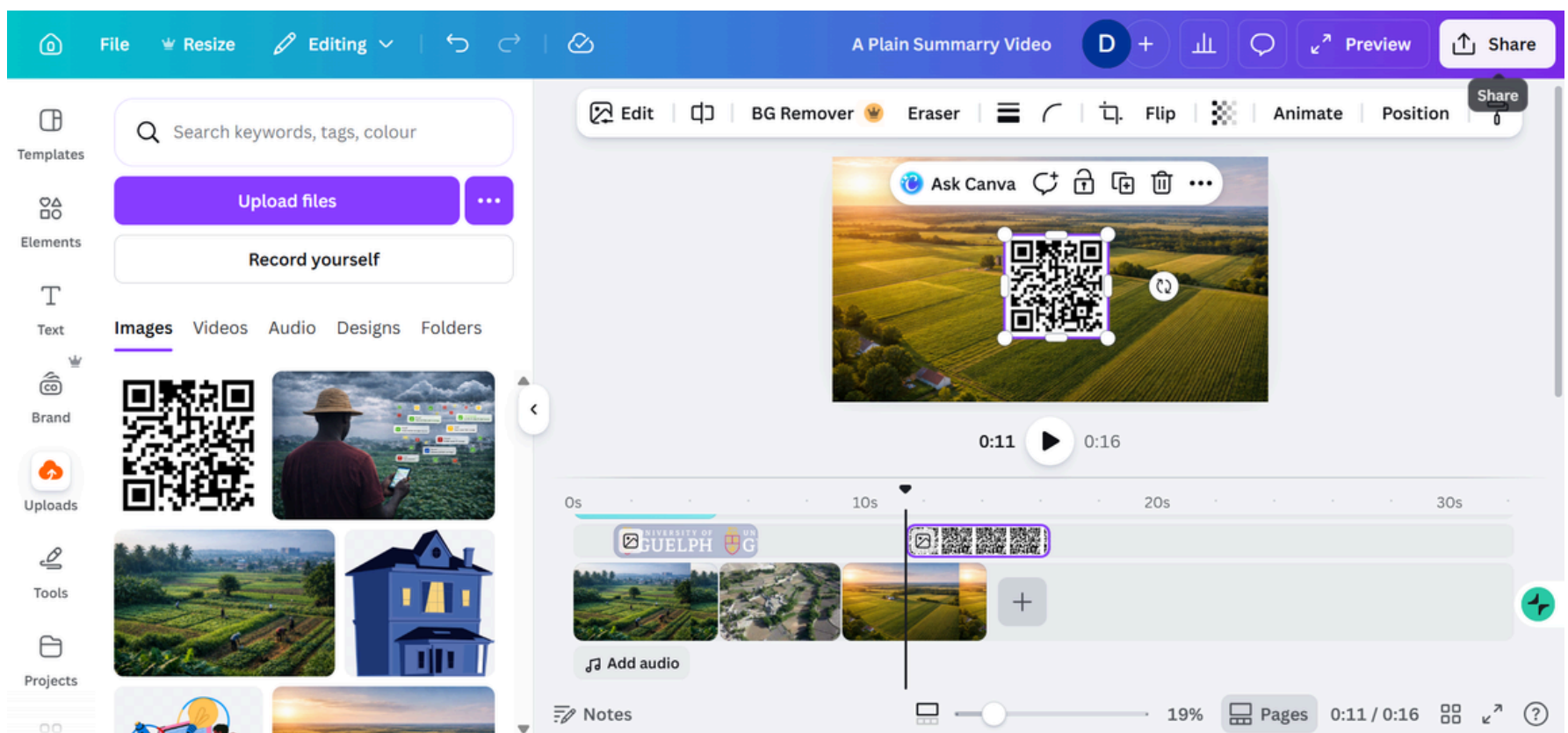


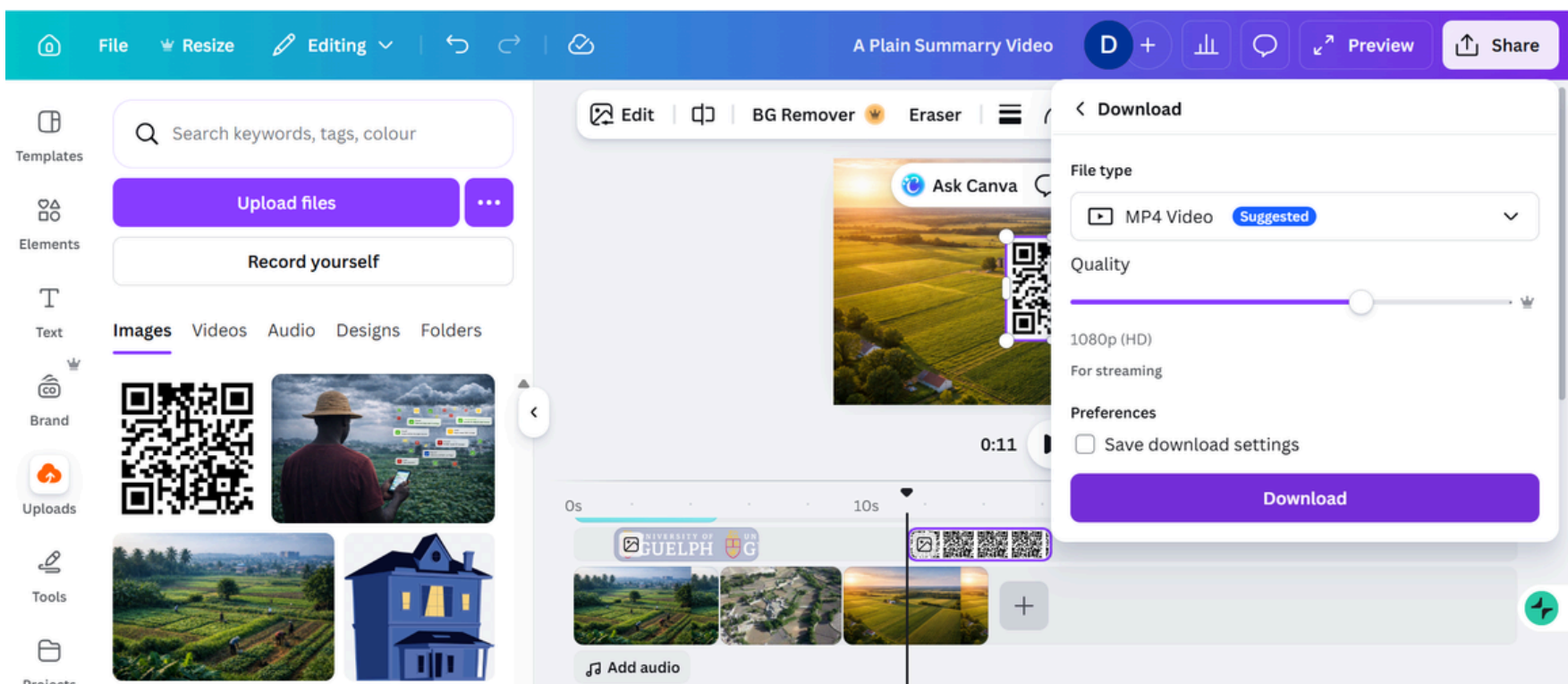
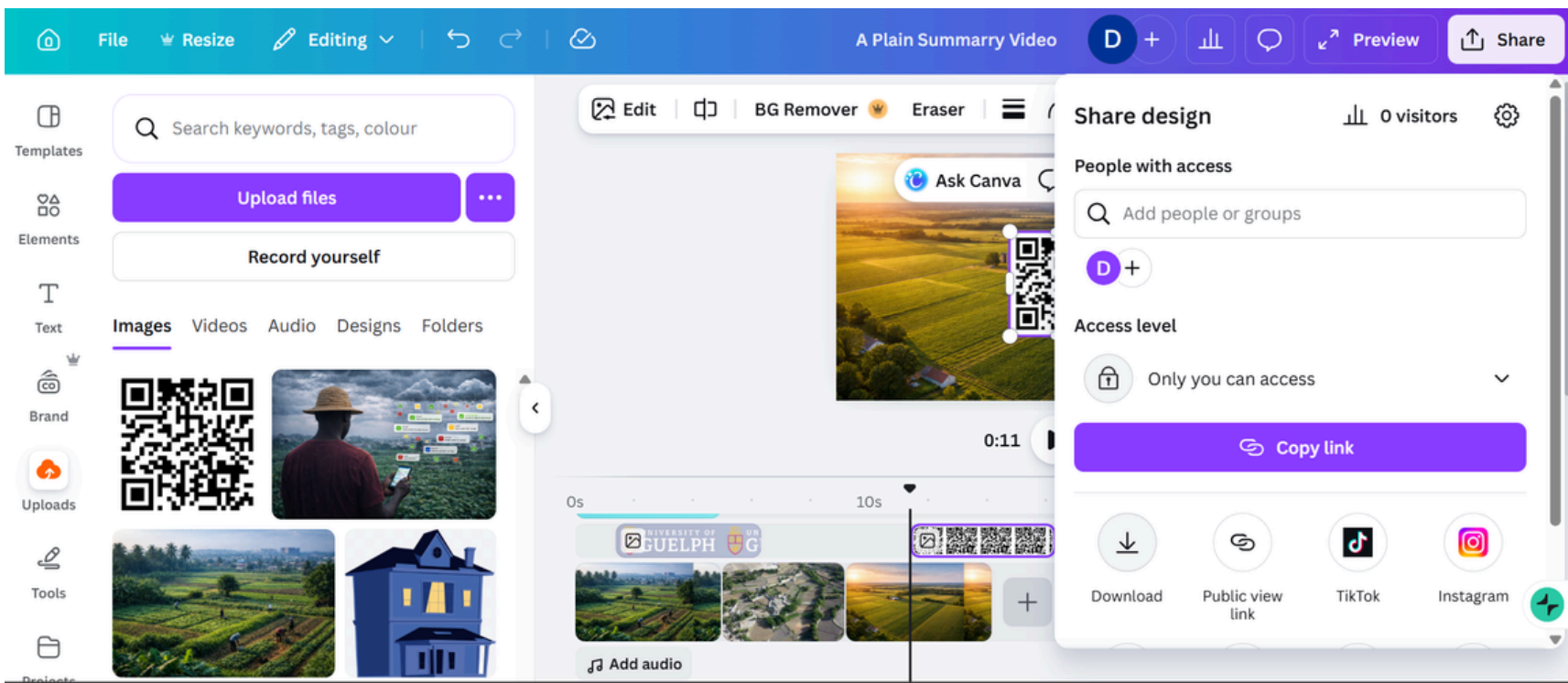
<b>Volume under voiceover</b>	10–15% – the music should be felt, not heard
<b>Genre</b>	Acoustic, ambient, gentle folk, or soft instrumental – never lyrics or dramatic music
<b>What to avoid</b>	Recognizable melodies, fast tempos, anything with lyrics, emotional music that overshadows the message
<b>Track length</b>	Choose a track longer than 55 seconds, or Canva will loop it automatically

## Step 9 — Review and export

65. Click 'Present' at the top of the editor and watch your full video from start to finish. Watch it twice – once for visuals, once for audio.

66. Check every slide: text readable, callout point correct, caption accurate, footage not obscuring text.
67. Check audio: voiceover clear on all 5 slides, music volume low, no sudden volume jumps between slides.
68. When satisfied, click 'Share' in the top right corner, then 'Download'.
69. Select 'MP4 Video'. Keep the default resolution (1080p). Click 'Download'.
70. Your finished 55-second video will save to your computer.





## Final review checklist

Video is 55 seconds total (5 slides × 11 seconds)

Callout point on every slide – amber background, max 12 words, correct position

Captions visible and accurate on every slide

Voiceover present on all 5 slides – clear and consistent

Background music at 10–15% volume, fades in and out

Images or footage on all slides – relevant and not obscuring text

Study title, authors, institution, journal, and funder spelled correctly

## Additional Free Resources

Canva Free covers everything you need for this workflow. If you find that Canva’s free media library does not have the images or footage that best represent your research, the following websites offer free, high-quality alternatives.

### Free photos and video footage

<b>Pixabay</b>	<a href="https://pixabay.com">pixabay.com</a> – free photos, illustrations, and video clips. No account required. Particularly strong for nature, community, and rural imagery.
<b>Pexels</b>	<a href="https://pexels.com">pexels.com</a> – free stock photos and videos. Large library with strong search. No attribution required.
<b>Unsplash</b>	<a href="https://unsplash.com">unsplash.com</a> – high-quality free photos from professional photographers. Best for clean, editorial-style imagery.
<b>Videvo</b>	<a href="https://videvo.net">videvo.net</a> – free stock video footage and motion graphics. Filter by “Free” licence. Good for abstract and nature clips.

## Free voiceover and text-to-speech tools

<b>TTSFree.com</b>	<a href="https://ttsfree.com">ttsfree.com</a> — free text-to-speech tool. Paste your script, choose a voice, and download the MP3. Use this if Canva's text-to-speech is unavailable on your plan.
<b>Natural Readers</b>	<a href="https://naturalreaders.com">naturalreaders.com</a> — free online text-to-speech with multiple voice options. No account required for basic use.
<b>ElevenLabs</b>	<a href="https://elevenlabs.io">elevenlabs.io</a> — AI voice generation tool. The free tier allows a limited number of characters per month with high-quality, natural-sounding voices.

## Free background music

<b>YouTube Audio Library</b>	<a href="https://studio.youtube.com">studio.youtube.com</a> — completely free, no attribution required for most tracks. Strong selection of calm and instrumental music.
<b>Free Music Archive</b>	<a href="https://freemusicarchive.org">freemusicarchive.org</a> — curated collection of free music. Filter by licence type. Good for ambient and acoustic tracks.
<b>Bensound</b>	<a href="https://bensound.com">bensound.com</a> — royalty-free music for video projects. Free tier available with attribution in your video description.

# Section 3: Quality Checklist

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Confirm every item below before sharing your video. Do not skip this step.

## Content and timing

- Total video length is 55 seconds
- Each slide is 11 seconds
- Each voiceover script is 25–28 words
- Language is plain — no jargon, no academic terminology without explanation
- Each slide communicates one clear idea

## Visual quality

- Slide 1 (Title) shows the study title only — no author names, no institution
- Slide 5 (Closing) shows the QR code and funder acknowledgment only — no other text
- QR code tested and confirmed — scanning it opens the correct article page
- Funder name or logo present on closing slide
- Callout point on every slide — correct position, max 12 words, amber background
- Caption bar on every slide — text mirrors the voiceover

- Images or footage on every slide — relevant, appropriately sized and blended
- Animated graphic element on slides (optional but recommended) — subtle, low opacity
- All text is readable against the background — check especially where footage is behind text
- Study title is spelled correctly on Slide 1

## **Audio quality**

- Voiceover recorded or generated on all 5 slides — clear and consistent volume
- Background music present at 10–15% volume
- Music fades in at start and fades out at end
- No sudden volume jumps between slides

# Section 4: Quick Reference Card

The complete workflow in 9 steps. Keep this open during your session.

1	Open Canva Free — choose Presentation 16:9 format, select a dark free template
2	Set up 5 slides — set each to 11 seconds duration (total: 55 seconds)
3	Add images and footage — own research photos first, then Canva Free library
4	Add 1 animated graphic per slide — free elements only, low opacity, away from text
5	Add callout point to every slide — amber box, top left / centre / right, max 12 words
6	Add caption bar — dark rectangle bottom of slide, white text matching voiceover script
7	Add voiceover — record your voice, use Canva text-to-speech, or upload audio file
8	Add background music from Canva Free audio library — 10–15% volume, fades
9	Review full video twice, test QR code scans correctly, export as MP4 1080p

# Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

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## **Voiceover script is too long**

Writing more than 28 words per slide. At 11 seconds per slide, anything longer will either rush your delivery or run over the slide time. Count your words before recording. Cut until it fits.

## **Callout text is too long**

Writing a full sentence in the callout box. Callouts are 6–12 words maximum. If it takes more words, it belongs in your voiceover script — not on screen as a callout.

## **Footage competes with text**

Using images that are too bright or positioned directly behind the main text. Always reduce opacity to 40–60% and apply a dark gradient or multiply blend on the text side of the slide.

## **Music volume is too high**

Setting background music above 20%. At that level it competes with the voiceover. Keep it at 10–15% — it should fill silence, not dominate it.

## **Captions do not match the voiceover**

Writing captions as summaries rather than transcriptions. Viewers who rely on captions need to read exactly what is being said. Caption text should mirror the voiceover word for word.

## **Trying to say too much**

Cramming multiple findings or implications into one slide. A 55-second video with one clear message per slide is far more powerful than a 3-minute video that covers everything. Choose what matters most.

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