

COURSE 1 OF 3

Starting Your YouTube Channel

From understanding the algorithm to publishing your first ten videos — a complete foundation for building a channel that grows.

- 1 How YouTube Works
- 2 Finding Your Niche
- 3 Researching Existing Content
- 4 Channel Setup
- 5 Content Strategy
- 6 Video Ideation & Scripting
- 7 Understanding Analytics
- 8 Your First 10 Videos

Starting Your YouTube Channel

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · How YouTube Works

Before you buy a camera, pick a niche, or record a single second of footage, it's worth understanding what YouTube actually is and how it decides which videos succeed. Most people who start channels and give up within three months do so because reality didn't match their expectations. This chapter sets the record straight — how the platform works, what the algorithm actually optimises for, and what a realistic growth timeline looks like.

What YouTube Actually Is

YouTube is not a video hosting site that happens to show ads. It is an advertising platform that uses video as the mechanism to keep people watching for as long as possible. Every decision the platform makes — what it recommends, what it promotes, what it suppresses — serves that one goal: **maximise total watch time across the platform**.

This matters because it means YouTube's interests and your interests are aligned — but only if you make videos people actually want to watch. The platform has no preference for experienced creators over beginners, for big channels over small ones, or for polished production over raw authenticity. It only cares whether people click on your video and then keep watching.

THE RIGHT MENTAL MODEL

Think of YouTube as a search engine crossed with a recommendation engine. People come with intent (searching for "how to make sourdough") or they browse (scrolling the homepage). Your job is to appear in front of the right people at the right moment — and then deliver on the promise your thumbnail and title made.

How the Algorithm Works

There is no single "algorithm" — YouTube uses multiple systems for different surfaces (Search, Homepage, Suggested/Up Next, Trending, Subscriptions). Each surface works differently, but they all share the same underlying signals.

The signals that drive recommendations

Click-through rate (CTR)

What percentage of people who see your thumbnail actually click it. YouTube shows your video to a test audience first — if they click, it shows it to more people. If they don't, it stops. Typical CTR: 2–10%.

Average view duration

How many minutes of your video the average viewer watches. Absolute minutes watched matters more than percentage — a 10-minute video where people watch 7 minutes beats a 3-minute video where they watch all of it.

Audience retention

The shape of your retention curve — do viewers drop off immediately (bad hook), stay flat (strong content), or even increase (a re-watch moment)? YouTube looks at this curve, not just the average.

Satisfaction signals

Likes, comments, shares, saves, and — most importantly — whether viewers watch another video after yours. "Post-session activity" tells YouTube your content left people satisfied, not frustrated.

Viewer history

YouTube personalises recommendations. The same video appears to different people based on their watch history. Your video may be perfect for some viewers and invisible to others — that's by design.

Recency & consistency

Fresh content gets a burst of exposure. Channels that upload consistently build a subscriber base that watches new videos quickly — which generates early signals that help the algorithm promote the video further.

How a Video Gets Promoted — The Funnel

YouTube doesn't show your video to everyone at once. It runs a controlled test, expanding promotion only if early signals are strong:

YOUTUBE'S PROMOTION FUNNEL — WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU PUBLISH

1. Your subscribers

First shown to people already following you. Their early engagement is the first signal.

2. Suggested audience

If subscribers engage well, YouTube tests the video on viewers of similar content.

3. Browse / Homepage

Strong sustained signals push the video to homepage recommendations of broader audiences.

4. Search results

Videos with proven engagement rank higher in search over time — SEO helps but engagement confirms it.

Trending

Exceptional velocity across all signals. Rare and not worth chasing directly.

Most videos stall at step 1 or 2. This isn't failure — it's the platform calibrating. A video can restart its promotion cycle weeks or months later if a similar video goes viral and YouTube surfaces older related content.

What Actually Drives Success

After everything else is stripped away, two things drive YouTube success:

1. **Packaging** — your thumbnail and title. These determine whether someone clicks at all. The best video in the world with a bad thumbnail gets no views. This is why experienced creators spend as much time on thumbnails as on the video itself.
2. **Delivery** — whether the video delivers on the promise the thumbnail made. If you promised "I built a PC for £300" and the video is interesting and informative, viewers stay. If it's dull, padded, or misleading, they leave — and YouTube notices.

Everything else — production quality, upload frequency, keywords, posting time — is secondary to these two. A creator with a phone camera and a great idea will consistently outperform a creator with £10,000 of equipment making boring videos.

Realistic Growth Timelines

The most damaging thing a new creator can do is compare their channel at month 2 to someone else's channel at year 3. Here is what realistic growth looks like for a creator publishing consistently (roughly once a week) with improving content:

Months 1–3

The invisible phase

Views come almost entirely from your own shares and a handful of search results. Subscriber count moves slowly. Analytics look discouraging. This is normal — YouTube needs data before it promotes you. The job here is to post, learn, and not quit.

Months 4–9

Early signals

One or two videos start performing better than others. YouTube begins suggesting your content to related audiences. Subscriber growth ticks up. You start to understand what your audience actually responds to — which is often different from what you expected.

Months 9–18

The compounding phase

Older videos accumulate views as search and suggested traffic compounds. A channel with 50 videos gets more passive views than a channel with 10, even if recent uploads perform similarly. Monetisation thresholds become reachable for many niches.

18+ months

Breakout potential

Creators who reach this point with consistent output have a library YouTube can promote, an audience it understands, and patterns they can replicate. Most viral-feeling growth for mid-sized channels happens here, not in month one.

THE 1,000-SUBSCRIBER MILESTONE IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK

YouTube requires 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 watch hours in the past 12 months to join the YouTube Partner Programme and earn ad revenue. For most niches, this takes 12–18 months of consistent effort. Plan for this timeline — do not plan for income in the first few months.

Common Myths — Corrected

The myth	The reality
"You need to post every day to grow"	Consistency matters more than frequency. One high-quality video a week beats seven mediocre ones. Daily posting is a strategy for some creators — it is not a requirement.
"The algorithm is broken / shadowbanning me"	The algorithm is working correctly — it's just not promoting your video because early signals weren't strong enough. This is almost always a packaging or content problem, not a platform conspiracy.
"You need expensive equipment to start"	A modern smartphone with decent lighting and a £30 microphone is enough to start. Equipment becomes a limiting factor much later — and audio quality matters far more than video quality.
"Buying subscribers / views gives you a head start"	Fake subscribers destroy your channel metrics. YouTube shows your videos to your subscribers first — if they don't watch (because they're bots), the algorithm concludes your content is bad and stops promoting it.
"Hashtags and keywords in the description are the main growth lever"	SEO helps discoverability through search, but the algorithm's primary signal is watch behaviour, not metadata. A bad video with perfect SEO still gets buried. A great video with mediocre SEO still gets pushed.
"Going viral will fix everything"	Viral videos often bring the wrong audience — people who came for one thing and have no interest in your other content. Sustainable growth comes from building a consistent audience, not chasing spikes.

The Right Mindset Going In

The creators who succeed on YouTube share one characteristic more than any other: they kept going when nothing seemed to be working. Not because they were grinding blindly, but because they treated each video as a data point — something to learn from — rather than a verdict on whether they should continue.

The platform rewards creators who improve over time, who understand their audience, and who make videos that deliver genuine value or entertainment. None of those things happen in the first month. But all of

them are learnable, and the next chapter starts with the most important early decision: what your channel is actually about and who it is for.

Next — Chapter 2: Finding Your Niche

Passion versus audience demand — why the overlap between what you love and what people search for is where channels actually grow. How to evaluate a niche for competition, saturation, and long-term viability before you commit to it.

Starting Your YouTube Channel

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Finding Your Niche

The single most consequential decision you'll make about your channel isn't your equipment, your editing style, or your upload schedule. It's what your channel is about and who it's for. Get this right and almost everything else becomes easier. Get it wrong and you'll spend months making content that fails to find an audience — not because the videos are bad, but because you're fishing in the wrong pond, or fishing in a pond so crowded there's nothing left to catch.

The Overlap That Actually Works

Niche selection isn't about finding what you're passionate about OR what people want to watch. It's about finding the overlap between the two — and then checking whether that overlap is commercially viable.

THE NICHE SWEET SPOT



Passion without audience = a diary
nobody reads

Audience demand without interest = burnout by
month 4

Pure passion channels — "I'll make videos about whatever I feel like" — rarely build audiences because the algorithm can't categorise you and viewers don't know what to expect. Pure demand channels — "I'll make whatever gets views" — burn creators out because there's no genuine interest sustaining the work when views are low. The overlap is where channels actually survive long enough to grow.

Broad vs Narrow — The Spectrum

One of the most common mistakes is starting too broad. "Technology" is not a niche. "Budget smartphones under £300" is. The narrower your niche, the easier it is for YouTube to identify your audience and the easier

it is for viewers to decide whether your channel is for them. You can always broaden later once you have an audience — narrowing after the fact is much harder.

NICHE WIDTH — EXAMPLES ACROSS THE SPECTRUM

Narrow (easier to start)

Middle ground

Broad (hard to break through)

Narrow niches

- Budget mechanical keyboards under £100
- Sourdough bread for beginners
- PC gaming on a £500 build
- Learning Japanese for anime fans
- Raspberry Pi home server projects

Mid-range niches

- Mechanical keyboards
- Home baking & bread
- Budget PC gaming
- Learning Japanese
- Raspberry Pi projects

Too broad to start

- Tech reviews
- Cooking
- Gaming
- Language learning
- DIY & electronics

THE EXPANSION PATH

Start narrow, earn trust, then expand. A channel that starts with "budget mechanical keyboards" can later cover desk setups, productivity hardware, and office tech — because the audience already trusts the creator's taste. A channel that starts with "tech" has no clear identity to expand from.

Evaluating a Niche Before You Commit

Before you settle on a niche, run it through these four filters. You don't need to pass all four perfectly — but if a niche fails multiple filters, reconsider.

Filter	What to check	Good sign	Warning sign
Sustained demand	Do people search for this topic consistently, or only around events/trends?	EVERGREEN — "how to change a tyre" gets searched every day	TREND-DEPENDENT — searches spike around one product launch then die
Competition level	Search your niche on YouTube. Who's there? How big are they? Is there a gap?	SOME COMPETITION — proves demand; you can differentiate	ZERO OR MEGA CHANNELS ONLY — either no audience or no air to breathe

Filter	What to check	Good sign	Warning sign
Content volume	Can you make 50–100 videos in this niche without running dry?	DEEP CATALOGUE POTENTIAL — many angles, sub-topics, formats	THIN TOPIC — you'll cover it in 10 videos and have nothing left
Monetisation viability	Do advertisers spend money in this space? Are there products to recommend?	HIGH-VALUE AUDIENCE — finance, tech, B2B, health, education	LOW RPM NICHES — entertainment, vlogs, memes earn far less per 1,000 views

Assessing Competition — What You're Actually Looking For

Competition in a niche is not a reason to avoid it — it's evidence that an audience exists. What you're looking for is not an empty niche but a **gap** within a populated one. Search your niche on YouTube and ask:

Are the top channels old?

Channels that haven't uploaded in 1–2 years still rank in search but aren't actively competing. Their audience is underserved and looking for someone new. This is a gap.

Is the production quality polarised?

If the top videos are either highly polished or very rough, there may be room for a creator who hits the middle — clear, competent, and personal without requiring a production team.

Are comments asking questions nobody answered?

Scroll the comments of top videos. Repeated unanswered questions are content ideas. "Does this work on X?" or "What about Y?" are topics the existing channels haven't covered.

Is there a unique angle or audience segment missing?

The niche might be crowded for one audience but empty for another. "PC building" is saturated — "PC building for people who've never opened a computer" is a different channel.

Passion, Knowledge, and the Sustainability Test

Passion alone is overrated as a niche criterion. What matters more is **sustained interest** — can you talk about this topic for three years, including during months when your videos get 200 views each? A better test than "am I passionate about this?" is:

- Do you already consume content in this space without being paid to?

- Do you have opinions, experience, or a perspective that differs from what's already out there?
- Could you write 40 video titles in this niche right now without struggling?
- When something happens in this space, are you the first to notice and want to discuss it?

If yes to most of these, you have the raw material. **Knowledge matters as much as passion** — you don't need to be the world's greatest expert, but you should be able to explain things clearly and give a viewer something they couldn't easily get elsewhere.

THE "I'LL FIGURE OUT THE NICHE LATER" TRAP

Starting without a defined niche and hoping one emerges naturally almost always fails. Your first videos attract scattered viewers with no common interest. Your subscriber list becomes a mixed bag that's hard to serve. The algorithm can't categorise you. Pick a direction — even an imperfect one — and adjust from there. You can always pivot with context, but you can't build on nothing.

Niche vs Format — Two Different Decisions

Your niche (what you cover) and your format (how you cover it) are separate choices, and both matter. A niche can support many formats — tutorials, reviews, essays, vlogs, reaction videos, comparisons, interviews. Choosing a format that plays to your natural strengths makes the content feel easier to produce and more authentic to watch.

- **On-camera presenter** — comfortable talking directly to camera; works well for tutorials, commentary, vlogs
- **Screen recorder** — works for software, gaming, coding, any topic where the screen is the content
- **Voiceover + footage** — for creators who don't want to be on camera; works for documentary-style and educational content
- **Faceless / AI-assisted** — covered in depth in Course 2, chapters 9–10; viable but has specific constraints

A Practical Exercise Before Moving On

Write down three potential niches you're genuinely interested in. For each one:

1. Search it on YouTube — note the top 5 channels and their subscriber counts and last upload dates
2. Try to write 20 video title ideas in that niche in 10 minutes
3. Check Google Trends for the topic — is interest stable, growing, or declining?

4. Ask: who is my ideal viewer for this niche, and what do they get from my channel that they can't get elsewhere?

The niche where this exercise feels easiest and most exciting is usually the right one. The next chapter covers how to research it in depth — using tools like TubeBuddy and VidIQ, analysing what the top videos in your niche are doing right, and reading the signals hidden in comments and analytics.

Next — Chapter 3: Researching Existing Content

How to study the top performers in your niche like a strategist rather than a fan — using TubeBuddy, VidIQ, and YouTube's own data to find what works, spot gaps, and generate video ideas grounded in real demand.

Starting Your YouTube Channel

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Researching Existing Content

The most successful new channels don't start from scratch — they start from evidence. Before you film a single video, you can spend a few hours studying what already works in your niche and come away with a content strategy grounded in real data rather than guesswork. This chapter covers how to do that research systematically: the tools available, how to read a competitor's channel like a strategist, what signals to look for in comments, and how to spot the outlier videos that reveal what an audience is really hungry for.

Free Research — What YouTube Itself Tells You

Before reaching for any paid tool, YouTube's own interface reveals more than most beginners realise. The platform shows you exactly what it's promoting — you just have to know where to look.

- **Search autocomplete** — type your niche keyword into YouTube's search bar and stop before pressing Enter. The autocomplete suggestions are real search queries people are typing. These are content ideas with built-in demand.
- **Search results ranking** — the top 5 results for a keyword are there because they perform well on that query. Note their view counts, upload dates, and thumbnails — these are your benchmarks.
- **Suggested videos** — watch a top video in your niche, then look at what YouTube suggests beside and after it. This is the neighbourhood your videos will live in if you cover similar topics.
- **Trending tab / Explore** — shows what's performing broadly right now. Less useful for niche research but helpful for spotting seasonal spikes.
- **Channel "Sort by — Most Popular"** — on any competitor channel, switch the video sort to Most Popular. Their top 10 videos by views tell you exactly what that audience came for. Often very different from what the creator makes most frequently.

Research Tools — Free and Paid

TubeBuddy

Free tier available · Pro from ~\$4.99/mo

Browser extension that overlays data directly onto YouTube's

VidIQ

Free tier available · Basic from ~\$7.50/mo

Similar to TubeBuddy with a different interface and some unique

Google Trends

Free

Shows relative search interest over time. Invaluable for checking whether a niche is growing, stable,

interface. The most widely used YouTube research tool.

- Keyword Explorer — search volume + competition score
- Tag explorer — what tags top videos use
- Best Time to Publish — based on your audience's activity
- A/B thumbnail testing (paid)
- Competitor scorecard — compare your channel metrics

features. Many creators use both — they complement each other.

- Video Scorecard — SEO score for any video
- Channel audit — weaknesses in your own channel
- Trending alerts — topics gaining momentum in your niche
- Daily video ideas — AI-generated based on your channel
- Competitor tracking — watch specific channels

or dying — and for spotting seasonal patterns.

- Compare multiple keywords side by side
- Filter by YouTube Search specifically
- Geographic breakdown — where your audience lives
- Related queries — what people search alongside your topic

Answer The Public

Free tier (limited) · ~\$9/mo

Visualises every question, preposition, and comparison people search around a keyword. A goldmine for video title ideas phrased exactly as viewers think them.

- "How do I...", "Why does...", "What is the best..."
- Great for tutorial and FAQ-style content
- Export results as a spreadsheet

START WITH FREE TOOLS

TubeBuddy and VidIQ's free tiers give you enough data to research a niche thoroughly before you've earned a penny. Save the paid subscriptions for when your channel is active and you need features like A/B thumbnail testing and bulk processing.

How to Analyse a Competitor Channel

Pick three to five channels in your niche that you'd consider direct competitors — similar size, similar topic, similar audience. For each one, work through this research workflow:

1

Sort by Most Popular and study the top 10

These are the videos that built or sustained the channel. Note the topics, title patterns, and thumbnail styles. Ask: what is the common thread? Is it the subject matter, the format (tutorial vs review vs story), or the angle (beginner-friendly, expert-level, contrarian take)?

2 Look for outliers — videos that punched above their weight

A channel with 50,000 subscribers shouldn't have a video with 2 million views — but sometimes it does. That outlier reveals a topic the algorithm decided to push far beyond the existing audience. It's a demand signal hiding in plain sight.

3 Check what they're making recently vs what performed

Sort by Latest and compare recent uploads against the most popular list. If a creator keeps making one type of content but their audience came for something different, that's a gap you can fill. Their subscribers are primed for that content — and nobody's serving it.

4 Read the About section and channel trailer

How does the creator describe their channel? Who do they say it's for? This tells you how they've positioned themselves — and whether there's a positioning gap you can occupy.

5 Use TubeBuddy or VidIQ to see their tags

The tags on a competitor's video reveal exactly which keywords they're targeting. This isn't for copying — it's for understanding the vocabulary your audience uses to find content, which you'll need for your own titles and descriptions.

The Outlier Method — Finding Breakout Topics

One of the most reliable research techniques is hunting for outlier videos: videos that dramatically overperform relative to the channel's average. These reveal topics with audience demand far beyond what the existing creator captured.

OUTLIER SPOTTING — EXAMPLE CHANNEL WITH 30,000 SUBSCRIBERS

18,000 views

Budget GPU comparison — typical performance

12,000
views

PC cooling guide — typical performance

940,000 views

Can you game on integrated graphics in 2024? — OUTLIER

14,000 views

RAM speed testing — typical performance

The outlier topic attracted 30x the channel's average views. This tells you the algorithm pushed it hard — meaning that specific question has huge audience demand that the niche is underserving. A new creator covering this topic (with a fresh angle) can tap into the same demand signal.

Reading the Comments — Signal Mining

Comments on popular videos in your niche are a goldmine of audience intelligence that most creators never mine. You're not reading them to be entertained — you're reading them to extract signals about what the audience wants, what confused them, and what they wish existed.

Comment pattern	What it signals	How to use it
Repeated questions	"Does this work with X?" appearing across multiple comments	Direct video topic — answer the question the original video didn't
Follow-up requests	"Can you do a video on Y?" or "What about Z?"	The audience is explicitly telling you what content they want next
Confusion markers	"I don't understand the part about..." or "This was confusing when..."	A clearer, more beginner-focused version of the same topic would outperform
Outdated complaints	"This doesn't work anymore" or "The interface changed"	An updated version of the video — evergreen demand, fresh opportunity
Strong agreement / disagreement	Top-liked comments that challenge the video's conclusion	A rebuttal or alternative-take video — high engagement potential
Gratitude specifics	"The bit at 4:30 where you explained X was exactly what I needed"	The specific moment that delivered value — expand that into its own video

Turning Research Into a Video Idea Bank

After a solid research session you should be able to fill a spreadsheet with 30–50 validated video ideas. Keep track of where each idea came from — this helps you prioritise:

Video idea	Source	Evidence of demand
Can you game on integrated graphics in 2024?	OUTLIER VIDEO	940k views on competitor video with 30k subs
Does budget DDR5 RAM actually make a difference?	COMMENT QUESTION	Repeated across 3 separate videos, no dedicated answer exists
Best GPU under £200 — updated for 2025	OUTDATED VIDEO	2022 video still ranking #1, comments full of "still relevant?" queries
PC building for complete beginners — no jargon	GAP ANALYSIS	All top results assume prior knowledge; comments show beginners struggling
Why I stopped buying the "best" components	TRENDING ANGLE	Contrarian format performing well across tech channels this quarter

RESEARCH IS NOT COPYING

Identifying that a topic has demand does not mean remaking someone else's video. Your angle, your experience, your personality, and your packaging are what differentiate your version. A hundred channels can cover "best budget GPU" and each one succeeds or fails based on how well it serves its specific audience — not on who covered it first.

How Much Time to Spend on Research

Research has diminishing returns. An hour of focused research on a new niche will teach you more than you can act on in a month. After that, the value of more research drops quickly — and the real learning comes from making and publishing videos.

A practical split for a new channel: spend 3–5 hours researching your niche thoroughly before you start. Then, for each new video, spend 20–30 minutes on targeted keyword research and a quick check of what exists on that specific topic. Reserve deep competitor analysis for once a month — when you review your own analytics and update your content strategy accordingly.

Next — Chapter 4: Channel Setup

The practical work of building your channel's foundation — branding, channel art, the About section, playlist architecture, and the channel trailer. What matters, what doesn't, and how to set yourself up so that when viewers arrive, they immediately understand what your channel is and why they should subscribe.

Starting Your YouTube Channel

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Channel Setup

You've identified your niche and done your research. Now it's time to build the actual channel. This chapter covers everything that needs to be in place before you publish your first video — branding, channel art, your handle and name, the About section, playlist architecture, and the channel trailer. Done well, these elements tell a new visitor within five seconds what your channel is about and whether it's for them. Done poorly, they create friction that costs you subscribers you'd otherwise keep.

Your Channel Name and Handle

Your channel name is one of the few things that's genuinely hard to change later — YouTube allows name changes, but if you've built recognition around a name, changing it creates confusion. Choose carefully from the start.

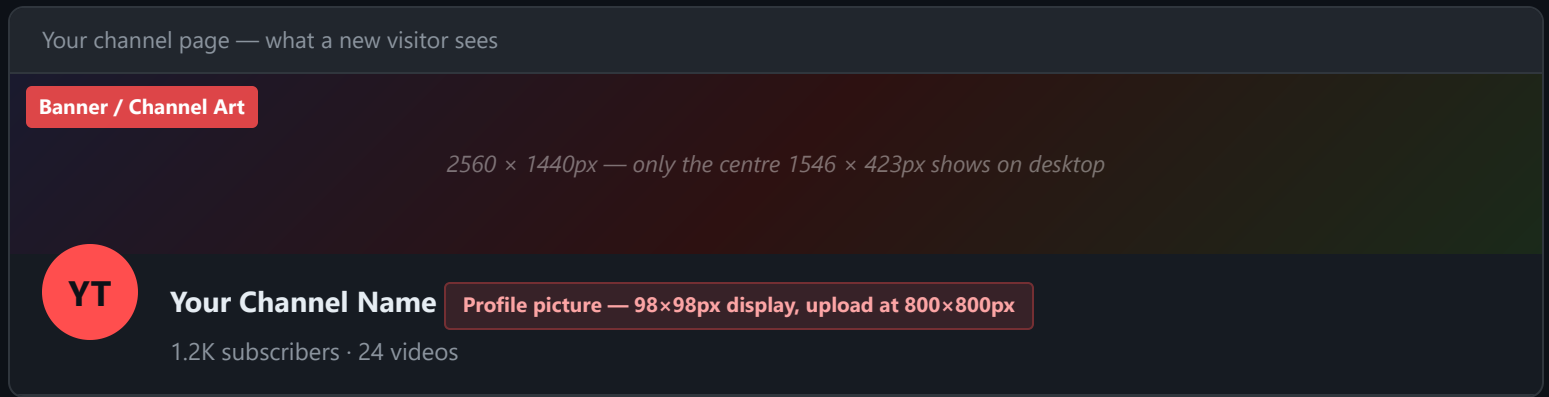
What makes a good channel name

- **Easy to spell and say aloud** — if someone hears your channel name mentioned in a video and can't type it into a search bar, you've lost them. Avoid unusual spellings, numbers substituting for letters, and anything that requires explanation.
- **Specific enough to signal the niche without being so specific it cages you** — "Budget PC Builds" is clear but locks you out of peripherals, monitors, and desk setups. "Tom's Tech Corner" is vague but scales. Find a middle ground.
- **Memorable and short** — two words or fewer is ideal. The longer the name, the harder it is to reference and harder to fit in thumbnails.
- **Available across platforms** — before committing, check that the same name (or a close variant) is available on Instagram, X, and TikTok. Consistent handles across platforms make you findable everywhere.

Your **handle** (the @username) is separate from your channel name and is what appears in URLs and @ mentions. It must be unique across all of YouTube. Keep it simple, lowercase, and matching your channel name as closely as possible.

Channel Art — What Goes Where

YouTube displays your branding in several places with different dimensions. Design for the most demanding placement and it will work everywhere else.



Channel Banner

2560 × 1440 px

Design the safe zone (centre 1546 × 423px) first — that's what all devices see. Outer areas only show on TV apps.

Profile Picture

800 × 800 px

Displays as small as 30×30px in comments. Must be readable as a tiny circle — avoid text, use a clear icon or face.

Video Watermark

150 × 150 px

Appears bottom-right of every video as a subscribe button overlay. Use your logo or a simplified profile icon.

Thumbnail

1280 × 720 px

Not channel art but should use a consistent style that makes your videos recognisable in a grid. Covered in depth in Course 2.

Designing your banner

If you're not a designer, Canva has free YouTube banner templates sized correctly for the safe zone. Keep it simple: your channel name, a tagline (one sentence on what your channel does), and optionally your upload schedule. Avoid cluttering it with social media icons — that's what the links section is for.

FREE DESIGN TOOLS

Canva (canva.com) — free tier is sufficient for channel art; has YouTube-specific templates already sized correctly. **Adobe Express** is an alternative. Both let you export at the right dimensions without needing Photoshop or Illustrator.

The About Section

The About section is underused by most creators and overused (badly) by others. It has two audiences: human visitors who want to understand the channel, and YouTube's systems, which use it as additional context for categorisation. Write it for humans first.

About section formula — four components in order		
WHO IT'S FOR	One sentence describing your target viewer.	"For anyone who wants a powerful PC without spending a fortune."
WHAT YOU COVER	2–3 sentences on your content topics and format.	"I review budget graphics cards, break down the best value builds, and cut through marketing to tell you what's actually worth buying."
UPLOAD SCHEDULE	When new videos appear — gives visitors a reason to subscribe.	"New videos every Tuesday."
CONTACT / BUSINESS	Email for sponsorships or enquiries if relevant.	"For business enquiries: hello@yourchannel.com"

Keep it under 200 words. The About section is not a biography — nobody reads a 600-word essay about how you've been passionate about tech since childhood. Get to the point: this channel exists to give you X, new videos on Y schedule, contact at Z.

Playlist Architecture

Playlists serve two purposes: they help viewers find related content (increasing watch time), and they help YouTube understand how your videos relate to each other. Set them up before you publish your first video, even if they're empty initially — you'll fill them as you go.

RECOMMENDED PLAYLIST STRUCTURE FOR A NEW CHANNEL	
	Start Here (or Best of [Channel Name]) Your handpicked introduction playlist — the 5–10 videos you'd show a new visitor to represent your best work. Update it regularly. This is what your channel trailer links to.
	One playlist per content series or topic pillar If you cover budget builds, GPU reviews, and desk setup guides, each gets its own playlist. Viewers who finish one video automatically get queued into the next in the series.
	Beginner / Getting Started playlist If your niche has a learning curve, a "where to start" playlist captures viewers who don't know enough yet to pick a video themselves. High subscriber conversion rate.



Avoid: giant "All Videos" playlist

A playlist with 80 unrelated videos is useless for navigation and doesn't help YouTube categorise your content. Every playlist should have a clear, specific theme.

The Channel Trailer

The channel trailer plays automatically for non-subscribers who visit your channel page. It's the single most important piece of content for converting visitors into subscribers — and most channels either don't have one or have one that works against them.

The trailer is not a highlights reel. It is a pitch. Keep it to **60–90 seconds maximum**. Viewers who are still watching at 90 seconds have already decided — the rest is wasted time.

0:00 – 0:08 **Hook — lead with a question or a provocative statement**

Don't start with "Hi, welcome to my channel." Open with something that makes the target viewer think "that's exactly my situation." Example: "Are you spending too much on PC hardware you don't actually need?"

0:08 – 0:25 **Credibility — why you, briefly**

One or two sentences on why your perspective is worth listening to. Not a life story — just the relevant context. "I've built over 40 PCs on tight budgets and I've learned which compromises are worth making and which aren't."

0:25 – 0:55 **Value proposition — what the viewer gets**

Describe the specific topics you cover and the transformation or value you deliver. Show clips from your best videos here to demonstrate, not just describe. "On this channel you'll find honest GPU reviews, budget build guides, and enough peripherals content to ruin your desk budget."

0:55 – 1:10 **Call to action — subscribe + what to watch next**

Ask for the subscribe directly — be specific about why. "If that sounds like your kind of channel, hit subscribe — I post every Tuesday." Then point them to a specific video or playlist to watch next, not just "check out my other videos."

UPDATE YOUR TRAILER AS YOUR CHANNEL GROWS

A trailer made with your first three videos will look dated by the time you have fifty. Revisit it every six months — update the clips to show your best recent work and refine the pitch based on what you've learned about your audience. It's a live document, not a one-time task.

What Actually Matters vs What Doesn't

Setup element	Priority	Why
Channel name & handle	High	Hard to change without confusion later; affects searchability and brand recognition
Profile picture	High	Appears everywhere — comments, search results, suggested videos. Blank or generic = amateur signal
About section	High	Keyword-rich text helps YouTube categorise your channel; converts curious visitors
Channel trailer	High	Only chance to pitch non-subscribers who land on your page; high leverage for subscriber conversion
Banner / channel art	Medium	Contributes to professional impression but viewers spend little time looking at it
Playlist structure	Medium	Increases watch time and helps YouTube understand your content — more important as your library grows
Channel sections layout	Low	Most viewers find videos through search and suggested, not your channel page — don't obsess over shelf arrangement
Links / social media	Low	Useful once you have a community to direct — irrelevant at launch when you have no social presence to offer

GOOD ENOUGH AND PUBLISH BEATS PERFECT AND WAITING

Channel setup should take one focused afternoon, not two weeks. A profile picture, a completed About section, and a basic banner are enough to look credible. The channel trailer can come after your first three videos when you have footage to show. Do not delay publishing videos while you perfect the banner gradient.

Next — Chapter 5: Content Strategy

How to plan what you'll make before you make it — pillar content, series, upload cadence, and building a content calendar that keeps you producing consistently without burning out. The difference between creators who post randomly and creators who build an audience.

Starting Your YouTube Channel

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Content Strategy

Most channels that fail don't fail because the creator lacks talent or knowledge. They fail because the creator had no system — they posted when inspired, ran out of ideas, took a two-month break, and never came back. Content strategy is the plan that prevents this. It tells you what to make, when to make it, and how to keep going when motivation runs dry. It doesn't need to be complicated. It needs to exist.

The Content Pyramid

Not all videos serve the same purpose. Successful channels typically produce three types of content in different proportions, each playing a distinct role in the channel's growth.

CONTENT PYRAMID — THREE ROLES, THREE PROPORTIONS

PILLAR ~20%	Evergreen pillar content Foundational, high-effort videos that will drive search traffic for years. They answer a definitive question or teach a core skill in your niche. Example: "The Complete Beginner's Guide to Budget PC Building." These take the most time but keep earning views long after posting.
SERIES ~50%	Series and recurring formats Your regular output — the content that keeps subscribers coming back. These have a recognisable format viewers expect. Example: monthly GPU roundups, "Under £100 Build Challenges," or a weekly Q&A. Predictable format reduces decision fatigue for both you and the viewer.
REACTIVE ~30%	Reactive and timely content Videos responding to news, announcements, trending topics, or viewer requests. Lower production investment, often spikes in traffic quickly but fades fast. Example: "RTX 5080 Announced — Is It Worth It?" These build momentum but shouldn't be your whole strategy.

These percentages are guidelines, not rules. A news-focused channel might invert the ratio and post 80% reactive content. A tutorial channel might be almost entirely pillar content. The point is to be intentional — know which role each video you're making serves, and avoid a library that's entirely one type.

Content Formats — What You're Actually Making

Within your niche, you'll likely settle into a small number of repeatable formats. Knowing your formats in advance means you're not reinventing the wheel every time you need a new idea.

TUTORIAL / HOW-TO

Step-by-step instruction

High search intent — viewers looking for a specific answer. Strong long-term traffic. Requires clear structure and patience for the camera. Best for niches with learnable skills.

REVIEW / OPINION

Evaluating a product or idea

Timeliness matters — reviews of old products die quickly. Builds credibility and attracts sponsorship interest. Works best when you have a clear, opinionated perspective, not a balanced "it depends" conclusion.

COMPARISON

X vs Y — which should you get?

High-intent search queries. Viewers are close to making a decision and want help. Affiliate revenue potential. Structure is built-in: examine both options, pick a winner, explain when the loser makes sense.

LISTICLE / ROUNDUP

Best X for Y, top 5 ways to...

High CTR potential from thumbnail/title format. Good for evergreen topics. Risk: feels formulaic and thin without genuine depth behind each entry. Only works if each item is actually explained, not just named.

VLOG / BEHIND-THE-SCENES

Personality-driven content

Builds audience connection and loyalty. Harder to scale — requires consistent on-camera charisma. Works as a supplement to inform-focused content, rarely as the primary format in technical niches.

CHALLENGE / EXPERIMENT

Can I build a PC for £200?

Naturally engaging format — built-in suspense, clear stakes. Shareable and memorable. Hard to sustain as a primary format because the stakes must keep escalating. Best used occasionally as high-engagement spikes.

Upload Cadence — How Often to Post

Upload frequency is one of the most debated topics in YouTube strategy — and also one of the most misunderstood. The algorithm does not favour channels that post more frequently per se. It favours videos that *perform well*. A channel posting one excellent video per week will outperform a channel posting five mediocre ones.

What frequency does affect is **subscriber expectation and habit formation**. When you post unpredictably, subscribers stop anticipating your content. When you post on a predictable schedule, viewers start building the habit of checking for your videos.



Low pressure, slow growth, harder to build habit	Most recommended starting point for quality channels	Viable with strong system, risky without one	Reserved for short-form or repurposed content only
--	--	--	--

Schedule	Best for	Risk	Verdict
1 per month	Long-form documentary style, heavy production	Very slow growth, algorithm rarely surfaces the channel	Situational
1 per week	Most tutorial/review channels, solo creators with day jobs	Manageable if you batch-produce content	Recommended start
2–3 per week	Channels with a team or very fast production formats	Quality drops without a strong system; burnout likely	After 6 months
Daily	Shorts, news commentary, reaction content	Unsustainable for long-form; quality suffers immediately	Avoid for long-form

CONSISTENCY BEATS FREQUENCY

Missing your schedule is more damaging than posting less frequently. If you can only reliably produce one video every two weeks, post every two weeks — and never miss. A creator who posts biweekly for two years beats one who posts weekly for three months and then vanishes.

Building a Content Calendar

A content calendar is simply a forward-looking schedule of what you'll produce and when. It removes the decision of "what should I make this week?" — a question that, under pressure, reliably produces either paralysis or your worst ideas.

You don't need special software. A spreadsheet with columns for video title, type, filming date, edit deadline, and publish date is all you need. The goal is that at any given time you have at least **four weeks of ideas already decided**, with two of those weeks in various stages of production.

Example weekly production calendar — solo creator, 1 video/week		Recurring rhythm, not a one-off schedule	
MONDAY	- Review previous video's analytics — what performed, what didn't - Finalise script and shot list for this week's video	WRITE	
TUESDAY	- Film main footage - Record any b-roll or supplementary clips	FILM	FILM

WEDNESDAY

- Rough cut — trim and sequence footage EDIT
- Re-film anything that didn't work FILM

THURSDAY

- Full edit — colour, audio levels, captions, music EDIT
- Create thumbnail EDIT

FRIDAY

- Write title, description, tags, chapters WRITE
- Schedule publish for Saturday morning PUBLISH
- Add to idea bank: 3 new video ideas generated this week WRITE

Batch production — a more efficient alternative

Instead of producing one video per week in real-time, some creators film four videos in one weekend per month and edit throughout the month. This works well if you have a day job — block one weekend a month, film everything, then edit in the evenings at your own pace. The trade-off is less responsiveness to trends, but significantly less mental overhead.

The Idea Bank

Running out of ideas is usually not the real problem — not having a system to capture ideas when they arrive is. Your idea bank is a living document (a Notion database, a spreadsheet, a text file — doesn't matter) where you log potential videos as they occur to you. When it's time to plan your next month, you pick from the bank rather than brainstorm from scratch.

A good idea bank entry has four fields: the video concept, the content type, an estimated demand signal (how many people are likely searching for this), and a status.

Example idea bank — Budget PC channel

VIDEO CONCEPT	TYPE	DEMAND	STATUS
Complete Beginner's Build Guide 2025	Pillar / Tutorial	High	FILMING
RX 7600 vs RTX 4060 — Budget GPU Showdown	Comparison	High	NEXT UP
£300 Gaming PC Build — Does it Actually Work?	Challenge	Med	BACKLOG
Best Budget Monitors for Gaming 2025	Listicle	High	BACKLOG

Avoiding the Most Common Strategy Mistakes

Chasing every trend

Reactive content has its place, but a channel that only chases trends never builds a recognisable identity. Viewers follow channels for a consistent point of view, not just a list of the week's news. Make reactive content when it genuinely intersects with your niche — not just because something is trending.

Pivoting too early

Most creators change direction at least once in the first six months because they're not growing as fast as they expected. The problem is that six months is usually not enough data to make an informed decision. YouTube channels typically take 9–18 months to see meaningful organic growth from search. Pivoting at month three is usually panic, not strategy.

Optimising for views over subscribers

A viral video that brings in 100,000 views from people who aren't your target audience is less valuable than a 5,000-view video that converts 10% of viewers into subscribers. Plan content for your *ideal viewer*, not for maximum reach. The algorithm will eventually show your content to the right people — but only if your content is clearly for a defined audience.

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Before your next session, write down 20 video ideas for your channel without stopping to evaluate them. Then sort them into the three pyramid categories (pillar, series, reactive) and estimate demand for each (high / medium / low based on your research from Chapter 3). That's the beginning of your idea bank and your first content calendar.

Next — Chapter 6: Video Ideation & Scripting

How to turn ideas from your bank into actual video scripts — brainstorming frameworks, building hooks that stop the scroll, the difference between scripted and conversational delivery, and how to structure a video so viewers stay to the end.

Starting Your YouTube Channel

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Video Ideation & Scripting

A video idea is not the same as a video. Between "I could make something about budget GPUs" and a finished, watchable video lies a process — turning a vague topic into a specific angle, building that angle into a structure, and deciding how you'll actually say what you need to say. This chapter covers how to do that efficiently, so the creative work stays creative instead of becoming a recurring source of dread.

Generating Ideas — Four Reliable Frameworks

Your idea bank from Chapter 5 holds your raw material. These frameworks help you sharpen vague topics into specific, compelling video concepts with a clear angle that differentiates them from what already exists.

FRAMEWORK 1

The Audience Question Mine

Go to the comments on your competitors' top videos and find the questions viewers ask. Every unanswered comment is a video idea with a proven audience. Look specifically for questions that appear multiple times — that's a high-demand topic that the creator didn't address.

"Why does everyone recommend the 7600X over the 7700? Nobody ever explains the actual gaming difference." — that's a comparison video.

FRAMEWORK 2

The Angle Pivot

Take a topic that already has well-performing videos and add a constraint, audience, or time dimension that makes it new. **Topic + constraint + audience = angle.** The constraint is what differentiates you from the existing videos on the same subject.

"Best budget GPU" exists. "Best budget GPU for 1440p in 2025 under £200" is a specific angle with a defined audience and a clearer answer.

FRAMEWORK 3

The Misconception Video

Find a belief that's widely held in your niche but is oversimplified, outdated, or just wrong. These videos perform well because they promise to correct something the viewer already believes — which creates curiosity and mild tension. **Disagreement is inherently watchable.**

"More RAM doesn't make games faster" — debunks a common belief, forces the viewer to stay to find out when it actually does matter.

FRAMEWORK 4

The Experience Report

Document something you actually did — a purchase, a build, a month-long experiment — and report the honest outcome. These videos are differentiated because they're personal and specific. They can't be copied by someone who didn't have the same experience. **First-person evidence beats general advice.**

"I used a £50 GPU for 30 days — here's what actually happened." Specific, personal, built-in narrative arc.

Building the Hook

The hook is the first 30 seconds of your video. It is the single most important part of any video you make — more so than the quality of the information, the production value, or the length. A viewer who isn't hooked leaves. A viewer who leaves counts against you in the algorithm. Get this right before you worry about anything else.

A good hook does two things simultaneously: it confirms to the viewer that *this video is for me*, and it creates a reason to keep watching. It should never begin with an introduction, a channel recap, or thanks for watching. The hook is about the viewer, not about you.

PROBLEM HOOK

Open with the viewer's pain point

Name a specific frustration your target viewer is experiencing right now. If they feel seen, they stay. Works best for how-to and tutorial content where the viewer has a problem to solve.

"If you've been staring at GPU prices wondering why nothing in your budget actually performs well at 1440p — this video is for you."

CURIOSITY HOOK

Tease the answer without giving it

Introduce the conclusion but withhold the explanation. The viewer must watch to resolve the open loop. Be careful: if the teased payoff doesn't deliver, this creates frustration and a poor satisfaction signal.

"I tested every budget GPU under £200. One of them is significantly better than everything else — and it's not the one reviewers keep recommending."

PROMISE HOOK

State exactly what the viewer will know by the end

Clear, direct, outcome-focused. Works well for informational content where the viewer is outcome-driven rather than curious about the journey. Less exciting, but very high trust signal.

"By the end of this video you'll know exactly which GPU to buy for 1440p gaming on a tight budget, and why — without needing to read a single spec sheet."

STORY HOOK

Begin mid-action, then rewind

Drop the viewer into a specific moment — the result, the mistake, the discovery — then pull back to explain how you got there. Creates immediate narrative tension. Common in vlog and experience-report formats.

"Three weeks ago I turned on a PC that cost me £287 to build. It ran Cyberpunk at over 60fps. Here's how."

CONTRAST HOOK

Open with a surprising contradiction

State something that contradicts conventional wisdom or the viewer's expectation. Forces a double-take. Best for misconception videos and opinion-driven content where you have a contrarian position to

defend

"The most common advice on this topic is completely wrong — and following it cost me £150 on parts I didn't need."

Video Structure — The Architecture of Retention

After the hook, you need to keep people watching. The underlying principle is simple: a viewer stays as long as they believe the best part of the video is still ahead of them. Structure your video so there's always something coming that they'd regret missing.

Standard tutorial / review video structure — 8–15 minute video

0:00 – 0:30

Hook

Open with the problem, promise, or story. No intro music, no "hey guys welcome back." The viewer's attention is at its highest here and drops every second. Use it.

Critical: if retention data shows a large drop in the first 30 seconds, the hook is broken — rewrite it before fixing anything else.

0:30 – 1:30

Context & credibility

Set up why this topic matters and why your perspective is worth hearing. Brief — one or two minutes maximum. This is also where you can introduce yourself, but keep it one sentence.

Optional: use a "here's what we'll cover" roadmap for longer videos — gives viewers confidence that the answer is coming.

1:30 – 11:00

Main content — with internal re-hooks

Deliver the substance. Break it into clear sections. Every 2–3 minutes, add a micro-hook: a teaser for what's coming next in the video ("but wait until you see the performance results"). This prevents viewers from feeling the video is finished before it is.

Each section should have a clear point — if you can't state what the viewer learned from a section in one sentence, it probably needs to be cut or restructured.

11:00 – 12:30

Conclusion & recommendation

Summarise what was covered and give a clear, direct answer or recommendation. Don't hedge with "it depends" unless you immediately follow it with "here's what it depends on and here's the answer for each scenario."

12:30 – 13:00

Call to action

One CTA only — subscribe, or a specific related video to watch next. Not both. Not "like, subscribe, comment, share, and check out my Patreon." One clear next step.

Linking to a related video outperforms a generic subscribe ask for most channels — viewers who watch two videos in a row are far more likely to subscribe than viewers prompted directly.

Scripted vs Conversational Delivery

There is no universally correct approach here. The right choice depends on your subject matter, your natural delivery style, and your production setup. Most creators land somewhere between the two extremes.

FULLY SCRIPTED

- Every word planned — no rambling, no filler
- Easier to edit — you know what was supposed to be said
- Works well for complex technical topics needing precision
- Reduces on-camera anxiety for new creators
- Risk of sounding robotic if you read rather than perform
- Takes longer to write upfront
- Spontaneous reactions and moments get lost

BULLET-POINT CONVERSATIONAL

- Feels natural and authentic on camera
- Faster to prepare — outline only
- Better for personality-driven and opinion content
- Genuine reactions and enthusiasm come through
- Higher risk of rambling and repetition
- Harder to edit — harder to know what to cut
- Can miss key points without a full script

The most practical approach for most new creators: **write a hybrid**. Script the hook and conclusion word-for-word (these are the highest-leverage parts of the video), and use bullet points for the main content sections. This gives you precision where it matters and natural delivery in the middle.

What a script actually looks like

A script doesn't need to be a Word document formatted like a screenplay. It just needs to tell you what to say and what to do. Here's a practical format:

```
== HOOK == Three weeks ago I turned on a PC that cost me £287 to build. It ran Cyberpunk at over 60fps at 1080p medium settings. Today I'm going to show you exactly how – every part, every decision, and every compromise I made to hit that number. == CONTEXT (keep to 60 seconds) == [Brief: who this is for, what we'll cover] This isn't a hypothetical build. These are parts I actually bought, prices from last Tuesday, and real benchmark numbers from my testing. == SECTION 1: The CPU Decision == [B-ROLL: CPU on table, benchmark screen recording] ACTION: Show CPU packaging on camera The biggest money-saving decision in this build was the CPU. I went with the Ryzen 5 5600, not the 5600X... [BULLET POINTS – expand naturally:] · Why 5600 not 5600X (price delta vs gaming perf delta) · What I'd upgrade to with another £30 · The one scenario where you do want the X variant == CTA == If you found this useful, the next video I'd watch from this channel is the GPU comparison I did last month – it answers the obvious follow-up question about which card gets the most out of this CPU. It's linked on screen now.
```

Where Viewers Drop Off — and How to Stop Them

Audience retention data (available in YouTube Studio once your video has views) shows you a curve of how many people are still watching at each moment. Understanding the common drop-off points lets you write scripts that avoid them.

TYPICAL RETENTION CURVE SHAPE — WHERE THE LOSSES HAPPEN AND WHY



0:00–0:30 Largest single drop — viewers who the thumbnail brought in but the opening didn't retain. Fix: stronger hook, immediate relevance signal, no intro.

Section ends Viewers who got their question answered and leave. Fix: micro-hooks at section transitions — "before you go, there's one thing I haven't covered yet."

Mid-video Pacing drop or a section that feels like filler. Fix: cut ruthlessly — if a segment doesn't advance the story or add new information, remove it.

After CTA Normal — once the subscribe ask appears, some viewers leave. Acceptable. Putting genuinely useful content after the CTA can retain this group.

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Pick one idea from your idea bank and apply the full process: choose a hook type, write the hook word-for-word, outline the main sections with bullet points, and write the CTA sentence. That's your first script. Do not make it longer than one A4 page for a 10-minute video — if it doesn't fit, the video has too many ideas and needs to be split.

Next — Chapter 7: Understanding Analytics

Which numbers actually matter in the early days of your channel, which ones to ignore, how to read your retention curve, and how to use analytics to make smarter decisions about what to make next — without drowning in data that doesn't yet have enough signal to act on.

Starting Your YouTube Channel

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Understanding Analytics

YouTube Studio gives you access to more data than you will ever need. Most of it, in the early months of a channel, is noise. Acting on small-sample data produces bad decisions — pivoting your entire content strategy because three videos underperformed is how creators destroy momentum before they've given themselves a fair chance. This chapter is about what to look at, what to ignore, and when you actually have enough data to act on what you're seeing.

The Metrics That Actually Matter

There are dozens of numbers in YouTube Studio. For a channel under 1,000 subscribers, only a small handful are actionable. Everything else is context at best, distraction at worst.

FOCUS ON THESE

Click-Through Rate (CTR)

Analytics > Reach > Impressions click-through rate

The percentage of people who see your thumbnail in the feed and click on it. This is a direct measure of how compelling your thumbnail and title combination is. Low CTR means people see your video and scroll past — the content is irrelevant until the packaging works.

Benchmark: 2–10% for most channels. Under 2% suggests thumbnail/title problems. Over 10% is exceptional and usually unsustainable at scale.

Average View Duration (AVD)

Analytics > Engagement > Average view duration

How long, on average, a viewer watches your video. This is the primary signal YouTube uses to judge whether viewers found what they came for. A short video with high AVD beats a long video with low AVD every time.

Benchmark: 40–50% of video length is solid. Under 30% suggests the hook or content isn't delivering on the title's promise.

Audience Retention Curve

Analytics > individual video > Engagement > Audience retention

Shows the percentage of viewers still watching at each moment in your video. Unlike AVD which gives an average, the curve shows *where* people leave — and that location tells you what caused it. This is your most precise editorial feedback tool.

What to look for: Cliffs (sudden drops) = a specific moment that lost viewers. Gradual slope = normal decay.

Subscriber Growth per Video

Analytics > individual video > Reach > Subscribers

How many subscribers each video gained (or lost). This tells you which content resonates with your target audience enough to make them commit. Viral traffic with no subscriber gain means you reached the wrong people.

Watch for: Videos that over- or under-perform on subscribers relative to views. Those outliers tell you what your audience actually wants from you.

Bumps upward = a segment people rewatched.

USEFUL CONTEXT — READ CAREFULLY

Impressions

Analytics > Reach > Impressions

How many times your thumbnail was shown. Impressions alone mean nothing — a million impressions with 1% CTR is worse than 10,000 impressions with 8% CTR. Use this alongside CTR, never in isolation. New channels get low impressions by default; this improves as the algorithm gains confidence in your content.

Traffic Sources

Analytics > Reach > Traffic source types

Where your views are coming from — YouTube Search, Suggested Videos, Browse Features (homepage), External. The mix matters: search traffic is durable and grows over time. Browse/Suggested traffic spikes then fades. A channel built on search has more stable long-term growth.

Watch Time (hours)

Analytics > Overview

Total hours watched across all videos. YouTube historically used this for monetisation eligibility (4,000 hours). As a growth metric it matters less than AVD — 4,000 hours from the wrong audience watching the wrong content does not help the algorithm understand who to show your videos to.

MOSTLY IGNORE IN YEAR ONE

Likes, Comments, Shares

Analytics > Engagement

Engagement metrics are feel-good indicators but weak algorithmic signals. YouTube's algorithm is powered primarily by watch behaviour, not likes. A video with 5 likes and 45% retention is doing better than a video with 500 likes and 18% retention. Don't optimise for comments by asking viewers to comment.

Revenue & RPM

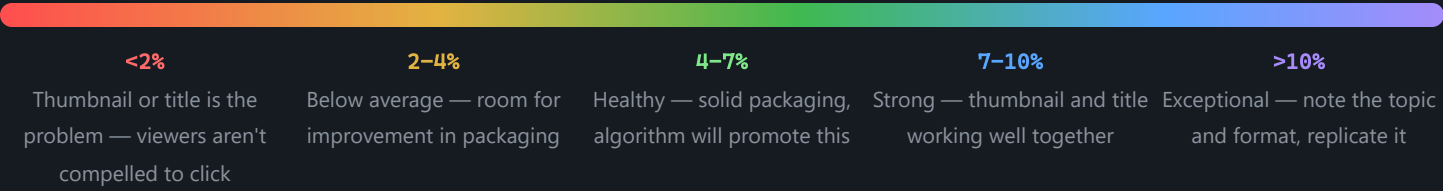
Analytics > Revenue

Irrelevant until you're in the YouTube Partner Programme (1,000 subscribers + 4,000 watch hours). Even then, RPM varies enormously by niche and season. Looking at £1.40 from your first three monetised videos will either mislead you about potential or demoralise you unnecessarily. Covered properly in Course 3.

CTR in Depth — Reading the Number Correctly

CTR is frequently misread. The most important context: CTR is highly dependent on *where* your video is being shown. Homepage impressions have lower CTR than search impressions. A new channel's CTR tends to be higher than an established channel's simply because YouTube shows new videos to a smaller, more targeted audience first. As your reach expands, CTR typically falls — that is normal, not failure.

CTR INTERPRETATION GUIDE — VARIES BY NICHE, PLACEMENT, AND CHANNEL AGE

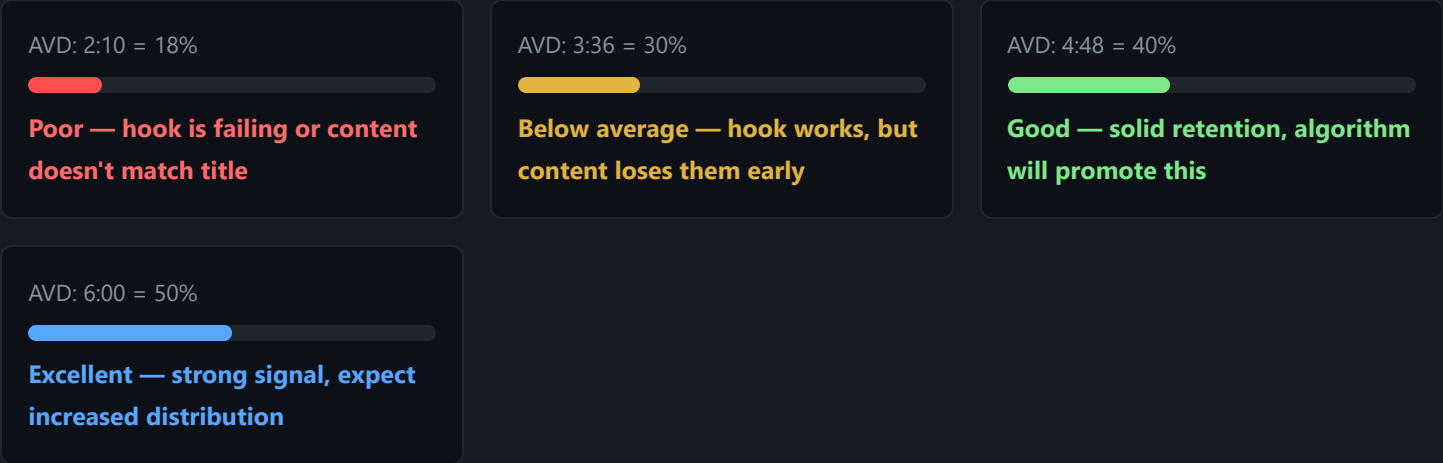


CTR WITHOUT RETENTION IS A TRAP

A misleading title can produce a high CTR and terrible retention — viewers click, find the content doesn't match the promise, and leave immediately. YouTube penalises this. The combination of good CTR *and* good retention is what signals a genuinely successful video. If your CTR is high but retention is low, your title is overpromising what the content delivers.

Average View Duration — What the Percentages Mean

AVD PERCENTAGE SCENARIOS — SAME 12-MINUTE VIDEO, DIFFERENT OUTCOMES



Note that absolute watch time (minutes watched) matters too — a 50% retention on a 20-minute video is more valuable to YouTube than 50% on a 2-minute video. This is one reason mid-length videos (8–15 minutes) tend to perform well: they generate meaningful watch time while still being achievable retention targets.

Traffic Sources — Understanding Where Viewers Come From

MOST VALUABLE LONG-TERM YouTube Search	HIGH UPSIDE, VOLATILE Suggested Videos	ALGORITHMIC — EARNED Browse Features (Homepage)
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Viewers actively looking for your topic. High intent, high retention, tends to grow steadily over time as your video ages and accumulates SEO history.

If low: titles aren't matching search queries. Research keywords more carefully (Chapter 1 of Course 3).

YouTube surfaces your video alongside a related video someone is already watching. Traffic spikes quickly and fades. Depends heavily on the algorithm finding your content relevant to established videos.

If dominant: you're benefiting from someone else's audience. Good short-term, but don't rely on it.

YouTube recommending your video on subscribers' home feeds. This source grows as your subscriber base grows. Requires consistent posting so the algorithm keeps your channel in rotation.

If low early on: normal — you need more subscribers before this traffic source is significant.

YOU CONTROL THIS

External

Traffic from links outside YouTube — social media, blogs, newsletters, Reddit. Tends to have lower retention than search traffic since the viewer wasn't actively looking for your content.

If promoting on social: don't judge video quality by this traffic. It skews AVD down due to casual visitors.

Using Analytics to Make Decisions

Analytics are only useful when they point to a specific action. The table below maps the most common diagnostic patterns to their likely causes and fixes.

What you observe	Likely cause	What to do
Low CTR (<2%) on every video	Thumbnail design or title writing is the bottleneck	Study thumbnails of top videos in your niche. Redesign — brighter colours, clearer focal point, larger text. Test new title formats.
Good CTR, low AVD (<30%)	Title over-promises; hook doesn't land; opening is slow	Rewatch your first 60 seconds. Cut everything that isn't the hook. Rewrite the hook to match what the video actually delivers.
Steep cliff at a specific timestamp	A single segment that fails — too long, off-topic, or confusing	Watch the video at that timestamp. Identify what you were saying. That type of content needs to be cut or restructured in future videos.

High views, zero subscriber growth	Content attracted the wrong audience or no CTA	Check if the video topic is truly in your niche. Add a specific, contextual subscribe CTA at the end. Link to a
------------------------------------	--	---

What you observe	Likely cause	What to do
		second related video.
Traffic almost entirely from search	Evergreen content working well; algorithm not yet surfacing you	Good sign long-term. Keep producing search-optimised content. Browse traffic grows with subscriber count — be patient.
One video dramatically outperforms all others	Topic, format, or thumbnail/title combination struck a chord	Study what made it different. Make more videos with the same topic angle, similar thumbnail style, and comparable title structure.

Where to Find Everything in YouTube Studio

YouTube Studio navigation reference — studio.youtube.com		
Analytics > Overview	High-level view: views, watch time, subscribers, revenue — for any date range	
Analytics > Reach	Impressions, CTR, unique viewers, traffic sources breakdown	
Analytics > Engagement	Average view duration, top videos by watch time, likes, cards	
Analytics > Audience	Returning vs new viewers, subscriber geography, age/gender, when they're online	
Content > [video] > Analytics	Per-video metrics — same tabs as channel-level but scoped to one video	
Content > [video] > Analytics > Engagement > Audience retention	The retention curve — the most useful single screen in YouTube Studio	
Analytics > Reach > Traffic source: YouTube search	Exact search terms that brought viewers to your videos — free keyword data	

FREE KEYWORD INTELLIGENCE

The search terms report (Analytics > Reach > Traffic source: YouTube search) shows you the exact phrases people used to find your videos. This is some of the most valuable data available to you — and it's free. These are real queries from real viewers, not estimated keyword volumes. Use them to title future videos and find related topics to cover.

When You Have Enough Data to Act

This is the part most creators get wrong. They see one video underperform and rewrite their entire strategy. The problem: one video is not a sample size. A video needs at minimum **500–1,000 views** before its metrics stabilise enough to draw conclusions. For a small channel, that can take weeks or months.

The rules of thumb:

- **Under 5 videos:** don't read anything into the numbers. There's no pattern to find. Just make the next video.
- **5–20 videos:** look at averages across videos, not individual performance. Identify the two or three videos that clearly over- or underperformed and ask what was different.
- **20+ videos:** you have enough data to identify patterns — which topics, formats, thumbnail styles, and title structures consistently outperform. Start optimising based on these patterns.
- **Under 48 hours:** never judge a video's performance in the first two days. YouTube is still distributing it to test audiences. A slow start often recovers to become a strong long-term performer, especially for search-driven content.

THE ONLY EARLY METRIC WORTH WATCHING WEEKLY

In the first three months, check only one thing weekly: are your retention curves improving or staying flat? If the curve is gradually improving — even a few percentage points — your content is getting better. Everything else is noise until you have the sample size to act on it.

Next — Chapter 8: Your First 10 Videos

The final chapter of Course 1 — what to prioritise, what not to obsess over, how to build the production habit, and how to set yourself up for sustainable growth rather than a strong start that burns out by month three.

Starting Your YouTube Channel

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Your First 10 Videos

The first ten videos you publish are unlike every video you'll make after them. They are not primarily about reaching an audience — they are about becoming a creator. The habit of filming, editing, publishing, and doing it again is a skill in itself, and it is more important in this phase than the quality of any individual video. This chapter covers how to structure those ten videos intentionally, what to prioritise, what to let go of, and how to build the system that keeps you going past the point where most channels quietly stop.

A Map for Your First Ten Videos

The order and type of your first ten videos matters more than most new creators realise. You're simultaneously building a library, training the algorithm on what your channel is about, and building your own production confidence. A deliberately structured first ten achieves all three.

Recommended structure — first 10 videos for a new channel

1

Pillar video — your best, most definitive piece of content

PILLAR

Start with your strongest, most searchable topic. This is the video you'd send someone to explain what your channel does. Don't save it for later — lead with it. It anchors what comes after.

2

Series video #1 — introduce your recurring format

SERIES

Establish the format that will define your regular output. Viewers who came from video 1 now understand what to expect from you on an ongoing basis.

3

Second pillar — approach from a different angle

PILLAR

A second foundational video that captures a different search query or sub-topic within your niche. You're building library depth and showing the algorithm that your niche coverage is consistent.

4–6

Mix of series and topic exploration

SERIES

Continue the series format and explore adjacent topics within your niche. Pay attention to which topics generate more comments and questions — they're pointing you at your next videos.

7

Reactive or timely video

REACTIVE

If something relevant has happened in your niche, make a reactive video. This tests a different format and can spike traffic. Don't force it if nothing is timely — skip to 8.

8-9

Informed by early data

DATA-LED

By now you have some retention and CTR data. Video 8 and 9 should begin incorporating what you've learned. Double down on the topic or format that outperformed. Adjust the hook style that underperformed.

10

Update your channel trailer

REFRESH

By video 10 you have footage from nine real videos. Rebuild your channel trailer using your best clips. It will be significantly stronger than the one you made with no footage. This is also the moment to reassess your channel art and About section.

What to Prioritise vs What to Let Go Of

New creators systematically misprioritise. They spend six hours perfecting a colour grade on a video where the audio is barely listenable, or they agonise over their channel banner while not having filmed anything in three weeks. Here is a clear split of where your time should and shouldn't go.

ACTUALLY PRIORITISE

- **Audio quality** — viewers forgive bad video; they leave for bad audio. A decent USB microphone changes everything.
- **The hook** — write the first 30 seconds last, after you know what the video contains. It takes 10 minutes and matters more than any other part.
- **Publishing on schedule** — a slightly worse video published on time beats a perfect video published two weeks late every single time.
- **Learning one editing skill per video** — don't try to master everything at once. Pick one thing to improve each time: pacing, colour, b-roll, captions.
- **Reading your own retention curves** — it's the fastest honest feedback you can get on what you're actually producing.

STOP OBSESSING OVER

- **Subscriber count** — it grows slowly and non-linearly. Checking it daily is demoralising and tells you nothing actionable.
- **Competitor subscriber counts** — their trajectory is irrelevant to yours. They started before you did and you don't know their full context.
- **Video length** — make it as long as the content requires, no longer. Don't pad to hit 10 minutes and don't cut substance to hit 8.
- **Production perfection** — the best equipment you'll ever have is the equipment you actually use to film today.
- **Going viral** — viral videos usually happen to established channels because the algorithm already trusts them. Building that trust is the job right now.

Building the Production Habit

Motivation is not a reliable engine for a YouTube channel. Motivation is high when you start, declines as the reality of the work sets in, and craters the first time a video you worked hard on gets 47 views. The creators

who build lasting channels don't rely on motivation — they build a **system that runs on habit instead.**



Commit to a specific day

Don't plan to "film this week." Plan to film every Tuesday at 7pm. Specificity beats intention. The same day and time every week removes the decision overhead that derails production.



Keep the idea bank topped up

The hardest moment in production is staring at a blank script wondering what to make. If your idea bank always has at least 8 ideas in it, that moment never happens. Add to it whenever an idea arrives — not just during scheduled planning time.



Set a "good enough" standard

Define in advance what done means. "I'll publish when the audio is clean, the hook is sharp, and the main content delivers on the title." Not "I'll publish when I can't find anything else to improve." There is always something else to improve.



Monthly review, not weekly panic

Check analytics once per month for the first six months. Weekly checks produce emotional reactions to noise. Monthly checks give you enough data to see patterns and make calm, informed decisions about what to adjust.



Find one accountability partner

Telling someone else your publish date raises completion rates significantly. It doesn't need to be another creator — a friend who checks in once a week is enough. Public commitment beats private intention.



Batch where you can

If you film two videos in one session, you've halved the setup overhead per video. Scripts, thumbnails, and descriptions can also be batched. Batching is the most impactful productivity change most solo creators can make.

What the Growth Curve Actually Looks Like

The biggest source of early creator abandonment is the mismatch between expected and actual growth. Here is an honest picture of what most channels experience:

REALISTIC GROWTH TIMELINE — NON-VIRAL CHANNEL WITH CONSISTENT POSTING

● VIDEOS 1–10 (MONTHS 1–3)

Views will mostly come from your own network — friends, family, social shares. **Analytics are misleading at this stage** because your audience isn't the target audience. Expect 20–200 views per video. Subscriber growth is slow. This is normal. Your only job is to finish videos and improve.

● VIDEOS 10–30 (MONTHS 3–9)

Search traffic begins to arrive on earlier videos as they accumulate watch history. You'll notice some videos outperform others from the search side. **This is the most important data you'll get** — those outperforming topics tell you what the algorithm is successfully matching to viewer intent. Double down on them.

● VIDEOS 30–50 (MONTHS 9–18)

Channel identity is now established in the algorithm. Suggested video traffic begins to grow. Subscriber conversion improves because new visitors can see a consistent library. **Compound growth begins** — new videos benefit from the trust built by older ones. Many creators give up just before this phase begins.

- **VIDEOS 50+ (18 MONTHS+)**

For channels that reach this point with consistent quality and niche focus, growth tends to accelerate. The library does ongoing work — older videos keep finding new viewers. Monetisation thresholds become realistic. **The creators who reach this point are those who treated months 1–9 as the foundation, not the product.**

The Five Mistakes That Kill Channels Early

1 Posting inconsistently, then "relaunching"

Taking a three-month break and coming back with a "I'm back" video resets your algorithmic momentum and signals unreliability to any subscribers who remain. If you must take a break, keep it under two weeks and don't announce it — just return and post normally. **Fix: build a 2-video buffer. Never publish video N without video N+1 already filmed.**

2 Chasing a viral moment instead of building a library

One successful video does not build a channel. The audience a viral video brings expects more of the same — if your library doesn't deliver that, they leave. A library of 30 solid, related videos compounds forever. A channel built around one outlier collapses when that video's traffic decays. **Fix: make the next video, not the perfect video.**

3 Changing niche after poor early performance

The algorithm needs 20–30 videos to understand what a channel is about. Switching niche at video 6 restarts that process entirely. Most early underperformance is not a niche problem — it's a packaging or consistency problem. **Fix: change thumbnails, titles, or hooks before changing your topic.**

4 Making content for other creators, not for the audience

It's tempting to watch popular YouTube channels about making YouTube and reproduce their format. The problem is that their audience is creators. Your audience is the people in your actual niche. Different needs, different formats, different hooks. **Fix: spend more time watching your niche's top channels than creator-advice channels.**

5 Waiting until everything is ready

The camera isn't good enough yet. The editing isn't polished enough. The room doesn't look right. There is always a reason to wait. Every month you delay is a month of compounding growth you don't get back. Your first video will be embarrassing to you in two years — that's proof you improved, not proof you should have waited. **Fix: set a publish date for your first video before you feel ready. Then keep it.**

THE ONLY QUESTION THAT MATTERS RIGHT NOW

Not "will this video perform well?" — you can't know that until it's published and you have data. The question is: **"Is this video better than my last one in at least one specific way?"** If the answer is yes, publish it. Incremental improvement compounded over 50 videos produces a creator who is unrecognisably better than the one who made video one.



Course 1 Complete

Starting Your YouTube Channel — 8 chapters

Ch.1 How YouTube Works

Ch.2 Finding Your Niche

Ch.3 Researching Content

Ch.4 Channel Setup

Ch.5 Content Strategy

Ch.6 Ideation & Scripting

Ch.7 Understanding Analytics

Ch.8 Your First 10 Videos

Ready to go further? **Course 2 — Production & Content Creation** covers everything about actually making the videos: camera and audio setup, lighting, filming techniques, editing software, thumbnail design, and the AI tools that are changing what solo creators can produce on their own.