



# Succeeding on YouTube as a Higher Education Institution

# YouTube By The Numbers

**2B**

**More than 2 billion logged-in users visit YouTube every month**

**70+%**

**Over 70% of students regularly consume educational YouTube content**



**#1**

**YouTube is the top video platform for US viewers age 18-34**

**53%**

**53% of students turn to online video when stuck on a concept in their coursework**

\* All data accurate as of March 2021. Sources: "2B": YouTube data, Global; "70+%" / "53%": Google Consumer Survey, October 2020, "1": YouTube data, US: "YouTube, on mobile alone, reaches more people in the 18-34 US audience than any TV network."



# Why Should Your Team Invest In YouTube?

YouTube is where the world comes for video. Increasingly, it's also where the world comes to learn. That's why we created this resource: not just because of how impactful your institution can be on YouTube, but because of **how impactful YouTube can be for your institution.**



## REACH

With more than 2 billion logged-in users each month, YouTube represents an amazing opportunity to connect with a significant audience, including viewers who could be **your future students, faculty, or just lifelong learners.**



## REPUTATION

YouTube can be an incredible place to showcase your institution's programs, achievements, and expertise, ultimately **improving your institution's reputation.**



## RESPONSIBILITY

Through producing original YouTube content, you can take your educational mission beyond the current student body and into the **lives of millions learners online.**



## How To Use This Resource

Imagine a student who excitedly purchases textbooks, and then puts them on a shelf, rarely sparing them a thought. Those books hold life-changing possibilities, but without study and application, that potential can never be realized.

**We created this resource to help your institution avoid that student's mistake.** Consider it your textbook for bringing to life the remarkable potential a strategic YouTube presence can offer your institution.

While we highly recommend utilizing best practices from every section in this resource, we know that not every institution will have the resources to do so. That's why we've divided this guide into three different sections, each requiring a bit more effort and offering greater possible rewards.

### YouTube 101



**Entry-level tactical tips on getting started and making individual videos more YouTube-friendly.**

**Perfect for new channels and/or those lacking the resources to tackle the deeper, more important "strategic" approach.**

### YouTube 201



**Intermediate guidance for crafting and executing the strategies necessary for meaningful, sustained success.**

**If you are a leader thinking through your social media strategy, YouTube 201 is the place to start.**

### YouTube 301



**Advanced strategies for institutions to make their already-successful YouTube presence even better.**

**Perfect for channels that have mastered fundamentals and are ready to invest more deeply to take their channels to the next level.**



Introductory

# YouTube 101





# YouTube 101 Lesson Plan

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Please note that these best practices are tips to guide you that we have gathered from what has worked on the platform, but they are not a guarantee for success.

1

Overview

2

Setting Up Your Channel Page

3

Beginners' Guide to Content Creation & Curation

4

Title & Thumbnail Best Practices

5

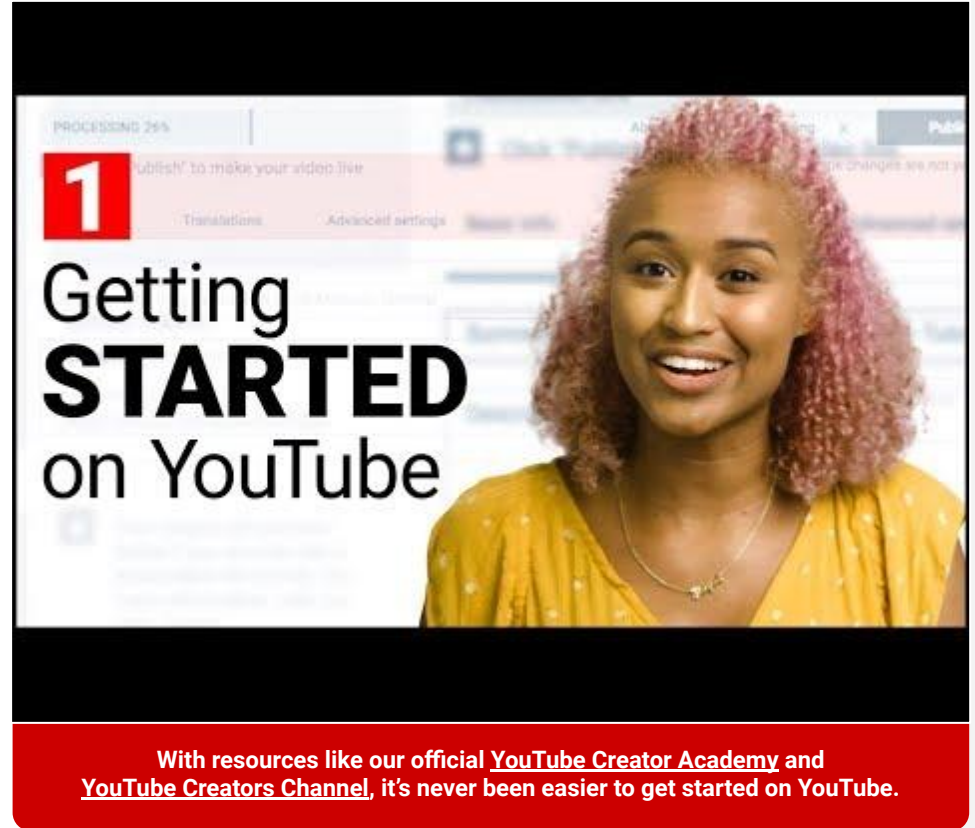
Q&A



# 1. Overview

With online video playing an ever-increasing role in our lives, having a YouTube presence is vital for any higher education institution.

In **YouTube 101**, we'll cover the fundamentals of beginning your YouTube journey. While we recommend you apply the more advanced concepts explored later in this resource, implementing these **YouTube 101** best practices will help you set out on the right foot!



# YouTube Terminology

As we begin, here are some **key YouTube terms** to remember.

- **Channel:** The hub of your presence on YouTube, this is where you compile video content, particularly original videos and playlists.
- **Channel Manager:** The person or persons who have full access to making changes to the channel, such as uploading or deleting content. This is often the same person as the Creator, but doesn't necessarily need to be. (More information on access [here](#).)
- **Collaboration (AKA "Collab"):** A special video or series of videos created in partnership by two or more Creators and/or channels.
- **Creator:** On YouTube, "Creator" refers to the person or persons who produce and post original content on a YouTube channel. Creators often, though not always, appear as onscreen talent.
- **Playlist:** A collection of videos put together by the Channel Manager(s).
- **YouTube Studio:** Found at [studio.youtube.com](https://studio.youtube.com), this is where you manage your channel. (More information [here](#).)





## 2. Setting Up Your Channel Page

**Channel banner** is real-estate to highlight your institution, share social links, and inform viewers when you'll be posting content.

1

**Channel avatar** is a signature image or logo that represents your brand; it will be visible when leaving comments, community posts, live chats, etc.

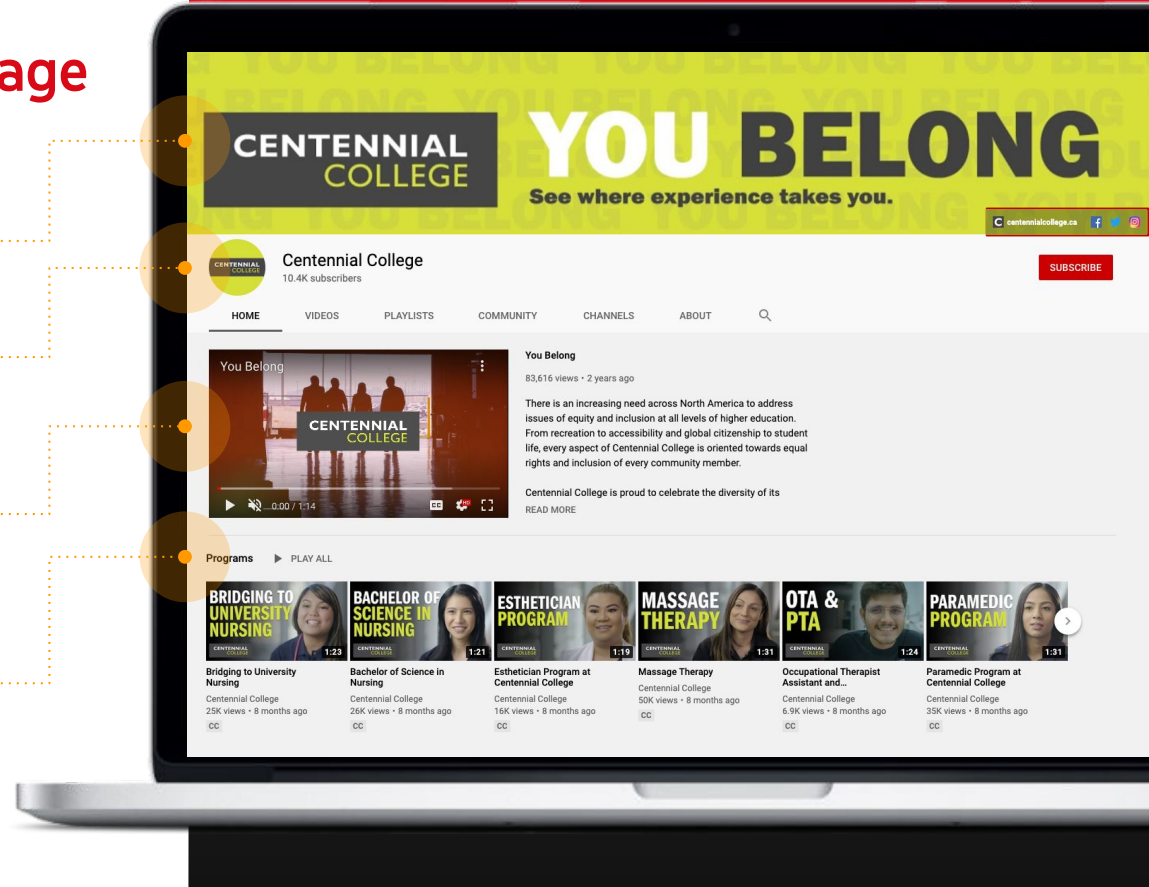
2

**Featured video** is the first video viewers see when they visit your channel. Though many channels use this space for a custom **channel trailer**, it's also a great place to put either your latest video or the most important one to your target audience. You can change it as often as you need.

3

**Playlist shelves** allow you to organize content around a theme, topic or format. The content in these shelves can be created by you **and/or** by others that you curate (see [slide 11](#)).

4





## Quick Questions & Answers

# Setting Up Your YouTube Channel

### How can our institution get a YouTube verification badge to denote it is our official channel?

- As of March 2021, to submit a request for verification your channel must have 100,000 subscribers. If you aren't verified, here are some other ways to distinguish your channel from similar channels.
  - Use your institution's name as your channel name and create a custom URL (see below)
  - Use a high-quality image for your profile picture to make your channel look professional in search results
  - Customize your channel layout and branding for a personalized look and feel. If someone is impersonating you or your channel, please [\*\*report it to us\*\*](#).

### How do we get a custom ("vanity") URL?

- You can find step-by-step instructions [\*\*here\*\*](#).

### More than one person will be using our YouTube account. Do we all have to share the same email address and password?

- **Not at all!** As [\*\*explained in this article\*\*](#), you can have multiple people manage your channel without giving them access to your Google Account. Regardless of how many managers have access to your account, though, **we recommend having a dedicated email that is always monitored.**



### 3. Beginners' Guide to Creating & Curating YouTube Content

There can be overlap, but broadly speaking there are two ways learning institutions can use their channels as a hub for great content that adds value to their target viewers' lives:

**Content Creation** and **Content Curation**.

- **Content Creation** is when a YouTube channel is used to publish original videos created by the channel's owners.
- **Content Curation** is when a YouTube channel is used to organize playlists, usually around a topic or theme. This playlists can be made up of videos either created by you and/or on other channels. (See [this slide](#).)



Want to dive even deeper into the ins and outs of video production? Check out these resources.

CHOOSING YOUR EQUIPMENT »

MAKING EFFECTIVE THUMBNAILS AND TITLES »

TOTAL BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO EDITING »



## Video Creation Basics

You can start making videos with something as simple as a good mobile phone! Here are some tips for any type of equipment.

1. **Talent:** Your YouTube videos will be an introduction to and a representation of your institution, so include people of various backgrounds and/or stages of their career. For more on creating inclusive content, check out this [Creator Academy lesson](#).
2. **Lights:** When choosing your shot, use natural light and avoid shadows. Be mindful of your background, prioritizing areas with visual depth (i.e., try not to shoot against a wall).
3. **Camera:** Wipe off the lens, choose the settings to film in the highest quality possible, place your device on horizontally on a stationary surface, and turn on Do Not Disturb mode if you're using a phone.
4. **Action:** On camera, frame the subject with their eyes in the top third of the video (like [this](#)). If you're filming yourself, remember to look at the camera lens, not at yourself.



**Important Note:** Publishing copyrighted clips or content that you don't own can lead to strikes on your account. For more details, please refer to this YouTube Creator Academy article: ["What is copyright?"](#)





## Capture Great Audio

Audio quality significantly impacts how viewers experience your video, typically even more than camera or lighting mistakes.

- **Keep audio in mind when choosing locations.** If recording outside, things like traffic or wind can be distracting on camera. Research locations to avoid unpleasant sounds. If you’re inside, consider the room’s acoustics and noises that electronics or other elements might create.
- **Use external microphones.** While something as simple as a smartphone can film incredible video, ideally you’ll want to use external (not in-camera) microphones to record quality audio.





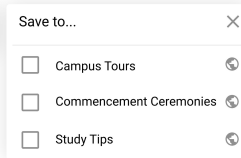
## CONTENT CURATION

# Creating Playlists

YouTube playlists can be a great tool for institutions looking to organize their content in an approachable way, showcase their expertise in a particular field, and much more.

As mentioned, you can curate content you created *and* content from other channels. Here's how.

1. On YouTube, sign into your account, find content you'd like to share, and click to be taken to its video page.
2. Below the video, select **SAVE**.
3. When the Save to pop-up menu appears, select the appropriate playlist (or, if necessary, create a new one).
4. To make your playlists viewable for everyone who visits your channel, set them to **Public**. (You can always change this by clicking Playlists in [YouTube Studio](#).)
5. Share your playlist as a channel section on your YouTube channel page. For step-by-step instructions on setting up channel sections, check out the next slide!

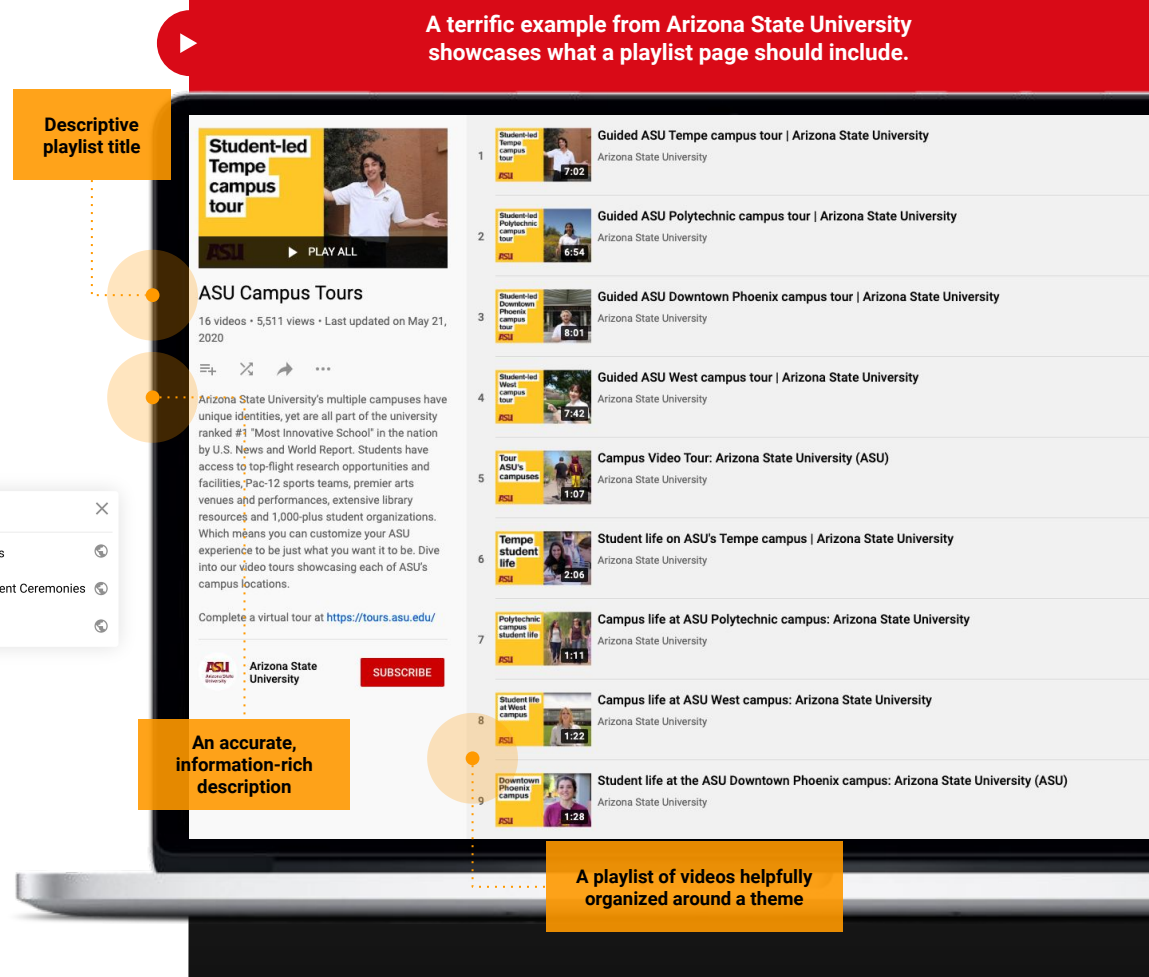


Descriptive  
playlist title

An accurate,  
information-rich  
description

A playlist of videos helpfully  
organized around a theme

A terrific example from Arizona State University  
showcases what a playlist page should include.



## CONTENT CURATION

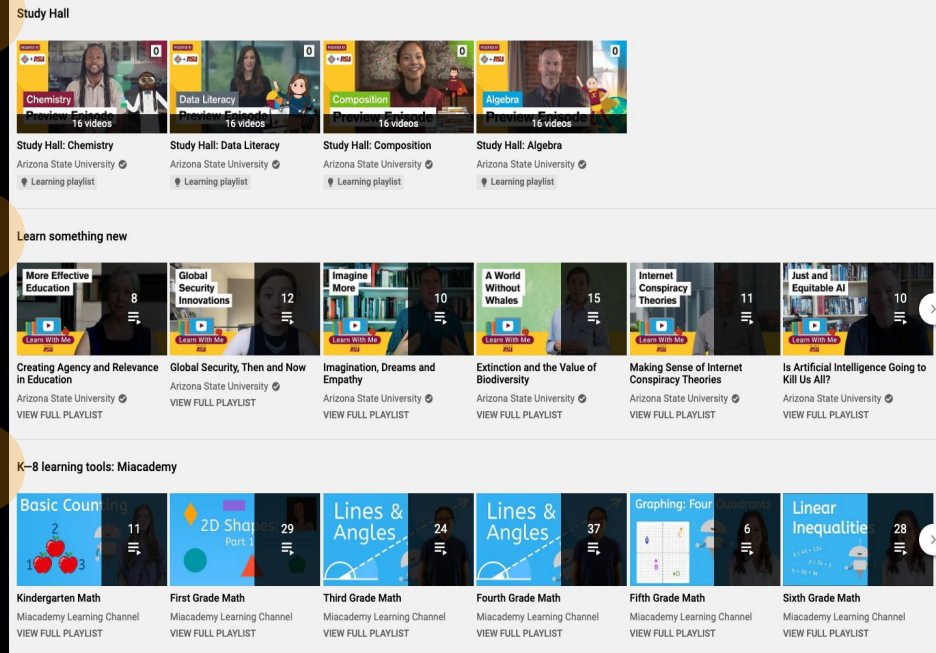
# Sharing Playlists

Once you've created your curated playlists, it's time to share them on your channel! Here's how to do so using channel sections.

1. While logged into your channel account, go to your channel (e.g., youtube.com/MySchoolName)
2. Click **CUSTOMIZE CHANNEL**
3. Click **ADD A SECTION**
4. Click **SELECT CONTENT -> PLAYLISTS**
5. Click **SINGLE PLAYLIST -> MY PLAYLISTS ->** the Playlist you'd like to share
6. Repeat and arrange as needed!

Channel Sections

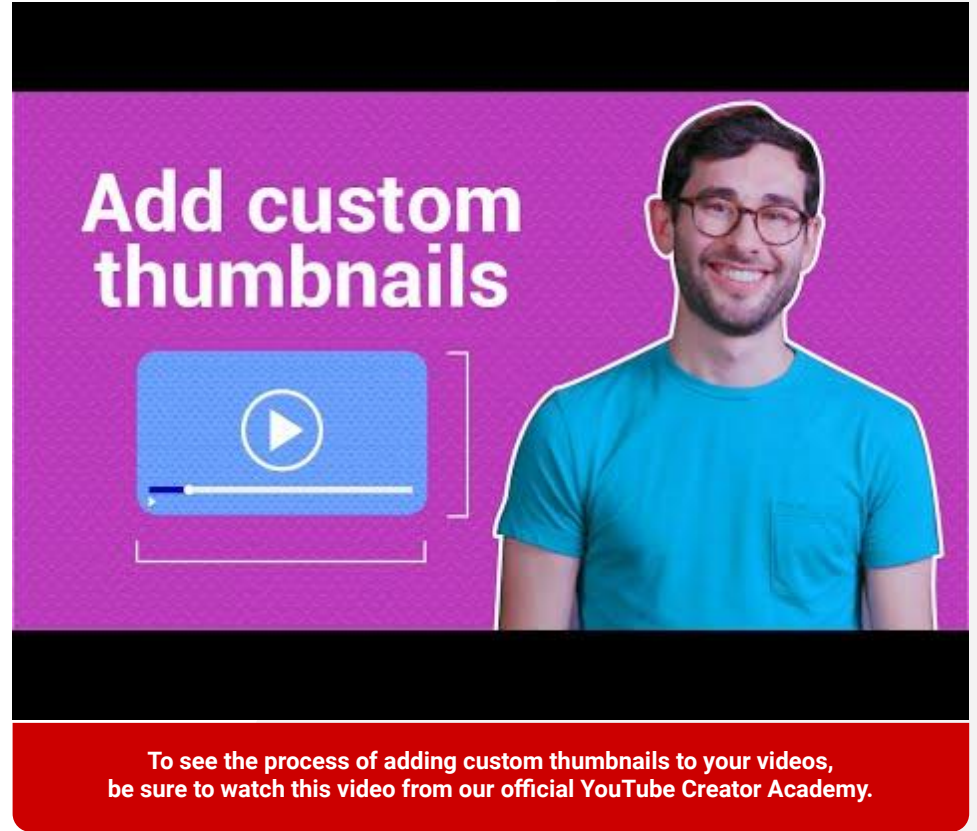
Arizona State University's channel page does a great job using channel sections to feature playlists of content they created, as well as relevant content made by others.



## 4. Title & Thumbnail Best Practices

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Thumbnails and titles can make all the difference in a viewer's decision to watch your videos on YouTube. Let's explore some best practices for both.



To see the process of adding custom thumbnails to your videos, be sure to watch this video from our official YouTube Creator Academy.





# Create Effective Titles

Titles (and thumbnails) act as a billboard for your videos. Here's how to optimize yours.

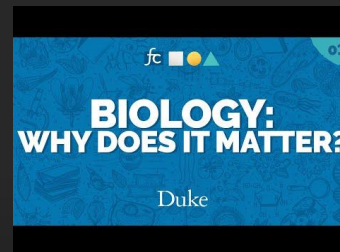
- **Be accurate.** Make sure your title is a true representation of the video. Otherwise, viewers are likely to click on your video, realize it's not what they thought, and quickly click away.
- **Be concise.** Your titles essentially allow you to provide a one line description of your video. While YouTube allows longer titles, try keeping yours under 70 characters with the most important words at the front.
- **Be searchable.** When possible, include search-friendly keywords in your title. This can help you capitalize on pre-existing interest of users looking for particular topics (e.g. student life, admissions, etc.).



The titles of the videos below showcase three important components of effective titles.



**WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY:**  
How to Apply to WVU



**DUKE UNIVERSITY:**  
Why Biology Matters |  
Fundamental Concepts



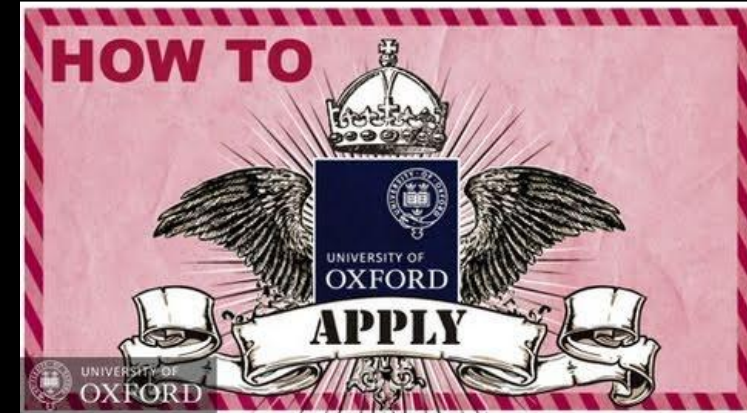
**CENTENNIAL COLLEGE:**  
Returning to Campus



## Create Effective Thumbnails

Thumbnails are the images that show up when people search on YouTube. Think of them as a snapshot that gives viewers visual indication of what your video is about.

- **Think mobile-first.** You'll likely receive a large share of your traffic from users on mobile devices, so make sure your thumbnails are readable and "pop" even when shrunk down.
- **Strive for brand consistency.** Using recurring elements such as custom thumbnail templates or brand color palettes can help viewers quickly distinguish your videos from others.
- **Consider the topic and audience.** Who is your video targeting? For instance, imagine you've created a video about a robot built by students in your undergrad engineering program. If that video were aimed at prospective students, you may want the thumbnail to include students' faces as well as the robot. But if that video were instead targeting more general audiences, it may be better to focus on the robot more exclusively.
- **Plan ahead.** While stills from the video itself can work, taking time during the production process to stage and shoot a custom thumbnail for each video is often the better option.



## 5. Section Q&A

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Let's explore some common questions related to the **YouTube 101** topics we just covered.





## Questions & Answers

# About Choosing Your Content

### What types of content are people looking for from universities?

- As we'll explore in **YouTube 201: Content Planning**, the types of content depends on the types of people.

### What types of content should we create to help inform and inspire a prospective student?

- For this particular audience, we've often seen universities have success with the formats listed below. (Remember, you can create these videos on your own and/or create playlists of these types of content from other channels!)
- acceptance / scholarship surprise reactions
- application guidance
- campus tours
- day in the life vlogs
- dorm tours
- mock interviews (especially for post-graduate students)
- student testimonials
- **And other similar content!**

It's vital to **build your content around a spirit of inclusion**, so be sure to feature people of differing backgrounds, perspectives, and cultures, including those that may be marginalized or underrepresented. To **avoid tokenism**, it's equally important to build inclusive content *regularly*, not just during one-off moments (e.g., Black History Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month).





## Questions & Answers

# About YouTube Videos

### How “produced” should our videos be?

- You always want to tailor your videos and their style (including how “produced” they seem) around the videos’ specific target audience and goals. For more, check out **YouTube 201: Content Production**.

### What is the right video length?

- Content of essentially any length can succeed on YouTube! The important thing is not how long the video lasts, but that it’s engaging all the way through. Dive deeper into video length questions with [this video from YouTube Creator Academy, “How Long Should Your Videos Be?”](#)





## Questions & Answers

# About YouTube Contacts & Qualifications

### We want to build up our channel. Who can we reach out to at YouTube for guidance?

- That's great! The best way to reach the right party at YouTube is to fill out [this Google Form](#).

### How can we monetize our content?

- To monetize on YouTube, you'll need to apply for the YouTube Partner Program (YPP). [Learn more here](#).

### How do we register our channel as a nonprofit?

- Unfortunately, schools, academic institutions, and/or universities are not eligible for our [Google for Nonprofits](#) program. However, if you are a 501(c)(3), please feel free to fill out [this Google Form](#) (also linked above) and indicate as such. After we review your request, we can classify your channel in a way that enables features best suited to such organizations.



Intermediate

# YouTube 201





# YouTube **201** Lesson Plan

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Please note that these best practices are tips to guide you that we have gathered from what has worked on the platform, but they are not a guarantee for success.

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**Overview**

2

**Content Planning**

3

**Content Production**

4

**Content Publishing**

5

**Engaging Your YouTube Community**

6

**Q&A**

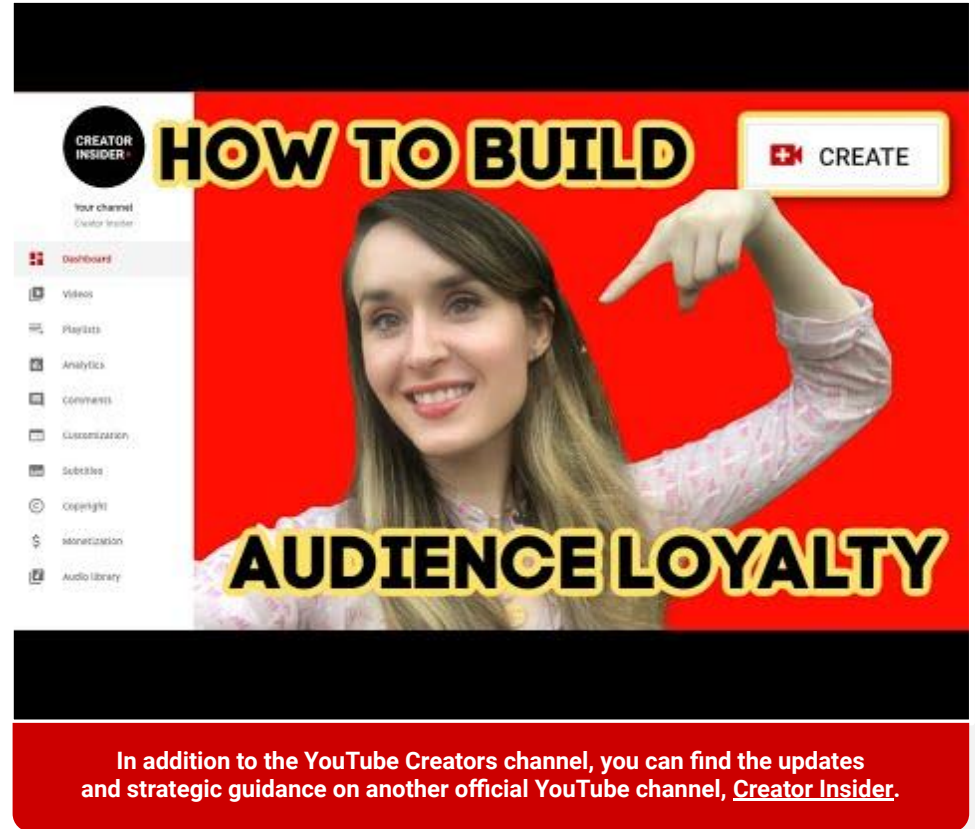




# 1. Overview

The aim of **YouTube 201** is to empower you to do incredible things on the platform and avoid a misstep higher education institutions too often make: using YouTube only as a clip repository for all video content.

By digging in and applying **YouTube 201**'s recommendations, you'll be equipped to **plan, produce, and publish** content in a purposeful way that not only engages YouTube audiences but also ultimately serves your institution's greater goals!



In addition to the YouTube Creators channel, you can find the updates and strategic guidance on another official YouTube channel, [Creator Insider](#).



## 2. Content Planning

Building a successful YouTube channel is often the result of creating a thoughtful, purposeful plan for reaching your goals. In this section, we'll explore how to make your own plan through three main avenues.

- **Begin With Big Questions**
- **Know Your YouTube Formats**
- **Program With Purpose**



We'll discuss more about making the most of your YouTube presence as a whole in YouTube 301. For now, note that all YouTube 201 principles will ideally be applied not just to your institution's main channel, but also to any YouTube channel associated with your institution.



# Begin With Big Questions

## Big Question #1: *Who am I trying to reach?*

- **Why is identifying your target audience so important?**  
Essentially, your target audience is your North Star. Knowing who specifically you're trying to reach can inform every decision you make on YouTube, from content style to publication schedule.
- **There's no "right" answer.** It's much more about who you specifically want to reach with your channel. Examples of an institution's target audience could include **prospective students, your local community, the general public, media, and alumni.**
- **Try to narrow it down.** Though you may have multiple audiences, try to focus on the one or two most important to you. The more specific your answer, the more effective your institution will be at finding viewers, understanding what content to make, and measuring progress toward your goals!

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR ALUMNI FAMILY



# Begin With Big Questions

## Big Question #2: *Why am I trying to reach them?*

- **Think of it this way: In an ideal world, what outcome do you want to achieve on YouTube?** Examples could include boosting applications, giving your school's sports fans an insider look, or making announcements to your alumni community.
- **Why? goes hand in hand with Who?**
  - For instance, imagine **your target audience is prospective students; your Why (or goal) is to boost applications**. These parameters suggest a particular strategy: You could use your resources to publish videos at the time of year when students are mulling college choices, with topics such as student life or how to write great admissions essays.
  - On the other hand, imagine that your **YouTube goal is reputation management**. In this case, **your target audience is likely the general public and/or media**, and you may want to use your content to showcase your faculty's latest achievements.



## Schedule Strategically

The "right" publishing schedule is the one aligned with your goals and resources.

For instance, if your goal is to make your school's lectures available to viewers worldwide, you may upload several times a week. But if it's to persuade prospective students to apply, you might publish fewer videos around specific, high-impact times of year.

No matter your upload cadence, it's important to communicate your schedule to your audience and stick to it. Here are some additional general guidelines to consider.

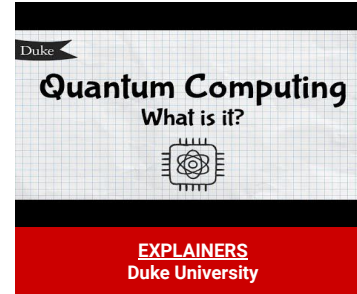
- **How many releases can you commit to per week/month?** Is this sustainable over the long term?
- **Will your release schedule rotate based on content type?** (e.g., Tuesday = Student Spotlight; Thursday = Professor Interview)
- **Can you link content to specific days of the week?** (e.g., Med Student Mondays, Live Stream Fridays)
- **Are there any major events you can plan content around?** (e.g., International Women's Day, college admissions deadlines, holiday season)





# Know Your YouTube Formats

Especially early in your YouTube journey, consider leaning into existing formats that online audiences already know. Below are a few of the popular formats you can put to work to serve your YouTube goals.



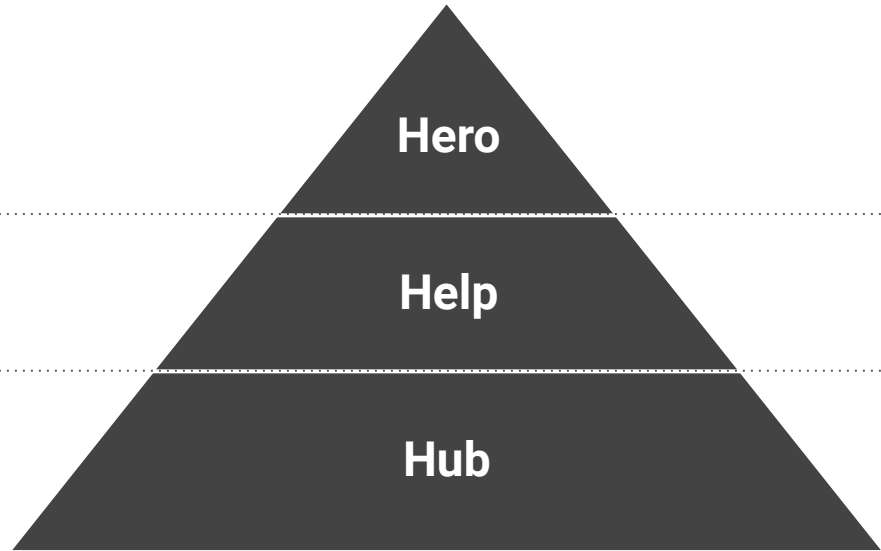
**Bonus Tip:** In addition to using these formats for future content, consider how you can repackage content you already have in new, more YouTube-appealing ways!



## Program With Purpose

When programming your channel, always think about the intended audience, goals, and scope of each video.

A great place to start this process is bucketing your videos across three content categories: **Hero, Help, and Hub.**





What *your* Hero Content might look like will depend on your goals and intended audience on YouTube. Below are a few different examples.

# Hero Content

**Hero Content** provides a moment of significant visibility for your content, perhaps converting a large amount of casual viewers into long-term subscribers.

- **Audience:** Hero Content attempts to cast as wide a net as possible and be accessible to viewers who may be unfamiliar with your organization or content
- **Content:** Mass appeal topics that lean may into increased interest in the general public at a particular time (e.g., a remarkable commencement speech, March Madness, explaining a recent major medical breakthrough)
- **Frequency:** Rare. Usually built around a major event, moment, or idea



**INTENDED AUDIENCE:** Media and general public

**GOAL:** Showcase the school's latest amazing scientific breakthrough to highlight their cutting-edge work

"Cassie - Next Generation Robot"  
Oregon State University

**INTENDED AUDIENCE:** Appeals to general public, but especially prospective and current students

**GOAL:** Use popular "Celebrities Read Mean Tweets" format to increase awareness and affinity for the university



"UL Lafayette Profs Read Rate My Professors Reviews"  
by University of Louisiana at Lafayette







What *your* Help Content might look like will depend on your goals and intended audience on YouTube. Below are a few different examples.

# Help Content

**Help Content** provides evergreen videos that continuously gain viewership and convert subscribers at a steady rate.

- **Audience:** Targeted, largely determined by the video topic. Typically this can appeal to viewers who would not normally engage with your channel
- **Content:** Evergreen topics targeted towards specific questions or areas (e.g., College Essay Tips, How To Remember The Pythagorean Theorem, Dorms & Resident Advisors Explained)
- **Frequency:** More often than Hero, less often than Hub



**INTENDED AUDIENCE:**  
Business students, lifelong learners, entrepreneurs

**GOAL:**  
Provide expert advice on how to create a business plan, showcase faculty expertise

"Entrepreneurship Series - Business Plan Writing 101"  
Wharton School

**INTENDED AUDIENCE:**  
Prospective students

**GOAL:**  
Assist interested students and boost applications



"How to Apply to College in Ontario"  
Centennial College





What your Hub Content might look like will depend on your goals and intended audience on YouTube. Below are a few different examples.

# Hub Content

**Hub Content** keeps your audience coming back with steady, consistent content that appeals to their expectations and desires. Secondly, it provides a bank of content for new viewers to explore after subscribing.

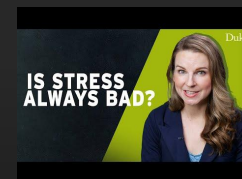
- **Audience:** Your existing subscriber base, plus viewers who've been watching but haven't subscribed
- **Content:** Sustainable, targeted content that appeals directly to your subscribers' tastes and expectations. (Lean into those sustainable formats!)
- **Frequency:** Your regular chosen cadence. Think of Hub Content as your channel's "bread and butter"



**INTENDED AUDIENCE:**  
Current and incoming students

**GOAL:**  
Update new and returning students on the latest relevant information about the campus

"What to expect on Carolina's campus for Fall 2020"  
UNC-Chapel Hill



"Extra Credit" series, Duke University

**INTENDED AUDIENCE:** Lifelong learners

**GOAL:** Use "Extra Credits" format to provide educational information from expert academics to audiences worldwide





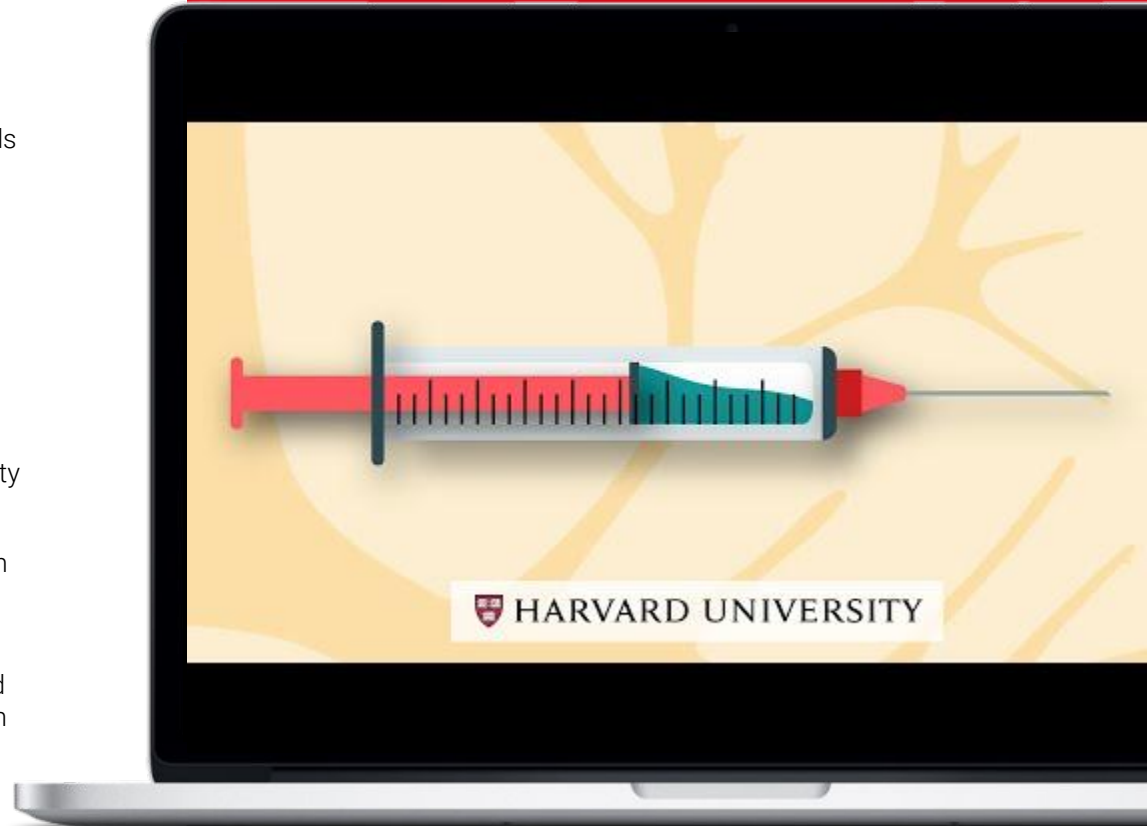
As COVID-19 vaccines became available to the public, Harvard University published this video educating viewers on how mRNA vaccines work.

## Lean Into Current Events

In addition to having a consistent channel strategy, creating content that engages with emerging news and YouTube trends can represent an opportunity to gain a moment of increased visibility for your channel and institution.

If this type of content will align with your goals, remember to:

- **Be timely.** News cycles and YouTube trends move at an incredible rate, so engage with them while they're still fresh.
- **Be accurate.** That said, don't take research and fact-checking shortcuts that could impinge your credibility in the long run.
- **Be creative.** Don't be afraid to use your unique spin when creating content. Not only will your content feel fresh, it will also stand out among the noise.
- **Don't be modest!** Especially if your institution or featured faculty are experts in the area, feel free to mention that in the video!



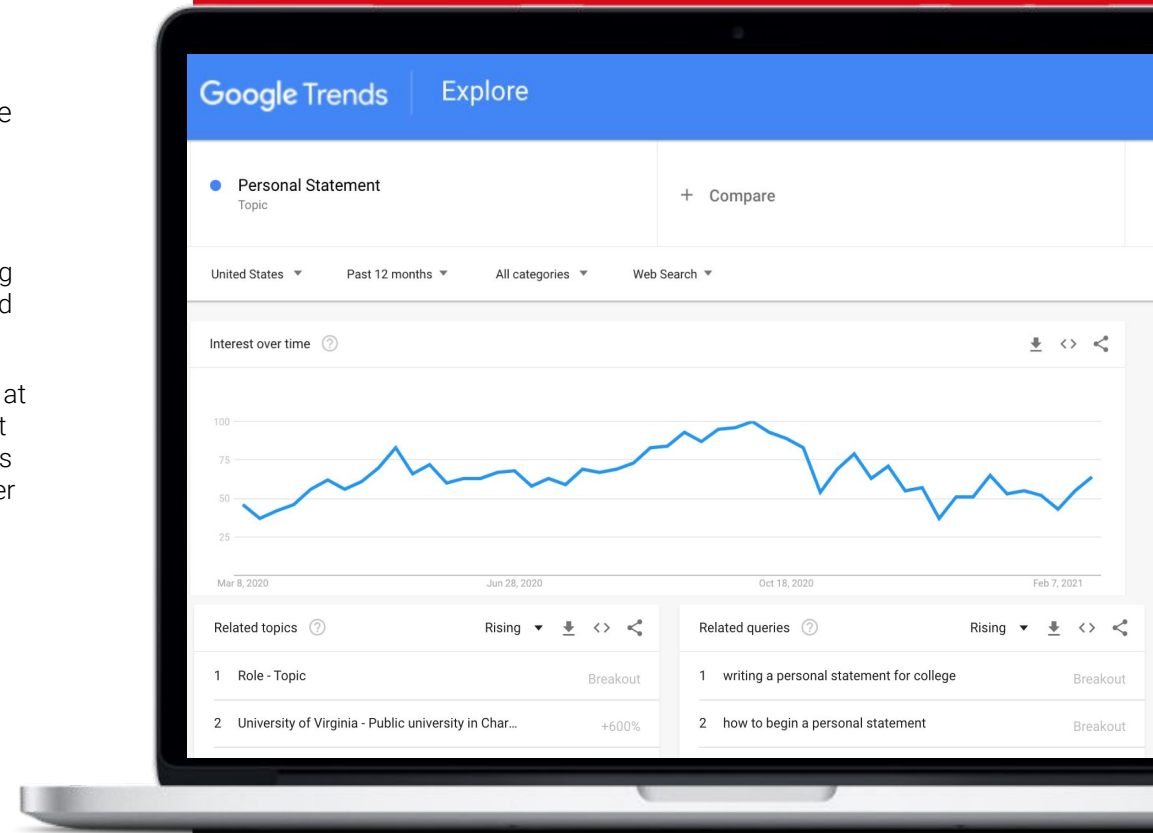


**Google Trends** is a powerful tool that allows you to see the relative popularity of specific search terms over time, compare them to others, and find related queries.

# Lean Into Audience Data

Unsure about what topics to cover in your content? Here are some ways you can use data to help guide you!

- **Google Trends.** Google Trends allows you to track the popularity of various search terms by time period and geography, and see related searches. Consider searching the name of your organization and then reviewing related queries for additional insight into future video ideas.
- **YouTube Analytics.** Within YouTube Studio, take a look at Traffic Sources > YouTube Search, where you'll find what terms viewers are using to find you. If a particular term is especially popular, consider how you might create further relevant content. (We'll explore Analytics further in **YouTube 301**.)



### 3. Content Production

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You don't need big budgets and fancy equipment to make great content. In this section, we'll explore best practices for producing amazing videos for YouTube, in three ways.

- **Make the most of production (and post-production!)**
- **Keep YouTube viewers engaged**
- **Connect with audiences**





Florida State University regularly uses green screens for their videos, giving them the freedom to easily insert varying backdrops and other elements in post-production.

# Make The Most Of Production

Creating videos takes time and resources, so it's always smart to try to maximize your output.

- **Batch shoot.** Whenever possible, get multiple videos out of each shoot you do. For instance, if you're interviewing experts within your organization, is it possible to schedule two or more in the same day? As for scripted videos, consider using formats that lend themselves to batch shooting, such as [West Virginia University's series with University President E. Gordon Gee, Gee Mail.](#)
- **Get resourceful with your footage.** Imagine you've filmed Campus Career Day. You likely captured compelling moments that won't fit into a single video. Rather than abandoning them, think about how you can use them in other videos!
- **Use a green screen.** Portable and simple to use, filming in front of a green screen allows you tremendous flexibility to custom backgrounds, animations, and more in post-production. Click [here](#) for tips for using a green screen!



## Make The Most Of Post-Production

Video editing isn't a mere stepping stone toward publication: It's a creative opportunity to make your videos even better!

- **Use big, bright visuals and text.** Make sure everything “pops” and is easily readable on a small screen.
- **Lean into graphics and b-roll.** Whether full animation, circle and arrow graphics to emphasize key visuals, or even “stock footage” to accompany and illustrate voiceover, using different visuals is a powerful tool for keeping viewers' attention.
- **Use background music.** This can give your content greater energy. Visit [YouTube's free music library](#) to get started.



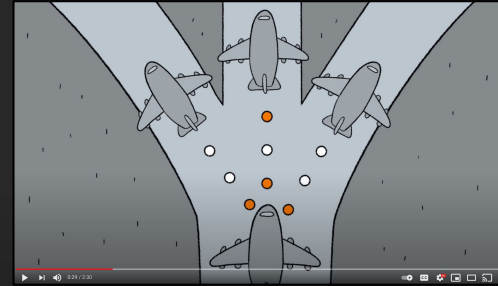
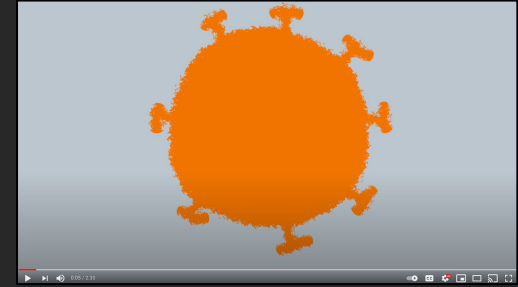


# Keep YouTube Viewers Engaged

With 500+ hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute, it's vital that your content is engaging from beginning to end. Let's learn from a fantastic Stanford Medicine video, [Global COVID-19 Prevention](#).

- **An opening hook.** Don't start with logos or branding. Rather, quickly give your audience a reason to stay, as Stanford Medicine does here by showing the speed with which COVID-19 can spread during everyday activities.
- **Multiple twists and peaks.** While traditional narrative structure dictates slowly rising action toward a single peak, on YouTube it's often better to feature fairly *frequent* twists and *several* peaks.
- **Finally, the payoff.** This is where you'll provide the audience with what your title and thumbnail promised them.
- **Remember, no time in a video should be wasted!** If viewers feel a video isn't what they thought or is taking too long, they'll move on to something else.

**Hook.** The video immediately jumps into an illustration of the virus, which also introduces the orange color that will represent the virus's presence throughout.



**Twists.** The first of several twists comes with a visualization of varying ways individuals' actions can inadvertently hasten transmission of the virus.



**Payoff.** A stirring concluding segment that summarizes the actions viewers can take to slow the spread of COVID-19 and reminds us that we are stronger together.







This video from Virginia Tech's Athletics channel of a student being surprised with a college scholarship exemplifies how touching and effective "personal content" can be.

## Connect With Audiences

YouTube is not TV. Audiences want to feel connected to the content they watch, which can be accomplished in a few ways.

- **Don't "sell."** YouTube is all about providing authentic value. Rather than approaching your content as mere commercials, think instead about how you can reframe it and provide value to your audience.
- **Present your content in ways YouTube audiences already love.** This is where the formats we discussed earlier come in handy! As an example, instead of simply interviewing a business professor about their research, could you work with them to frame that research in a list-based video like "5 Reasons Sony Is Betting Big On Playstation 5"?
- **Personal content is often best.** Stories about specific individuals or communities are a powerful way to foster a sense of connection between viewers and your organization. For instance, while there will always be a place for big-budget videos about college sports, why not also showcase what goes into preparing for the big game with the day-in-the-life journey of a groundskeeper prepping the field?
- **Imperfections can be your friend.** While it may seem counterintuitive, don't be afraid to keep your videos a little rough around the edges. This can humanize your institution and make it feel more approachable.





## Questions & Answers

# About Producing Your YouTube Content

### Who should be the production and management team for our channel?

- **For production**, the ideal is that the person(s) leading the creative aspects understand (or are willing to learn) not just how to make good videos, but how to make good *YouTube* videos that resonate on the platform.
- **For management**, institutions' main channels are often managed by PR, Marketing, and/or Social Media teams. Additionally, some individual school departments ([Engineering](#), [Medicine](#), etc.) have found success running their own, niche-focused channels.

Whatever your institution chooses, take care to ensure that 1) there's a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, and 2) each channel applies the principles explored in **YouTube 201: Content Planning**, perhaps especially **Begin With Big Questions**.

### Who should be the talent on our channel?

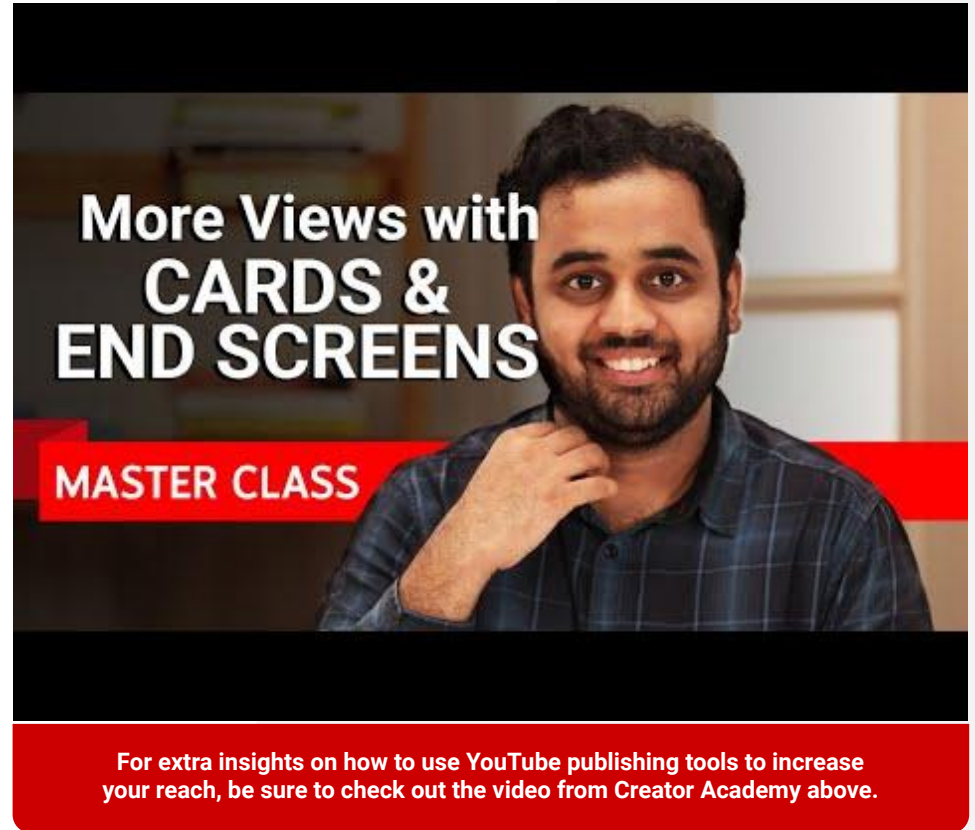
- Once you've decided who you want to reach and why you want to reach them, a good general rule is to choose your on-camera talent based on what kind of person would 1) be the most likely to convey your message with sincerity and credibility, and 2) be able to connect with viewers in an authentic way. Additionally, endeavor to be inclusive and utilize talent from diverse backgrounds. Please see our [Creating Inclusive Content](#) Creator Academy lesson for more on this important topic.



## 4. Content Publishing

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With great content in hand, it's time to discuss some best practices for making sure it gets to as many relevant viewers as possible.



# Give Viewers Somewhere To Go

End screens give you the opportunity to extend engagement on your channel by directing viewers to up to four different elements during the last 20 seconds of your video.

- **Maximize impact.** End screens can be paired with an in-video “end card” that visually houses links and features a call-to-action directing viewers to additional videos and to “like, share, and subscribe.”
- **Use YouTube cards.** Cards are notifications that appear in the top right corner of your videos. Try pairing cards with relevant moments in your video. For instance, if you mention a collaborator, have a card linking to their channel appear at the same time.
- **Choose thoughtfully.** End screens are most successful when they give your viewers something relevant to watch. Consider using them to drive traffic between episodes of your formats or series.



# Utilize Cross Promotion

Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram can provide unique promotional opportunities, as well as access to existing audiences.

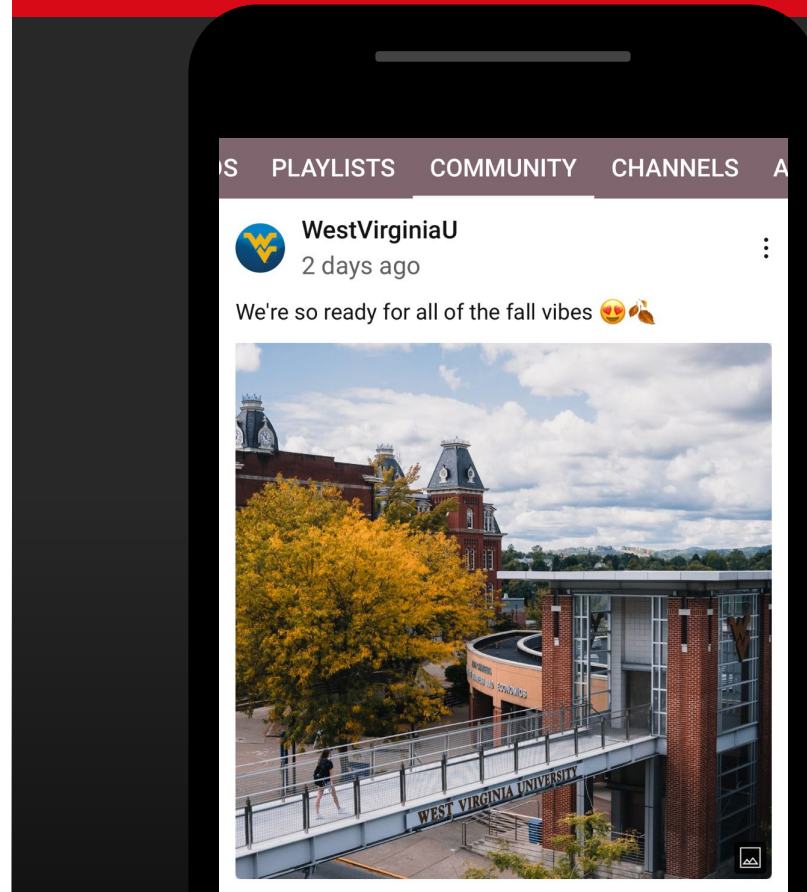
- **Features are your friends.** Lean into promotional features on platforms like Snapchat and Instagram. For instance, “**swipe up**” is a great way to ensure that non-YouTube audiences can quickly make their way to your content, while **polls** allow you to ask your followers what kind of content they’d most like to see on your channel.
- **Go beyond trailers and montages.** Incentivize viewers by linking content across your social platforms.
- **Calls-to-Action are key.** While promotional clips or trailers of your YouTube content can be effective, posting videos where you speak directly to your audience is one of the best ways to motivate them to check out new content.



## 5. Engaging Your YouTube Community

As you think about the best strategy for your institution to interact with viewers on YouTube, keep the following in mind.

- **Have a game plan.** While there's room for flexibility down the line, it's a good idea to be clear about how much direct interaction with viewers (through Comments, etc.) you'd like to commit to.
- **Keep it positive.** To make sure the focus stays on the video, consider what [Comment Settings](#) you'd like to use, particularly when speaking about sensitive topics or live streaming.
- **Keep it interactive.** For many institutions, speaking directly to the audience to ask what else they'd like to see on the channel is a great idea.
- **Cultivate community.** Outside of Comments, features like Shorts, Stories, and Community are a great way to maintain consistent, lightweight engagement.



## 6. Section Q&A

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Let's explore some common questions related to **YouTube 201** topics.





## Questions & Answers

# About Students

### Should students be highlighted on our channel? How is this usually done?

- If it aligns with your institution's YouTube goals, highlighting students can be a wonderful way to build affinity with your school for many viewers, including prospective students. As covered earlier, always endeavor to be inclusive and utilize talent from diverse backgrounds.
- As for how it's usually done, there isn't necessarily a definitive status quo, so feel free to experiment! Some examples include: [Day In The Life](#), [Student Spotlights](#), and [Campus Tours](#).

### How should we manage student athlete creators in light of changes regarding NIL (Name, Image and Likeness)?

- These questions are best directed to your school's legal counsel.







## Questions & Answers

# About Comments

### What are best practices for comments?

- Your particular goals should guide how interactive you'll be in the comments section. Here are a few tips.
  1. **Focus on sustainability.** How often can you engage with or reply to comments in the long term?
  2. **Establish clear roles and responsibilities.** Though it may change over time, it's important to assign comment duties to a specific person or team who can write in your brand voice.
  3. **Use comments for engagement and inspiration.** For instance, you might solicit audience comments by ending your videos with a specific prompt ("What are *your* favorite college sports memories?") and/or by asking what questions viewers would like answered in a future video.

### How do we handle negative comments?

- While YouTube comments can be a wonderful tool for connection, you may occasionally receive unpleasant comments. To keep your comment section a positive experience, consider the tips below.
  1. **Utilize Comment Settings.** This feature found in YouTube Studio allows you to streamline your comment moderation experience.
  2. **If comments are hurtful or abusive,** delete and/or ignore them. Read [this Creator Academy lesson](#) for more on handling such comments.
  3. **When appropriate, take action.** If you have the ability to clarify or rectify an issue raised in a negative comment, it may be worth directing the commenter to more accurate information and/or the appropriate department that could help resolve their issue.





## Questions & Answers

# About Channel Growth

### What are best practices to get subscribers, and what is the value of subscribers?

- **Lean into what's already working for you.** In YouTube Studio, look at which videos are driving the most subscribers to your channel. (You can find this in Analytics > Advanced Mode > Subscription Source.) Are there commonalities among the videos? If so, how can you create additional content that plays to those strengths?
- **Use verbal calls-to-action and clear value propositions.** Tell audiences to subscribe and tell them why (e.g., "Subscribe for more YouTube 301 videos every week").
- **Use end screens and cards.**

Subscribers tend to spend more time watching your channel than viewers who aren't subscribed—and if they have Notifications turned on, they'll be alerted when you post something new. They can also view your newly published videos in their Subscriptions feed.

### We want to build up our channel. Who can we reach out to at YouTube for guidance?

- That's great! The best way to reach the right party at YouTube is to fill out [this Google Form](#).



Advanced

# YouTube 301





# YouTube **301** Lesson Plan

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Please note that these best practices are tips to guide you that we have gathered from what has worked on the platform, but they are not a guarantee for success.

1

**Overview**

2

**Understanding YouTube Search & Discovery**

3

**Understanding YouTube Analytics**

4

**Consider Collaborations**

5

**Case Studies**

6

**Q&A**

7

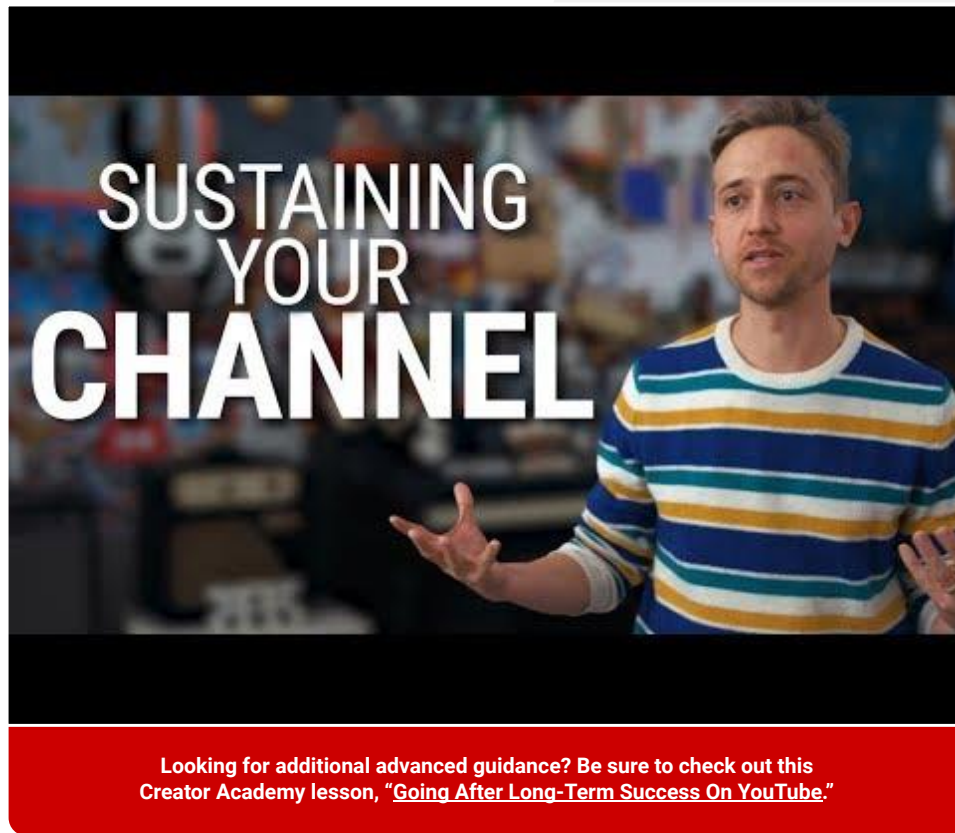
**Extra Credit**



# 1. Overview

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In **YouTube 301**, we'll be exploring advanced concepts and techniques for succeeding on YouTube, expanding your audience, and examining how other institutions have taken their YouTube presence to the next level.

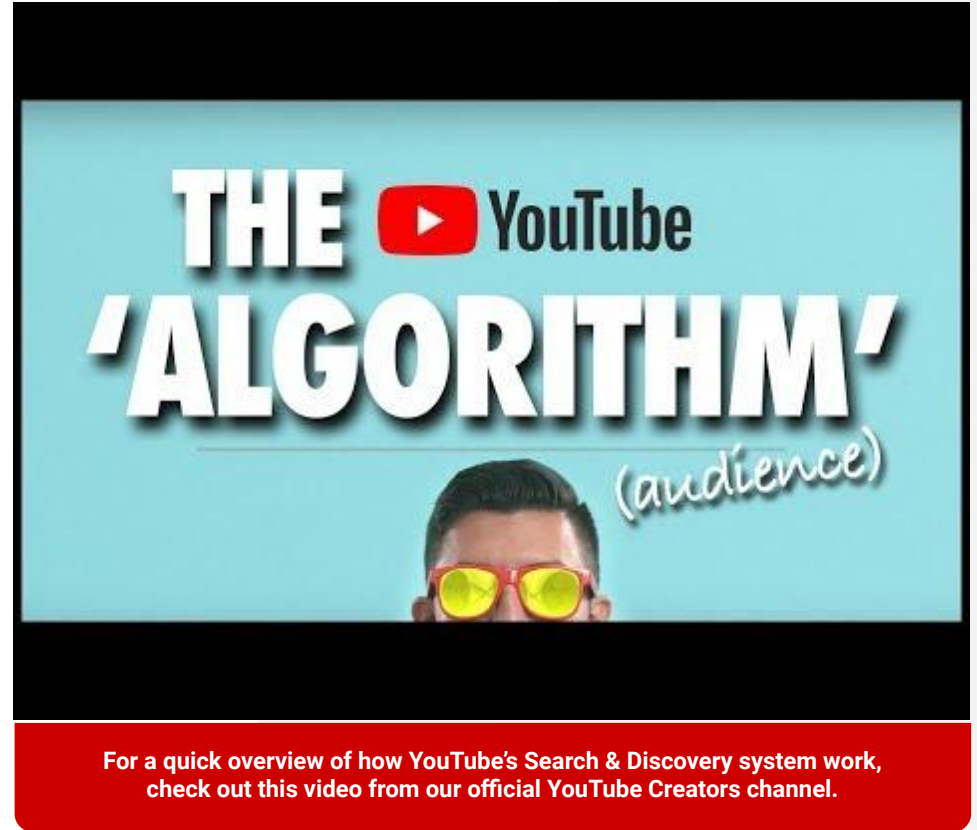


## 2. Understanding YouTube Search & Discovery (AKA Algorithm)

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We know creating great YouTube content can take a lot of time and resources, and it's important for you to understand how yours can get discovered.

So let's dive into how YouTube's Search & Discovery system (AKA algorithm) works, and how you can make it work better for you.



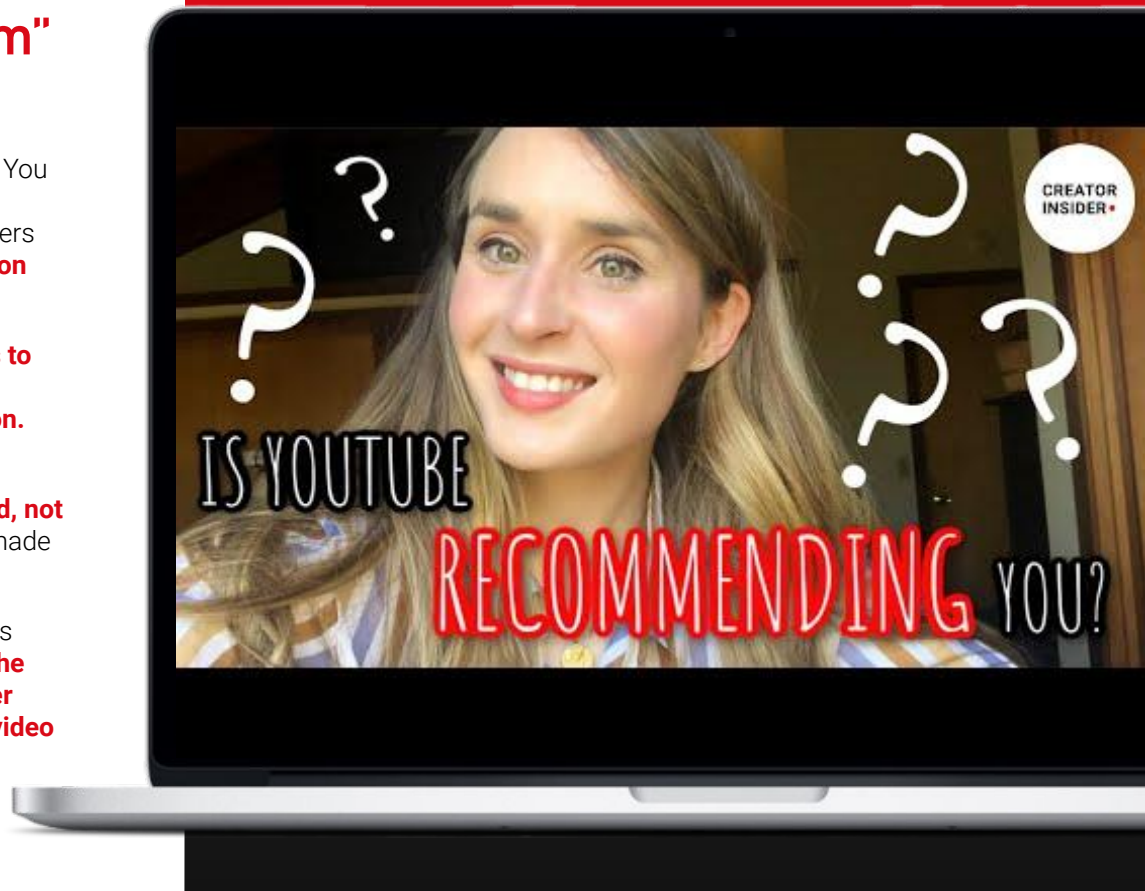


Our Creator Insider channel offers a wealth of content about advanced topics, such as this video about better understanding how your videos are getting discovered.

# Think “Audience,” Not “Algorithm”

Here are some foundational questions to get us started.

- **What is YouTube’s Search & Discovery (“S&D”) system?** You can think of it as the “engine” behind the scenes that determines what videos are surfaced and ranked for viewers across the YouTube platform. **Effectively, viewers arrive on YouTube and the system finds videos for them.**
- **What is the system’s goal?** It’s twofold: to **surface videos to viewers** we think that particular viewer will enjoy, and to **maximize long-term viewer engagement and satisfaction.**
- **How are decisions about what videos to surface made?** **Fundamentally, the algorithm follows the audience’s lead, not the other way around.** In other words, the decisions are made based on audience behavior.
- **What sort of audience behavior?** Remember, the system’s goal is to surface videos we think a viewer will love. **So the system primarily focuses on metrics that indicate viewer satisfaction such as likes and dislikes, how long into a video viewers tend to watch, and more.**





One important metric to consider is Audience Retention.  
For more information on how to improve yours, check out the video below.

## Listen To The ~~Algorithm~~ Audience

Many Creators wonder “what kind of content the algorithm prefers.” Rather than worrying what the algorithm “likes,” however, focus on what audiences like. If you do that and people watch, the algorithm will follow!

Here are some ways to “listen to audiences.”

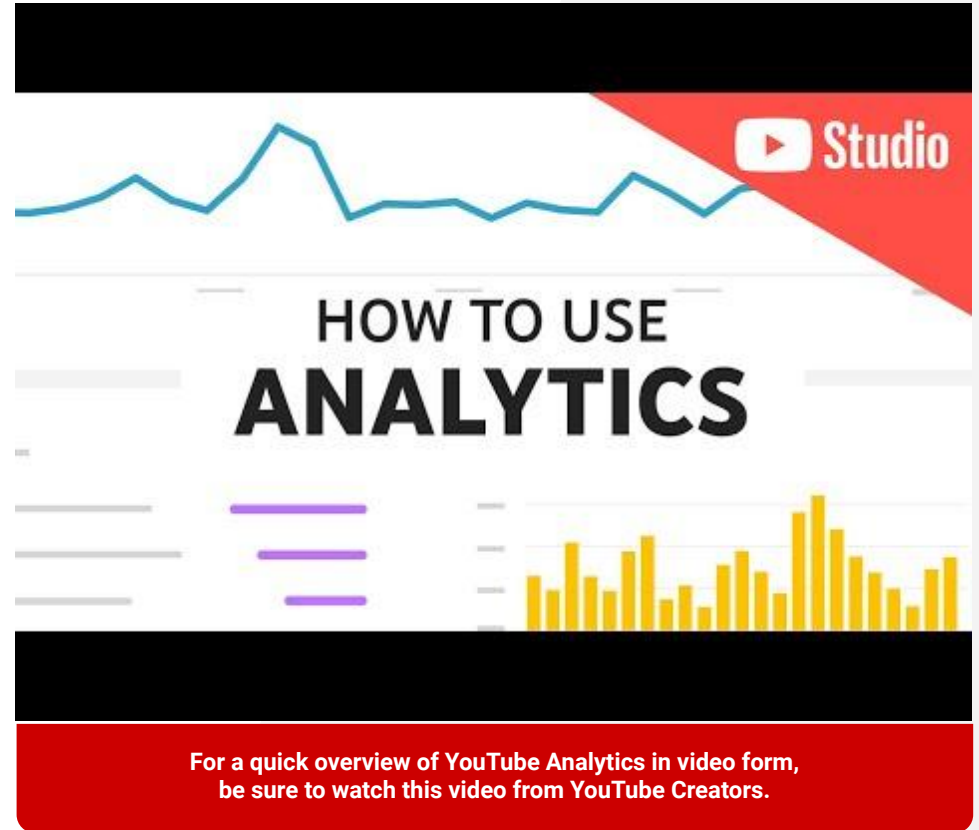
- **Study your content.** In Analytics, look at your channel's performance over the course of many months. Are there particular videos that overperformed or underperformed? Take note of commonalities. For instance, do most overperformers tend to be above or below a certain length? Do most underperformers have a certain style of thumbnail? These patterns can empower you to make changes accordingly!
- **Study other institutions' content (like those in [YouTube 301: Case Studies](#)).** Take a look at other institutions, particularly those whose content is excelling, and ask, Are they doing something different, exciting, or new? If so, how might you incorporate your own spin on it with new creative elements in future content?
- **Study YouTube.** We also recommend watching non-related content, too! YouTube is an incredibly dynamic space. So study high-quality content that's currently succeeding and take inspiration from it!





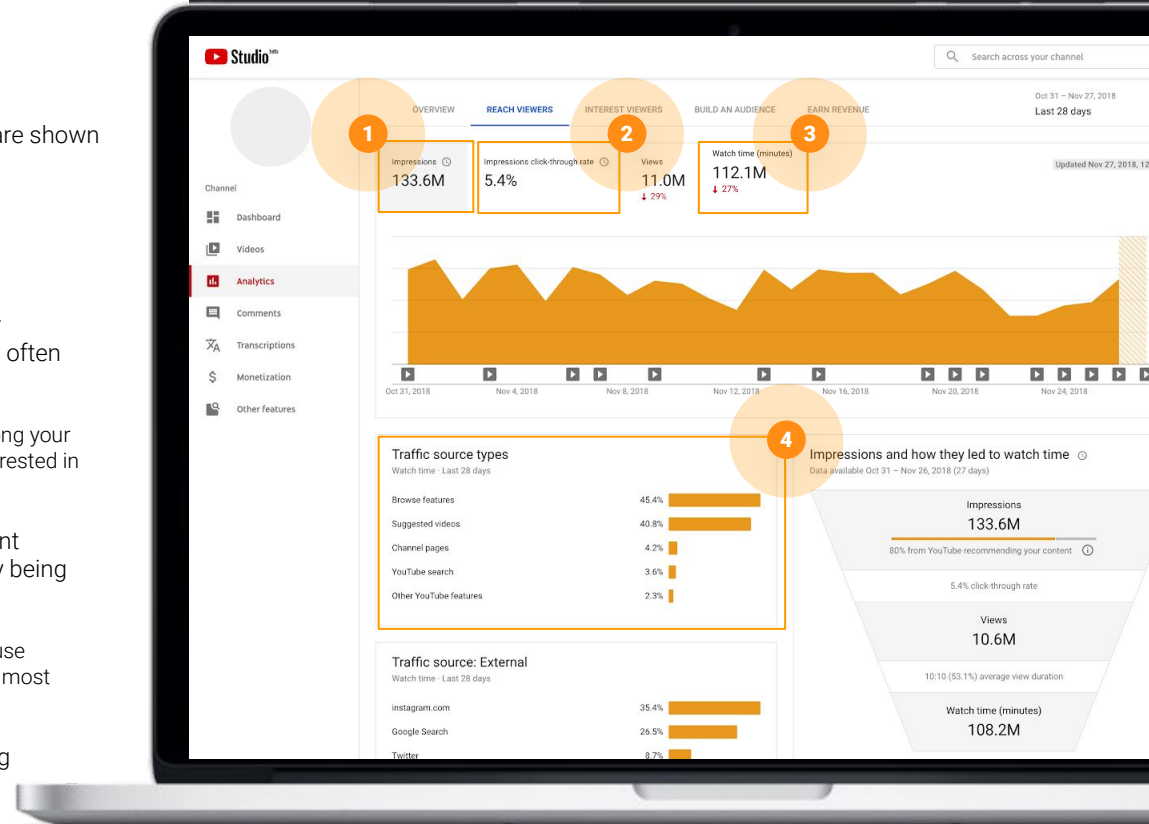
### 3. Understanding YouTube Analytics

Found in YouTube Studio, YouTube Analytics can be a powerful tool for growing your channel. While you may want to dive further into making the most of Analytics with resources like [this Creator Academy lesson](#), let's review a few of the most impactful metrics you can use right away.



# Viewership

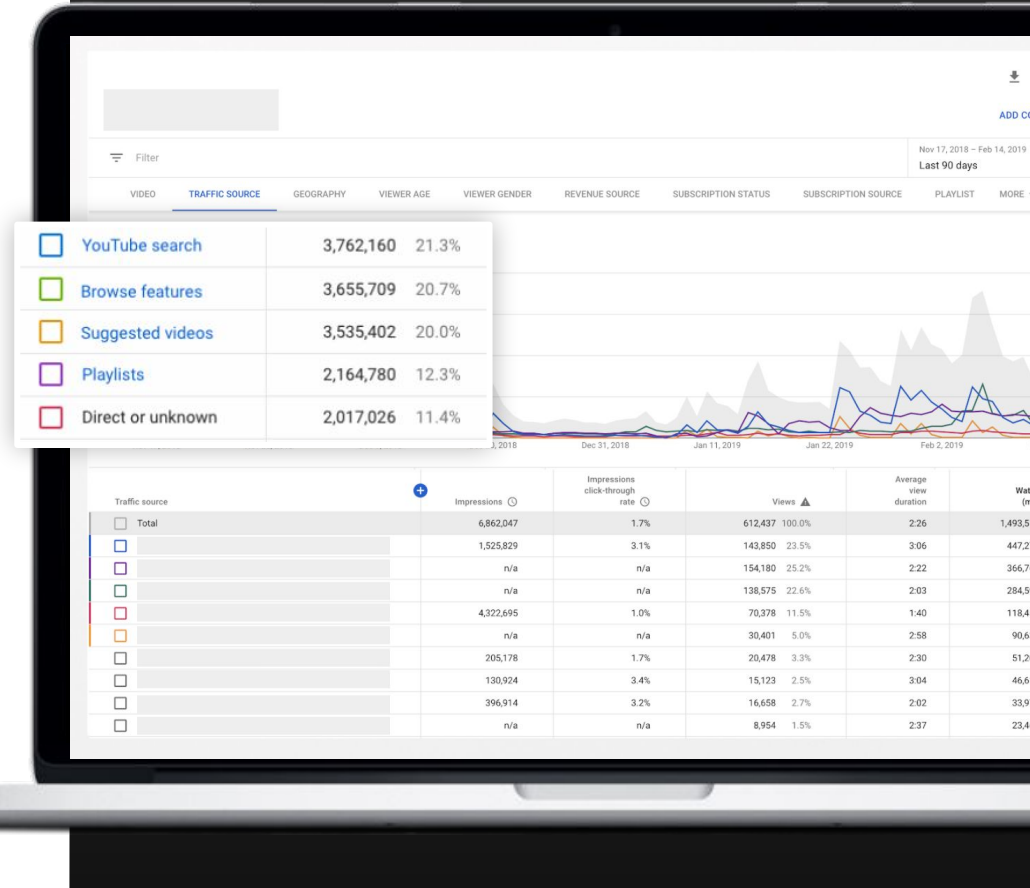
- Impressions** highlight how many times your video thumbnails are shown on YouTube. Think of Impressions as indicating the number of opportunities your content was given to earn a view.
  - TIP:** To increase Impressions, consider optimizing your titles with search-friendly keywords, as covered in **YouTube 101**.
- Click-through rate (“CTR”)** shows you what percentage of your impressions on YouTube turned into views. Put simply, it is how often viewers click on a video after seeing an Impression.
  - TIP:** To improve your click-through rate, look for commonalities among your videos with the highest CTRs. The audience is telling you they’re interested in content like that, so consider how you could make more like it!
- Watch Time** refers to the amount of time that viewers have spent watching your content and gives you a sense of what is actually being watched (as opposed to clicked on and then abandoned).
  - TIP:** If your CTR is strong but Watch Time is comparatively weaker, use Analytics > Engagement to see which moments viewers tend to find most engaging (“spikes”) and least engaging (“dips”).
- Traffic Sources** give you a sense of how viewers are discovering your content. You can click through to get an in-depth view of each source. See the next slide for more on Traffic Sources.



# Traffic Sources

**Traffic Sources** are the individual locations where viewers find your videos. Let's explore three major ones, what drives them, and how to optimize for each.

- **YouTube Search** looks at search queries that directed viewers to your content.
  - **What factors drive videos being surfaced on Search?** How well the title, description, and content match the user's query; and which videos have the strongest engagement for those queries.
  - **How can we boost Search traffic?** Optimize titles and video descriptions with keywords; and utilize data from Google Trends to capitalize on interest in seasonal trends. (More [here](#).)
- **Browse features** refers to traffic generated by Home, Trending, and Subscriptions feeds.
  - **What factors drive videos being surfaced on Browse?** Video performance (how well similar viewers enjoyed the video) and watch history (how often the viewer watched a similar video or topic).
  - **How can we boost our Browse traffic?** Use accurate and effective thumbnails and titles; stick to your programming schedule and inform viewers of changes; and lean into what's performing well for you.
- **Suggested videos** are shown to viewers beside and/or below the video they're currently watching, and/or as "Watch next" content.
  - **What factors drive videos being surfaced on Suggested?** Relevance (which videos are topically related), performance (which videos viewers of the current video also enjoyed), and a viewer's watch history.
  - **How can we boost our Suggested traffic?** Drive viewer attention using cards and end screens; lean into series content (since relevance is a factor); and make sure content jumps right into the action and fulfills the promise of the thumbnail and title.



## 4. Consider Collaborations

When done right, collaborations with endemic YouTube Creators can be a great way to get your content in front of established audiences who may be unfamiliar with your off-YouTube presence.



## Collaborate With YouTube Creators

Wondering who you might collaborate with? Here are some tips for choosing.

- **Start with your community.** If you're just starting out, consider pitching your collaboration ideas to alumni who have become YouTube Creators.
- **Choose thoughtfully.** The most popular creator on the platform may not be the best pick. Instead, focus your efforts on Creators who already have the audience you most want to reach (e.g., SciShow's audience of science enthusiasts). Additionally, this could be an opportunity to engage Creators from underrepresented backgrounds who are producing great content, but may not yet have the most substantial number of subscribers.
- **Consider what you uniquely offer to Creators.** Whether it's access to world class experts or groundbreaking technology, think about how you could supply opportunities Creators wouldn't have otherwise.
- **Create content for your collaborators' channel, too.** To fully capitalize on this powerful promotional opportunity, make sure you work with the Creator to make an amazing video they'll post on their channel as well.



## 5. Case Study

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Success leaves clues. That's why seeing others' success can be both an inspiration and an education.

Let's take a look at channels from different higher education institutions and explore how they've honed their particular approach to meet their YouTube goals.



## CASE STUDY

# Arizona State University

## Crafting a winning strategy & collaborating with YouTube creators

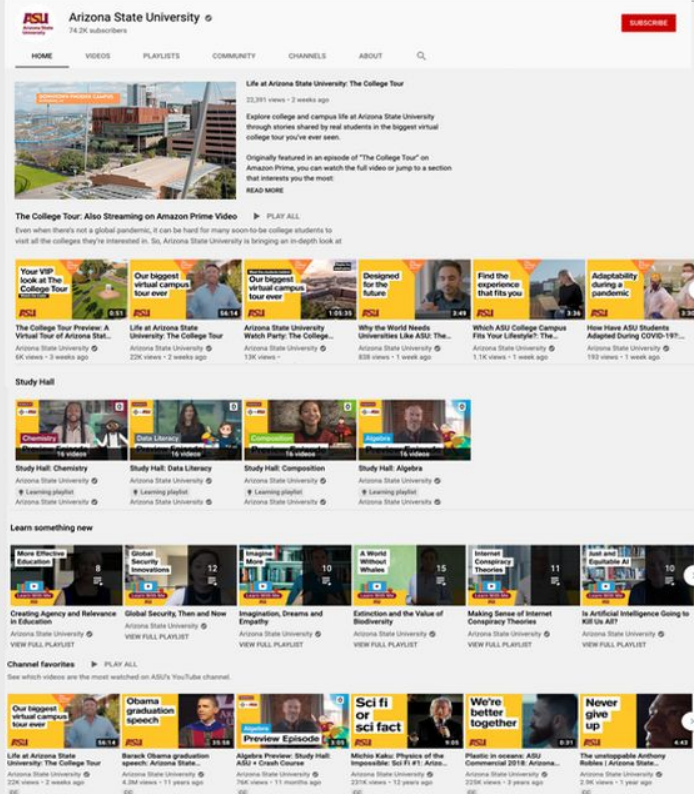
Arizona State University is an inspiration. In recent years, they've not only pivoted their channel from being a "promotional hub" to something far more thoughtful, organized, and impactful, but have also partnered with YouTube Creators to create incredible content and take their educational mission to learners around the world.

- **Branding.** Arizona State University utilizes attractive, consistent, and instantly recognizable thumbnails to set their videos apart from others.
- **Collaborations.** Study Hall, created in a trailblazing partnership with beloved [YouTube channel Crash Course](#), provides real educational value and burnishes ASU's reputation for innovation.
- **Highlights.** Through thoughtful use of playlists, ASU is able to quickly spotlight their channel's best offerings and establish their brand in viewers' minds.

The College Tour playlist placed prominently for easy discovery

Study Hall playlists, organized by topic

Channel Favorites playlist showcases videos ASU has purposely chosen that represent some of the best of their channel, regardless of the videos' age





## CASE STUDY

# Duke University

## Showcasing faculty & serving the public with YouTube-friendly educational content

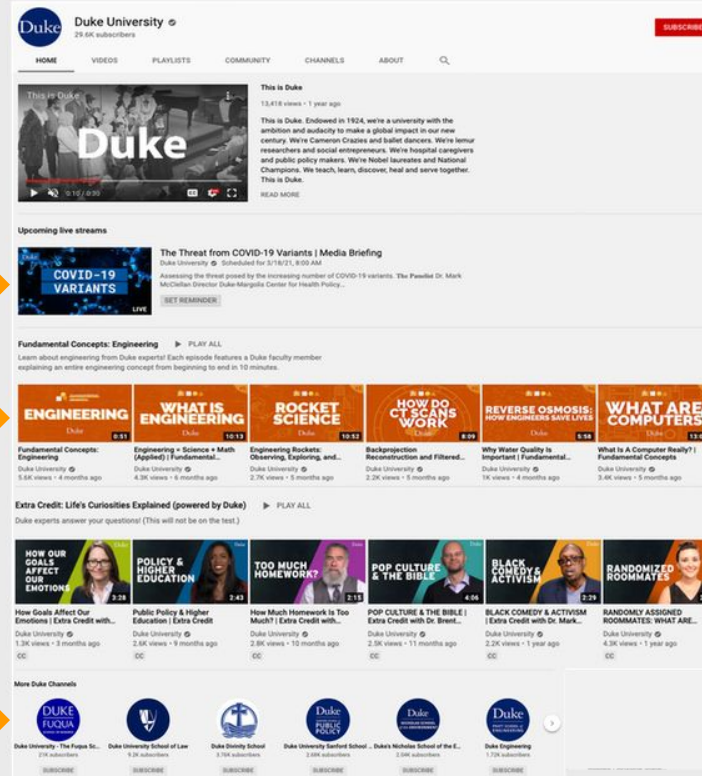
One of the most innovative higher education learning institutions on the platform, Duke University is a great example of how to develop a successful channel and burnish their institution's image as a leader by offering value in entertaining, informative fashion.

- **Formats.** Duke University utilizes consistent and YouTube-friendly formats like [Quick Learner](#) and [Extra Credit](#) that are layman-friendly and easily accessible.
- **Personable.** Having content hosted by faculty who are subject matter experts in the relevant area, Duke University showcases not just their extraordinary work but also the individual people who make it happen.
- **Organized.** Duke's use of playlists and channel sections makes their channel easily navigable. Notably, they also utilize a channel section to list More Duke Channels, linking directly to other channels from the University.

Upcoming media live streams emphasize the university's expertise

Organized playlists with clear, search-friendly value proposition

Links to other Duke channels





## CASE STUDY

# West Virginia University

## Building affinity among current & prospective students with personality-LED content

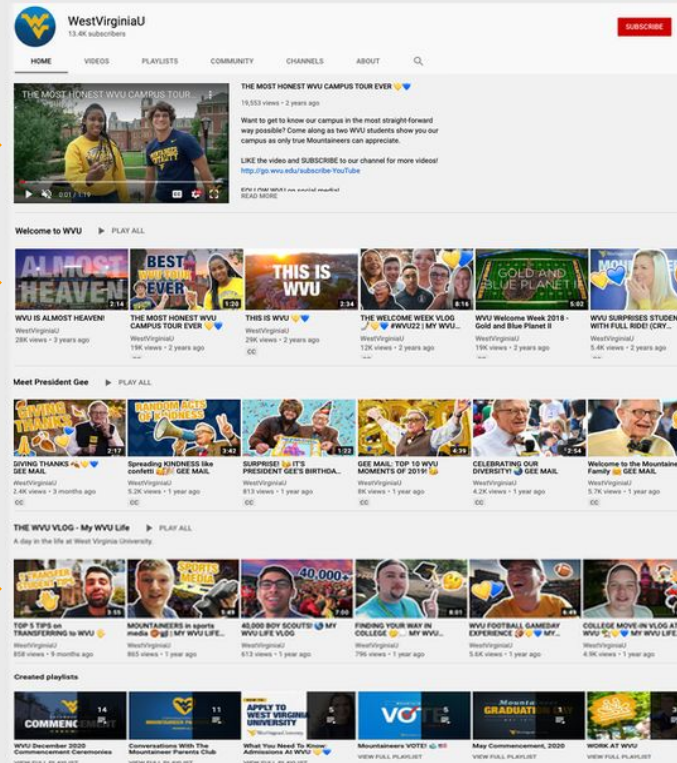
In everything from their thumbnails to their video formats, West Virginia University's has a clear target audience (current and prospective students) and central goal (to build affinity and connection with the university, which may help boost applications).

- **Connection.** With content featuring their students and/or charming University President E. Gordon Gee, WVU is able to put a face on their institution and connect with audiences.
- **YouTube style.** WVU has tailored their content clearly and savvily toward a young students audience, something that can be seen in the formats they choose (like vlogs) and the bright, inviting (and mobile-friendly!) style of their titles and thumbnails.
- **Zooming in and zooming out.** Additionally, the channel offers content that showcases both the "big picture" ("THIS IS WVU") and the more intimate "personal picture" ("THE MOST HONEST WVU CAMPUS TOUR EVER") of their institution.

Student-led content prioritizes building connections viewers

Appealing "Welcome to WVU" targets prospective students

Vlog format offers both insights and affinity for prospective students



## 6. Section Q&A

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Let's explore some common questions related to "YouTube 301" topics.





## Questions & Answers

# About Connections

### What is the best strategy to “connect” the channels for our institution if we have several?

- We recommend using channel sections and the Channels tab. (Learn more about setting up your channel page [here](#), and see how Duke University uses channel sections [here](#).)

### We want to build up our channel. Who can we reach out to at YouTube for guidance?

- That's great! The best way to reach the right party at YouTube is to fill out [this Google Form](#).



## 7. Extra Credit

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Here are some helpful additional YouTube resources.

- [Creating Inclusive Content](#)
- [Get Insights With YouTube Analytics](#)
- [Growing Your YouTube Community](#)
- [Live Streaming On YouTube](#)
- [YouTube Creator Academy](#)





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# Thank You

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