



Long-form content 101

In this resource, we'll review some fundamentals to help you get started on your journey.

Build a strategy

A good strategy can help you focus your resources, build a consistent brand identity and stay inspired.

Know your 'why'

Your 'why' is the core purpose that drives you; the reason that you show up even when you're feeling uninspired. It's the unique value proposition that you offer your audience beyond the topic itself.

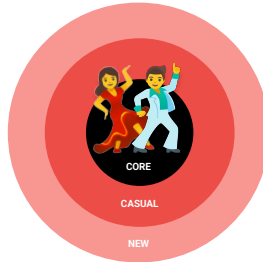
Your 'why' can also be connected to your core values and passions. Ask yourself what truly drives you. Is it to **educate** by demystifying complex topics, to **build a sense of community** so people feel like they belong, to **provide entertainment and joy**, to offer inspiration and **motivation** or to champion advocacy for a cause?

For example, if you make cooking videos, the process might look like this:

- **Why do I make cooking videos?**
Because I love food.
- **Why do I love food?**
It brings people together.
- **Why is bringing people together important to me?** *I believe that shared experiences create stronger communities.*

Know your audience

Building an audience is an evolving process where viewers come and go. Remember that your channel's audience is made up of different types of users.



- **Core viewers** are your regulars – they frequently return, often searching for your channel directly.
- **Casual viewers** watch a few of your videos but don't return often.
- **New viewers** discover your content for the first time but might not follow your journey yet.
- **Reflect:** Who is your audience and what are their needs?

Find your niche

A niche defines the content's subject matter and, more importantly, the community that you're building.

It answers the question:

'What is my channel about and who is it for?'

Map out your niche by identifying where you can bring the most value:

- **Look outwards:** Analyse what's popular in your niche. Study successful channels to see what content formats resonate with the audience that you want to reach. Use this research as a blueprint and as a source of inspiration.
- **Look inwards:** Your authentic self is your greatest asset. What unique experiences, identity or expertise do you have? Consider what you're already good at and how you can offer a different perspective or more value to an existing community.
- **Play the long game:** Choosing a niche isn't just about what's popular now; it's also about playing the long game. By building your channel around a subject that you truly love, you're setting yourself up for sustained success.

Find your format(s)

A video format is the creative container for your content. It's the structure, style and presentation that you use to deliver information. It answers the question, **'How will I present this?'**. You can have different formats within a niche or channel. YouTube has many popular formats and some may even be specific to a community or content type. Don't feel limited by them – you can always come up with your own. Here are some examples:

Entertainment and storytelling

- **Storytime/sit-down:** A personal narrative driven by a storyline.
- **Reaction:** A genuine and unscripted reaction to a video, product or piece of media.
- **Challenge:** An attempt at a specific, often difficult task.
- **Commentary:** Providing thoughts, opinions and analysis on a topic or media piece.
- **Unboxing:** Opening a new product and sharing initial impressions, often for the first time, on camera.
- **Podcast:** A long-form conversation or interview.

Interactive and community focused

- **Vlogs or 'a day in the life':** This is a format that shows a creator's lifestyle, often showcasing someone's typical day.
- **Q&A (questions and answers):** A creator answers questions submitted by their audience.

Instructional and educational

- **How-to guides/tutorials:** Step-by-step videos that teach a skill or process.
- **Explainer videos:** Breaking down complex topics or concepts into simple terms, often using narration, animation and/or simple graphics.
- **Video essays:** An in-depth and narrative-driven format that explores a specific topic, film or cultural phenomenon.
- **Top 10/listicle:** A countdown of the best or worst items in a category.

Build a content plan

A content plan is your roadmap for creation and distribution, helping you meet your channel goals.

This approach can help you with:

- **An organised schedule:** A content plan helps you establish a consistent publishing cadence, making it easier to plan your video production and schedule content ahead of time.
- **Strategic variety:** Think strategically about how different video formats and topics can help you achieve various channel goals.
- **Audience and community:** You don't have to stick to just one format. Experimenting with a mix of video types is a great way to attract new viewers while also building a community of loyal viewers.

Content calendar

This is a key tool in a content strategy. It provides a visual roadmap for your publishing schedule that helps you create with purpose.

- **Helps you stay organised:** A calendar gives you an overview of your content pipeline, helping you manage your workflow and publish consistently.
- **Enables proactive planning:** You can plan for important dates and events in your community's lives well in advance, creating relevant content for festive periods, seasonal shifts or cultural events.
- **Encourages a balanced content mix:** A calendar helps you visualise your content to ensure that you're publishing a variety of formats and topics to keep your content fresh and engaging.

HERO, HUB, HELP

Let's explore a framework that ties the above concepts together. We call it 'Hero, Hub, Help'. Its purpose is to help you categorise your content ideas by considering each video's scope, intended audience, goals and production capacity.

	CONTENT ATTRIBUTES	AUDIENCE BEHAVIOUR	PUBLISHING CADENCE
Hero	Appeals to a large audience; provides an opportunity for mass promotion. Often centred around tentpole events, newsworthy moments, popular topics or high-value productions.	BROWSING: Discovering inspiring or entertaining new content	Rare; usually built around a major event, release or big idea. Provides an opportunity for high exposure.
Hub	Appeals to your core audience and keeps them coming back via steady and consistent programming that appeals to their expectations.	TUNING IN: Catching up on their favourite content	Regularly scheduled content that appeals to the core audience.
Help	Content is search friendly and it is aimed at answering questions or explaining ideas or concepts (tutorials/how-tos/explainers). It is considered to be evergreen as it usually stays relevant for longer.	SEARCHING: Actively seeking relevant content	Always-on, 'pull' content, characterised by its evergreen nature. Provides a constant stream of traffic to the channel.

While this framework offers a clear path, it's just one of many ways to build a content strategy. The key is to experiment with different formats and publishing cadences to find a model that best suits your goals and keeps your audience engaged.

See it in action



Meet Hannah Morris, a climbing creator on a mission to make bouldering accessible and empower climbers. Her creative voice is rooted in storytelling, blending bouldering sessions with personal vlogs to share the mental and emotional journey of climbing. Hannah has built a thriving community, using her platform to foster inclusivity and encouragement.



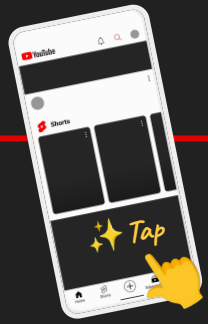
HERO – This example showcases a high-stakes physical challenge that can attract a broad audience beyond her usual climbing community. Occasionally, she creates other broad-appeal content, such as competition recaps and physical challenges, to attract new viewers.



HUB – This video speaks directly to her core climbing audience. It lets loyal viewers tune in to Hannah's personal experience with other climbers known to the community. Other examples of her Hub videos include interviews with top climbers and training updates.



HELP – This video was designed to be evergreen and searchable. It answers a common question that climbers have. Hannah often publishes these kinds of 'how-to' and tips videos, thus ensuring a steady stream of traffic from viewers actively seeking to improve their skills.



Craft your packaging

Thumbnails

A compelling thumbnail captures the viewer's attention, accurately represents your video and encourages viewers to click and watch, therefore contributing to your overall video engagement.

- **- Think about the context:** When designing a thumbnail, remember that it doesn't appear on its own but in a feed alongside many other videos competing for a viewer's attention. Design your thumbnail not only to describe your content but also to stand out from the crowd.
- **Accurately represent the content:** A thumbnail sets expectations for what viewers are about to watch. Do your best to represent the value and style of your content to encourage viewers to watch until the end. Mismatching expectations can cause the audience to stop watching.
- **Consider the audience:** Who is your video targeting? Content aimed at your core audience might highlight familiar features (e.g. your face) while content with the potential to reach a more casual audience can lean on more universally recognisable imagery.

TOP TIP: [Put yourself in the shoes of the audience.](#) Look at your videos as if you were a new viewer. Would you click to watch? (Be honest.)

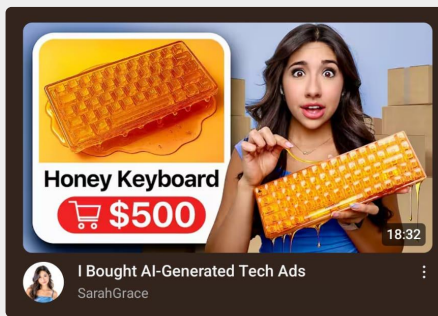
Did you know? Many creators design their video packaging before production. This allows them to stress test an idea early on and ensures that they capture the best titles and visual assets while filming. This proactive approach helps to optimise content before shooting.

Test and compare

The **test and compare tool** helps you get data-backed insights based on how your audience responds to different types of packaging.

Create synergy

You can take your packaging strategy to the next level by creating a synergy between your title and thumbnails. They can work together to tell a story and kindle curiosity.



In this example from creator **Sarah Grace**, she:

- **Creates curiosity:** The thumbnail features a bizarre product with a high price tag – the 'Honey Keyboard' – which immediately sparks viewer curiosity. The creator's stunned expression promises a video with surprising and entertaining results.
- **Thumbnail–title synergy:** The title, 'I Bought AI-Generated Tech Ads', works seamlessly with the thumbnail to create a cohesive narrative. The combination of the title and the image of a keyboard dripping with honey tells a clear story, enticing viewers to click to satisfy their curiosity.

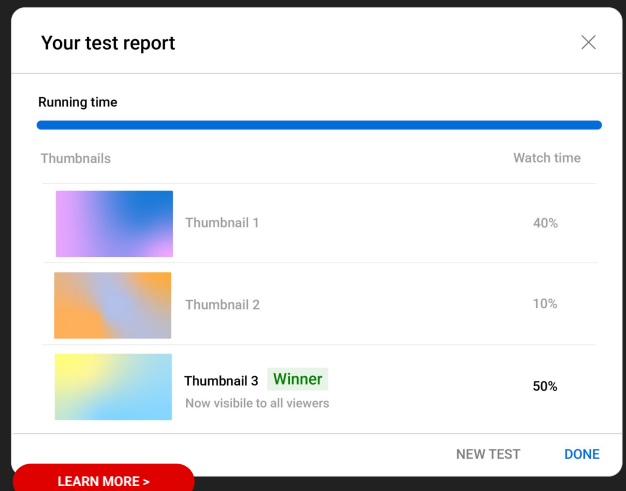
Titles

While a thumbnail grabs attention, a title provides the next layer of information by contextualising the image and explaining what the video is about.

- **Be accurate:** Make sure that your title is a true representation of your video. Otherwise, viewers are likely to click on your video, realise it's not what they thought and quickly click away.
- **Be specific:** Focus on the core value that a viewer will get from your video and capture it in a concise way. For instance, a vlog might cover your whole day, but the title should either summarise the entire video or highlight one or two key moments.
For example: 'How to spend a day travelling in Japan' is probably better than 'Café hopping, Tokyo Tower and sushi with friends for dinner!'
- **Keep it simple:** Using simple language can increase your content's accessibility and broaden its potential reach, for example, to people whose first language isn't English or viewers across different age groups.

Here's how it works:

- This tool runs a concurrent A/B/C test, showing up to three different options to viewers at the same time. You can use it on both new and older videos. The test may take anywhere from a few hours to two weeks, with more variation between testing sets providing faster, clearer results.
- The 'winner' is determined by watch time share, which measures the percentage of watch time that each option generated during the test.



Packaging for reach

Packaging is more than just a title and a thumbnail. It is also about how you conceptualise your idea so that people are compelled to watch. Even within a niche, you can frame your content around a universal problem or appeal to make it more accessible to a wider audience. Here are some examples:

STRATEGY	VIDEO IDEA	FROM NICHE APPEAL Example	TO UNIVERSAL APPEAL Example
From 'how-to' to 'problem solved'	A tutorial on a complex topic framed as a solution to a common frustration.	'Advanced video editing techniques'	'How I cut my editing time in half': This appeals to a universal desire for efficiency, even if the viewer doesn't care about the specific editing techniques.
From 'niche skill' to 'relatable journey'	Content based around a personal transformation or challenge.	'Learning to play guitar'	'I tried to learn a song in seven days (and failed)': This taps into the relatable experience of striving, challenges and imperfection, making the content more human and approachable.
From 'specific knowledge' to 'broad curiosity'	Answering a question that a non-expert might have.	'Macroeconomics today'	'Why is everything so expensive at the moment?': This makes a complex subject accessible by connecting it to a daily concern that almost everyone can relate to.

Not all content has to be for everyone. When targeting a specialised niche, tailor your titles and thumbnails with specific terminology and visuals that resonate with that niche's community. This may lead to fewer impressions, but it will result in higher engagement and help you build a loyal audience. If your goal is to reach a broader audience, reframe your content to appeal to a more universal interest.

Maintain viewer engagement



The hook: Start strong

Deliver value straight away. Your content's hook is where viewers decide whether to stay or move on.

The first seconds are critical

You only have a few seconds to engage a viewer. Use this brief window to deliver your boldest statement, ask a compelling question or show your most exciting visual to convince them to keep watching.

Match the hook to the promise

Your hook acts as a bridge between your title and thumbnail and what's actually in the video. Ensure that the first seconds reassure the audience that they are getting what they came for.

Connect with viewer intention

The hook is your chance to show viewers that you get them. By starting with a question that addresses their specific pain point or curiosity, you instantly build a connection and prove that your video is exactly what they've been looking for.



The journey: Maintain engagement

Getting a viewer to click on your video is just one step towards a video that performs well. How long a viewer watches and how they interact with your content has implications for its performance.

Storytelling

By applying elements like tension points, rising action and climax, you can turn a simple topic into a compelling journey, getting viewers invested in your content and making them more likely to return.

Experiment with pacing

Use creative editing to keep viewers engaged throughout the content. Vary your pace by strategically inserting key events and changes in tone to keep viewers engaged. This creates a compelling narrative flow that holds attention and gives the audience something new to look forward to.



Common questions among creators

How long should a video be?

There is no ideal length for a YouTube video. Instead of holding yourself to an arbitrary length, concentrate on what makes a compelling story and keeps your audience engaged. It's better to have high viewer retention on an 8-minute video than low retention on a 15-minute video. Ultimately, we want both short and long videos to succeed, so we encourage you to make your videos the appropriate length depending on the content.

Is it more important to focus on percentage watched or average view duration?

The reality is that there's no single metric to optimise for. All metrics are taken into consideration to help us understand viewer preferences across different intents, surfaces and devices. The algorithm uses both absolute and relative watch time as signals when determining viewer engagement.

Be open to experimentation

Focus on creating videos that are as long as they need to be to provide value to the viewer, nothing more. If you're just getting started with long-form content, it's completely fine to ease into it. You don't need to create a 20-minute video straight away. Start with shorter videos and gradually work your way up to longer ones. Experiment with different lengths, topics and styles to see what resonates with your audience and what you enjoy making. This flexible approach lets you build confidence and refine your craft.

Learn from the feedback

YouTube Analytics (YTA) can empower you with the data and insights that you need to understand your performance and make data-led creative decisions. Reviewing the data can help you:

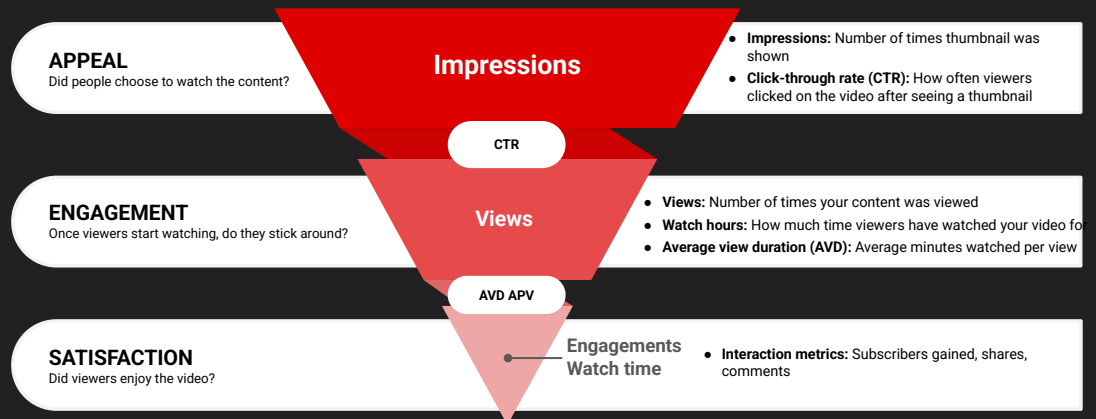
- **Analyse and adapt:** By analysing your content's performance, you gain data-driven insights into what truly resonates with your audience. This helps you identify which topics, formats and behaviours drive the most engagement, allowing you to refine your content strategy.
- **Track progress towards your goals:** Monitoring your progress also lets you track goals, celebrate milestones and adapt to shifts in audience preferences or emerging trends. This knowledge is key to staying relevant, keeping your audience engaged and ensuring that your channel continues to grow.

TOP TIP: In the [Content tab](#), you can **filter performance data** by content type. Click on the 'Videos' chip to review long-form performance.

Analytics best practices

- **Zoom out:** Expand your date range from 28 to 90 days to gain a broader perspective on recent performance and identify long-term trends.
- **Look for patterns:** Observe your data to uncover trends and patterns that can be turned into actionable insights for your content strategy.
- **Compare apples to apples:** Remember that different content formats are discovered and consumed differently. Compare content with similar metrics.

Metrics to look out for when analysing long-form content:



Good to know

Some videos are built for the long haul while others are designed for immediate impact.

- A highly searchable 'Help' video may have a slower start but can consistently attract new viewers over time, acting as a stable source of traffic. In contrast, a timely or seasonal 'Hero' video might see a massive initial spike in views before its performance tapers off. It's important to understand that not all content needs to perform the same way; each piece serves a different purpose within your overall strategy.

Remember that content creation is a journey of practice, experimentation and learning.

- Don't be afraid to try new things. Most creators try different styles before finding their unique voice. Creating isn't about getting it perfect on the first try; it's about seeing every piece of content as a chance to learn something new about your creative style and what truly resonates with your audience. Be patient with yourself and embrace every video as a step forward.

Want to learn more?

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