

FREE COURSE · SHORT.NOW ACADEMY

Learn short-form video, from your first Short to a growing channel

A free, step-by-step course for YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels. Short lessons in plain language, a practice task in each one, and a quiz so you know it stuck.

7 modules · 31 lessons · 124 quiz questions

Read it online, take the quizzes and get your free certificate at short.now/academy

short.now

Contents

Module 1. Start here

1. How to Become a Content Creator: A Realistic Plan for Your First 90 Days 9 min
2. How to Choose a Niche (With 60 YouTube Channel Ideas) 10 min
3. YouTube Shorts, TikTok or Reels: Where Should a Beginner Start? 8 min
4. How to Start a YouTube Channel: A Beginner's Step-by-Step Guide 10 min
5. How to Start a Faceless YouTube Channel (That Can Actually Get Monetized) 10 min

Module 2. How the platforms work

1. How the YouTube Shorts Algorithm Works (and What You Can Control) 9 min
2. How the TikTok Algorithm Works: The For You Feed Explained 9 min
3. How the Instagram Reels Algorithm Works: How Reels Are Ranked 9 min
4. Short-Form Video Specs Cheat Sheet: Length, Size, Safe Zones and File Types 7 min

Module 3. Ideas, hooks and scripts

1. 75 Short-Form Video Ideas (and How to Find Your Own) 10 min
2. How to Structure a Short Video So People Watch to the End 9 min
3. How to Write a Script for a Short Video (30-60 Seconds) 10 min
4. How to Be Confident on Camera (Without Sounding Read) 9 min

Module 4. Filming and editing

1. How to Film Good Vertical Video With Just a Phone 9 min
2. Lighting and Sound on a Budget: Window Light, Cheap Mics and Quiet Rooms 9 min
3. How to Edit Short-Form Video: Pacing, Jump Cuts, Captions and B-Roll 10 min
4. Music, Sounds and Copyright for Creators: What You Can Actually Use 11 min

Module 5. One long video, many shorts

1. A Content Repurposing System: One Long Recording a Week, a Month of Shorts 10 min
2. How to Find Clip-Worthy Moments in a Long Video 10 min
3. How to Turn Horizontal Video Into Vertical (Reframe and Crop) 10 min
4. Batch Content Creation: Film Once, Post All Month 10 min

Module 6. Publishing and growth

1. How to Go Viral on TikTok: What You Can Actually Control 9 min
2. How to Grow on TikTok From Zero Followers 10 min
3. How to Get More Views on YouTube Shorts 10 min
4. Titles, Captions and Hashtags for Short Videos 9 min
5. How to Read Your Short-Form Analytics: Retention, Swipe-Away and Shares 11 min
6. How Often to Post Short Videos, and How to Stay Consistent 9 min

Module 7. Making money

1. How to Monetize YouTube Shorts: Requirements, Revenue Share and the 2027 Changes 10 min
2. How to Make Money on TikTok: Every Official Program and What It Takes 10 min
3. How to Get Brand Deals as a Small Creator: Media Kit, Pitch, Rates and Disclosure 11 min
4. What Is Clip Farming? And How to Become a Clipper (Honestly) 10 min



MODULE 1

Start here

Decide what you will make, for whom, and on which platform, then set up the account.

1. How to Become a Content Creator: A Realistic Plan for Your First 90 Days
2. How to Choose a Niche (With 60 YouTube Channel Ideas)
3. YouTube Shorts, TikTok or Reels: Where Should a Beginner Start?
4. How to Start a YouTube Channel: A Beginner's Step-by-Step Guide
5. How to Start a Faceless YouTube Channel (That Can Actually Get Monetized)

MODULE 1 · START HERE · 9 MIN

How to Become a Content Creator: A Realistic Plan for Your First 90 Days

What a content creator actually does, the gear you need (a phone), and a step-by-step 90-day plan to go from zero posts to a working routine on Shorts, TikTok or Reels.

Key takeaways

- Becoming a content creator means publishing on a schedule, not having a big following. You are one the day you post your first video.
- Start with one topic, one platform and one repeatable format. Spread yourself thin and you learn nothing from your numbers.
- A phone, window light and a $20 clip-on mic are enough for your first 90 days.
- Judge yourself on output and small skill gains for the first three months, not on views or followers.
- Money usually comes later and from several sources: platform payouts, brand deals, your own products. Disclose every paid deal.

To become a content creator, pick one topic you can talk about for a year, pick one platform, and publish a short video on a fixed schedule, starting this week. You don't need a following, a camera or a brand. You need a repeatable format and the habit of reading your numbers and adjusting.

The rest of this lesson turns that into a concrete plan: what the job actually involves, the gear you need, a 90-day routine, and how money works once you get there.

What a content creator actually does

A content creator makes media for an audience on a regular schedule. For short-form video, the weekly work breaks down into five jobs:

Job	What it means	Time per week (starting out)
Ideas	Finding questions, stories or moments worth 30-60 seconds	1 hour
Scripting	Writing a hook and a tight point	1-2 hours
Filming	Recording, usually on a phone	1-2 hours
Editing	Cutting, captions, cover text	2-3 hours
Publishing and review	Titles, posting, reading analytics	1 hour

That is six to nine hours a week for three videos. It's a real hobby-sized commitment, and it gets faster. Most creators cut their editing time in half within two months because they reuse the same structure every time.

Notice what is missing from the list: “going viral.” Views are a result of the five jobs. You can’t do views directly, so don’t plan around them.

Decide your lane: topic, platform, format

Beginners usually stall because they try to be everything at once. Narrow three things before you film anything.

Topic

Pick a subject where you can list 30 video ideas in one sitting. It can be something you know (your job, a skill, a hobby) or something you are learning in public. The lesson on how to choose a niche walks through this with 60 examples.

Platform

Start on one. You can copy your videos to the others later, but early on you want one set of analytics to learn from. If you are unsure, read which platform to start on. The short version: YouTube Shorts if you might ever want long videos, TikTok if you want fast feedback, Reels if your audience already lives on Instagram.

Format

A format is a repeatable shape for your videos. Examples:

- “One mistake beginners make with ___, and the fix” (30 seconds)
- “I tried ___ for 7 days, here’s what happened” (60 seconds)
- “Answering your question: ___” (45 seconds)
- “Before and after” with a voiceover explaining the change

A format saves you from starting from a blank page three times a week. It also teaches viewers what to expect, which is a reason to follow you.

The gear you need (and what to skip)

You need less than you think. Here is a starter kit that works:

- **Your phone’s main rear camera.** It’s better than the selfie camera. Prop the phone up and use a second device or a mirror to check framing.
- **Light from a window.** Face the window, don’t sit with it behind you.
- **A clip-on lavalier mic (about $15-30).** Viewers forgive shaky video much more than bad sound.
- **A cheap tripod or phone clamp.** Anything that holds the phone still at eye level.
- **A free editor.** CapCut, the YouTube Create app, or the editor built into TikTok or Instagram.

Skip for now: ring lights, a new camera, paid editing courses, a logo designer. Buy upgrades only when a specific problem shows up in your videos, such as echo in your room or dark footage in winter.

> **TIP**
>
> Record a 20-second test clip in your filming spot and watch it with headphones before every session. It catches bad audio and messy backgrounds before you waste an hour.

Your first 90 days, week by week

Here is a plan built around three short videos a week. If that's too much, do two. The schedule matters more than the number.

Weeks 1-2: set up and publish badly

- Create your account and fill in a one-line bio that says who the videos are for.
- Write 10 ideas. Script and post the first three.
- Expect them to feel awkward. That's the point: you are learning the workflow, not making your best work.

Weeks 3-6: lock in the format

- Post three times a week on the same days.
- Keep the same structure: hook in the first two seconds, one point, a clear ending.
- After each video is 48 hours old, write down two numbers: views and average percentage viewed (or average watch time).

Weeks 7-10: double down on what held people

- Sort your videos by average percentage viewed. Look at the top three. What do they share? A type of hook, a topic, a length?
- Make your next six videos variations of the winners.
- Try one experiment a week, such as a new opening line style or a shorter length.

Weeks 11-13: review and decide

- You will have roughly 36 videos. That is enough to see patterns.
- Decide: keep the topic, narrow it, or shift to the adjacent topic your best videos point to.
- Consider copying your best videos to a second platform.

Your goal for these 90 days is output and watch-time gains, not a follower number. TikTok's own explanation of its feed says follower count is not a direct factor in what gets recommended. So a new account with a well-made video can reach strangers, and an account that posts often learns faster what works.

Make content faster with one long recording

Three separate shoots a week is the hardest way to do this. Many creators record one longer piece (a 20-minute talk to camera, a podcast, a livestream, a tutorial) and cut several shorts out of it. One good conversation can hold five to ten standalone moments.

You can cut those clips by hand in any editor. If you'd rather not, Short.now finds the strongest moments in a long video, reframes them to vertical and adds captions, and the free plan has no watermark. The repurposing module covers the full workflow.

How content creators make money

Treat money as a later stage, but know the main sources so you build toward them:

1. **Platform payouts.** Programs like the YouTube Partner Program share ad revenue. YouTube's help page currently lists 1,000 subscribers plus either 4,000 qualified watch hours on public long-form videos in the last 12 months or 10 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days. Rules change, so check YouTube's official page before you plan around them.
2. **Brand deals.** Companies pay creators to feature products. Small, focused accounts get deals because their audience is specific.
3. **Your own products.** Courses, templates, coaching, merch, a service. Often the biggest earner for creators with a niche audience.
4. **Affiliate links.** A commission when viewers buy through your link.

Whatever the source, disclose it. The US Federal Trade Commission says you must disclose any financial, employment, personal or family relationship with a brand, and that free products count. Put the disclosure in the video itself, in plain words like "ad" or "thanks to X for the free product," not only in the description.

Common beginner mistakes

- **Changing topic every week.** You never get enough videos in one lane to see what works.
- **Waiting for perfect gear.** Your first 20 videos are practice regardless of the camera.
- **Long intros.** "Hey guys, welcome back" costs you the first two seconds, which is when people decide to stay or swipe.
- **Judging a video in the first hour.** Short-form videos often pick up views over several days. Check at 48 hours.
- **Copying other people's clips.** Reposted content without your own work added is usually not eligible for recommendations or monetization. Make your own.

> **TIP**
>
> Keep a simple spreadsheet: date, topic, hook, length, views at 48 hours, average percentage viewed. After 20 rows you'll see patterns that no general advice can give you.

What's next

You have a plan. The next decision is the most important one in it: what your videos are about. Go to how to choose a niche for a simple test and 60 channel ideas to start from.

PRACTICE

Do it now: plan your first 10 videos

1. Write one sentence: 'I make videos about ___ for ___ who want ___.'
2. Pick one platform to post on first. If you can't decide, pick YouTube Shorts.
3. List 10 video ideas that each answer one question your viewer has. Keep each idea to one line.
4. Choose two fixed posting days per week and put them in your calendar for the next four weeks.
5. Script idea number one in under 120 words and read it aloud with a timer. Cut until it fits in 45 seconds.

Open the free publishing calendar →

Check yourself

1. **You have a phone, an hour a day and no audience. What is the best first move?**

   A Buy a mirrorless camera and a light kit

   B Post on all three platforms with different content for each

   C Pick one topic and one platform and post a repeatable format on a schedule

   D Wait until you have 30 videos finished before posting any

2. **After four weeks your videos get 200 to 400 views each. What does that most likely mean?**

   A Your account is shadowbanned

   B This is a normal start, so look at which videos held viewers longest and make more like those

   C You picked the wrong niche and should switch now

   D You need to delete the low performers

3. **A brand sends you a free product and you mention it in a video. What do FTC guidelines say?**

   A Disclose it clearly in the video itself, for example 'Thanks to X for the free product'

   B No disclosure is needed because no money changed hands

   C A note in your bio is enough

   D Writing #sp in the description is enough

4. **Which goal is the most useful for your first 90 days?**

   A Reach 10,000 followers

   B Get one video to a million views

   C Publish 36 videos and improve your average watch time

   D Get accepted into a monetization program

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Can anyone become a content creator?

Yes. There is no license or sign-up beyond creating an account. What separates people who keep going from people who quit is a narrow topic, a format they can repeat, and a posting schedule they can actually keep.

How much money do content creators make?

It ranges from nothing to a full-time income, and most beginners earn nothing for the first months. Platform payouts have eligibility thresholds that change, so check the official pages. Many creators earn more from brand deals and their own products than from views.

Do I need followers to get views?

Not on short-form feeds. TikTok says follower count is not a direct factor in its recommendations, and Shorts and Reels also show videos to people who don't follow you. A new account can reach strangers from its first post.

How long does it take to grow as a content creator?

There is no fixed timeline. Plan on at least 90 days of steady posting before you judge your topic or format. Most of what you learn in that time comes from comparing your own videos against each other.

Sources

- YouTube Creators: get started
- TikTok Newsroom: How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou
- YouTube Help: YouTube Partner Program overview and eligibility
- FTC: Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers

MODULE 1 · START HERE · 10 MIN

How to Choose a Niche (With 60 YouTube Channel Ideas)

A simple three-question test for picking a niche you can stick with, how to check that people want it, and 60 channel ideas for Shorts, TikTok and Reels.

Key takeaways

- A good niche is a topic plus a specific viewer plus your angle, not just a broad category like 'fitness'.
- Use the 30-idea test: if you can't list 30 video ideas in one sitting, the niche is too narrow or not yours.
- Check demand with free signals: search suggestions, comments on similar videos, and the Trends tab in YouTube Studio.
- Avoid niches built on reposting other people's footage. They tend to fail monetization and recommendation rules.
- Treat your niche as a 10-video experiment. Your numbers will tell you where to narrow.

To choose a niche, pick a topic you could make 30 videos about this week, aim it at one specific type of viewer, and check that people are already asking questions about it. Then post 10 videos and let your numbers tell you where to narrow. Don’t wait for the perfect niche. You find it by publishing.

Below is a simple test, a way to check demand for free, 60 channel ideas grouped by type, and the niches to avoid.

What a niche actually is

A niche is more than a category. “Fitness” is a category. A niche adds two things: who the videos are for and what angle you bring.

Niche = topic + viewer + angle

Too broad	Workable niche
Cooking	Weeknight dinners for one, under $5 a plate
Tech	iPhone tips for people over 60
Fitness	Desk-job mobility routines in 5 minutes
Gaming	Beginner guides for one specific strategy game
Money	Budgeting for first-time renters
Travel	Day trips from one city by public transport

The narrow version is easier in every way. You know what to film next. A viewer knows within one video whether you are for them, and that is the moment they follow. And your analytics compare like with like, so you can see what works.

You can widen later. Starting narrow and expanding is much easier than starting broad and trying to find focus.

The three-question niche test

Run each candidate niche through these questions. You want three yeses.

1. Can you list 30 ideas in one sitting?

Set a 15-minute timer and write ideas, one line each. If you stall at eight, the niche is too narrow, or you don't know enough about it yet to post often. If you hit 30 and keep going, you have depth.

2. Is there a specific viewer with a problem or interest?

Name them. "New parents who used to work out," "people learning Spanish for a move," "small bakery owners." If you can't picture the viewer, your hooks will be vague.

3. Would you make this for a year with little reward?

Early growth is slow for almost everyone. The topic has to be interesting enough to you that you keep going through months of small numbers. Your existing job, a hobby you already spend weekends on, or a skill you are actively learning usually pass this test. Topics picked only because they "pay well" often don't.

> **TIP**
>
> Learning in public counts. 'I'm learning to draw, day 1 to day 365' works as a niche even if you're a beginner. Viewers who are one step behind you are the audience.

How to check demand for free

You don't need a paid tool to see whether people care. Spend 20 minutes on these:

- **Search suggestions.** Type your topic into YouTube and TikTok search and read the autocomplete. Those are real searches. "how to budget as a…" will show you who is asking.
- **Comments on similar videos.** Find three creators in your space. Read the comments on their recent videos for questions they didn't answer. Each question is a video idea.
- **YouTube Studio's Trends tab.** Once you have a channel, open Analytics, then Trends. YouTube shows top searches, breakout videos from similar channels, and content gaps: searches where viewers can't find enough quality results. Some insights are limited to certain countries and languages.
- **Forums and Reddit.** Subreddits and Facebook groups show what beginners struggle with in their own words. Those words make good hooks.

What you are looking for: steady questions with only a handful of good answers, or good answers that are all long videos. A 45-second answer to a question that usually gets a 20-minute video is a strong short.

If you find zero searches, zero similar creators and zero questions, that's a warning sign. Some competition is good. It proves people watch the topic.

60 channel ideas to start from

Use these as starting points and add your own viewer and angle. Each works as Shorts, TikTok or Reels, and many are also good for long videos later.

Skills and how-to

1. Excel and Google Sheets tricks for office workers
2. Phone photography tips with no extra gear
3. Learning a language in 10 minutes a day
4. Beginner woodworking with hand tools only
5. Sewing repairs and clothing alterations
6. Public speaking practice for shy people
7. Keyboard shortcuts and productivity software tips
8. Beginner guitar songs with four chords
9. Drawing exercises for absolute beginners
10. Home repairs renters are allowed to do

Food and home

11. Meals for one under $5
12. High-protein vegetarian dinners
13. One-pan recipes for students
14. Recipes from one country or region
15. Baking bread, from failures to good loaves
16. Small-apartment organizing
17. Houseplant care for people who kill houseplants
18. Cleaning hacks tested honestly
19. Meal prep for shift workers
20. Budget home decor makeovers

Money and career

21. Budgeting for first-time renters
22. Interview answers for a specific industry
23. Resume fixes, one mistake per video
24. Day in the life of your actual job
25. Side hustles you tried, with real numbers
26. Freelancing for designers or writers
27. Personal finance basics for teenagers

28. Negotiating salary and raises
29. Small business tips for one trade, like hairdressers or plumbers
30. Explaining how one industry works from the inside

Health and outdoors

31. Desk-job mobility routines
32. Running from couch to first 5K
33. Strength training at home with one kettlebell
34. Beginner hiking trails in your region
35. Camping gear on a budget
36. Gardening in small spaces
37. Fishing tips for one type of water
38. Cycling commutes and bike maintenance
39. Sleep routines and wind-down habits (stick to general tips, not medical advice)
40. Healthy lunchbox ideas for kids

Entertainment and culture

41. Book recommendations in one genre
42. Film and TV analysis of one franchise
43. Beginner guides for one game
44. Board game rules explained in 60 seconds
45. History stories from your city
46. Weird facts about one topic, like the ocean or space
47. Music theory behind popular songs
48. Thrift and vintage finds
49. Car reviews from an owner's point of view
50. Local food spots and street food reviews

Tech, science and creative

51. AI tools tested on real tasks
52. Budget tech and accessories reviewed
53. Coding concepts explained simply
54. Science experiments at home
55. 3D printing projects and fails
56. Video editing tips for one app
57. Smart home setups for renters
58. Explaining news in one field, like space or climate
59. Graphic design critique and redesigns
60. Your podcast or long video, cut into short clips

Number 60 is worth a note: if you already make long content, your niche is chosen. Your shorts are the best moments of what you already make. The repurposing module shows how.

Niches to be careful with

Some niches look easy but fight the platforms' rules:

- **Compilations of other people's footage.** YouTube's monetization policies treat clips edited together with little or no narrative as reused content, and that applies even if you have permission. Edited footage where you add your own storyline and commentary is a different story.
- **Mass-produced template videos.** YouTube's "inauthentic content" policy covers slideshows, templated storylines or scrolling text with little narrative or educational value, including generic AI-generated videos.
- **Reposted clips on Instagram.** Instagram says accounts that mostly post non-original content may not be recommended to people who don't follow them. Adding a border or watermark doesn't count as editing.
- **Health, money and legal advice.** These can work, but viewers and platforms hold them to a higher standard. Share experience and sources, not guarantees.

If you want to stay off camera, that's fine and covered in how to start a faceless YouTube channel. The rule is the same: add your own voice, script and editing.

Test your niche with 10 videos

Choosing a niche is a hypothesis. Here's how to test it:

1. Post 10 videos in your niche over three to four weeks. Use one format.
2. For each, record views and average percentage viewed after 48 hours.
3. Look at the top three by percentage viewed, not by views. What do they share?
4. Narrow toward that. If your budgeting videos for renters beat everything else, become the renters' budgeting channel.

Most creators don't land on their final niche first. They start near it and their audience pulls them the rest of the way. TikTok's feed, for example, recommends based on how people interact with each video, so your best videos show you what your viewers actually want.

What's next

You know what your videos are about. Next, decide where they go first: YouTube Shorts, TikTok or Reels, and how a beginner should choose.

PRACTICE

Do it now: run the 30-idea test

1. Pick two or three candidate niches from the list in this lesson or your own life.
2. Set a 15-minute timer and list as many video ideas as you can for each one.
3. For the niche with the most ideas, search five of them on YouTube and TikTok. Note which ones already have lots of videos and which have few.
4. Fill in the sentence: 'I make videos about ___ for ___ so they can ___.'
5. Turn your three best ideas into titles and save them as your first scripts.

Try the free YouTube title generator →

Check yourself

1. **Which of these is the most usable niche for a new short-form channel?**

   A Fitness
   B Home workouts for new parents with 15 minutes a day
   C Videos about anything I find interesting
   D Motivation

2. **You list 30 ideas for a niche in 15 minutes and still have more. What does that tell you?**

   A The niche is too broad and you should narrow it to 5 ideas
   B You should start three channels
   C Nothing, idea count doesn't matter
   D You have enough depth to post for months, so it passes the first test

3. **What is a 'content gap' in YouTube Studio's Trends tab?**

   A A week where you didn't post
   B A gap in your video's audio
   C A search where viewers can't find enough quality results on YouTube
   D A topic banned on YouTube

4. **Why is a channel of compiled clips from TV shows a risky niche?**

   A It can be fine if you add a storyline and commentary, but bare compilations count as reused content
   B YouTube doesn't allow any clips
   C Compilations always get more views
   D Only TikTok allows compilations

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Do I need a niche to start a YouTube channel?

You don't need one to start, but you'll grow faster with one. A clear niche tells viewers why to follow and makes your own analytics easier to read, because similar videos can be compared fairly.

What is the most profitable niche?

Niches where viewers spend money, like personal finance, software, business and career skills, tend to attract more advertisers and brand deals. But a profitable niche you quit after a month earns nothing, so pick one you can sustain first.

Can I change my niche later?

Yes. Most creators drift toward whatever their best videos are about. Shifting to an adjacent topic is easy; jumping to an unrelated one is closer to starting over, since your current viewers followed you for the old topic.

Is it too late to start in a popular niche?

Usually not, if you bring a narrower angle. 'Cooking' is crowded; 'cooking for one on a student budget' or 'Filipino dishes in 20 minutes' has room. Popular niches mean proven demand.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Get video ideas with the Trends tab
- YouTube Help: YouTube channel monetization policies
- Instagram Creators: Original content guidelines
- TikTok Newsroom: How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou

MODULE 1 · START HERE · 8 MIN

YouTube Shorts, TikTok or Reels: Where Should a Beginner Start?

A beginner's decision guide, not a spec sheet. Answer four questions to pick your first short-form platform, then learn when and how to add the other two.

Key takeaways

- Pick one platform for your first 30 days so you have one clean set of numbers to learn from.
- YouTube Shorts suits creators who may want long videos later. TikTok gives the fastest feedback. Reels suits people whose audience or customers already use Instagram.
- All three can show a new account's videos to strangers, so 'no followers' isn't a reason to choose one over another.
- Don't choose based on payouts. Monetization rules change and you won't qualify for months anyway.
- When you expand, upload clean files with no other app's watermark and keep each upload original to you.

If you might ever want to make long videos, start on YouTube Shorts. If you want the fastest feedback on short videos and nothing else, start on TikTok. If your audience or customers already use Instagram, start on Reels. Whichever you pick, stay on that one alone for your first 30 days, then add the others.

This lesson helps you make that call in five minutes. If you want a full side-by-side of reach, algorithms and payouts, read our Shorts vs TikTok vs Reels comparison. Here we focus on what a beginner needs to decide.

The short answer

If this sounds like you	Start on
You want to make tutorials, podcasts or long videos eventually	YouTube Shorts
You want quick feedback and to learn fast what works	TikTok
You have a local business, a shop or clients who already follow you on Instagram	Instagram Reels
Your viewers are teenagers or young adults and you like trends and sounds	TikTok
You want people to find your videos through search for years	YouTube Shorts
You can’t decide	YouTube Shorts

Why YouTube as the default? Because the same channel can grow into long videos, which is a bigger and more flexible library to build. It’s a tiebreaker, not a rule. TikTok and Reels are equally good places to learn the craft.

Four questions to decide

Answer these honestly. The platform that wins most of them is your starting point.

1. Where do the people you want to reach already spend time?

This beats every other factor. A cooking channel for retirees and a skate channel for 16-year-olds should not start in the same place. Ask five people in your target audience which app they open most. That's real data.

2. Do you want to make long videos at some point?

If yes, YouTube Shorts lets you build one channel that later holds both formats. Shorts can also link viewers to one of your long videos (YouTube lists "Related Video" on a Short as an advanced feature, which needs verification). Your Shorts viewers become an audience for your longer work.

3. Is your goal an audience or customers?

If you sell something locally or to people who already know you, Reels has an advantage: your existing followers, friends and customers are there, and DMs make it easy to turn a viewer into a booking. If your goal is a new, broad audience, TikTok and Shorts lean more toward strangers.

4. Which app do you already use daily?

You will make better videos for an app you understand from the viewer side. You already know its pacing, its humor and what makes you swipe away. That intuition is worth a lot in your first month.

> **TIP**
>
> Still tied? Flip it around: which app would you be least embarrassed to post a rough first video on? Pick that one. The first 10 videos are practice, and posting them matters more than where they go.

What each platform is like for a beginner

YouTube Shorts

- Shorts can be up to 3 minutes long when made with YouTube's Shorts tools, and you can upload vertical video up to 1080p.
- Your Shorts live on the same channel as any long videos, playlists and community posts.
- YouTube is also a search engine. Clear, specific titles help a video keep getting found.
- Good fit: educators, explainers, podcasters, reviewers, anyone building a library.

TikTok

- TikTok says follower count isn't a direct factor in recommendations. Interactions, video details like captions and sounds, and whether people finish watching are what matter.
- Feedback comes fast, so you learn quickly which hooks work.

- Trends and sounds move quickly. That's an opportunity if you can post often, and a treadmill if you can't.
- Good fit: entertainers, trend-friendly niches, people who want to test lots of ideas.

Instagram Reels

- Reels sit next to your photos, Stories and DMs, so they work well for people with an existing community or a business.
- Trial reels let eligible creators show a reel to non-followers first, see the results, and then decide whether to share it with followers. Instagram can also share it automatically if it does well in its first 72 hours.
- Instagram says accounts that mostly post non-original content may not be recommended to new viewers, so make your own.
- Good fit: local businesses, lifestyle, fashion, food, fitness, creatives who sell.

Don't choose based on money

It's tempting to start wherever the payouts look best. Two reasons not to:

1. **Rules change.** Thresholds, rates and program names change. Anything you read today might be different by the time you qualify. Always check the platform's own help pages.
2. **You won't qualify yet.** Every payout program has eligibility requirements a new account doesn't meet. By the time you do, you'll know more about your audience than any comparison article can tell you.

The money module covers each program in detail when you get there. For now, pick for audience fit and learning speed.

What if you pick the wrong one?

You can't really pick wrong, because the work transfers. A good short is a good short on all three apps: a fast hook, one clear point, captions, a clean ending. Everything you learn about writing, filming and editing on one platform carries over to the next.

What doesn't transfer automatically is your audience. Followers on one app don't follow you to another unless you give them a reason. That's why the first choice is about where your viewers already are, not about which app has the best features this year.

Signs it's time to switch your main platform (not just add one):

- **Your viewers keep asking where else they can find you.** If commenters say "is this on YouTube?" or "do you have a longer version?", follow them.
- **Your best videos do much better when you test them elsewhere.** If a clip that got 300 views on one app gets 5,000 on another, that's a signal about fit, not luck, once it happens three or four times.
- **The format you enjoy making doesn't fit the app.** If you love 2-minute explainers and the app's viewers keep swiping at 20 seconds, look at where longer shorts are watched.

Signs it isn't time to switch:

- **You've posted fewer than 15 videos.** That's not enough to judge anything.
- **One video flopped.** Every creator has flops. Look at your average over the last ten.
- **A friend's account grew faster elsewhere.** Different topic, different audience, different result.

> **TIP**
>
> Before you switch, post your three best videos to the other app as a test. If they beat your average there too, you have a real reason to move.

When and how to add a second platform

After 30 days and around 10 to 15 videos, you'll know your format works. That's the time to expand. Do it like this:

- **Upload your original file.** Don't download your TikTok and re-upload it with the watermark. Export a clean file from your editor and upload that.
- **Adjust the caption and title.** YouTube rewards searchable titles. TikTok and Reels captions can be shorter and more conversational.
- **Check the safe zones.** Each app puts buttons and captions in slightly different places. Keep text away from the edges. Our Shorts size guide has the details.
- **Keep watching your main platform's numbers.** It stays your learning loop. Use the second one as a bonus, not a new experiment.

Posting to three apps by hand gets tedious quickly. If you'd rather schedule once, Short.now can auto-post the same clip to TikTok, YouTube and Instagram on a schedule (on the Creator plan and up).

A simple 30-day start

Week	What to do
1	Set up your account. Post 2 videos in your chosen format.
2	Post 2-3 videos. Check each one's average watch time at 48 hours.
3	Make variations of your best video. Try one new hook style.
4	Post 2-3 more. Review all videos. Decide on a second platform.

That's 9 to 11 videos. Not a lot, but enough to know whether your format holds attention.

What's next

If you picked YouTube, or YouTube is where you want to end up, set up your channel properly with how to start a YouTube channel. It takes about an hour and covers the settings most beginners miss.

PRACTICE

Do it now: pick your platform and set a 30-day cadence

1. Answer the four questions in this lesson and write down the platform that got the most answers.
2. Open that app and watch 15 minutes of videos in your niche. Note three formats you could copy the structure of (not the content).
3. Decide how many videos per week you can sustain for 30 days. Two or three is plenty.
4. Put the posting days in your calendar and set a date, 30 days out, to decide whether to add a second platform.

Plan it with the free clip cadence planner →

Check yourself

1. **You run a hair salon and most of your clients follow you on Instagram. Where should you start?**

   A TikTok, because it is the biggest
   B YouTube Shorts, because of long-form
   C Instagram Reels, because your customers already use the app
   D All three at once

2. **Why start on one platform instead of three?**

   A You get one clean set of analytics and one feedback loop to learn from
   B Posting on more than one platform gets you banned
   C Algorithms punish creators who post everywhere
   D Two of the three platforms are about to shut down

3. **According to TikTok, does follower count directly affect whether your video gets recommended?**

   A Yes, you need 1,000 followers first
   B Only for accounts older than a year
   C Only on the Following feed
   D No, TikTok says follower count is not a direct factor

4. **You want to add Reels after a month on TikTok. What should you upload?**

   A The original edited file, with no TikTok watermark
   B The video downloaded from TikTok with its watermark
   C A screen recording of the TikTok
   D A screenshot with a link to TikTok

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Which platform is easiest to grow on as a beginner?

There is no universal answer, because it depends on your topic and audience. TikTok tends to give the fastest, most visible feedback, which helps you learn. The easiest platform for you is the one where your viewers already spend time and where you can post consistently.

Can I post the same video on TikTok, Reels and YouTube Shorts?

Yes, as long as it's your own video. Upload the original file to each app rather than a download with another platform's watermark, and write a caption that fits each audience. Instagram says reposted content from other sources may not be recommended to non-followers.

Which platform pays creators the most?

Payout programs, rates and eligibility differ and change often, so check each platform's official help pages for current rules. As a beginner you won't qualify for months, so it's better to choose based on audience and long-term goals.

Should I start a YouTube channel or a TikTok account first?

If you ever want to make long videos, podcasts or tutorials, start a YouTube channel and post Shorts there, since the same channel can hold both. If you only want short videos and fast feedback, TikTok is a fine first choice.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Get started creating YouTube Shorts
- TikTok Newsroom: How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou
- Instagram Creators: Trial reels
- Instagram Creators: Original content guidelines
- YouTube Help: Access features on YouTube (feature tiers)

MODULE 1 · START HERE · 10 MIN

How to Start a YouTube Channel: A Beginner's Step-by-Step Guide

Create your channel, choose a name and handle, verify it, set up branding and audience settings, and publish your first Short, all in about an hour.

Key takeaways

- Create a channel from Settings > Add or manage channel(s). To let an editor or teammate help, invite them in YouTube Studio > Settings > Permissions; never share your password.
- Pick a name viewers can remember and a handle of 3 to 30 characters that matches it.
- Verify your phone number on day one. It unlocks custom thumbnails, videos longer than 15 minutes and live streaming from a computer.
- Set your audience (made for kids or not) for the channel. YouTube requires it.
- Your first Short can go up today. Shorts can run up to 3 minutes, but aim for something tight you can repeat.

To start a YouTube channel, sign in to YouTube with a Google account, open Settings, choose **Add or manage channel(s)**, then **Create a channel**. Pick a name, a handle and a profile picture, and you're live. After that, take 30 more minutes to verify your phone, set your audience and write a description, then post your first Short.

Here is every step in order, with the settings beginners tend to miss.

Step 1: Decide who owns the channel and who can help

YouTube gives you two ways to create a channel:

Option	Who can manage it	Best for
Channel on your Google account	You own it; invite helpers in Studio > Settings > Permissions	Solo creators and small teams
Brand Account channel	Can have more than one owner	Businesses that may change hands, agencies

You don't need a Brand Account to get help. YouTube's channel permissions let you invite people by email as a Manager, Editor, Subtitle Editor or Viewer, and remove them at any time, all without sharing your Google password. A Brand Account still makes sense when a business needs more than one owner. One Brand Account can hold only one channel.

How to create it

1. Sign in to YouTube on a computer or the mobile site.
2. Click your profile picture, then **Settings**.

3. Under **Account**, select **Add or manage channel(s)**.
4. Choose **Create a channel** (or create a Brand Account channel from your channel list).
5. Choose a profile picture, enter your name and handle, then click **Create channel**.

If you use YouTube with a supervised account, you may not be able to create a channel.

Step 2: Pick a name and handle

Your **channel name** is what appears on your videos. Your **handle** is your @name and your channel URL (youtube.com/@yourhandle). They don't have to match, but it helps viewers find you.

Handle rules from YouTube:

- 3 to 30 characters for most languages.
- Letters and numbers, plus underscores, hyphens and periods, but not at the start or end.
- Not case-sensitive, and it can't look like a URL or phone number.

What makes a good name:

- **Easy to say and spell.** If someone hears it in a video, can they type it?
- **Hints at the topic or is simply your name.** "Sam Bakes" says more than "SB Productions."
- **Not too narrow.** "iPhone 17 Tips" ages badly. "Phone Tips with Ana" doesn't.
- **Same handle on every platform** if you can get it. Check TikTok and Instagram before you commit.

> **TIP**
>
> Say your name and handle out loud to two friends and ask them to type it into their phones. If either spells it wrong, simplify.

Step 3: Verify your phone number

New channels start with standard features: uploading videos and Shorts, playlists and posts. Phone verification moves you to **intermediate** features, which include:

- Videos longer than 15 minutes
- Custom thumbnails
- Live streaming on a computer
- Creating a podcast

Advanced features need phone verification plus either enough channel history or ID or video verification. They include pinned comments, chapters, clickable links in descriptions, adding a Related Video to a Short and applying for monetization.

Check where you stand in YouTube Studio under **Settings > Channel > Feature eligibility**. Do this on day one so nothing blocks you later.

Step 4: Set up branding and your About section

You don't need a designer. You need three things done well enough.

Profile picture

Your face (cropped close) or a simple logo. It shows small, rendering at 98 x 98 pixels, so avoid text. The file must be 15 MB or smaller.

Banner

Optional on day one. If you add one, YouTube's minimum is 2048 x 1152 pixels (16:9), with 2560 x 1440 recommended, at 6 MB or smaller. Keep important text in the middle, since the edges get cropped on phones.

Description

Two or three sentences that answer: who is this for, what will they get, and how often? Example:

> Quick budgeting tips for people renting their first place. New Shorts every Tuesday and Friday, plus a longer breakdown each month.

Add a business email for contact and links to your other profiles. Our free YouTube description generator can give you a draft to edit.

Step 5: Set your audience and basic settings

These are easy to skip and annoying to fix later.

- **Audience.** YouTube requires every creator, in every country, to say whether their content is made for kids. Set the channel default in Studio under **Settings > Channel > Advanced settings**, and you can also set it per video. "Made for kids" means content directed at children, not just content kids might enjoy.
- **Upload defaults.** Under **Settings > Upload defaults**, set a default description footer (links, a short line about the channel) and category so you don't retype them.
- **Country and keywords.** Under **Settings > Channel > Basic info**, add your country and a few keywords describing the channel.

Step 6: Upload your first Short

Don't start with a trailer or an "introducing my channel" video. Nobody is subscribed yet, so there's nobody to introduce yourself to. Start with a useful short that answers one question.

What YouTube allows

- Shorts made in YouTube's Shorts tools can be up to 3 minutes long. More on that in how long YouTube Shorts can be.

- Upload vertical video. YouTube accepts Shorts at up to 1080p.
- Titles can be up to 100 characters. Keep yours to about 60 so it isn't cut off.

How to post one from your phone

1. Open the YouTube app and tap **+** (Create), then **Short**.
2. Record, or tap the gallery icon to upload a vertical video you've already edited.
3. Add text or a sound if you want, then tap **Next**.
4. Write a specific title, set visibility to **Public**, set the audience, and tap **Upload Short**.

A first-Short checklist

- First line spoken within the first second, no "hey guys."
- One point only. If you have three tips, that's three Shorts.
- Burned-in captions or on-screen text, since many people watch muted. See how to add captions automatically.
- A title that says what the viewer gets: "Fix a squeaky door in 30 seconds," not "Door hack!!"

Short videos are faster to make than long ones, so they're a good way to learn. If you already have long recordings, such as a podcast or a livestream, you can cut Shorts from them. Short.now does this automatically and its free plan adds no watermark, or you can do it by hand with the steps in how to make Shorts from long videos.

Step 7: Plan your first 10 videos

A new channel grows by publishing, not by tweaking settings. Write down your first 10 ideas now. A simple mix:

Videos	Type	Why
1-4	Answers to common beginner questions in your niche	Searchable and easy to make
5-7	Your take or experience ("what I'd do differently")	Shows who you are
8-10	Variations of whichever of 1-7 did best	Doubles down on what works

Post on fixed days, two or three times a week. Check each video at 48 hours in YouTube Studio: look at views and how much of the video people watched. If you add long videos later, verify early so custom thumbnails are ready; our YouTube thumbnail size guide covers the specs.

Common setup mistakes

- **Sharing your password with an editor or agency.** Invite them in Studio > Settings > Permissions instead, with the lowest role that does the job.
- **A handle full of numbers or underscores.** Hard to say, hard to find.
- **Skipping verification.** Then wondering why you can't upload a custom thumbnail.
- **Leaving the audience setting unset.** YouTube requires it.
- **Spending a week on the banner.** Nobody visits a channel page with zero videos. Post first.

What’s next

Your channel is ready. If you’d prefer not to be on camera, read how to start a faceless YouTube channel next. It covers formats that work without your face, and the monetization rules that faceless channels most often run into.

PRACTICE

Do it now: set up your channel in one sitting

1. Create the channel and pick your name and handle. If someone will help you, invite them in Studio > Settings > Permissions.
2. Verify your phone number in YouTube Studio under Settings > Channel > Feature eligibility.
3. Upload a profile picture and write a two-sentence channel description: who it's for and what they get.
4. Set the channel's audience setting under Settings > Channel > Advanced settings.
5. Film and upload your first Short. Give it a specific title under 60 characters.

Draft it with the free YouTube description generator →

Check yourself

1. **You're starting a channel for your bakery and an employee will help post. Which setup is best?**

   A Invite the employee in YouTube Studio > Settings > Permissions with an Editor or Manager role

   B Give the employee your Google password

   C Make a second channel for the employee

   D Let the employee upload from their own personal channel

2. **What does phone verification unlock?**

   A Monetization

   B A verified checkmark next to your name

   C Nothing, it is only for security

   D Intermediate features such as custom thumbnails, videos over 15 minutes and live streaming on a computer

3. **Which of these is a valid YouTube handle?**

   A @ab

   B @_bakerysam

   C @sams.bakery

   D @www.samsbakery.com

4. **Which is the best first video plan for a brand-new channel?**

   A A trailer about what the channel will be

   B A short that answers one specific question your viewer has

   C One 45-minute introduction video

   D A video asking people to subscribe

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Is it free to start a YouTube channel?

Yes. Creating a channel and uploading videos costs nothing. All you need is a Google account. Gear and editing software are optional; a phone and a free editor are enough to start.

Should I start with Shorts or long videos?

Start with Shorts if you're new to making video: they're quicker to make, so you learn faster, and they can reach people who have never heard of you. Add long videos once you know what your viewers respond to. Both live on the same channel.

Can I make a YouTube channel without showing my face?

Yes. Voiceovers, screen recordings, hands-only filming and animation all work. See our lesson on faceless YouTube channels for formats and the monetization rules to watch.

How many subscribers do you need to get paid on YouTube?

YouTube's help page currently lists 1,000 subscribers plus either 4,000 qualified watch hours on public long videos in 12 months or 10 million qualified Shorts views in 90 days for the YouTube Partner Program. These rules change, so check the official page.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Manage your channel permissions
- YouTube Help: Create a YouTube channel
- YouTube Help: Choose your handle
- YouTube Help: Access features on YouTube (feature tiers)
- YouTube Help: Manage your channel branding
- YouTube Help: Determine if your content is made for kids
- YouTube Help: Get started creating YouTube Shorts

MODULE 1 · START HERE · 10 MIN

How to Start a Faceless YouTube Channel (That Can Actually Get Monetized)

Formats that work without showing your face, the gear and workflow for each, and the YouTube rules on reused, mass-produced and AI content that faceless channels most often break.

Key takeaways

- A faceless channel still needs a person behind it: your script, your voice or your hands, and your editing.
- The safest faceless formats are voiceover explainers, screen recordings, hands-only filming and original animation.
- Compilations of other people's footage and template videos with no real narration are the main reasons faceless channels get turned down for monetization.
- Using AI for scripts, titles or thumbnails doesn't need a label. Realistic AI scenes or making a real person appear to say something do.
- A good microphone matters more on a faceless channel than on any other kind, because your voice is the personality.

To start a faceless YouTube channel, pick a format where the visuals carry the video (a screen recording, your hands, or animation), write your own script, record your own voiceover, and edit it together. Then post on a schedule like any other channel. The part most guides skip: YouTube's monetization rules reject channels built on other people's footage or mass-produced templates, so being faceless is fine but being generic isn't.

If you haven't set up the channel itself, start with how to start a YouTube channel. This lesson picks up from there.

What "faceless" really means

A faceless channel doesn't show the creator's face. It still has a creator. Viewers come back for a voice, a point of view, a style of explaining. Faceless channels that last replace the face with something else that's clearly you:

- **Your voice** narrating and explaining
- **Your hands** doing the thing
- **Your screen** showing exactly how
- **Your drawings or animation**

The faceless channels that struggle swap the creator for nothing: stock clips, a robotic voice reading a list, text scrolling over a photo.

Faceless formats that work

Format	What you need	Example	Effort per Short
Screen recording + voiceover	Free screen recorder, mic	”3 Excel shortcuts that save an hour a week”	Low
Hands-only filming	Phone on an overhead mount	Cooking, crafts, drawing, repairs, unboxing	Medium
Voiceover explainer with your own visuals	Mic, photos or footage you shot, editor	”Why your sourdough is flat” over shots of your bread	Medium
Gameplay with commentary	Capture tool, mic	Beginner tips for one game	Low to medium
Original animation or whiteboard	Drawing or animation app	Science or history explainers	High
Point-of-view filming	Phone on a chest or head mount	Walking a hiking trail, a day at your job	Medium
Podcast or audio show with visuals	Mic, waveform or captions, B-roll	Clips from your own audio show	Low once set up

Start with the lowest-effort format that fits your topic. You can add harder ones once you’ve got a posting rhythm.

> **TIP**
>
> For hands-only and overhead shots, a cheap gooseneck phone holder clamped to a table edge does the job of an expensive overhead rig.

The rules faceless channels run into

Most faceless channels that get rejected for monetization break one of three policies. Read them now, before you pick a format.

Reused content

YouTube’s monetization policies say repurposing existing content without meaningful original commentary or modification isn’t eligible, and it’s judged at the channel level. Examples of what’s not allowed include clips from a show edited together with little or no narrative, and short videos compiled from other social media sites. YouTube is explicit that this applies **even if you have permission** from the original creator.

What is allowed: edited footage from others where you add a storyline and commentary.

Inauthentic content

Since July 2025, YouTube calls this policy “inauthentic content” (it used to be “repetitious content”). It covers mass-produced, generic or repetitive videos. Image slideshows, templated storylines or scrolling text with minimal narrative or educational value are on the list, as are AI-generated videos made with generic or unoriginal templates.

What is allowed: a series with the same intro and outro, as long as each video’s content is different.

Unsatisfying content

YouTube also lists videos that stitch together unrelated or inconsistent AI clips to shock viewers, and channels that lean heavily on generic templates or emotionally manipulative themes.

The common thread: **YouTube wants to see your creative contribution.** A test you can apply: if someone else could make your exact video in 10 minutes with the same template and stock library, it’s too generic.

Using AI without getting flagged

AI tools can speed up a faceless channel a lot. YouTube is fairly clear about where the lines are.

No disclosure needed (YouTube calls these production assistance or minor edits):

- AI help with scripts, outlines, titles and thumbnails
- Auto-generated captions and audio cleanup
- Cloning your own voice for voiceovers or dubs
- Color correction, beauty filters, background blur
- Clearly unrealistic content, like a cartoon world

Disclosure needed (turn on the altered or synthetic content setting when uploading):

- Making a real person appear to say or do something they didn’t
- Altering footage of a real event or place
- A realistic-looking scene that never happened
- AI-generated music that is the main focus

Disclosure is a separate question from monetization. A properly labeled video can still fail the inauthentic content policy if it’s mass-produced. Use AI to help you make your video, not to make it for you.

Your faceless setup

Audio first

On a faceless channel, your voice is the face. Spend your first money here:

- A USB or lavalier mic in the $20-60 range is a big step up from a laptop mic.

- Record in a small room with soft things in it: a closet of clothes, a bedroom with curtains. Bare walls cause echo.
- Keep the mic a hand's width from your mouth and speak a little slower than normal.

Visuals

- **Screen recording:** OBS Studio is free on every desktop. Phones have built-in screen recording.
- **Hands-only:** shoot vertical, overhead, with light from a window to the side so your hands don't cast shadows on the work.
- **Your own B-roll:** film 10-20 seconds of everything related to your topic whenever you can. Your own footage beats stock because nobody else has it.

Editing

Any free editor works: CapCut, DaVinci Resolve, the YouTube Create app, or the editor built into the Shorts camera. Add captions to every video. On a voiceover channel, captions help viewers who watch muted follow along.

A faceless Short, step by step

1. **Write the script.** 100 to 130 words for 40-50 seconds. Open with the answer or the most surprising line. Use the script timer to check length.
2. **Record the voiceover.** Do three takes in a row and keep the best. Leave a one-second pause between sentences so editing is easier.
3. **Match visuals to lines.** Make a quick list: line one gets this shot, line two gets that one. Change the picture every 2-4 seconds.
4. **Edit to the voice.** Lay down the audio first, then cut the visuals to it. Trim every pause and breath.
5. **Add captions and a text hook.** Put a short line of text on screen in the first second that says what the video is about.
6. **Upload as a Short.** Vertical, up to 3 minutes if made in YouTube's Shorts tools, though most faceless explainers work best well under a minute.

Make one recording do more

A 15-minute screen-recorded tutorial or an episode of your podcast often holds five or more standalone tips. Cutting them into Shorts is one of the most efficient faceless workflows. Short.now can find those moments, reframe them to vertical and add captions automatically, or you can follow the manual steps in how to make Shorts from long videos.

15 faceless channel ideas

1. Software tutorials for one app (Notion, Excel, Canva, Figma)
2. Coding tips explained over your screen
3. Overhead cooking for one cuisine
4. Cake decorating or baking techniques
5. Drawing and painting process videos

6. Miniatures, model kits or 3D printing builds
7. Phone and computer fixes for non-techies
8. Personal finance explainers with your own charts
9. History stories narrated over maps and your own drawings
10. Science explained with simple home experiments
11. Gaming guides for one game
12. Plant care, filmed on your own plants
13. Car or bike maintenance, hands-only
14. Walking tours of your city, point of view
15. Clips from your own podcast with captions

For more, see the 60 ideas in how to choose a niche. Most of them work without a face.

What's next

You've finished the Start module. Next, learn how the feeds decide who sees your videos, starting with how the YouTube Shorts algorithm works.

PRACTICE

Do it now: make a 45-second faceless test Short

1. Pick one format from the table in this lesson that fits a topic you know.
2. Write a script of 100 to 120 words that answers one question. Start with the answer, not a greeting.
3. Record the voiceover on your phone in a closet or under a blanket to cut echo.
4. Capture visuals for every sentence: screen recording, hands, or your own photos.
5. Edit to the voiceover, add captions, and upload it as a Short.

Time your voiceover with the free script timer →

Check yourself

1. **Which faceless channel is most likely to run into YouTube's reused content policy?**

   A Screen-recorded tutorials with your voiceover
   B Clips from popular TV shows edited together with no commentary
   C Hands-only cooking videos you filmed
   D Original animated explainers

2. **You used AI to write your script and generate a thumbnail. Do you need to turn on the altered or synthetic content label?**

   A Yes, any AI use needs a label
   B Only if the video is longer than a minute
   C Only on Shorts
   D No, YouTube treats scripts and thumbnails as production help

3. **Which upgrade helps a new faceless voiceover channel most?**

   A A 4K camera
   B A ring light
   C A decent microphone and a quiet, soft-furnished room to record in
   D A green screen

4. **What does YouTube's 'inauthentic content' policy target?**

   A Content that is mass-produced, generic or repetitive, like slideshows or scrolling text with little narrative
   B Any channel that doesn't show a face
   C Any video that uses AI
   D Videos with the same intro every time

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Can faceless YouTube channels get monetized?

Yes. YouTube doesn't require you to show your face. What it requires is original work: its policies reject reused content without meaningful commentary and mass-produced or templated videos. A faceless channel with your own script, voiceover and editing can qualify like any other.

Can I use an AI voice for a faceless channel?

You can, but it's riskier. YouTube treats cloning your own voice for voiceovers as a minor change that needs no disclosure. Generic text-to-speech over stock footage is the kind of template content its inauthentic content policy describes, so add real scripting, research and editing if you go this route.

What are the best faceless YouTube niches?

Niches where the visuals explain themselves: software and tech tutorials, cooking, crafts and DIY, drawing, gaming guides, personal finance explainers, history and science storytelling. If viewers want to see a screen, a process or your hands, you don't need your face.

Is a faceless channel easier than showing your face?

It's easier to start if you're camera-shy, but often more work per video, because you have to find or film visuals for every line. Many faceless creators make up for that by recording one longer tutorial and cutting several Shorts from it.

Sources

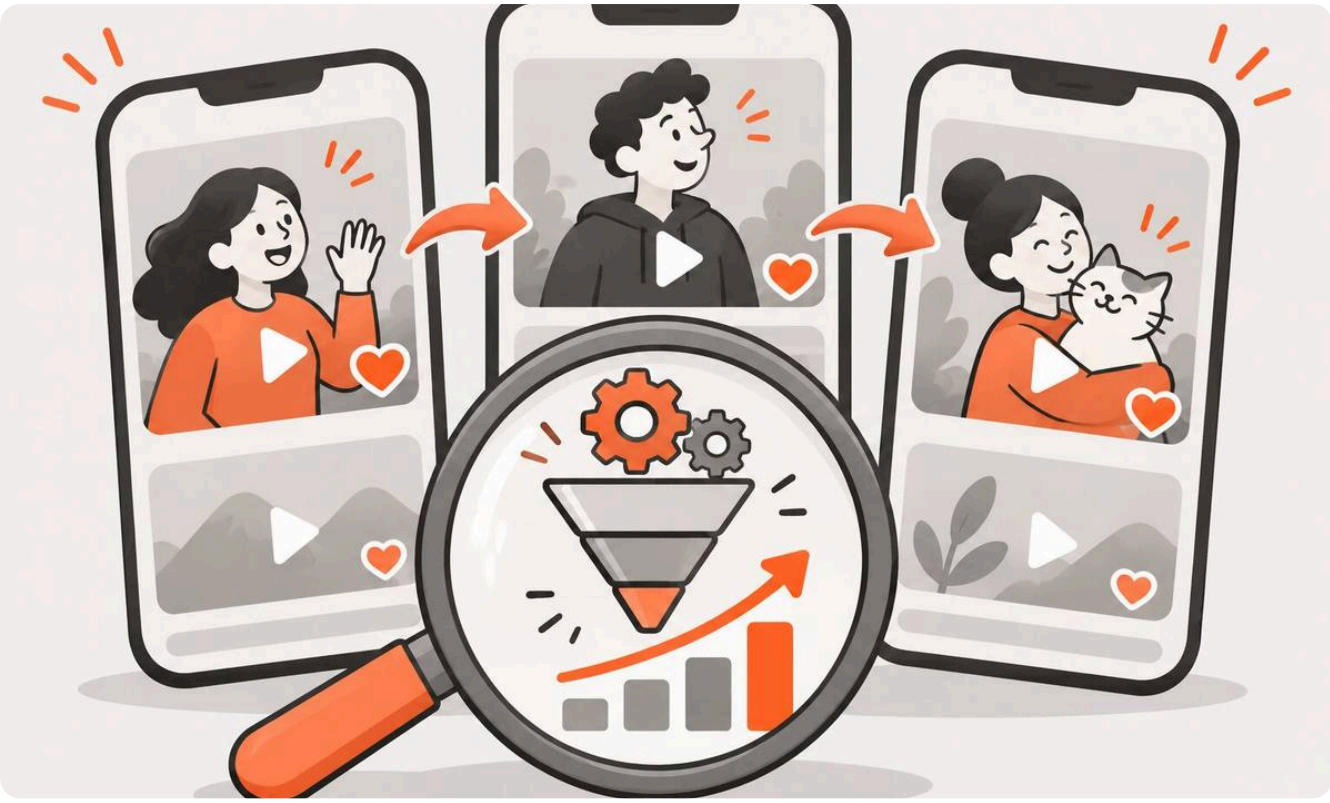
- YouTube Help: YouTube channel monetization policies
- YouTube Help: Disclosing use of altered or synthetic content
- YouTube Help: Get started creating YouTube Shorts

PUT THIS MODULE TO WORK

Practice on your own videos

Short.now turns one long video into ready-to-post Shorts, TikToks and Reels with captions. Free plan, no watermark, no card.

Try Short.now free →



MODULE 2

How the platforms work

What each feed measures, how videos get shown to new people, and the format rules that matter.

1. How the YouTube Shorts Algorithm Works (and What You Can Control)
2. How the TikTok Algorithm Works: The For You Feed Explained
3. How the Instagram Reels Algorithm Works: How Reels Are Ranked
4. Short-Form Video Specs Cheat Sheet: Length, Size, Safe Zones and File Types

MODULE 2 · HOW THE PLATFORMS WORK · 9 MIN

How the YouTube Shorts Algorithm Works (and What You Can Control)

What YouTube has actually said about how Shorts get recommended, the signals that matter, the myths that don't, and a checklist for making Shorts the feed keeps showing.

Key takeaways

- There is no single Shorts formula. YouTube matches each Short to viewers it predicts will enjoy it, based on what those viewers watched, liked, skipped and rated.
- A new Short is shown to a small seed audience first. If those viewers keep watching instead of swiping away, it gets shown to more people.
- The number to watch is 'Stayed to watch' in YouTube Studio: the share of viewers who kept watching past the first seconds.
- Posting time, custom thumbnails and posting more often matter far less than people think. Deleting and re-uploading a Short can look like spam.
- The practical rule from YouTube itself: think about the audience, not the algorithm. Make the first second clear and the whole Short worth finishing.

The YouTube Shorts algorithm is a recommendation system that tests each new Short on a small group of viewers, then shows it to more people if those viewers keep watching instead of swiping away. There is no fixed formula. YouTube predicts what each person wants to see next from what they and similar viewers have watched, liked, skipped and rated.

That means you can’t trick it, but you can understand it. This lesson covers what YouTube has said in its own words, the numbers in YouTube Studio that reflect it, and what to change in your next Short.

How a Short finds its viewers

Long videos get chosen. Someone sees a thumbnail and a title, then taps. Shorts are different: people swipe through the feed without knowing what comes next. YouTube’s Shorts product lead, Todd Sherman, made this point in a 2023 Q&A. Because people swipe through hundreds of Shorts instead of choosing 10 or 20 long videos, the Shorts feed leans toward variety.

In practice, a new Short goes through a loop like this:

1. **Seed audience.** YouTube shows the Short to a small set of people it predicts may enjoy it. Sherman described this as finding “a seed audience.”
2. **Reaction.** Those viewers either keep watching or swipe away. Some like it, share it, subscribe, or tap “Not interested.”
3. **Wider test or taper.** A strong response means the Short is shown to more people with similar tastes. A weak one means traffic slows down.

4. **Repeat.** This can happen several times, which is why some Shorts jump in views days or weeks after posting.

This explains the most common beginner experience: a few hundred views in the first hours, then a flat line. That is not a ban. The first test didn't go well enough to widen. The fix is a better next Short, not a reposted one.

> **TIP**
>
> Every Short starts with a fresh test. A flop doesn't block your next upload, and a big hit doesn't guarantee the next one. Judge your channel on your last 10 Shorts, not your last one.

What YouTube actually measures

YouTube's help page on recommendations says the system learns from "over 80 billion pieces of information" it calls signals. For any viewer, the main ones are:

Signal	What it tells YouTube
Watch history	What this person watches and finishes, which shapes their whole feed
Search history	Topics they're curious about right now
Subscriptions	Channels they already trust
Likes and dislikes	What to show more or less of
"Not interested" and "Don't recommend channel"	Strong signals to stop showing something
Satisfaction surveys	Whether a video was worth their time, beyond raw watch time

Two points matter for creators.

Watching beats clicking. YouTube's 2021 explainer on its recommendation system describes the history: clicks were tried as a signal and dropped because "clicking on a video doesn't mean you actually watched it." Watch time came next, then satisfaction. YouTube surveys some viewers, asking them to rate videos from one to five stars, and trains a model to predict how everyone else would answer. On Shorts, the swipe is the click. What counts is whether someone stays.

Weights differ by person. There is no universal ranking of signals. The same 2021 post gives an example: if someone shares every video they watch, a share from that person carries less weight. Chasing one magic metric doesn't work.

YouTube also says videos made with AI "can be recommended as broadly" as videos made without it. The tool you edit with is not a ranking factor. Whether people watch is.

The metric to watch: Stayed to watch

In YouTube Studio, each Short has a reach metric called **Stayed to watch**. YouTube defines it as “the percentage of times viewers stayed to watch past the initial seconds of a Short.” Everyone else swiped away.

This is the closest public number to what the seed test measures. If most people swipe in the first second, the Short has little chance to travel, however good the second half is.

A few related numbers:

- **Views.** YouTube now counts a view the moment a video starts to play, for Shorts and long videos alike. That makes views a measure of how many people saw it, not how many watched.
- **Engaged views.** Views where the person stayed past the initial seconds, not counting loops. YouTube uses these for average view duration and unique viewers on Shorts.
- **Average view duration.** How long people who stayed actually watched. Compare it with the Short’s length to see whether you lost them in the middle.

YouTube doesn’t publish a “good” Stayed to watch number, and it varies by topic. Compare each Short with your own recent average. The full walkthrough of every metric is in how to read your analytics.

What matters less than you think

A lot of Shorts advice is folklore. Here is what YouTube’s Shorts team said in the same 2023 Q&A, plus what YouTube’s help pages state.

- **Posting time.** Time of day isn’t something to optimize, except for news, where freshness matters. Post when you can post consistently. The best time to post guide covers when timing makes a small difference.
- **Posting volume.** Posting more Shorts doesn’t by itself earn more traction. A good Short beats three rushed ones.
- **Custom thumbnails.** Viewers swiping the feed never see your thumbnail. It only shows on shelves, search and your channel page, so it helps a little there and not at all in the feed.
- **#Shorts in the title.** Not needed. YouTube’s help pages say any square or vertical video up to three minutes is classified as a Short.
- **Hashtags.** Useful as context about the topic, according to Sherman, but they won’t save a Short people swipe past.
- **Length.** YouTube says there is no best length. Shorts can be up to three minutes, but longer is harder to hold. Note one hard rule: a Short over one minute with an active Content ID claim is blocked worldwide. Details are in how long YouTube Shorts can be.

> **TIP**
>
> Don't delete and re-upload a Short that flopped. YouTube's Shorts team has said this can be seen as spam. Make a new version with a different opening instead, and leave the old one up.

How to make Shorts the feed keeps showing

YouTube's own advice to creators is to think about the audience, not the algorithm. A viewer who keeps watching, rewatches and shares is the signal. Here is what that means in a script.

Make the first second readable

The swipe decision happens fast. Open on the most interesting thing: the result, the claim, the question. Cut any "Hey guys" or logo. A useful test: mute the Short and look at the first frame. Can a stranger tell what it's about?

A weak opening and a stronger one for the same cooking Short:

- Weak: "So today I want to show you a quick trick I use in the kitchen."
- Stronger: (shot of perfectly peeled garlic) "This is 20 cloves of garlic, peeled in 10 seconds."

For more opening patterns, see how to create viral video hooks.

Keep a reason to stay

After the hook, every few seconds should either add new information or move toward a payoff. Cut pauses, repeated points and slow setups. If your average view duration drops sharply at one spot, that spot is the edit to fix next time. The short video structure lesson shows how to build hook, setup, payoff and loop.

End cleanly, or loop

Stop when the idea is complete. A Short that ends on the payoff, or loops smoothly into its own start, gets rewatched. A long outro asking people to subscribe gives them a reason to swipe before the end.

Stay in one lane

Recommendations work from what similar viewers enjoyed. If your Shorts jump between cooking, gaming and finance, each one starts from scratch with a different audience. Posting around one topic helps YouTube learn who your Shorts are for, and helps viewers know why they should subscribe.

Check your Shorts before posting

- [ ] Vertical (9:16) or square, three minutes or less
- [ ] The topic is clear in the first second, even with sound off
- [ ] Captions are on and sit clear of the buttons and title at the bottom
- [ ] No dead air at the start or a long outro at the end
- [ ] Music is from the Shorts audio library or royalty-free, especially past one minute
- [ ] Title says what the Short is about in plain words

If you cut Shorts from long videos, the same rules apply to each clip: it has to make sense to someone who never saw the original. Short.now can find those self-contained moments in a long video and add captions, but you still decide which openings are strong enough to post.

Shorts and your long-form channel

Shorts and long videos are watched differently, and YouTube recommends them in different places. YouTube has said it doesn't see Shorts as cannibalizing long-form. Still, a Shorts viewer who subscribes won't automatically watch your 20-minute videos.

Two things help connect them:

- **Related video link.** In YouTube Studio you can attach one of your public or unlisted long videos to a Short. Viewers see a link under your channel handle. This needs advanced feature access on your channel.
- **Matching topics.** Shorts on the same subject as your long videos bring in viewers who are likely to care about both. Shorts on random trending topics bring viewers who leave.

Links typed into Shorts descriptions and comments are not clickable, so the related video link is the main way to send Shorts viewers to a long video.

What's next

YouTube is one of three big short-form feeds, and the next one works on similar ideas with some important differences. Read how the TikTok algorithm works next, then use how to get more views on YouTube Shorts when you're ready to put this into a growth routine.

PRACTICE

Do it now: audit your last five Shorts

1. Open YouTube Studio, go to Content, then the Shorts tab, and open the analytics for your five most recent Shorts.
2. For each one, write down two numbers: 'Stayed to watch' and average view duration. Put them in a simple list.
3. Sort the list by 'Stayed to watch'. Watch the first two seconds of your best and worst Short back to back.
4. Write one sentence on what the best opening does that the worst one doesn't (for example: shows the result first, starts mid-sentence, has a clear on-screen question).
5. Script the opening line of your next Short using that pattern and time it so it lands in under two seconds.

Open the free AI hook generator →

Check yourself

1. **Your new Short gets 800 views in the first hours, then stops growing. What is the most likely explanation?**

   A Your channel has been shadowbanned
   B YouTube tested it on a small seed audience and the response wasn't strong enough to widen the test
   C You posted at the wrong time of day
   D You forgot to add #Shorts to the title

2. **Which metric in YouTube Studio tells you most directly whether viewers swiped away at the start?**

   A Subscribers gained
   B Impressions
   C Likes
   D Stayed to watch

3. **A Short flopped. What does YouTube's Shorts team advise against?**

   A Deleting it and re-uploading the same video to give it a second chance
   B Making a new Short on the same topic with a stronger opening
   C Leaving it up and moving on
   D Checking where viewers dropped off

4. **Why does YouTube use satisfaction surveys on top of watch time?**

   A To decide which creators get paid
   B Because watch time alone can't tell whether viewers felt the video was worth their time
   C To count views more accurately
   D To pick videos for the Trending page

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How does the YouTube Shorts algorithm work?

YouTube shows each Short to a small group of viewers it predicts will like it. If they watch instead of swiping away, and like, share or rate it well, the Short is shown to more people with similar tastes. Each viewer's feed is personal, built from their own watch history and feedback.

How long does it take for a YouTube Short to get views?

There is no fixed timeline. Many Shorts get most of their views in the first day or two, but some pick up weeks later when YouTube finds a new group of viewers for them. Judge a Short after about a week, not after an hour.

Do hashtags help YouTube Shorts?

A little, as context. YouTube's Shorts team has said hashtags can be useful, but they won't rescue a Short that people swipe away. You don't need #Shorts: a vertical or square video up to three minutes is treated as a Short automatically.

Does posting Shorts hurt my long-form videos?

YouTube has said it doesn't see Shorts as cannibalizing long-form. Shorts and long videos are watched in different ways, so treat them as two formats. You can link a Short to one of your long videos with the related video option in YouTube Studio.

Sources

- YouTube Help: How YouTube recommendations work
- YouTube Official Blog: On YouTube's recommendation system (2021)
- YouTube Help: Understand your video reach (Stayed to watch definition)
- YouTube Help: Understand three-minute YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: Add a related video to your YouTube Shorts
- TechCrunch: YouTube demystifies the Shorts algorithm (Shorts product lead Q&A, 2023)

MODULE 2 · HOW THE PLATFORMS WORK · 9 MIN

How the TikTok Algorithm Works: The For You Feed Explained

How TikTok picks videos for each person's For You feed, which signals count most, why follower count isn't a direct factor, and what makes a video ineligible for recommendation.

Key takeaways

- TikTok predicts how likely each viewer is to watch, like, share, comment on or skip a video, and builds their For You feed from the highest scores.
- Signals are weighted by strength. TikTok's own example: finishing a longer video counts far more than sharing a country with the creator.
- Follower count and your past hits are not direct ranking factors. A first video from a new account can reach the For You feed.
- Some videos are kept out of For You entirely, including unoriginal or reused content with nothing new added, and posts that bait people for likes or follows.
- The feed avoids showing the same creator or sound twice in a row, so variety is built in. Your job is to make each video worth finishing.

The TikTok algorithm builds each person’s For You feed by predicting how likely they are to watch, like, share, comment on or skip each video, then showing the videos with the highest scores. Your own activity matters most, especially what you watch to the end. TikTok says follower count isn’t a direct factor, which is why a brand-new account can get views on its first post.

TikTok has explained its system in more detail than most platforms, in a Newsroom post and in its Safety Center. This lesson turns those explanations into what you should actually do when you make a video.

How the For You feed picks videos

TikTok’s Safety Center describes the process in a few stages. Simplified, it looks like this:

1. **Candidate sourcing.** The system pulls a large pool of videos that passed TikTok’s initial moderation.
2. **Prediction.** For each video, models estimate how likely you are to like it, share it, comment on it, or skip it. These combine into one score.
3. **Ranking.** Videos are sorted by score. Your For You feed is built from the top of that list.
4. **Similarity check.** If videos next to each other are too alike, some are swapped out for others. TikTok also has rules such as including creators from your region.

For a creator, this means every viewer is a small test. TikTok shows your video to some people whose activity suggests they might like it. Their reactions update the predictions, and that decides how many more people see it.

> **TIP**
>
> "Skip" is one of the things TikTok predicts. A video that people swipe past in the first second gives the system a clear answer. Spend more effort on your first line and first frame than on anything else in the edit.

The signals TikTok uses

TikTok's Newsroom post groups the signals into three kinds, and says they are weighted by how strongly they indicate interest.

Group	Examples	Weight
Your interactions	Videos you watch, like, share or comment on; accounts you follow; videos you create; videos you mark "Not interested"	Strongest
Video information	Captions, sounds, hashtags, and (per the Safety Center) post time, length and the creator's language	Medium
Device and account settings	Language, country, device type	Weak, mostly for performance

The key example comes straight from TikTok: whether you finish watching a longer video from beginning to end is a strong indicator of interest, much stronger than whether you and the creator are in the same country.

Two practical takeaways:

- **Completion is the big one.** A 40-second video that most people finish sends a strong signal. A 3-minute video that most people leave at 15 seconds sends a weak one. Make your video as long as the idea needs and no longer.
- **Your text and sound are context.** Captions, hashtags and sound help TikTok understand what the video is about and who to test it on. They don't make people watch. Use plain words that describe the topic. The titles, captions and hashtags lesson covers how to write them.

What isn't a direct factor

TikTok states two things are not direct factors in recommendations:

- **Follower count.** Bigger accounts do get more views on average, but TikTok says that's because they've built an audience that engages, not because the system favors their size.
- **Your past high-performing videos.** A viral hit last month doesn't lift this week's video on its own. Each video is judged on how people react to it.

This is good news for beginners. You don't need to "build up" an account before your videos can travel, and one bad video doesn't sink the next.

It also means a viral video doesn't guarantee anything. If your next video doesn't hold viewers, it won't travel as far. The how to go viral on TikTok lesson covers the parts of that you can control.

Why the feed mixes things up

TikTok openly says recommendation systems can trap people in a narrow "filter bubble." To push against that, it adds variety on purpose:

- The For You feed generally won't show two videos in a row with the same sound or from the same creator.
- It mixes in videos that may not match your stated interests, to help you find new creators and topics.
- It tries not to repeat videos you've already seen or near-duplicates of them.

For creators, this explains why reach is spread out. Your video competes for a slot against videos from many different creators and topics, and the same viewer won't see five of your videos back to back. It also explains why a video sometimes reaches a completely unexpected audience: the system is testing it with people outside your usual group.

Why some videos never reach For You

Some content is allowed on TikTok but not recommended in the For You feed. People can still find it through search or by following you, but it won't be pushed to strangers. Things TikTok lists include:

- **Unoriginal content.** TikTok's guidelines say content is ineligible for For You if it "includes unoriginal or reused material without anything new." A reposted clip from someone else, or your own old clip reposted unchanged, falls here.
- **Engagement bait.** Content that tries to push people into sending gifts or inflating likes or follows ("Like this or you'll have bad luck") isn't eligible.
- **Content not suitable for a broad audience.** For example, certain graphic or regulated material, as defined in the guidelines.
- **Accounts under 16.** Content from these accounts is not eligible for For You.
- **Spam and duplicates,** plus some videos that were just uploaded or are still under review.

TikTok's analytics will show you if a specific video was made ineligible for recommendation. Check there before assuming you've been "shadowbanned." Most of the time a low-view video is simply one the first viewers didn't stay for.

> **TIP**
>
> Reposting clips from other platforms or creators is the fastest way to stall a new account. If you reuse your own long videos, edit each clip into its own piece with a new hook, captions and a clean ending. That counts as adding something new.

How to make videos TikTok can match to viewers

You can't control who TikTok tests your video on. You can control whether those viewers stay.

Lead with the payoff

State what the viewer gets in the first line, and show it in the first frame if you can.

- Weak: "Okay so I've been getting a lot of questions about this…"
- Stronger: "Three things I'd never buy again after working at a hardware store."

Cut for completion

Remove the intro, the pauses, and every sentence that repeats an earlier one. Read the script aloud with a timer: a tight 45 seconds usually beats a loose 90. TikTok's Creator Rewards Program rewards original videos over one minute long, so if you're aiming for that, the minute has to earn its length.

Pick one topic and stay there

TikTok matches videos to viewers whose activity suggests interest. When your videos share a topic, the people who liked one are likely to like the next, and your profile makes sense to someone deciding whether to follow.

Give people a reason to share or comment

Shares and comments are among the things TikTok predicts. A video that is useful to send to a friend, or that asks a real question, earns both. Asking people to "comment for part 2" without a real reason does not.

Make it look native

Vertical 9:16, sound that matches the moment, captions that sit clear of the buttons and caption text. The TikTok video size guide has the exact safe zones. If your source is a horizontal YouTube video, Short.now's YouTube to TikTok converter reframes it to vertical around the speaker and adds captions.

Myths worth dropping

Myth	What TikTok has said
"You need followers before you get views."	Follower count isn't a direct factor.
"One viral video boosts everything after it."	Past high performers aren't a direct factor either.
"Low views mean a shadowban."	Analytics tell you if a video was made ineligible. Usually it just didn't hold viewers.
"Hashtags make videos go viral."	Hashtags are video information that helps matching. They're context, not a boost.

Myth	What TikTok has said
"Reposting a flop gives it a second chance."	Duplicated content is something TikTok tries not to recommend.

What's next

Instagram Reels runs on similar ideas, but with a few differences in what it rewards, including how much it weighs shares and original content. Read how Instagram Reels are ranked next. When you're ready to apply this, how to grow on TikTok from zero followers turns it into a weekly plan.

PRACTICE

Do it now: score three of your videos like TikTok would

1. Open TikTok Studio (or the analytics on any of your videos) and pick your three most recent posts.
2. For each, note the average watch time, the percentage who watched the full video, and the share count.
3. Divide average watch time by video length. A video people watch 80% of is doing better than one they watch 30% of, even if the second is longer.
4. Check that none of the three shows a notice that it is ineligible for the For You feed.
5. For your next video, write the first line so it states the payoff, and cut it so it ends right after the payoff lands.

Open the free script timer →

Check yourself

1. **According to TikTok, which of these is a strong signal of interest?**

   A The viewer and creator being in the same country
   B The viewer finishing a longer video from start to end
   C The creator having over 10,000 followers
   D The video being posted at 6 p.m.

2. **You open a new account and post your first video. Can it reach the For You feed?**

   A No, you need 1,000 followers first
   B Only if you pay to promote it
   C Yes, because follower count is not a direct factor in recommendations
   D Only after you've posted 10 videos

3. **Which video is most likely to be kept out of the For You feed?**

   A A clip downloaded from another creator and reposted with no changes
   B A 90-second tutorial with captions
   C A video using a trending sound
   D A video posted by an account with 50 followers

4. **Why might TikTok show you a video that doesn't match anything you've liked?**

   A It's a paid ad in disguise
   B Your account settings are broken
   C The creator paid for placement
   D TikTok deliberately mixes in different content to avoid a repetitive feed and to learn what else you might like

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How does the TikTok algorithm decide what to show?

TikTok gathers a large pool of videos that passed moderation, predicts how likely you are to watch, like, share, comment on or skip each one, and ranks them. It then swaps out videos that are too similar to each other so your feed has variety. Your own activity is the biggest input.

Does the TikTok algorithm favor accounts with more followers?

Not directly. TikTok says follower count isn't a direct factor. Bigger accounts often get more views because more people already engage with them, but a video from a small account is ranked on how viewers react to it.

Why are my TikTok views suddenly low?

Usually because recent videos didn't hold the first viewers who saw them, so TikTok didn't widen their reach. Check each video's analytics for a notice that it was made ineligible for recommendation. If there's none, compare watch time and completion with your better videos and change the opening first.

Does deleting TikTok videos hurt the algorithm?

TikTok hasn't said deleting a video hurts your other posts. But deleting a video and reposting the same clip adds nothing new, and duplicated content is one of the things TikTok tries not to recommend. Make a new version with a different hook instead.

Sources

- TikTok Newsroom: How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou
- TikTok Safety Center: Introduction to the TikTok recommendation system
- TikTok Community Guidelines: For You feed eligibility standards
- TikTok Community Guidelines: Integrity and authenticity
- TikTok Newsroom: Introducing the new Creator Rewards Program

MODULE 2 · HOW THE PLATFORMS WORK · 9 MIN

How the Instagram Reels Algorithm Works: How Reels Are Ranked

What Instagram has said about how Reels are ranked: the signals that count most, why sends matter for reaching new people, what lowers reach, and how to test ideas with trial reels.

Key takeaways

- Instagram runs a separate ranking system for Reels, built for discovery. Most Reels people see come from accounts they don't follow.
- Instagram's head, Adam Mosseri, has named the top three ranking signals: watch time, likes and sends. Sends matter slightly more for reaching non-followers.
- A new Reel is shown to a small group of non-followers first. If they watch and engage, it goes to a bigger group, then bigger again.
- Reels over 3 minutes aren't recommended to new audiences. Watermarks from other apps, low resolution and reposts of content already on Instagram also cut reach.
- Trial reels let you test an idea on non-followers before your followers see it, so you can try formats without cluttering your profile.

The Instagram Reels algorithm ranks each Reel by how likely a viewer is to watch it, like it, and send it to someone. Instagram’s head, Adam Mosseri, has said those three, watch time, likes and sends, are the signals that matter most. A new Reel is shown to a small group of people who don’t follow you, and if they engage, Instagram shows it to a larger group.

Instagram has explained its ranking in a 2023 post, in creator guides, and in Mosseri’s videos. This lesson pulls those together and turns them into choices you can make before you post.

Reels has its own ranking system

There isn’t one “Instagram algorithm.” In his 2023 explainer, Mosseri wrote that Feed, Stories, Explore and Reels each have their own ranking, because people use them differently. Stories are mostly people you follow. Reels is built for discovery and entertainment, and most Reels people see come from accounts they don’t follow.

For Reels, the process has two steps:

1. **Sourcing.** Instagram gathers Reels it thinks you might like.
2. **Ordering.** It ranks them by how interesting or entertaining it predicts each one is for you.

Instagram also surveys people, asking whether a Reel was worth their time or fun to watch, and uses those answers to improve its predictions. Like YouTube, it doesn’t just count views. It tries to measure whether people enjoyed what they saw.

The signals Instagram uses

The 2023 explainer lists the main inputs for Reels, roughly in order of importance:

Signal	Examples
Your activity	Reels you liked, saved, reshared, commented on or recently engaged with
Your history with the creator	Whether you've interacted with this account before (often you haven't)
Information about the Reel	Audio, visuals and how popular it is
Information about the creator	Their popularity, to give a wide range of creators a chance

From those, Instagram predicts how likely you are to:

- reshare the Reel
- watch it all the way through
- like it
- go to its audio page (a sign you might make your own Reel with that sound)

In January 2025, Mosseri gave a simpler version in a video: "The top three signals that matter most for ranking are watch time, likes and sends." He told creators to watch average watch time, likes per reach and sends per reach in their Insights.

Likes vs. sends

Mosseri added one useful distinction: "Likes are slightly more important for connected content, and sends are slightly more important for unconnected content." Connected means people who follow you. Unconnected means everyone else.

So if your goal is reaching new people, which is what Reels is for, ask yourself one question before posting: would someone send this to a friend? A Reel that's useful, funny or relatable enough to forward gets sends. A Reel that's merely fine gets a like at most.

> **TIP**
>
> Raw counts mislead. A Reel with 50 shares from 500 views did better than one with 200 shares from 50,000 views. Divide likes and shares by reach, as Mosseri suggests, to see which Reels actually landed.

How a new Reel gets distributed

Instagram's creator team described the rollout in a 2025 post. Your Reel goes to your followers and, separately, to non-followers. For non-followers:

1. It's shown first to a small group the system predicts will like it.
2. If it performs well with that group, it's shown to a slightly larger group.
3. The best performers keep moving to wider groups.

The signals for each step include watch time, retention, likes and comments. Instagram says this is meant to put creators of all sizes on more equal footing, distributing Reels based on engagement rather than just follower count.

This is the same test-and-widen pattern TikTok and YouTube Shorts use. It's why a small account can get a Reel to thousands of strangers, and why a big account can post a Reel that goes nowhere.

What lowers your reach

Instagram has been unusually direct about this. Its 2023 explainer says it makes some Reels less visible, including Reels that are:

- low resolution
- watermarked (for example, exported from another app with its logo)
- muted, or with borders around the video
- mostly text
- already posted on Instagram (reposts)

Two more rules from Instagram's own pages:

- **Length.** Instagram says you can record Reels much longer than 3 minutes, but "Reels over 3 minutes won't be recommended to new audiences." For discovery, stay at 3 minutes or less.
- **Originality.** In 2024, Instagram said that when it finds identical content, it will only recommend the original. Content that has been significantly changed, such as turned into a meme or a parody, isn't replaced. Accounts that repeatedly post content they didn't create or improve were to be excluded from recommendations.

> **TIP**
>
> If you post the same clip on TikTok and Instagram, export a clean file from your editor and upload that to both. Never save the TikTok with its watermark and repost it. The Reels size guide has the export settings and safe zones.

How to make Reels that travel

Hook in the first three seconds

Instagram's creator FAQ says to make the first 3 seconds engaging so people don't scroll away. Show the result or state the point up front. Text on screen helps, since many people start watching with sound off.

- Weak: (slow pan of a desk) "So I finally redid my workspace…"
- Stronger: (finished desk, text on screen) "$60 desk setup that fixed my back pain."

For structure beyond the hook, see how to structure a short so people watch to the end.

Build for watch time

Every second should either show something new or move toward the payoff. End when the idea is done. A Reel that people watch twice beats one they leave halfway.

Make it worth sending

Useful lists, relatable moments, and “this is so you” humor get sent. Before you post, name the person a viewer would send it to. If you can’t, the Reel is probably a like at best.

Use audio on purpose

Audio is one of the content signals Instagram reads, and it considers how popular trends are when ranking Reels tied to them. A trending sound can help if it fits your content. Original audio you create is credited to you if others reuse it.

Write a clear caption

A caption tells people and Instagram what the Reel is about. Lead with the topic in plain words, then add a few relevant hashtags. More on this in titles, captions and hashtags.

Post consistently

Instagram’s creator FAQ notes that creators with the strongest net follower growth post, on average, 10 or more Reels per month, while saying frequency is only one factor. That’s a useful target: two or three Reels a week.

If you already record long videos, cutting them into Reels is the easiest way to keep that pace. Short.now can pull the strongest moments from a long video, reframe them to 9:16 and caption them, with no watermark on the export.

Test ideas with trial reels

Trial reels let you post a Reel to non-followers first. Your followers don’t see it in their feed or the Reels tab, and it doesn’t appear in your profile grid. After about 24 hours, you can see views, likes, comments and shares. Then you choose whether to share it with everyone, or let Instagram share it automatically if it gets good views in the first 72 hours.

Good uses for trial reels:

- testing two different hooks on the same idea
- trying a new format or topic without confusing your existing followers
- checking whether a clip from a long video works on its own

Not every account has the feature yet. If you do, it’s in the sharing options when you post a Reel.

Track results with how to read your analytics, which covers Instagram Insights alongside YouTube and TikTok.

What's next

You now know how all three feeds decide what to show. The last lesson in this module puts every format rule on one page: length, size, safe zones and file types for Shorts, TikTok and Reels. Read the short-form video specs cheat sheet next.

PRACTICE

Do it now: find your most sendable Reel

1. Open Insights on your last five Reels (tap the Reel, then View insights).
2. For each, write down reach, average watch time, likes and shares (sends).
3. Divide likes by reach and shares by reach so you can compare Reels of different sizes fairly.
4. Pick the Reel with the highest shares per reach and write one sentence on why someone would send it to a friend.
5. Plan your next Reel around that same reason, and if your account has trial reels, post it as a trial first.

Open the free AI caption generator →

Check yourself

1. **You want a Reel to reach people who don't follow you yet. Which signal has Instagram said matters slightly more for that?**

   A Sends (people sharing it in DMs)
   B Likes
   C Number of hashtags
   D Follower count

2. **You download your TikTok with its watermark and post it as a Reel. What is likely to happen?**

   A It gets a boost because it already proved itself on TikTok
   B Nothing, watermarks aren't checked
   C It may get less reach, because Instagram makes watermarked reels less visible
   D It's removed for copyright

3. **Your 4-minute Reel gets views from followers but almost none from Explore or the Reels tab. Why?**

   A Instagram only recommends Reels posted in the morning
   B Reels over 3 minutes aren't recommended to new audiences
   C You used too few hashtags
   D Long Reels are shadowbanned

4. **What is the main purpose of trial reels?**

   A To schedule Reels in advance
   B To post Reels without captions
   C To pay for extra reach
   D To show a Reel to non-followers first and see how it performs before your followers see it

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How does the Instagram Reels algorithm work?

Instagram first gathers Reels you might like, mostly from accounts you don't follow, then orders them by how likely you are to watch, like, send or reshare each one. A new Reel is tested on a small group of non-followers and shown to more people if that group engages.

What matters most for Instagram Reels reach?

Adam Mosseri has said the top three signals are watch time, likes and sends. He suggests tracking average watch time, likes per reach and sends per reach in your Insights. Sends weigh slightly more when the Reel is shown to non-followers.

Do hashtags help Instagram Reels?

They give Instagram a little context about the topic, and Instagram considers trends when ranking. But a hashtag won't make people watch. A clear caption and a strong first three seconds do more.

How long should an Instagram Reel be?

Long enough for one complete idea and no longer. For reach, stay at 3 minutes or less: Instagram says longer Reels won't be recommended to new audiences. Most Reels that hold viewers well are much shorter than that.

Sources

- Instagram: Instagram Ranking Explained (Adam Mosseri, 2023)
- Instagram for Creators: Helping creators of all sizes break through (2025)
- Instagram for Creators: Frequently asked questions
- Instagram for Creators: Trial reels
- Instagram: Reels features (length and recommendations)
- Social Media Today: Mosseri on the top three ranking signals (January 2025)

MODULE 2 · HOW THE PLATFORMS WORK · 7 MIN

Short-Form Video Specs Cheat Sheet: Length, Size, Safe Zones and File Types

Every format rule for YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels on one page: how long each can be, the one export size that works everywhere, where to keep captions, and which file settings to use.

Key takeaways

- Export one vertical file, 1080 × 1920 at 9:16, as an MP4 with H.264 video and AAC audio. It works on Shorts, TikTok and Reels.
- Keep any video meant to reach new viewers at 3 minutes or less. YouTube only treats up to 3 minutes as a Short, and Instagram doesn't recommend longer Reels to non-followers.
- On YouTube, a Short over 1 minute with a Content ID claim is blocked worldwide. Under 60 seconds is the safest length for clips with music.
- Each app covers the bottom and right edge of the frame with buttons and text. Keep captions and faces in the middle.
- Export from your editor, not from another app. Watermarked or low-resolution re-uploads get less reach on Instagram and can count as unoriginal on TikTok.

One file works on all three short-form apps: a vertical MP4, 1080 × 1920 pixels (9:16), H.264 video with AAC audio, 3 minutes or less. Keep captions and faces in the middle of the frame, away from the bottom and the right edge, where each app puts its buttons and text. If the clip has music and you want it on YouTube, keep it under 60 seconds.

The rest of this page is the reference version, with the reasons behind each rule. When you need every detail for one platform, follow the links to the full size guides.

The one-file spec

If you only remember one table, make it this one.

Setting	Use this
Resolution	1080 × 1920 px
Aspect ratio	9:16 (vertical)
Container	MP4
Video codec	H.264
Audio	AAC, 48 kHz
Frame rate	The same rate you filmed at, usually 30 fps

Setting	Use this
Length	3 minutes or less; under 60 seconds if it has music

This matches YouTube's recommended upload settings (MP4, H.264, AAC, upload at the frame rate you recorded) and TikTok's developer guidelines, which recommend MP4 and H.264. Filming in 4K is fine, but exporting 1080 × 1920 keeps files small and uploads fast. The apps compress everything for phone screens anyway.

> **TIP**
>
> Set this up once as an export preset in your editor. The most common beginner mistake is exporting 1920 × 1080 by habit, which makes a horizontal file. On YouTube that becomes a regular video instead of a Short.

Length limits

Length rules are the ones that change most often, so check your own upload screen if something looks different.

Platform	Maximum length	What matters for reach
YouTube Shorts	3 minutes, square or vertical	Over 1 minute, a Content ID claim blocks the Short worldwide
TikTok	Varies by account; all creators can post at least 3 minutes, and many can upload much longer	Your upload screen shows your limit
Instagram Reels	Can record up to 20 minutes	Reels over 3 minutes aren't recommended to non-followers

A few details behind those numbers:

- **YouTube** decides what is a Short from shape and length alone. A square or vertical video of 3 minutes or less is a Short. A horizontal 16:9 video is always long-form. Most songs in the Shorts audio library can be used for up to 90 seconds, some only 60 or 30. How long YouTube Shorts can be covers every rule past the one-minute mark.
- **TikTok** has raised its limits several times and rolled them out unevenly. For most short-form clips the limit doesn't matter. What matters is whether people watch to the end, as covered in how the TikTok algorithm works.
- **Instagram** lets you post long Reels, but if the goal is reaching new people, 3 minutes is the real ceiling. Details are in the Instagram Reels size guide.

The maximum is not a target. A clip should last as long as one complete idea takes. For most beginners that's 20 to 60 seconds.

Aspect ratios compared

All three apps accept other shapes, but only 9:16 fills the screen.

Ratio	Pixels	How it looks in the feed
9:16	1080 × 1920	Fills the screen. Use this.
4:5	1080 × 1350	Bands above and below
1:1	1080 × 1080	Large bands; still counts as a YouTube Short
16:9	1920 × 1080	A small strip in the middle; on YouTube it's not a Short at all

If your footage is horizontal, crop or reframe it to 9:16 instead of placing it on a background. The horizontal to vertical lesson shows the three ways to do it and when each works.

Safe zones for captions and faces

Every app draws its interface over your video: titles, usernames, captions, sound names, and a column of buttons on the right. None of the three publishes exact pixel values for regular posts, and the overlay shifts with device and caption length. These margins on a 1080 × 1920 frame keep text clear on all three:

Edge	Keep clear (approx.)	What covers it
Top	290 px	Tabs, search, status bar
Bottom	480 px	Username, caption, sound name, title, progress bar
Right	190 px	Like, comment, share and profile buttons
Left	60 px	Nothing, but text on the edge is hard to read

That leaves a safe area of about 830 × 1150 px, a little left of center and a little above the middle. Put captions, on-screen text and the speaker's face there. These are the strictest margins across the three apps, so a clip that fits them is clear everywhere. Per-platform margins are in the size guides for YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels.

> **TIP**
>
> Before you post a batch, upload one clip privately and watch it on your own phone. It takes two minutes and catches captions hidden under a button far more reliably than any template.

Captions and on-screen text

Captions aren't a platform rule, but they are close to one in practice. Many people start watching with the sound off, and words on screen help them decide in the first second whether to stay.

- Use 1 to 2 lines at a time, 3 to 6 words per line.

- Make the text large enough to read at arm's length: on a 1080-wide frame, around 60 to 80 px tall is a good starting point.
- Use high contrast: white text with a dark outline or shadow, or a solid box behind it.
- Keep captions in the same spot for the whole clip, inside the safe area.

The captions guide covers tools that do this automatically. If you're cutting clips from a long video, Short.now reframes them to 9:16 and places captions inside the safe zone for you.

Covers and thumbnails

The cover is the still image people see before they tap, on your profile and in search.

- **YouTube Shorts:** In the feed nobody sees a thumbnail. It shows on your channel page, in search and on shelves. Pick a clear frame, or add a custom one in the same 9:16 shape. See how to add a thumbnail to YouTube Shorts.
- **TikTok:** Pick a cover frame when you post and add a short text label so your profile grid tells people what each video is.
- **Instagram Reels:** Make the cover 1080 × 1920, but keep the title and face in the middle, because the profile grid shows a crop from the center.

Don't break these rules

Some mistakes don't just look bad, they cut reach.

- **Re-uploading a watermarked file.** Instagram makes watermarked and low-resolution Reels less visible. TikTok's guidelines say reused material with nothing new added isn't eligible for the For You feed. Always export a clean file from your editor.
- **Long clips with claimed music on YouTube.** Over 1 minute, a Content ID claim blocks the Short. Use the Shorts audio library, royalty-free music, or keep it under 60 seconds.
- **Upscaling a tiny crop.** A 608 × 1080 crop from a 1080p horizontal video looks soft when stretched to 1080 × 1920. Film in 4K if you plan to crop to vertical.
- **Adding borders or a blurred frame around small video.** Instagram lists Reels with borders among those it shows less.

Pre-upload checklist

- [ ] 1080 × 1920, 9:16, MP4 with H.264 and AAC
- [ ] 3 minutes or less; under 60 seconds if it uses music on YouTube
- [ ] Captions and face inside the safe area
- [ ] No watermark from another app
- [ ] Exported from the original footage, not a downloaded copy
- [ ] Checked once on a real phone

What's next

That's the end of the platforms module: you know how each feed decides what to show and what format to give it. Module 3 is about what to actually make. Start with 75 short-form video ideas and how to find your own.

PRACTICE

Do it now: set up one export preset for all three apps

1. In your editor, create a new project or sequence at 1080 × 1920, using the frame rate you film at (usually 30 fps).
2. Set the export to MP4, H.264 video, AAC audio, and save it as a preset named 'Vertical 1080'.
3. Add a test caption slightly below the middle of the frame and export a 10-second clip.
4. Upload it privately (or as a draft) to each platform you use and check on your phone that no button or text covers the caption.
5. Move the caption if needed, then save that position as your caption template.

Open the free subtitle tool →

Check yourself

1. **You upload a 2-minute 16:9 horizontal video to YouTube. What happens?**

   A It becomes a Short because it's under 3 minutes
   B It's published as a regular long-form video, not a Short
   C YouTube rejects the upload
   D YouTube crops it to vertical automatically

2. **Your 90-second Short uses a clip of a popular song outside the Shorts audio library and gets a Content ID claim. What happens?**

   A The rights holder gets the ad revenue and the Short stays up
   B Nothing, Shorts are exempt
   C The Short is blocked worldwide until the claim is resolved
   D Your channel gets a strike

3. **Where is the safest place for captions if you post the same clip to all three apps?**

   A Slightly below the vertical center, away from the edges
   B Along the bottom edge
   C Top right corner
   D Right edge, next to the buttons

4. **You want a Reel to be recommended to people who don't follow you. What is the maximum length?**

   A 60 seconds
   B 90 seconds
   C 20 minutes
   D 3 minutes

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

What size should a short-form video be?

1080 pixels wide by 1920 pixels tall, a 9:16 vertical frame. That fills a phone screen and works on YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels without re-editing.

Can I post the same video on TikTok, Reels and Shorts?

Yes, if you upload a clean file from your editor to each one. Don't download your TikTok with its watermark and repost it, because Instagram shows watermarked Reels less and TikTok doesn't recommend reused material with nothing new added.

What is the best length for a short video to work on every platform?

Under 60 seconds. It's within every platform's limits, short enough that a music claim won't block it on YouTube, and short enough to hold attention. Go longer only when the idea truly needs it, and stay at 3 minutes or less.

Do I need to add #Shorts for a video to be a YouTube Short?

No. YouTube classifies any square or vertical video of 3 minutes or less as a Short when you upload it. The hashtag doesn't change that.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Understand three-minute YouTube Shorts
- Instagram: Instagram Ranking Explained (what makes Reels less visible)
- YouTube Help: Recommended upload encoding settings
- TikTok for Developers: Media transfer guide (video formats and limits)
- Instagram: Reels features (length and recommendations)
- Instagram for Creators: Frequently asked questions

PUT THIS MODULE TO WORK

Practice on your own videos

Short.now turns one long video into ready-to-post Shorts, TikToks and Reels with captions. Free plan, no watermark, no card.

Try Short.now free →



MODULE 3

Ideas, hooks and scripts

Find ideas that people want, open strong, and structure a short so viewers stay to the end.

1. 75 Short-Form Video Ideas (and How to Find Your Own)
2. How to Structure a Short Video So People Watch to the End
3. How to Write a Script for a Short Video (30-60 Seconds)
4. How to Be Confident on Camera (Without Sounding Read)

MODULE 3 · IDEAS, HOOKS AND SCRIPTS · 10 MIN

75 Short-Form Video Ideas (and How to Find Your Own)

75 ideas for YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Reels that work in almost any niche, plus six places to find fresh ideas every week and a simple test for which ones are worth filming.

Key takeaways

- Good short ideas are specific: one problem, one person, one result.
- Most ideas are formats you already know (list, before and after, myth vs fact) filled with your niche.
- Your best idea source is the questions people already ask: comments, search bars and your own long videos.
- Keep an idea bank and add to it daily, so filming day never starts from a blank page.
- Judge an idea by whether you can say the payoff in one sentence before you film.

The best short-form video ideas are small and specific: one problem, one tip, one story, one result. Below are 75 ideas that work for YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels in almost any niche, sorted by type. After the list you'll learn where to find your own ideas every week, and a quick test for which ones are worth filming.

Each idea has a blank in brackets. Fill it with your topic. "The [tool] I wish I'd bought first" becomes "The kitchen knife I wish I'd bought first" or "The guitar pedal I wish I'd bought first." If you don't have a topic yet, start with how to choose a niche.

How to use this list

Don't read 75 ideas and film none. Pick five that fit you, write the topic in the blank, and say the payoff out loud in one sentence. If the sentence is clear ("you'll learn how to stop your rice going mushy"), the idea is ready. If you have to ramble, narrow it.

Notice that most ideas below are **formats**, not topics. A format is the shape of a video: a list, a before and after, a reaction. Viewers already understand these shapes, so you spend your few seconds on content instead of explaining what kind of video this is. Find two or three formats you like and reuse them with new topics. That's how most regular posters keep up.

75 ideas by type

Teach something (1-15)

Teaching videos are the easiest place to start. They need no audience, no personality tricks, and they are useful even to someone who has never seen you before.

1. 3 mistakes beginners make with [topic]
2. The one [setting / step / habit] that fixed my [problem]
3. How to [do task] in under 60 seconds
4. [Topic] explained like you're 10
5. Stop doing [common habit]. Do this instead.
6. The cheapest way to [result]
7. What [number] hours of [practice] taught me about [topic]
8. 3 [tools / apps / products] I use every day for [task]
9. The difference between [A] and [B], fast
10. Myth vs fact: [common belief]
11. One thing nobody tells you about [topic]
12. How to tell if your [thing] is [good / broken / fake]
13. A [topic] shortcut most people don't know
14. The [number]-step checklist I use before [task]
15. How I'd learn [skill] if I started again today

Show the process (16-27)

These work when your topic is visual: cooking, fitness, crafts, design, cleaning, repairs, gardening, coding with a screen recording.

16. Before and after: [project]
17. Watch me [make / fix / clean] [thing] start to finish (sped up)
18. A day of [your job / hobby] in 30 seconds
19. I tried [method] for 7 days. Here's what happened.
20. Rating every [product / method] I've tried for [task]
21. Turning [cheap thing] into [nice thing]
22. The [tool] I wish I'd bought first
23. What [amount of money] gets you in [category]
24. Doing [task] the hard way vs the easy way
25. My setup for [activity], explained
26. Fixing a [viewer's / common] [problem] live
27. Step 1 of [long project] (start a series)

Share an opinion (28-37)

Opinion videos get comments because people want to agree or argue. Keep them honest and about ideas, not people.

28. Unpopular opinion: [belief in your niche]
29. Overrated or underrated: [3 things]
30. What I'd never [buy / do] again as a [role]
31. The [topic] advice I disagree with
32. Is [popular thing] worth it? My honest take.
33. If I could only keep one [tool / item] for [task]
34. Things in [niche] that are a waste of money
35. Ranking [category] from worst to best

36. What beginners worry about vs what actually matters
37. Green flags and red flags when choosing a [thing / service]

Tell a story (38-47)

A short story needs only three parts: what happened, what went wrong or changed, and what you learned. The lesson on video structure shows how to fit that into 40 seconds.

38. The worst [mistake] I made with [topic]
39. How I got my first [client / sale / result]
40. What happened when I [risky decision]
41. A customer / student / friend asked me [question]. Here's what I said.
42. The moment I realized [lesson]
43. I almost quit [thing] because of [reason]
44. My first [video / project / attempt] vs now
45. A story from [job / place] that still makes me laugh
46. What [famous person / event] taught me about [topic]
47. The cheapest [thing] that changed my [routine / work]

Behind the scenes (48-55)

People follow people. These ideas show the person behind the tips, which turns one-time viewers into followers.

48. What my [workspace / kitchen / bag] actually looks like
49. How I plan a week of [work / content / training]
50. The tools I use to make these videos
51. A normal morning as a [role]
52. What [your job] pays / costs, honestly (only what you're happy to share)
53. Things I keep on my desk and why
54. What went wrong while filming this
55. How long [result] really took me

Talk to your audience (56-65)

These turn comments and questions into videos. On TikTok you can reply to a comment with a video, and the reply also posts to your profile as a new video, with the original comment shown as a sticker.

56. Answering the most common question I get about [topic]
57. Replying to a comment that said [quote]
58. You asked how I [do thing]. Here's the full answer.
59. Reacting to your [setups / attempts / photos]
60. A viewer's [problem], solved
61. Questions beginners are scared to ask about [topic]
62. Pick one: [A] or [B]? (then answer in the next video)
63. What you should try this week in [niche]
64. Correcting a mistake from my last video

65. The comment that changed my mind about [topic]

Use a platform format (66-75)

These use features or trends built into the apps. Use them sparingly and always add your own angle.

66. Green screen: react to a [news story / chart / screenshot] about your niche
67. Stitch or remix a clip from another creator and add your take (check what the app allows)
68. A trending sound or format, rewritten for [niche]
69. POV: you're a [role] and [situation]
70. A "things that just make sense" list for [niche]
71. Guess the [price / answer / result] before I reveal it
72. A 3-part series on [topic], with part 1 ending on a question
73. The same [task] in 5 seconds, 30 seconds and 3 minutes
74. A highlight from your own long video or podcast, cut to stand alone
75. A quick recap of [event / news] in your niche this week

> **TIP**
>
> Idea 74 is the cheapest one on the list. If you already make long videos, livestreams or a podcast, each episode usually holds several moments that work on their own. The repurposing module shows how to find them, and tools like Short.now can scan a long video and suggest clips for you.

Where to find your own ideas

A list gets you started. To keep going for months, you need sources that refill themselves. These six are free.

1. Search bar autocomplete

Type your topic into the YouTube or TikTok search bar and stop before you press enter. The suggestions are things real people search for. "Sourdough starter…" might suggest "not rising" or "smells like acetone." Each one is a video.

2. TikTok Creator Search Insights

TikTok has a tool that shows topics people search for on the app. Type "Creator Search Insights" into TikTok's search bar to open it (it's available in select regions). Its content gap filter shows topics that are searched often but don't have many videos yet. For a new creator, those are the best openings: people want the answer and few have given it.

3. TikTok Creative Center

The Creative Center is TikTok's free public page of trends. Its Trends section shows trending hashtags, and you can filter by industry, region and time period. Use it to spot what's rising in your niche, not to copy what's already everywhere.

4. YouTube Studio

YouTube Studio has had an Inspiration tab that suggests ideas based on your channel's data. YouTube says it is being phased out from August 2026 and points creators to **Ask Studio** in YouTube Studio for brainstorming instead. Either way, treat the AI suggestions as a starting point and check them against what your viewers actually ask.

5. Comments, yours and other people's

Read the comments on the most popular videos in your niche. Look for questions ("does this work with…?"), complaints ("I tried this and it didn't…") and arguments. Each is a video someone already wants.

6. Your own life and work

Write down every question a friend, client or coworker asks you about your topic. Note anything that surprised you, annoyed you or took you longer than expected. These ideas are the hardest for anyone else to copy.

How to pick the ideas worth filming

Run each idea through four quick checks before you film:

Check	Pass	Fail
Who is it for?	"People whose bread won't rise"	"Everyone who likes food"
One-sentence payoff	"You'll know the 2 reasons and the fix"	"Some thoughts on baking"
Can it stand alone?	Makes sense with no other video	Needs part 1 or your backstory
Can you show it?	Something to see, not only hear	A talking head with nothing to point at

An idea that passes all four is ready. One that fails the payoff check needs narrowing, which is the most common fix. "Budgeting tips" fails. "The one budget rule that stopped me running out of money before payday" passes.

Next, decide the opening line. The hook does most of the work in the first seconds, so write it before you film. Our post on how to write viral video hooks has formulas you can copy.

Keep an idea bank

Ideas show up at bad times: in the shower, on a walk, while you're watching someone else's video. If you don't write them down, they're gone. Keep one note on your phone with three columns:

- **Idea:** "Why your sourdough won't rise"
- **Format:** Teach, 3 reasons
- **Payoff:** "You'll know the 2 most likely causes and how to fix each"

Add to it every day, even one line. When you sit down to plan, sort by the ideas with the clearest payoff and pick the top few. Aim to keep at least 20 ideas in the bank so a bad week never stops you. When you're ready to plan a full month, the content repurposing system and the free publishing calendar help you spread them out.

Test ideas without the pressure

You won't know which ideas land until you post them. A few ways to test without overthinking:

- **Post the same idea in two formats.** Make "3 mistakes" one week and "myth vs fact" the next on the same topic. Compare how many people kept watching.
- **Use trial reels on Instagram.** Eligible creators can share a reel as a trial, which shows it to non-followers first. After about 24 hours you see views, likes, comments and shares, and you can then choose to share it with your followers.
- **Turn the winners into series.** If one idea does clearly better than your others, make part 2, then a version for a slightly different audience.

YouTube's own advice for new Shorts creators is simple: post regularly and don't be afraid to try new things. Ten imperfect videos teach you more than one perfect plan. For how to read the numbers once you post, see how to read your analytics.

What's next

You have ideas. Now make sure people watch to the end. The next lesson, how to structure a short video, shows how to arrange the hook, setup, payoff and loop so viewers don't swipe away halfway.

PRACTICE

Do it now: fill your idea bank with 20 ideas

1. Open a note on your phone called Idea bank with three columns: idea, format, payoff in one sentence.
2. Pick 8 ideas from the list below and rewrite each one for your niche, with a real topic in the brackets.
3. Type your niche into the YouTube or TikTok search bar and write down 6 autocomplete questions as ideas.
4. Read the comments on 3 popular videos in your niche and turn 6 questions or complaints into ideas.
5. Star the 3 ideas where the one-sentence payoff is clearest. Those are your next three videos.

Try the free AI hook generator →

Check yourself

1. **Which of these is the strongest short video idea?**

   A Tips for cooking
   B My thoughts on healthy food
   C 3 ways to stop rice from going mushy
   D Cooking vlog part 4

2. **What does the content gap filter in TikTok's Creator Search Insights show?**

   A Topics people search for often that few videos cover
   B Videos that lost views last week
   C Hashtags that are banned
   D Creators who stopped posting

3. **You have a good idea but can't explain the payoff in one sentence. What should you do?**

   A Film it anyway and find the point in editing
   B Make it longer so there is room to explain
   C Narrow it down until the payoff fits in one sentence
   D Add trending music

4. **Why is it smart to reuse the same format many times?**

   A Platforms require it
   B Viewers learn what to expect and you get faster at making it
   C It stops people from copying you
   D Formats can only be used once per account

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

What should I post on YouTube Shorts as a beginner?

Start with short how-to and list videos about one narrow topic you know well, such as one tip, one mistake or one quick result. They are easy to film, easy to understand without context, and they teach you how to open and close a video. Post 10 of them before you judge what works.

How do I come up with TikTok ideas every day?

Don't try to invent them on the spot. Keep a running idea bank and add to it from comments, search autocomplete, Creator Search Insights and things that happen in your day. When it's time to film, you pick from the list instead of starting from nothing.

Can I copy a video idea from another creator?

You can use the same format, like a myth vs fact or a before and after, because formats are shared by everyone. Don't copy someone's script, footage or exact jokes. Bring your own topic, example and opinion so the video is clearly yours.

Do I need a niche to come up with short video ideas?

It helps a lot. A clear topic makes ideas easier to find and helps the platforms show your videos to the right people. If you're not sure yet, read the lesson on choosing a niche and test two or three topics for a few weeks.

Sources

- TikTok Newsroom: Creator Search Insights
- TikTok for Business Help: About Creative Center
- YouTube Help: Explore the Inspiration tab
- Instagram Creators: Trial reels

- YouTube Official Blog: Your guide to getting started with YouTube Shorts
- TikTok Newsroom: Reply to comments with video

MODULE 3 · IDEAS, HOOKS AND SCRIPTS · 9 MIN

How to Structure a Short Video So People Watch to the End

The four-part structure behind short videos people finish: hook, setup, payoff and loop. With timings for 30, 45 and 60 seconds, a worked example and how to fix drop-offs.

Key takeaways

- A short has four parts: hook, setup, payoff and loop. Each one has a job.
- The setup is where most beginners lose people. Keep it to one or two sentences.
- Save the best part for late in the video, but give small rewards along the way.
- End the moment the payoff lands. No outro, no 'thanks for watching'.
- Use your retention graph to find the exact second people leave, then fix that part.

To get people to watch a short to the end, build it in four parts: a **hook** that stops the scroll in the first 1-3 seconds, a **setup** of one or two sentences, a **payoff** that delivers what the hook promised, and an ending that **loops** back into the start. Everything else is cutting. This lesson shows what goes in each part, how long each should be, and how to fix the spot where viewers leave.

Why structure matters on short-form

All three platforms say finishing a video is a strong signal. TikTok says a strong indicator of interest, such as whether someone watches a longer video from beginning to end, carries more weight in its recommendations than weaker signals. Instagram says one of the most important things it predicts for Reels is how likely you are to watch a reel all the way through. YouTube Studio shows, for each Short, how often viewers stayed to watch past the first seconds versus swiped away.

You can’t control the algorithm, but you can control whether your video gives people a reason to keep watching each second. That’s what structure is for. For how each platform’s ranking works in more detail, see the YouTube Shorts algorithm lesson.

Here is what each part does:

Part	Job	Typical length	Common mistake
Hook	Make the viewer want the payoff	1-3 seconds	Saying hello first
Setup	Give just enough context	3-8 seconds	Backstory nobody asked for
Beats and payoff	Deliver, step by step, then the best bit	Most of the video	Giving the best bit away early
Loop	End so a replay feels natural	Last 1-2 seconds	Outros and “thanks for watching”

Part 1: The hook

The hook is your first line and your first frame. Its only job is to make someone want what comes next. It works best when the words, the picture and any on-screen text all say the same thing at once.

Hooks have their own craft, so we won't repeat it here. Our post on how to write viral video hooks covers five hook patterns with examples. What matters for structure is this: **the hook makes a promise, and the rest of the video has to keep it.** If your hook says "3 mistakes," the viewer is now counting to three. If it says "watch what happens when…," they are waiting for the moment. That expectation is what holds them, as long as you don't break it.

Part 2: The setup

The setup is the bridge from the hook to the content. It answers one question: what does the viewer need to know so the payoff makes sense? Usually that's one sentence about the problem or situation.

- Too long: "So I've been baking for about six years now, and a lot of you have been asking me about sourdough, and I know there's a lot of confusing information out there…"
- Right: "If your starter smells like nail polish, it isn't dead. It's hungry."

The test: delete the setup and watch the video. If it still makes sense, leave it deleted. Beginners lose more viewers here than anywhere else, because this is where the urge to explain kicks in.

> **TIP**
>
> Never start with your name, your channel or "in this video I'm going to." A new viewer doesn't know you yet. Introduce yourself through useful content, and put your name in your profile.

Part 3: Beats and the payoff

The middle of a short is a series of **beats**: small steps that each give the viewer something. A beat can be one tip, one step of a process, one turn in a story, or one visual change. Each beat should take a few seconds, and there should be a visible or audible change between them: a cut, a new angle, a zoom, new text, a new object in frame.

Two rules keep the middle tight.

Give small rewards, save the big one

If the hook promises "the one thing that fixed my sleep," don't reveal it in second four. Give a couple of smaller, useful steps first, then the main answer. But every step must be worth having on its own. Stalling with filler to delay the answer feels like a trick and people leave.

Re-hook in the middle

In anything over 30 seconds, add a line around the midpoint that renews the promise: “but the second one is the one most people get wrong,” or “this is where it went wrong.” It gives anyone who is drifting a reason to stay for the rest.

The **payoff** is the moment the hook promised: the answer, the reveal, the finished result, the punchline. Make it clear and make it visual if you can. Then stop. The video ends within a second or two of the payoff landing.

Part 4: The loop

Shorts, TikToks and Reels replay automatically. A loop is an ending built so the replay feels like a continuation, not a restart. Some viewers will watch the start again before they notice, and the ones who do get a second look at your hook.

Three ways to build one:

- **Sentence loop.** End on half a sentence that your first line completes. A creator on YouTube’s official blog describes opening a video with “5 mistakes people are doing with makeup” and ending with “and those are,” so the end runs straight back into the start.
- **Visual loop.** Make the last frame match the first. If you start facing left, end facing right, or start and end with the same object in the same spot.
- **Question loop.** End on the question the hook asked, so the replay answers it again.

What kills a loop: outros, end cards, a logo, “thanks for watching,” or a long pause before the video ends. If you want to ask for a follow, do it in a few words inside the payoff, or put it in the caption.

Timings for 30, 45 and 60 seconds

Use this as a starting map, not a rule. Every second you cut from a video that doesn’t need it makes the rest stronger.

Section	30-second short	45-second short	60-second short
Hook	0-2s	0-3s	0-3s
Setup	2-6s	3-8s	3-10s
Beats	6-25s (2 beats)	8-38s (3 beats + re-hook)	10-52s (3-4 beats + re-hook)
Payoff	25-29s	38-44s	52-59s
Loop line	last second	last second	last second

YouTube Shorts can now be up to three minutes long. That doesn’t mean they should be. A longer short needs more beats and more re-hooks, so start with 30-45 seconds and go longer only when the idea truly needs it. The specs cheat sheet lists the current length limits on each platform.

A worked example

Here is a 40-second tip video mapped onto the structure. Topic: home coffee.

Time	Part	Said	Shown
0-2s	Hook	"Your coffee tastes bitter because of one setting."	Close-up of a grinder dial, text: "the bitter coffee fix"
2-6s	Setup	"It's not your beans. It's how fine you grind."	Pouring bitter coffee down the sink
6-16s	Beat 1	"Too fine, and water pulls out the bitter stuff."	Fine grounds between fingers
16-20s	Re-hook	"But going coarser isn't the whole fix."	Quick zoom on the dial
20-32s	Beat 2	"Change one step at a time and taste after each brew."	Three cups lined up, notes on tape
32-38s	Payoff	"Two clicks coarser, and the bitterness was gone."	Taking a sip, nodding
38-40s	Loop	"So before you blame the beans…"	Back to the grinder dial

The last line leads straight back into "Your coffee tastes bitter because of one setting." To write this kind of script line by line, see how to write a short video script.

Find and fix drop-offs

After you post, your analytics show where people left. In YouTube Studio, open a Short's analytics to see how many viewers stayed to watch versus swiped away, and the retention graph across the video. TikTok and Instagram show watch time and retention numbers in their own analytics.

Read the graph like this:

- **Big drop in the first 1-3 seconds:** the hook or first frame isn't working. Rewrite the first line or start on a stronger image.
- **Drop right after the hook:** the setup is too slow, or the next seconds don't match the promise. Shorten the setup.
- **Slow steady slide in the middle:** the beats are too long or too similar. Cut each beat shorter and add a visual change.
- **Drop just before the end:** viewers sensed the payoff was over or an outro was coming. End sooner.
- **A bump in the line:** people are rewatching that moment. Note what's there, because it's something viewers wanted to see again.

There's no official "good" retention number. Compare a video to your own recent videos of similar length. The creator on YouTube's blog says she checks retention every day and uses drop-off points to decide where to add quick cuts or zooms. Treat each video as a test of one change. The analytics lesson goes deeper.

TIP

The same structure works for clips cut from long videos. When you pick a moment from a podcast or stream, check it has a clear opening line, a payoff and a clean ending point. If it opens slowly, start the clip a sentence later. Short.now's AI clipping scores moments partly on how strong the opening is, which is a fast way to shortlist clips before you trim them by hand.

What's next

Structure is the skeleton. Now put words on it. The next lesson, how to write a script for a 30-60 second video, turns this four-part map into a script you can read, time and film.

PRACTICE

Do it now: map one short on a beat sheet

1. Pick one idea from your idea bank and write the payoff in one sentence.
2. Write four lines: hook (under 3 seconds), setup (1-2 sentences), beats (2-4 short points) and payoff.
3. Add a last line that leads back into the first line, so the video can loop.
4. Paste the lines into the script timer and check the total lands between 25 and 60 seconds.
5. Cut any line that doesn't move the viewer toward the payoff.

Open the free script timer →

Check yourself

1. **What is the main job of the setup section?**

   A Introduce yourself and your channel
   B Give just enough context that the payoff makes sense
   C Show the final result
   D Ask people to subscribe

2. **Where should the strongest moment of your short usually go?**

   A In the first second, then nothing else
   B In a separate part 2
   C In the caption
   D Near the end, with smaller rewards along the way

3. **Your retention graph drops sharply at 0:12, right after your intro. What's the most likely fix?**

   A Cut or shorten what happens before 0:12
   B Add a longer intro
   C Change the hashtags
   D Post at a different time

4. **Which ending helps a short loop?**

   A Thanks for watching, see you next time
   B A 5-second logo animation
   C A last line that runs straight into the first line
   D A blank screen with music

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How long should a YouTube Short or TikTok be?

As long as the idea needs and no longer. Many tips and reactions work in 20 to 40 seconds, while a story or tutorial may need 60 or more. YouTube Shorts can be up to three minutes, but a longer video has to keep earning attention with more beats.

What is a loop in a short video?

A loop is an ending that flows back into the opening, so when the video replays automatically it feels like one continuous piece. A common way is to end on a half sentence that the first line of the video completes.

Should I put a call to action at the end of a short?

Keep it to a few words, or put it in the caption or a pinned comment. A long 'like and subscribe' ending tells viewers the useful part is over, and many will swipe before it finishes.

What is a good retention rate for Shorts?

There is no official benchmark from YouTube or TikTok, and it varies a lot by length and topic. Compare each video to your own recent videos of similar length, and look at where the graph drops rather than at one number.

Sources

- YouTube Official Blog: How Sydney Morgan creates her smoothest makeup transformations
- YouTube Help: Understand your YouTube content performance
- YouTube Help: Understand three-minute YouTube Shorts
- TikTok Newsroom: How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou
- Instagram: Instagram ranking explained

MODULE 3 · IDEAS, HOOKS AND SCRIPTS · 10 MIN

How to Write a Script for a Short Video (30-60 Seconds)

A step-by-step way to write a 30-60 second script for Shorts, TikTok or Reels: word counts by length, a two-column format, three fill-in templates and a full example.

Key takeaways

- Write the ending first. If you know the payoff, the rest of the script is easy to aim.
- At a lively pace of about 140-160 words a minute, a 30-second script is roughly 70-80 words.
- Use two columns: what you say and what the viewer sees. Short video is visual first.
- Write for the ear: short sentences, simple words, one idea per line.
- Read it out loud and time it before you film. Cut until it fits.

To write a script for a short video, start with the payoff: the one thing the viewer gets at the end. Then write a hook that promises it, one line of setup, two to four beats that lead to it, and a last line that loops back. At a lively speaking pace, that's about 70-80 words for 30 seconds and 140-160 words for 60 seconds. Read it out loud, time it and cut until it fits.

This lesson builds on how to structure a short. If you haven't read it, the short version is: hook, setup, payoff, loop.

How long should the script be?

Speaking speed is the simplest way to size a script. Most people talking to camera land somewhere between about 140 words a minute (relaxed) and 160 (energetic). Use this table as a first guess, then time yourself.

Video length	At 140 wpm	At 160 wpm	Good for
15 seconds	~35 words	~40 words	One tip, one reaction
30 seconds	~70 words	~80 words	A quick how-to, a myth vs fact
45 seconds	~105 words	~120 words	3 steps or a short story
60 seconds	~140 words	~160 words	A tutorial, a story with a lesson

Two things change the count. Pauses and visual moments (a reveal, a demo with no talking) take time but add no words, so cut words when you have them. And fast talkers can fit more, but faster isn't better if people can't follow.

YouTube Shorts can be up to three minutes long, but a short script that hits its point fast usually beats a long one. Start at 30-45 seconds. For the current limits on every platform, see the specs cheat sheet and our post on how long YouTube Shorts can be.

Write it in four steps

Step 1: Write the payoff first

Before any hook, write one sentence at the top of the page: **“By the end, the viewer will know/see/feel ___.”**

- “By the end, the viewer will know the one grinder setting that stops bitter coffee.”
- “By the end, the viewer will see my studio go from messy to filmable in 20 minutes.”
- “By the end, the viewer will know why I stopped freelancing for agencies.”

If you can’t finish that sentence, the idea isn’t ready. Narrow it until you can. Every other line in the script exists to get the viewer to this sentence.

Step 2: Write three hooks and pick one

Now write the opening line. It should promise the payoff without giving it away. Write at least three versions, read each one aloud, and keep the one that makes you most want to hear the next sentence.

For the coffee example:

1. “Your coffee tastes bitter because of one setting.”
2. “Stop buying new beans. Bitter coffee is a grinder problem.”
3. “I fixed bitter coffee with two clicks.”

For hook patterns and many more examples, use our guide on how to write viral video hooks or the free AI hook generator. Also plan the first frame and any on-screen text so they match the spoken hook.

Step 3: Write the setup and beats

The setup is one sentence that gives the viewer just enough context. The beats are the steps, points or story turns between setup and payoff. Most 30-60 second scripts need two to four beats. Give each beat one idea and one visual.

A beat is done when you can answer yes to both:

- Does it move the viewer closer to the payoff?
- Would the video feel broken without it?

If not, cut it. A beat that’s “interesting but extra” is the most common reason a 45-second script becomes 75.

Step 4: Write the last line

End within a second or two of the payoff. The last line can do one of two jobs:

- **Loop back.** A half sentence that leads into your first line. “So before you blame the beans…” runs straight back into “Your coffee tastes bitter because of one setting.”
- **Point to the next video.** A few words, like “Part 2 is on my page.” Keep it short, because a long sign-off tells people the useful part is over.

Skip “thanks for watching,” your channel name and long requests to like and subscribe. Put the call to action in the caption or a pinned comment instead.

Use a two-column format

Short video is visual. Many people watch without sound, and a screen that doesn’t change for five seconds gives them a reason to swipe. So write what’s shown next to what’s said, line by line.

Here’s a full 45-second script in that format.

Payoff: The viewer will know how to make a cheap phone video look brighter without buying a light.

Time	Said	Shown
0-3s	”Your videos look dark because you’re facing the wrong way.”	Dim shot of you facing a lamp. Text: “the free lighting fix”
3-7s	”You don’t need a ring light. You need a window.”	Point at a window
7-17s	”Turn so the window is in front of you, not behind. Behind makes you a silhouette.”	Side-by-side: backlit vs front-lit
17-21s	”But that’s only half of it.”	Quick zoom in
21-33s	”Stand about an arm’s length from the glass, and film in the morning or late afternoon when the light is softer.”	You stepping closer; clock on screen
33-41s	”Same phone, same room, no new gear.”	Final bright shot, before clip in a small corner
41-45s	”So before you buy a light…”	Cut back to the dim opening shot

That’s 76 spoken words. At 140 words a minute it reads in about 33 seconds, leaving room for the side-by-side and the reveal to breathe.

Three templates you can fill in

Copy one, fill in the brackets, then rewrite it in your own words.

Template A: Quick fix (30 seconds)

- **Hook:** “[Problem] happens because of one thing.”
- **Setup:** “It’s not [what people blame]. It’s [real cause].”
- **Beat 1:** “When you [cause], [what goes wrong].”
- **Beat 2:** “Do [fix] instead. [One detail that makes it work].”
- **Payoff:** “[Show the result].”
- **Loop:** “So before you [wrong fix]…”

Template B: Three steps (45 seconds)

- **Hook:** “3 things I do before every [task].”

- **Setup:** “Skip these and [bad result].”
- **Beat 1:** “One: [step]. [Why, in one line].”
- **Beat 2:** “Two: [step]. [Why].”
- **Re-hook:** “Number three is the one most people skip.”
- **Beat 3 and payoff:** “Three: [step]. [Result it gives].”
- **Loop:** “And that’s why I always…” (leads back to “3 things I do…”)

Template C: Mini story (60 seconds)

- **Hook:** “[Outcome] happened because I [decision].”
- **Setup:** “[One line of where you were before].”
- **Beat 1:** “[What you tried first and how it went].”
- **Beat 2:** “[The turning point].”
- **Re-hook:** “Then [unexpected thing] happened.”
- **Payoff:** “[Result, with a number or a visual if you have one].”
- **Last line:** “[The lesson in one sentence].”

Write for the ear, not the page

A script is something you say, not something someone reads. Rewrite any line that sounds like an essay.

- **Short sentences.** One idea each. If you need a breath in the middle, split it.
- **Simple words.** “Use” not “utilize.” “Help” not “facilitate.”
- **Say “you.”** Talk to one person watching on their phone.
- **Numbers and specifics.** “Two clicks coarser” beats “a little coarser.”
- **Cut throat-clearing.** “So, basically,” “in this video,” and “I just wanted to say” can almost always go.
- **No tongue-twisters.** If you stumble on a line twice while reading aloud, rewrite it.

A Toastmasters Magazine article on speaking to camera gives the same advice for any video: put your key message first, keep it short, and speak your drafts out loud so the delivery sounds like conversation.

> **TIP**
>
> Put stage directions in [square brackets] in your script, like [show product] or [pause]. The free teleprompter and script timer both leave bracketed notes out of the read time, and the teleprompter shows them in a different colour so you don't read them aloud.

Time it, then cut

Read the script out loud at the pace you’ll use on camera, with a timer running. Or paste it into the script timer, pick a pace, and see the read time before you film. Then cut in this order:

1. Remove any beat that fails the “would it feel broken without it?” test.
2. Shorten the setup to one sentence.
3. Cut filler words and repeated ideas inside each line.

4. Replace a spoken sentence with a visual where you can. Showing the before and after is faster than describing it.

Cut until the script fits your target length with a second or two to spare. When you're done, you should be able to say the whole video in one breath of a summary: "Bitter coffee is a grind problem, go two clicks coarser."

Full script or bullet points?

You don't have to read every word. Pick the method that fits you:

- **Full script** if you're new, nervous, or teaching steps that must be exact. Use a teleprompter so you don't sound read.
- **Bullets** if you're comfortable talking and want to sound loose. Write the hook and the last line word for word, and bullet the beats.
- **Hybrid** for most people: script the first and last lines exactly, bullet the middle, and do a few takes.

Either way, film in short sections. You can record one beat at a time and stitch them together in editing, which is much easier than nailing 45 seconds in one take. The next lesson covers how to deliver it without freezing.

What's next

You have a script that fits. Now you have to say it to a camera and sound like yourself. The next lesson, how to be confident on camera, covers teleprompter tips, delivery and a 7-day practice plan.

PRACTICE

Do it now: write and time a 45-second script

1. Pick one idea and write the payoff as one sentence at the top of a blank page.
2. Choose one of the three templates below and fill in each line for your topic.
3. Add a 'Shown' note next to every spoken line: what is on screen at that moment.
4. Paste the spoken lines into the script timer at 150 words per minute and cut until it reads in 45 seconds or less.
5. Read it aloud twice. Rewrite any sentence you trip over.

Open the free script timer →

Check yourself

1. **Which part of the script should you write first?**

A The hook
B Your introduction
C The payoff
D The call to action

2. **About how many words fit in a 30-second spoken script at a lively pace?**

   A 20-30
   B 70-80
   C 150-160
   D 250-300

3. **Why use a two-column script with 'Said' and 'Shown'?**

   A It makes you plan the visuals, so the screen changes as the words change
   B Platforms require it for upload
   C It doubles the video length
   D It replaces captions

4. **Which line is written for the ear?**

   A Utilizing an appropriate grind size facilitates optimal extraction.
   B It is recommended that one should consider grind size.
   C Grind size, which many overlook, matters in various ways.
   D Grind finer. Your coffee gets stronger.

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How many words is a 60-second script?

Usually around 140-160 words, depending on how fast you talk. A calm explainer might be 120 words, a high-energy tip closer to 170. Paste your script into a timer and read it aloud to check your own pace.

Do I need a script for TikTok or Shorts?

Not a word-for-word one for every video, but you need at least the hook, the beats and the last line written down. Talking videos without a plan tend to ramble, and rambling is where viewers swipe. Many creators script the first and last lines exactly and use bullet points in between.

What is the best format for a short video script?

Two columns, or two lines per beat: what you say and what is shown on screen. Add the time each beat should take. This keeps the script short and makes sure the visuals change as often as the words.

Can I use AI to write a short video script?

AI can help you brainstorm hooks or tighten a draft, but read the result out loud and rewrite it in your own words. Generic AI scripts sound alike and often include facts you need to check. Your own examples and opinions are what make the video worth watching.

Sources

- YouTube Official Blog: Your guide to getting started with YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: Understand three-minute YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Official Blog: How Sydney Morgan creates her smoothest makeup transformations
- Toastmasters Magazine: The Camera Never Lies

MODULE 3 · IDEAS, HOOKS AND SCRIPTS · 9 MIN

How to Be Confident on Camera (Without Sounding Read)

Practical ways to talk to a camera without freezing: a setup that lowers the pressure, how to use a teleprompter so it sounds natural, delivery tips and a 7-day practice plan.

Key takeaways

- Almost everyone feels awkward on camera at first. It fades with reps, not with waiting.
- Look into the lens, not at your own face on the screen.
- Film one beat at a time. Short takes remove most of the pressure.
- A teleprompter sounds natural when the text sits close to the lens, runs at your pace and is written the way you talk.
- Bring a bit more energy than feels normal. The camera flattens it.

To be confident on camera, make it easy to fail: film in short takes, look into the lens, and talk to one person instead of “an audience.” If you use a script, put it on a teleprompter right next to the lens, set it to your own speed and write it the way you talk. Most of the nerves fade after a few weeks of regular recording. They don’t fade if you wait until you feel ready.

Why you freeze

Freezing on camera usually comes from three things, and each one has a practical fix:

Cause	What it feels like	Fix
Too much at stake per take	”If I mess up, I start over”	Film one sentence or one beat at a time
No one to talk to	Talking into a void	Picture one real person and talk to them
Not knowing what to say next	Blanking mid-sentence	Script the hook and last line, keep the rest on a prompter or bullets

Notice that none of these fixes is “be more confident.” Confidence shows up after you’ve done something a lot. The steps below are about making each rep easier, so you do more of them.

Set up so it feels easy

Small friction makes recording feel like a big event. Remove it.

- **Keep a filming spot ready.** One place with good light and a stand that stays set up. If you need 15 minutes to set up, you’ll film less.
- **Phone at eye level, about an arm’s length away.** A phone on a desk looking up at you is unflattering and makes you hunch. Use a tripod, or prop it on books.

- **Face a window.** Soft light from in front is the cheapest way to look better on camera. The lighting and audio lesson has more.
- **Use the camera's timer.** YouTube's Shorts camera has a timer that counts down before recording starts and can stop at a set point, so you can get into position without rushing. Most phone camera apps have one too.
- **Hide your own face if it distracts you.** Many people perform better when they can't see themselves. Cover the preview, or put a sticker next to the lens to look at.

Look at the lens, not the screen

This is the single biggest visual fix. Eye contact on video comes from looking into the camera lens. When you look at your face on the screen, viewers see you looking slightly down and away.

A Toastmasters Magazine article on speaking to camera recommends aiming for close to 100% eye contact with the lens, because breaks in eye contact are much more noticeable on video than in person. Practical ways to do that:

- Put a small sticker or a dot of tape right next to the lens as a target.
- Use the back camera and a friend's face behind it if you can.
- When you need to check notes, cut. Look down, read, look back up, and start the next line. You'll edit the gap out.

Use a teleprompter so it sounds natural

A teleprompter lets you keep eye contact without memorising, but it can make you sound flat if it's set up badly. These settings matter most:

Put the text as close to the lens as possible

The further the text is from the lens, the more your eyes visibly track across it. On a phone, keep the reading line near the top of the screen, right under the front camera. On a laptop, use a narrow column at the top of the screen.

Make the text big and the column narrow

Large text in a narrow column means your eyes move less from side to side. Aim for three to six words per line.

Match the speed to you, not the other way round

Most people talking to camera sit somewhere around 140 words a minute for a relaxed pace and closer to 160 for energetic short-form. Read a paragraph aloud and adjust until the text keeps up with you, not the reverse. If you can't keep pace without rushing, slow it down. Some prompters, including our free one, can follow your voice instead of scrolling at a fixed speed, so the text waits when you pause.

Read a few words ahead

Glance at the next phrase, then look up and say it. You're saying lines, not reading them. It feels odd for the first few takes and then becomes automatic.

Write for speaking

A teleprompter can't fix a script that reads like an essay. Use contractions, short sentences and the words you'd use with a friend. Mark pauses and actions with notes like [pause] or [smile]. The script writing lesson covers this in detail.

> **TIP**
>
> The free teleprompter runs in your browser on a phone or laptop. Set the speed in words per minute, switch on voice scroll so it follows you, or tick the camera option to see yourself behind the text and record the take right there. Notes in [square brackets] show in a different colour so you don't read them aloud.

Delivery tips that work on short-form

Talk to one person

Pick someone real: a friend who's asking about your topic, or a past version of you. Say "you," not "you guys." Short video is watched by one person on one phone.

Turn your energy up a notch

The camera tends to flatten you. A bit more expression, a bit more vocal variety and a slightly faster start than feels normal usually looks natural on a phone screen. Don't shout, just lift.

Start already talking

Begin the take a second before your first word, then say the hook straight away. No "hi guys," no breath, no looking away first. You can trim the start in editing.

Use your hands, but keep them in frame

Gestures help you sound natural. Keep them in front of your chest so they don't flash in and out of a vertical frame.

Watch for habits

Toastmasters Magazine points out that habits like touching your face, pushing back your hair and filler words look exaggerated on camera. You won't notice them until you watch yourself back, so do that.

Film in short takes

You don't need to deliver 45 seconds in one breath. Record one beat at a time, then join them in editing. The YouTube Shorts camera lets you record in segments and shows them on a progress bar, and YouTube's beginner guide suggests recording in segments for smoother transitions. Other apps and any editor let you do the same.

A simple method:

1. Record the hook 3-5 times, changing the emphasis each time. The hook matters most, so it gets the most takes.
2. Record each beat once or twice. If you stumble, pause, then start the sentence again. Don't stop recording.
3. Record the last line a few times.
4. Pick the best take of each part and cut them together. Jump cuts between beats are normal on short-form, so you don't need to hide them.

The editing lesson shows how to cut takes together cleanly.

A 60-second warm-up

Do this right before you press record. It wakes up your face and voice so your first take isn't your stiffest.

1. **Shoulders:** roll them back three times and stand or sit tall.
2. **Breath:** breathe in for four counts, out for six, three times. It slows a racing heart.
3. **Face:** make the biggest face you can, then the smallest. Twice.
4. **Voice:** hum from low to high, then say "really red lorry" five times.
5. **First line:** say your hook out loud three times to the lens, as if you're telling a friend.

A 7-day practice plan

Confidence comes from reps. Do one short session a day for a week. None of these need to be posted.

Day	Practice	Time
1	Record yourself answering "what do you do?" in 20 seconds, no script	10 min
2	Record one hook 10 times, with a different emphasis each time	10 min
3	Read a 30-second script on the teleprompter, then say it again from bullets	15 min
4	Film a full short in beats and cut it together	30 min
5	Watch days 1-4 back with sound off. Note one body-language habit.	10 min
6	Re-film day 4's video, fixing that one habit	20 min
7	Post it, or send it to one friend and ask what they remember	10 min

Each time you watch yourself, look for **one** thing to change, not everything. The creator featured on YouTube's blog says she checks her retention numbers daily but warns against letting stats limit your creativity. The same goes for self-review: use it to improve one thing, then go film again.

If you'd rather not be on camera at all, that's a real option too. See how to start a faceless YouTube channel.

What's next

You can come up with ideas, structure them, script them and say them to a camera. Now it's time to make the footage look and sound good. The next module starts with how to film good vertical video with just a phone.

PRACTICE

Do it now: record your first 5 practice takes

1. Prop your phone at eye level about an arm's length away, facing a window.
2. Paste a 30-second script into the free teleprompter and set it to 140 words per minute.
3. Do the 60-second warm-up below, then record the hook alone 5 times, changing how you say it each time.
4. Record the rest of the script one beat at a time.
5. Watch the takes back once with sound off and once with sound on. Write down one thing to change next time.

Open the free teleprompter →

Check yourself

1. **Where should you look while talking to a phone camera?**

   A At your face on the screen
   B Into the camera lens
   C Slightly above the phone
   D At your notes on the table

2. **Why does filming in short chunks help nervous beginners?**

   A Platforms rank short clips higher
   B It makes the file smaller
   C It removes the need for editing
   D A mistake only costs you a few seconds, so there's less pressure

3. **Your teleprompter delivery sounds robotic. What's the best first fix?**

   A Read faster
   B Make the text smaller
   C Rewrite the script in the words you'd actually say and slow the scroll to your pace
   D Stop using a script at all

4. **Why add a little extra energy when you film?**

   A The camera tends to make you look flatter than you feel
   B It makes the video shorter
   C Algorithms detect energy
   D It hides background noise

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How do I stop being awkward on camera?

Record often and in short takes. Look at the lens, talk to one specific person in your head, and do a quick warm-up before you film. Most of the awkwardness is unfamiliarity, and it drops a lot after a few weeks of regular recording.

How do I not sound like I'm reading a script?

Write the script the way you speak, with short sentences and contractions. Put the teleprompter text as close to the lens as you can, set the speed to your natural pace, and read a few words ahead so you can look up and say each line rather than read it.

Can I make short videos without showing my face?

Yes. Voiceover with screen recordings, hands-only demos and b-roll all work. See the lesson on faceless channels for formats and tools. You can still use the voice tips here, since your voice carries the video.

Is it normal to hate how I look and sound on video?

Yes. Your recorded voice sounds different from what you hear in your own head, and seeing yourself on screen is unfamiliar. Watch your takes for one specific thing to improve, not for overall judgment, and it gets easier.

Sources

- Toastmasters Magazine: The Camera Never Lies
- YouTube Help: Tips to create YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Official Blog: Your guide to getting started with YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Official Blog: How Sydney Morgan creates her smoothest makeup transformations

PUT THIS MODULE TO WORK

Practice on your own videos

Short.now turns one long video into ready-to-post Shorts, TikToks and Reels with captions. Free plan, no watermark, no card.

Try Short.now free →



MODULE 4

Filming and editing

Film good-looking vertical video on a phone, get clean sound, and edit for pace.

1. How to Film Good Vertical Video With Just a Phone
2. Lighting and Sound on a Budget: Window Light, Cheap Mics and Quiet Rooms
3. How to Edit Short-Form Video: Pacing, Jump Cuts, Captions and B-Roll
4. Music, Sounds and Copyright for Creators: What You Can Actually Use

MODULE 4 · FILMING AND EDITING · 9 MIN

How to Film Good Vertical Video With Just a Phone

The phone settings, framing and stabilizing tricks that make vertical video look clean on YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Reels. No extra gear needed, and a 20-minute test shoot to prove it.

Key takeaways

- Hold the phone upright and fill the full 9:16 frame. Don't film sideways and crop later unless you have to.
- 1080p at 30 fps on the back camera is the right default for talking videos.
- Lock focus and exposure before you hit record so the picture doesn't pulse or go dark.
- Frame chest-up with your eyes about a third of the way down, and keep key things away from the bottom and right edges.
- A steady phone beats an expensive phone. Use a tripod, a clamp or a stack of books.

To film good vertical video with just a phone, hold it upright, use the back camera at 1080p and 30 frames per second, lock focus and exposure on your face, and keep the phone completely still on a tripod or something solid. Frame yourself from the chest up with your eyes about a third of the way down the screen. That covers most of the difference between a short that looks amateur and one that looks clean.

The rest of this lesson walks through each step, with the exact settings to check and a quick test shoot at the end.

Why vertical, and why it matters

YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels all play full screen on a phone held upright. That’s a 9:16 frame: 1080 pixels wide by 1920 tall at full HD. If you film sideways, the app either shows your video small with black bars or crops it, and you lose part of the picture.

TikTok’s own guide for businesses says videos that use the full 9:16 frame get a clear lift in impressions compared with videos that fit the screen poorly. On YouTube, shape decides the format: a square or vertical video up to three minutes long counts as a Short, while a 16:9 video is treated as a regular long-form video.

So the rule is simple: if the video is for short-form, film it vertical from the start. For the full list of sizes and file types per app, see the format cheat sheet.

TIP

Already have horizontal footage, like a podcast or a webinar? You don't have to reshoot it. The lesson on turning horizontal video into vertical shows how to reframe it.

Phone settings to check once

You set these once and then forget them. Names below are from the iPhone, and Android phones have similar options under Camera settings (the exact names vary by brand).

Setting	What to pick	Why
Resolution	1080p (HD)	YouTube lists 1080p as the max for Shorts uploads. 4K only if you'll crop in editing.
Frame rate	30 fps	Natural look for speech. Use 60 fps for fast motion or slow-mo.
Camera	Back camera, 1x lens	Usually the sharpest sensor on the phone.
Grid	On	Helps you level the shot and place your eyes.
Lock Camera (iPhone)	On	Stops the phone from switching lenses mid-take.
Enhanced Stabilization	On, if handheld	Smoother, but zooms in slightly.
Lock White Balance (iPhone)	On, for multi-take sessions	Keeps skin tones the same from clip to clip.

On an iPhone, most of these live in Settings > Camera > Record Video. Apple notes that higher resolutions and faster frame rates make bigger files, which matters if your phone is nearly full.

A few more settings worth knowing about:

- **Auto FPS.** iPhone can drop to 24 fps in low light to brighten the image. That's fine for most shorts. If you want every clip at exactly 30 fps, turn it off and add light instead.
- **HDR video.** HDR looks great on newer phones, but some apps and older screens show HDR clips too bright or washed out. If your uploads look different from what you saw while filming, try turning HDR off and compare.
- **Do Not Disturb.** Apple notes you can't record video during a phone call. Turn on a Focus or Do Not Disturb mode before a long session so a call doesn't end your best take.

TIP

Wipe the back lens before every session. Phone lenses pick up fingerprints from your pocket, and a smudge makes everything look soft and hazy. It's the cheapest quality upgrade there is.

Lock focus and exposure

Phone cameras keep adjusting focus and brightness as you move. On camera, that shows up as your face pulsing in and out of focus, or the picture brightening and darkening as you lean or gesture.

The fix is to lock both before you press record:

1. Frame the shot.
2. Touch and hold on your face until the lock indicator appears (AE/AF Lock on iPhone).
3. If the image is too dark or bright, drag the brightness slider next to the focus box.
4. Record. Tap the screen elsewhere later to unlock.

If you use the front camera and can't reach the screen easily, lock the settings while sitting in place, then lean back into position. Don't move closer or farther away after locking, or you'll drift out of focus.

Framing a vertical shot

Vertical framing is tall and narrow, so where you put your head matters more than in a horizontal video.

The basic talking-head frame

- **Chest-up.** The bottom of the frame cuts somewhere around mid-chest. Closer feels personal, farther feels like a lecture.
- **Eyes on the top third line.** Turn on the grid and put your eyes on the upper horizontal line. Leave a little space above your head, but not a lot.
- **Camera at eye level.** A phone looking up from a desk shows your chin and the ceiling. Raise it with books or a tripod until the lens is level with your eyes.
- **Look into the lens.** Not at your own face on the screen. If you read a script, put it right below the lens. The lesson on talking to camera has more on this.

Keep the edges clear

Every app puts buttons and text on top of your video. The caption and username sit along the bottom, and like, comment and share buttons stack up the right side. Anything important you place there, like on-screen text, a product or a chart, can end up hidden.

Keep your face, your hands when you demo something, and any text inside the middle of the frame. Exact safe-zone measurements differ per app; the specs cheat sheet has them side by side.

Your background

Pick a background with some depth and not much clutter. A shelf or a plant a few feet behind you looks better than a bare wall right behind your head. Turn off a TV or screen in the background, since it flickers and pulls the eye away from you.

Keep the phone steady

Shaky footage is the fastest way to look amateur. You don't need a gimbal to fix it.

For sitting or standing in one place:

- A cheap phone tripod with a clamp is the best $15 to $25 you'll spend.
- No tripod? Lean the phone against a stack of books, a mug or a window frame. A rubber band around the phone and a book works too.
- Start recording with a timer or a remote (a Bluetooth remote, a smartwatch or earbuds on some phones) so pressing the button doesn't shake the frame.

For walking and talking:

- Hold the phone with both hands, elbows tucked into your body.
- Walk slowly with bent knees, rolling from heel to toe.
- On supported iPhones, use Action mode for strong stabilization. Apple says it works best in bright light and records at a maximum of 2.8K, so save it for outdoor clips.

> **TIP**
>
> Don't use digital zoom by pinching. It throws away detail. If you want a tighter shot, move the phone closer or switch to a real lens like 2x or 3x if your phone has one.

Record in short takes

You don't need to nail a 60-second video in one go. Most shorts are edited from several short takes anyway.

- **Record one idea per take.** If you stumble, pause, take a breath and start that sentence again. You'll cut the mistake later.
- **Leave a beat of silence** at the start and end of each take. It makes editing cleaner.
- **Film a little extra:** a close-up of your hands, the thing you're talking about, a wider shot of the room. These become b-roll you can cut to.
- **Check storage and battery first.** An hour of 1080p 30 fps footage can take several gigabytes, and recording drains the battery and heats the phone.

Lo-fi is fine on short-form. TikTok's own guidance says a phone camera is all you need to start, while pointing out that lo-fi doesn't mean low quality. Its research found that most top-performing videos are 720p or higher.

Phone camera or in-app camera?

You can film straight inside TikTok, Instagram or the YouTube app, or in your phone's camera.

Use your phone's camera when you want full control (resolution, frame rate, locked exposure), when you'll edit in a separate app, or when you'll post the same video on more than one platform. You keep a clean original file with no app watermark.

Use the in-app camera when you're doing a trend that depends on an app effect, a green screen, or a sound you pick in that app. YouTube's Shorts camera, for example, lets you record in segments and undo the last clip.

For most beginners, the phone camera is the better default. You can always add effects and sounds later in the app when you upload.

What's next

A sharp, steady picture is only half of it. Viewers forgive average video much more readily than bad sound or a dark face. Next, learn how to fix both cheaply in lighting and sound on a budget.

PRACTICE

Do it now: a 20-minute test shoot

1. Set your camera to 1080p at 30 fps, clean the back lens with a soft cloth and turn on the grid in camera settings.
2. Prop the phone upright at eye level on a tripod or a stack of books, about an arm and a half away from where you'll sit.
3. Frame yourself chest-up with your eyes on the top grid line. Touch and hold on your face to lock focus and exposure.
4. Record three 15-second takes of the same line: one on the front camera, one on the back camera, one with the phone handheld.
5. Watch all three on your phone at full screen and write down which looked sharpest and steadiest. That's your setup from now on.

Open the free teleprompter →

Check yourself

1. **You're filming a talking-head short in a normal room. Which recording setting is the best default?**

   A 4K at 120 fps
   B 720p at 24 fps
   C 1080p at 30 fps
   D Whatever the in-app camera picks

2. **Your face keeps going bright and dark while you talk. What should you do first?**

   A Lock focus and exposure before recording
   B Turn on a beauty filter
   C Switch to the front camera
   D Film in Slo-mo

3. **Where should you avoid placing text or your product in a vertical frame?**

   A The center of the frame
   B The bottom strip and the right edge
   C The top third
   D Anywhere near your face

4. **Why does iPhone's Enhanced Stabilization make your shot look slightly tighter?**

   A It switches to the telephoto lens
   B It lowers the resolution to 720p
   C It zooms in a little to make room for stabilizing
   D It crops the video to square

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Should I film in 4K for TikTok and YouTube Shorts?

Usually no. YouTube lists 1080p as the maximum resolution for Shorts uploads, and 4K files are much bigger. Film in 4K only if you plan to crop or zoom into the shot while editing, then export at 1080 x 1920.

Is the front camera good enough for shorts?

It works, and it lets you see yourself. On most phones the back camera is sharper and handles low light better, though. If you use the back camera, put a small mirror or a second screen behind the phone, or record a short test first to check your framing.

Should I record inside the TikTok or Instagram app, or in my phone's camera?

Your phone's own camera gives you more control over resolution, frame rate, focus and exposure, and it keeps a clean original file you can post anywhere. In-app cameras are handy for effects and trends. Many creators film in the phone camera and only use the app to post.

What frame rate should I use for vertical video?

30 fps is the safe default for talking and most everyday content. Use 60 fps for fast movement like sports, dance or gameplay, or if you want to slow parts down later. 24 fps gives a more film-like look but can stutter on fast motion.

Sources

- Apple Support: Record a video with your iPhone camera
- Apple Support: Change video recording settings on iPhone
- YouTube Help: Upload YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: Understand three-minute YouTube Shorts
- TikTok for Business: 7 Top Tips for Making TikTok Videos (PDF)

MODULE 4 · FILMING AND EDITING · 9 MIN

Lighting and Sound on a Budget: Window Light, Cheap Mics and Quiet Rooms

How to light your face and record clear sound for short videos for $0 to $100. Where to put the window, which cheap mic to buy first, and how to kill room echo and background noise.

Key takeaways

- Face a window with soft daylight. Never sit with the window behind you.
- Turn off overhead lights when you use daylight, so you don't mix colors.
- For sound, distance beats price: get the mic close to your mouth.
- Soft things in the room (rugs, curtains, a sofa) cut echo more than any software.
- Your first purchase should be a cheap clip-on mic, not a light.

Good lighting and sound on a budget come down to two moves: face a window so soft daylight falls on your face, and get a microphone close to your mouth in a room with some soft furniture. Neither needs money. If you buy one thing, make it a clip-on mic for under $30, because people can watch past average video, but they can’t follow words they can’t hear.

This lesson shows you how to set up both, with three budget levels and fixes for the most common problems.

Why light and sound matter more than your camera

Phone cameras are good in bright light and noticeably worse in dim light. In a dark room, the phone raises brightness digitally, which adds grain and smears detail. So the cheapest way to make a phone look like a “better camera” is to give it more light.

Sound matters for a second reason: most shorts are talking videos. If people can’t make out your words, the video fails no matter how it looks. TikTok’s checklist for creators making videos for business asks whether your voice is audible and whether spoken words stay clear over any music. Clean audio also helps captions. YouTube notes its automatic captions can get words wrong because of background noise, and the same goes for any caption tool.

Lighting with a window ($0)

A window is a big, soft light source, and it’s free. Here’s how to use it.

Where to sit

- **Face the window**, or sit with it slightly off to one side (about 45 degrees). The light should hit your face.

- **Never sit with the window behind you.** The camera will expose for the bright sky and turn you into a dark shape.
- **Phone between you and the window**, or just to the side of it, so the lens looks at your lit face.

When to film

- **Cloudy days are your friend.** Clouds spread the light out, so shadows are soft and skin looks even.
- **Direct sun is harsh.** If sunlight is pouring in, hang a thin white curtain, a white sheet or baking paper over the window to soften it.
- **Light changes through the day.** If you batch film, pick a window and a time of day that works and stick to it, so videos in a series match.

Turn off the room lights

When you use daylight, turn off overhead lights and lamps. Daylight is cool and bluish. Most home bulbs are warm and orange. Mixing them gives you a face that's two colors at once, and no editing app fully fixes it.

> TIP
>
> Put a white sheet of foam board, a pillowcase or a large piece of paper on the side of your face away from the window. It bounces light back and fills in the dark side of your face. Professionals call this a reflector, and the cheap version works almost as well.

Lighting with a cheap lamp or LED

At night or in a room without a good window, you need your own light. You don't need a kit.

The one-light setup:

1. Put one light in front of you, about 45 degrees to one side.
2. Raise it slightly above eye level, pointing down at your face.
3. Make it soft: the bigger the light source compared with your face, the softer the shadows. Shine it through a white shower curtain, bounce it off a white wall, or buy a small softbox.
4. Use the bounce trick from above on the other side.

Ring lights are popular because they're simple. They give flat, even light with few shadows and a ring reflection in your eyes. That suits beauty, makeup and close talking videos. For a more natural look, a small LED panel to one side is usually better.

A second light behind you, aimed at the wall or a shelf, separates you from the background and adds depth. This is a nice upgrade, not a must.

When buying any LED light, look for adjustable brightness and adjustable color (warm to cool). Then you can match it to daylight or to your room.

Sound: get the mic close

This is the single most important audio rule. A microphone picks up your voice and the room at the same time. The closer it is to your mouth, the louder your voice is compared with echo and noise.

A rough guide for distance from mic to mouth:

Mic distance	What it sounds like
Phone across the room (2 m / 6 ft or more)	Hollow, echoey, noisy. Avoid.
Phone at arm's length	Usable in a quiet, soft room.
Phone or mic around 30 cm (1 ft)	Clear and close. Good for most shorts.
Clip-on mic on your collar	Clear and consistent, even if you move.

If you don't have a mic yet, put the phone closer and frame tighter. A slightly tighter shot with clear sound beats a wide shot that sounds like a cave.

Your phone's built-in sound options

Phones have a few settings that help. On iPhone 16 and later, Apple lets you choose Spatial Audio, Stereo or Mono in Settings > Camera > Record Sound, and wind noise is reduced automatically when recording in Spatial Audio or Stereo. For a single talking voice, Mono is plenty.

If you record in Spatial Audio, the Photos app's Audio Mix lets you change the sound after filming. The Studio option reduces background sound and reverb, and In-Frame reduces voices and sounds from people outside the shot. It's useful for a clip that came out noisy, but it can't rescue a voice that's buried under a loud room.

Supported AirPods can also be used as the microphone while you record on an iPhone. Earbuds sit near your mouth, so they often sound better than the phone at arm's length.

Cheap microphones that are worth it

You don't need a studio mic. For phone-shot shorts, these are the options, roughly in order of what to buy first:

1. **Wired clip-on (lavalier) mic.** Plugs into the phone and clips to your collar. Very cheap and very effective. The cable limits how far you can move.
2. **Wireless clip-on kit.** A small transmitter clips on you and a receiver plugs into the phone. Costs more, but you can walk around and film from farther away. Most kits come with two mics, which is handy for interviews.
3. **Shotgun mic on the phone.** Mounts on top and points at you. Better than the built-in mic, but still picks up the room, so it only helps if you're close.
4. **USB desk mic.** Great for voiceovers recorded at a desk, less useful for on-camera clips.

Check that whatever you buy fits your phone's port (USB-C or Lightning) or connects wirelessly, and test it before a real shoot.

> **TIP**
>
> Clip a lavalier mic about a hand's width below your chin, in the middle of your chest. Keep it away from necklaces, hair and jacket zippers, which rub and rustle on every movement.

Kill echo and room noise

Echo

Echo (or “room sound”) comes from your voice bouncing off hard surfaces: bare walls, tile, glass and wood floors. Fabric soaks it up.

- **Film in the softest room you have.** Bedrooms and living rooms with a sofa, curtains and a rug are usually best. Bathrooms and kitchens are worst.
- **Add soft things around you**, especially behind the camera, where your voice hits first. Blankets, cushions, a duvet over a chair, a rug on the floor.
- **For voiceovers,** a closet full of clothes is one of the best free recording booths there is.

Try the clap test: clap once and listen. A sharp ring or flutter means more fabric is needed.

Background noise

- Turn off fans, air conditioning, heaters, the fridge if you can, and anything with a hum.
- Close windows. Film when traffic and neighbors are quiet.
- Put your phone on Do Not Disturb so notifications don’t sound mid-take.
- Before your first line, record 5 seconds of silence. Many editors use it to learn what the noise sounds like and remove it.

Always listen back with headphones before you film the rest. Phone speakers hide hiss and echo that viewers with earbuds will hear.

Three budget setups

Budget	Light	Sound	Room
$0	Window in front of you, room lights off, white paper as a bounce	Phone close, or earbuds with a mic	Soft room, blankets behind the camera
Around $40	Same window, plus a cheap clamp or desk lamp with a soft shade for evenings	Wired clip-on mic	Same, plus a rug
Around $100	One small LED panel with adjustable color and brightness	Wireless clip-on kit	Same, plus a light behind you on the background

Spend on sound before light. Most homes have a usable window. Very few have a usable microphone.

If you film long recordings like podcasts or streams and cut them into shorts later, these same fixes apply to the long recording. Better sound in the source means cleaner clips and more accurate auto captions, whether you edit by hand or use a tool like Short.now to cut the clips for you.

What's next

With a clean picture and clear sound, you're ready to turn raw takes into a tight short. Next up: how to edit short-form videos, covering pacing, jump cuts, captions and b-roll. If you haven't set up your phone's camera yet, go back to filming vertical video on a phone.

PRACTICE

Do it now: find your best spot and test your sound

1. Walk through your home with your phone on the front camera. Stand facing each window and pick the spot where your face is bright and evenly lit.
2. Turn off the overhead lights and any lamps in that room, then record 10 seconds of yourself talking.
3. Record the same 10 seconds twice more: once with the phone at arm's length, once with the phone (or a clip-on mic) about a foot from your mouth.
4. Clap once loudly and listen for echo. If you hear a ring, add a blanket, cushions or a rug and clap again.
5. Play all takes back with headphones and pick the clearest one. Write down the spot, the time of day and the mic distance.

Check yourself

1. **You're filming at a desk next to a window. Where should the window be?**

   A In front of you or off to one side, facing your face
   B Behind you, so it lights the room
   C Directly above you
   D It doesn't matter if your phone has HDR

2. **Your video has an orange glow on one side of your face and blue on the other. What's the likely cause?**

   A The phone's white balance is broken
   B The resolution is too low
   C You're too close to the camera
   D You mixed daylight with warm indoor bulbs

3. **What single change improves phone audio the most?**

   A Buying a 4K camera
   B Moving the microphone closer to your mouth
   C Turning the volume up in editing
   D Recording in a bigger room

4. **Your bedroom recording sounds hollow and echoey. What's the cheapest fix?**

   A Record in the bathroom
   B Use a ring light
   C Add soft things like blankets, pillows and a rug around you
   D Speak louder

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Is a ring light worth it for short videos?

A ring light is fine for close-up talking videos and makeup, and it's easy to set up. It gives flat, even light and a ring reflection in your eyes. A small LED panel or softbox placed off to one side usually looks more natural. Try a window first, since it's free and often looks better than either.

Can I use AirPods or earbuds as a microphone?

Yes. Supported AirPods can act as the mic when you record video on an iPhone, and many wired earbuds with a mic work too. Because the mic sits near your mouth, they often sound better than the phone at arm's length. They can pick up rustling from clothes or hair, so test first.

How do I remove background noise from a video?

Prevent it first: switch off fans, air conditioning and the TV, close windows and move the mic closer. After that, most editors have a noise-reduction or voice-enhance option. On iPhone 16 or later, Audio Mix in the Photos app can reduce background sounds on videos recorded with Spatial Audio.

What's the best cheap microphone for TikTok and YouTube Shorts?

For most beginners, a clip-on (lavalier) mic is the best first buy. A wired one that plugs into your phone costs very little, and a wireless clip-on kit costs more but lets you move freely. Pick one that matches your phone's port (USB-C or Lightning) or connects wirelessly.

Sources

- Apple Support: Change sound recording options on iPhone
- Apple Support: Trim video length, adjust speed, and edit audio on iPhone (Audio Mix)
- YouTube Help: Use automatic captioning
- TikTok for Business: 7 Top Tips for Making TikTok Videos (PDF)
- TikTok Shop Seller University: Content quality guidelines

MODULE 4 · FILMING AND EDITING · 10 MIN

How to Edit Short-Form Video: Pacing, Jump Cuts, Captions and B-Roll

A step-by-step editing workflow for YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Reels. Cut dead air, pace with jump cuts, add readable captions and b-roll, balance sound, and export at the right settings.

Key takeaways

- Edit in passes: cut, tighten, cover, caption, sound, export. Don't try to do it all at once.
- Start on your hook. Cut every hello, intro and breath before the first real line.
- Jump cuts are normal on short-form. Use b-roll or a small punch-in to hide the ones that jar.
- Burn in captions: short lines, high contrast, kept out of the bottom and right edges.
- Export at 1080 x 1920, 30 fps, as an MP4. Watch it once on your phone before posting.

To edit a short-form video, work in passes: cut straight to your hook, tighten every pause with jump cuts, cover awkward cuts with b-roll, add readable captions, balance your voice against any music, and export at 1080 x 1920. A 30-second short usually takes 20 to 40 minutes this way once you've done a few. The goal of every pass is the same: remove anything that gives the viewer a reason to swipe.

Below is the workflow pass by pass, plus a quick look at free editors.

Before you start: pick one editor

You don't need paid software. These free options all cover cutting, captions, music and vertical export:

Editor	Where	Good to know
Built-in app editor (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube)	Phone	Fastest. Direct access to each app's sounds and effects. Fewer precise controls.
Edits (by Instagram)	iPhone, Android	Instagram says exports have no watermark. Timeline editing, green screen, captions.
YouTube Create	iPhone, Android	Free with no ads, per YouTube. Includes captions and a royalty-free music library. Not available in every country.
CapCut	Phone, desktop	Popular, lots of templates and auto captions. Check what's free and what's paid in your region.
DaVinci Resolve, iMovie	Desktop	Free and powerful for longer edits. More to learn.

Pick one and stick with it for your first 20 videos. Speed comes from knowing your tool, not from having the best one.

> **TIP**
>
> If you post the same video on several platforms, edit in a separate app and export a clean file. A TikTok download carries a TikTok watermark, and Instagram says it avoids recommending content that's largely reposted from somewhere else with only minor edits.

Pass 1: cut to the hook

Open your raw clip and find the first sentence that would make a stranger want to keep watching. Delete everything before it.

That usually means cutting:

- “Hey guys” and “So, today I want to talk about…”
- The second where you reach to press record
- A breath, a smile, a look off camera before you start

Your video should start mid-energy, on the first frame. If your hook is weak, no edit can save it, so check out how to write a hook that holds people and how to structure a short before you film the next one.

Pass 2: tighten with jump cuts

A jump cut is a cut within the same shot. You remove a piece of the middle, and the video jumps forward. On YouTube or TV that used to look like a mistake. On short-form it’s the normal style, because it removes dead air.

Go through the clip and cut:

- **Pauses** longer than a beat between sentences
- **Filler words**: um, uh, like, you know, so
- **Repeats**: if you said a sentence twice, keep the better take
- **Detours**: any sentence that doesn’t move toward the payoff

How tight is too tight?

Leave a tiny breath at the end of each sentence. If you cut every gap to zero, speech starts to sound robotic and viewers can’t keep up. Read it back at normal speed. If you can follow it easily on the first listen, it’s right.

A useful test: watch your edit and ask, every few seconds, “is something new happening right now?” A new idea, a new shot, a new piece of text. If nothing changes for a while, either cut there or cover it.

Speed

Some creators speed up their talking clips slightly, to around 1.1x. It can help with a slow delivery, but it’s easy to overdo. It’s better to speak with energy when filming than to fix it later.

Pass 3: cover cuts with b-roll and punch-ins

When you jump cut a talking-head shot, your head shifts a little in the frame on every cut. A few of those are fine. Many in a row look jittery. Two simple fixes:

Punch-ins. Zoom in on the next clip by about 10 to 20 percent, then back out on the one after. The change in framing makes the cut look deliberate. If you filmed in 1080p, keep the zoom small so the picture doesn't get soft. If you filmed in 4K, you have room to zoom more.

B-roll. B-roll is any footage that isn't you talking: your hands doing the thing, a screen recording, the product, the place, a photo. Place it over the cut while your voice keeps playing underneath. Good b-roll shows what you're saying. If you say "I changed one setting," show that setting.

> TIP
>
> Film b-roll on purpose while you're set up. Thirty seconds of close-ups and cutaways after every shoot gives you plenty to cover cuts later. Only use clips you filmed yourself or have the rights to use.

Pass 4: add captions that people can read

Many people scroll with the sound off, in public or late at night, so captions keep them watching. TikTok also lists closed captions as a way to make your videos accessible. Captions help people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and anyone watching in a second language.

Burned-in vs platform captions

- **Burned-in captions** are part of the picture. You style them, and they show everywhere you post.
- **Platform captions** (auto captions in TikTok or YouTube) can be switched on or off by the viewer, and you don't control the look.

For shorts, most creators burn in their own captions. Either way, read every line. YouTube warns that automatic captions can misrepresent what was said because of mispronunciation, accents, dialects or background noise. Names and niche words get mangled the most.

Caption style rules

- **Short lines.** Three to six words on screen at a time, one or two lines max.
- **High contrast.** White or yellow text with a dark outline or a dark box behind it.
- **Big enough to read on a phone** at arm's length without squinting.
- **In the safe area.** Above the bottom strip where each app's caption and username sit, and away from the button column on the right. The format cheat sheet shows where those are.
- **Match the words exactly.** Paraphrased captions confuse people reading along.

For a full walk-through of caption tools, see how to add captions to videos automatically.

Pass 5: balance sound

Turn your phone's volume up and listen to the whole video once with headphones.

- **Voice first.** Your voice should be the loudest thing, steady from start to finish. Raise clips that are quiet and lower ones where you were too close to the mic.
- **Music low.** If you add music, keep it well under your voice. TikTok's checklist for business videos says to check volume levels so spoken words stay audible. When you're not speaking, you can bring it up.
- **Sound effects sparingly.** A whoosh on a transition or a pop on a text reveal can add energy. One on every cut gets tiring fast.
- **Noise reduction** helps with a hiss or a hum, but too much makes your voice sound watery. Use the lightest setting that works.

Which music you can use, and where, depends on the platform and your account type. The music and copyright lesson explains the rules.

Pass 6: the ending and export

End on the payoff

Stop the video right after the payoff lands. Cut "thanks for watching," a logo animation and a long call to action. If you can, make the last line lead back into the first, so the replay feels seamless.

Export settings

Setting	Use
Resolution	1080 x 1920 (9:16)
Frame rate	Same as you filmed, usually 30 fps
Format	MP4, H.264
Quality	High or recommended. Not the smallest file.

YouTube lists 1080p as the maximum resolution for Shorts uploads, so a 4K export mostly gives you a bigger file to upload.

Final check on your phone

Before you post, watch the exported file on your phone at full screen:

1. Once with sound off. Can you follow it from the captions and visuals alone?
2. Once with sound on. Is every word clear?
3. Check that nothing important is hidden behind where the buttons and caption will sit.

Editing long videos into shorts

Everything above assumes you filmed the short on purpose. If your source is a long video, like a podcast, stream or webinar, most of the work is finding the right 30 to 60 seconds before you even start these passes. You can do that by hand by scanning the transcript, or let a clipping tool like Short.now pick the moments, reframe them to vertical and add captions, then do a final review and tweak yourself. Module 5 covers this workflow, starting with how to find the best moments.

What's next

Your edit is clean. Now make sure the music and sounds in it won't get your video muted, blocked or claimed. Next lesson: music, sounds and copyright for creators.

PRACTICE

Do it now: edit one 30-second short in six passes

1. Pick one raw take under 2 minutes and open it in a free editor (your app's built-in editor, CapCut, Edits or YouTube Create).
2. Pass 1 and 2: trim the start so the video opens on your first real sentence, then cut every pause, 'um' and repeated line.
3. Pass 3: add at least two b-roll shots or punch-ins over cuts that look jumpy.
4. Pass 4: generate captions, fix every wrong word and move them above the bottom area of the screen.
5. Pass 5 and 6: lower any music well under your voice, export at 1080 x 1920, then watch the result on your phone with sound off and then on.

Add subtitles to a video for free →

Check yourself

1. **Your raw clip starts with 'Hey guys, so today I wanted to talk about…' What should you do in the edit?**

   A Cut straight to the first sentence that delivers the hook
   B Keep it, it's friendly
   C Speed it up to 2x
   D Put a title card over it

2. **A jump cut looks jarring because your head shifts in the frame. Which fix works best?**

   A Add a fade to black
   B Remove all your cuts
   C Add a sound effect only
   D Cover the cut with b-roll or a slight punch-in

3. **Where should captions usually go on a vertical short?**

   A At the very bottom edge
   B Along the right edge
   C In the middle area, above the bottom strip where the app's text sits
   D Only at the top corner

4. **You added a song under your voice. How loud should it be?**

A As loud as your voice
B Clearly quieter, so every word is easy to hear
C Louder than your voice to add energy
D It doesn't matter if you have captions

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

What is the best free app to edit short videos?

Start with the editor built into the app you post on, since it's free and has its trending sounds and effects. For more control, free mobile editors like CapCut, Instagram's Edits and YouTube Create all handle cuts, captions and music. On a computer, DaVinci Resolve and iMovie are free. Pick one and learn it well rather than switching often.

How many cuts should a 60-second short have?

There's no fixed number. Cut whenever there's a pause, a repeated idea or a moment where nothing new happens. In a talking video that often means a cut every few seconds, but a strong uncut moment like a reaction or a demo can run longer. Let your retention graph tell you where people leave.

Should I use auto captions or add them myself?

Use auto captions to save time, then read through and fix every mistake. Auto captions can misread names, slang and accents, and YouTube says they can be wrong because of mispronunciation or background noise. Burned-in captions you style yourself are easier to read than the app's default subtitles.

What export settings should I use for TikTok, Shorts and Reels?

Export at 1080 x 1920 (9:16), the same frame rate you filmed at (usually 30 fps), as an MP4 with H.264. YouTube lists 1080p as the maximum resolution for Shorts uploads, so exporting in 4K mostly makes the file bigger.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Learn more about YouTube Create
- Edits by Instagram: video editing app for creators
- YouTube Help: Use automatic captioning
- YouTube Help: Upload YouTube Shorts
- TikTok for Business: 7 Top Tips for Making TikTok Videos (PDF)
- Instagram Help: Recommendations on Instagram

MODULE 4 · FILMING AND EDITING · 11 MIN

Music, Sounds and Copyright for Creators: What You Can Actually Use

How music rules work on YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels: in-app libraries, Content ID, business accounts, the cross-posting trap, fair use myths and what to do about a claim.

Key takeaways

- The safest music is music added inside each app from its own library, or audio you made yourself.
- A sound you add in one app is licensed for that app. Don't download a video with a trending song and post it elsewhere.
- Business accounts and paid promos count as commercial use: use TikTok's Commercial Music Library or Meta's Sound Collection.
- Giving credit, writing 'no copyright intended' or using a few seconds is not permission.
- A claim is not a strike. Fix it by removing or replacing the song, and only dispute when you have the rights.

You can safely use music in short videos in three ways: add it inside each app from that app’s own sound library, use tracks you’re licensed to use on that specific platform (like the YouTube Audio Library on YouTube), or use audio you made yourself. Business accounts and paid promotions have stricter rules and should stick to commercial libraries. Crediting the artist, writing “no copyright intended” or using only a few seconds doesn’t give you permission.

That covers most of it. The rest of this lesson explains how each platform handles music, the cross-posting trap that catches most beginners, and what to do when a claim shows up.

TIP

This lesson is practical guidance from each platform's own help pages, not legal advice. Rules change, and they can differ by country. If money or a brand deal depends on a track, check the platform's current page or ask a lawyer.

How platforms find music

All three platforms scan uploads automatically. Rights holders, meaning labels, publishers and artists, give the platforms reference files, and every upload gets compared against them.

- **YouTube** calls this system Content ID. When your video matches, a claim is placed on it, and the owner chooses whether to block the video, run ads on it and take the money, or just track its views.

- **TikTok** can remove videos that infringe, mute sounds it no longer has the rights to, and ban accounts of repeat infringers.
- **Meta (Instagram and Facebook)** says content with someone else's music can be reviewed by the rights holder and then blocked, hidden or removed if you don't have permission.

These systems match the recording, not the file name. Speeding a song up, pitching it, or adding effects doesn't reliably hide it, and trying to dodge detection isn't a plan.

YouTube Shorts

Music from the Shorts sound picker

When you create a Short in the YouTube app, you can add a song from the Shorts audio library. These songs are cleared for Shorts. YouTube says that depending on the song, you can use up to 90 seconds of music in a three-minute Short, and the library shows how much of each track you can use.

Using a library song creates a special claim that lets the rights holder see how their music is used. You can't see it and don't need to dispute it.

Music you edit in yourself

If you add a song in an outside editor and upload the finished file, it's treated like any other upload. It can get a standard Content ID claim or a copyright removal request.

There's an important rule for longer Shorts. YouTube says any Short over one minute with an active copyright claim of any type is blocked worldwide: it won't play, won't be recommended and can't earn money. There's no penalty to your channel, and it becomes viewable again once the claim is resolved. Shorts of one minute or less don't fall under this rule.

The YouTube Audio Library

In YouTube Studio, the Audio Library has free music and sound effects. YouTube says tracks you download from it won't be claimed through Content ID. Some tracks are Creative Commons and require you to credit the artist in your description. Filter by "Attribution not required" to skip that step.

The Audio Library is built for YouTube. YouTube doesn't give guidance on using these tracks on other platforms, so don't assume they're cleared for TikTok or Instagram.

Music and Shorts earnings

If you're in the YouTube Partner Program, music changes how Shorts ad revenue is split. YouTube says that for a Short with one track, half of the revenue tied to its views goes to the creator pool and half covers music licensing. With two tracks, the creator pool gets one third. Your own share of the pool doesn't change. For details, see how to monetize YouTube Shorts.

TikTok

Personal accounts vs business accounts

TikTok has a general sound library with popular songs, plus a **Commercial Music Library (CML)**. TikTok describes the CML as a pre-cleared global library of around 1 million songs that are free for businesses to use.

The key rule, in TikTok's words for advertisers: businesses can't use the general music library for commercial use, and should use the CML for all commercial TikTok activity, including organic posts, ads and branded content. TikTok's CML terms say individual users can access the CML too, not only businesses. Which library your sound picker shows depends on your account type, so check yours.

When your video counts as commercial

Even on a personal account, some posts are commercial. Examples:

- A paid partnership or sponsored video
- A video promoting your own product, service or shop
- Anything you'll also run as an ad

For those, use a CML track or your own audio. TikTok's CML terms say Commercial Sounds are the only sounds on TikTok available for commercial use.

Other people's original sounds

Other users' "original sounds" often contain someone else's music. TikTok's advice for businesses using original sounds or other licensed sounds is to check with a legal team that you have a proper license. For a personal, non-commercial video, using them in the app is normal. For anything commercial, avoid them.

Off TikTok

CML tracks are licensed for TikTok only. TikTok's CML terms say you may only post videos with Commercial Sounds within TikTok and that it grants no rights for commercial use elsewhere. The same logic applies to the general library: a TikTok download with a trending song isn't cleared for YouTube or Instagram.

Instagram and Facebook

The licensed music library

Instagram's Reels audio picker has a large licensed library of popular songs. Instagram says this music is intended for personal, non-commercial use. To keep it that way, certain business accounts and certain types of posts don't get access, and some songs aren't available in some countries.

Meta's Sound Collection

If your account can't use the licensed library, Instagram points you to Meta's Sound Collection: over 14,000 songs and sounds that are royalty-free, safe for Reels and Stories, and usable for commercial purposes like ads. You'll find it under Audio in the Reels camera.

Meta's music guidelines

Meta's music guidelines apply to music in any video on its apps. In short:

- You're responsible for the music in what you post.
- Commercial or non-personal use of music is prohibited unless you have the right licenses.
- The more music a video uses, the more likely it is to be restricted. Meta recommends shorter music clips.
- A video must have a visual part. Music shouldn't be the main purpose.
- Content can be blocked, hidden or removed, and you can dispute through the notification if you think you have the rights.

The cross-posting trap

Most music problems happen here. A song you add inside an app is licensed for that app, so when you move the video, the license stays behind.

A clean workflow:

1. **Edit a master file without music**, or with music you're allowed to use everywhere (your own, or a track with a license that covers all the platforms you post on).
2. **Upload that file to each platform.**
3. **Add trending sounds inside each app** when you post, from its own library, at a low volume under your voice.

This also matters if you schedule posts with a tool. Auto-posting, including from Short.now, uploads your file as it is, with no in-app sound added. So clips you auto-post should carry your own voice, original audio, or music you're licensed to use on every platform you post to.

> **TIP**
>
> Talking videos often don't need music at all. Your voice is original audio you own. If you want energy, a quiet track from the app's library added at posting time is enough.

Myths that get videos claimed

Myth	Reality
"I credited the artist."	Credit isn't permission. YouTube says giving credit doesn't make copying fair use.

Myth	Reality
”I wrote ‘no copyright infringement intended.’”	YouTube says there are no magic words that create fair use.
”It’s only 5 seconds.”	No length is automatically safe, and detection can match short clips.
”I bought the song.”	Buying a song lets you listen to it. It doesn’t license it for your videos.
”It’s fair use because I’m not making money.”	Non-profit use is one factor, not an automatic defense.
”I sped it up so it won’t be detected.”	Altered audio can still match, and it’s still someone else’s recording.

Why fair use isn’t a strategy

Fair use is a real US legal doctrine for things like commentary, criticism, teaching and news. Other countries have their own, often narrower, exceptions. YouTube explains that courts decide fair use case by case, weighing purpose, the kind of work, how much you used and the effect on the owner’s market. Content ID can’t make that judgment. Using a hit song as background music for a vlog rarely fits. If your channel depends on fair use, like music reviews or commentary, get proper legal advice.

If you get a claim or a mute

On YouTube, a claim affects one video and usually doesn’t touch your channel. Claims and strikes are different. Your options:

- **Leave it**, if you’re fine with the owner’s choice (for example, they take the ad money).
- **Remove the music**: mute the song, trim out the part, or swap it for an Audio Library track in YouTube Studio. That releases the claim.
- **Dispute**, only if you’re sure you have the rights, like your own song or a license. YouTube warns that disputing without a valid reason can lead to a removal request and a strike.

On TikTok, you’ll get an in-app notification. You can contact the copyright owner to ask for a retraction, or appeal from the notification if you believe the removal was wrong. Repeated infringement can get an account banned.

On Instagram and Facebook, you can dispute through the notification. Depending on the case, the content may be restored, you may be put in touch with the rights holder, or Meta may review it.

What’s next

With filming, editing and music sorted, you have the full production basics. Module 5 shows how to turn one long recording into a month of shorts, starting with a content repurposing system. If you skipped the editing lesson, go back to how to edit short-form videos.

PRACTICE

Do it now: set up your music workflow

1. Check your account type on each app (personal, creator or business) and note which sound library it gives you.
2. Open the YouTube Audio Library in YouTube Studio and save three tracks marked 'Attribution not required' that fit your niche.
3. In TikTok, open the sound picker and find the Commercial Music Library (TikTok calls these tracks Commercial Sounds). On Instagram, open the Reels audio picker and search a track, so you know where each library lives.
4. Re-export your latest edit without music, then add a sound inside the app when you post it.
5. Write a one-line rule in your notes: 'Trending songs only inside the app. Off-platform edits: my voice or licensed tracks only.'

Check yourself

1. **You make a TikTok with a trending song from TikTok's library, download it and upload it as a YouTube Short. What's most likely?**

   A Nothing, because TikTok licensed the song
   B YouTube's Content ID can match the song and claim the Short
   C It's fine if you credit the artist
   D YouTube automatically swaps the song

2. **Which statement about fair use is true?**

   A Using under 10 seconds is always fair use
   B Writing 'no copyright intended' makes it fair use
   C Courts decide fair use case by case, and automated systems can't
   D Giving credit to the artist counts as permission

3. **You run a TikTok business account for your bakery. Which music can you use in promotional videos?**

   A Tracks from TikTok's Commercial Music Library
   B Any song in TikTok's general sound library
   C Any original sound uploaded by another user
   D Any song you bought on a music store

4. **Your 2-minute YouTube Short gets a Content ID claim and is blocked. What does that mean for your channel?**

   A You got a copyright strike
   B Your channel is demonetized
   C Your channel will be deleted after three claims
   D The Short won't play while the claim is active, but there's no channel penalty

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Can I use copyrighted music in YouTube Shorts?

Yes, if you add it with the Shorts sound picker in the YouTube app. Songs from the Shorts audio library are cleared for Shorts, and depending on the song you can use up to 90 seconds in a three-minute Short. Music you edit into the file yourself can get a standard Content ID claim, and a Short over one

minute with an active claim is blocked.

Why can't I use popular songs on my TikTok or Instagram business account?

Popular songs in the main libraries are licensed for personal, non-commercial use. TikTok limits business use to its Commercial Music Library, and Instagram says certain business accounts and post types don't get the licensed library. Use the Commercial Music Library on TikTok and Meta's Sound Collection on Instagram instead.

Is it okay to use 5 seconds of a song?

There's no length that makes copyrighted music automatically safe. Detection systems can match very short clips, and fair use depends on several factors, not just length. If you want to use a song, add it from the app's own library or get a license.

Is a copyright claim the same as a copyright strike?

No. On YouTube, a Content ID claim affects one video: the owner can block it, monetize it or track it. A strike comes from a formal removal request and counts against your channel. Disputing a claim without a valid reason can lead to a removal request and a strike, so only dispute when you have the rights.

Sources

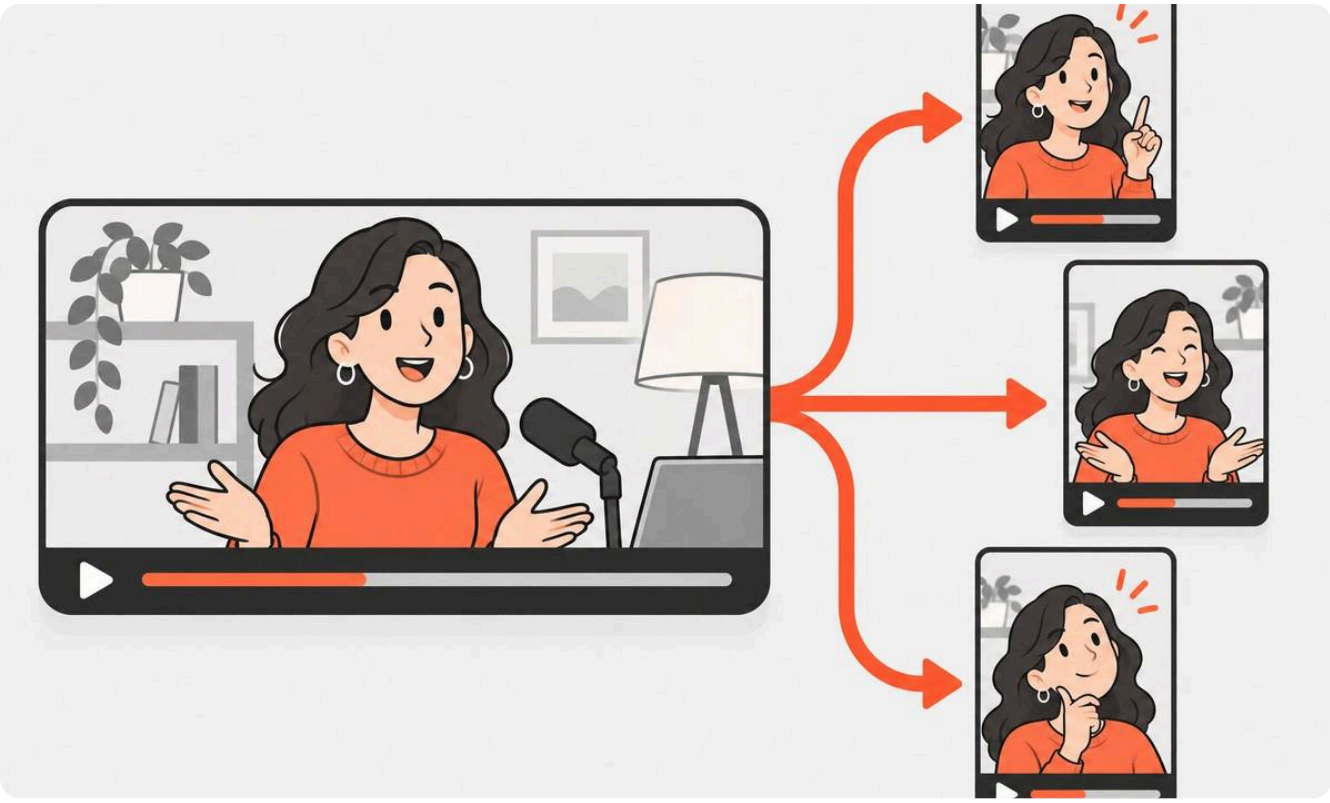
- YouTube Help: Music eligibility for YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: Learn about copyright claims
- YouTube Help: Fair use on YouTube
- TikTok Ads Help: About the Commercial Music Library
- Instagram Help: Access to the licensed music library on Instagram
- Meta: Music Guidelines

PUT THIS MODULE TO WORK

Practice on your own videos

Short.now turns one long video into ready-to-post Shorts, TikToks and Reels with captions. Free plan, no watermark, no card.

Try Short.now free →



MODULE 5

One long video, many shorts

Turn podcasts, streams and long videos into a steady supply of clips without filming more.

1. A Content Repurposing System: One Long Recording a Week, a Month of Shorts
2. How to Find Clip-Worthy Moments in a Long Video
3. How to Turn Horizontal Video Into Vertical (Reframe and Crop)
4. Batch Content Creation: Film Once, Post All Month

MODULE 5 · ONE LONG VIDEO, MANY SHORTS · 10 MIN

A Content Repurposing System: One Long Recording a Week, a Month of Shorts

A simple weekly workflow that turns one long recording into 20 to 30 short clips a month for YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Reels, with a schedule, a checklist and the math.

Key takeaways

- Record one long piece a week (a podcast, a lesson, a stream) and treat it as the raw material for every short you post.
- A 30 to 60 minute talk-heavy recording usually gives 5 to 8 clips worth posting. That is enough for one short a day on every platform.
- Split the work into four separate jobs: record, clip, package, schedule. Doing each one in its own session is what makes it fast.
- Post the same clip on all three platforms as a clean file you made, and link Shorts back to the full video.
- Every month, look at which clips won and let that decide what you talk about in the next long recordings.

A content repurposing system means you record one long piece of content a week, cut 5 to 8 short clips from it, and post those clips across YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels over the following days. Four recordings a month give you 20 to 30 clips, which is one short a day on every platform without filming anything extra.

This lesson shows you how to set that up: which long format to pick, how to split the week, how the numbers work out, and how to use your results to choose what to record next.

How the system works

Think of it as a waterfall. One big piece at the top feeds many small pieces below it.

Level	What it is	How many per week
Pillar	One long recording: podcast, tutorial, stream, talk	1
Clips	Self-contained 20-90 second moments cut from it	5 to 8
Posts	Each clip uploaded to Shorts, TikTok and Reels	15 to 24
Extras	Quotes, a newsletter, a community post	Optional

The pillar is where your real thinking happens. The clips are where most people find you. The two feed each other: clips bring viewers to the long video, and the long video gives you an endless supply of clips.

You can run this system on one platform and add the others later. Start where your audience already is.

Pick a pillar format you can keep up

The best pillar is the one you will still be making in month six. Here is how the common formats compare for clipping:

Format	Clip yield	Effort to make	Good for
Interview podcast	High	Medium (need a guest)	Stories, opinions, disagreements
Solo talk or Q&A	Medium to high	Low	Experts, coaches, teachers
Tutorial or screen share	Medium	Medium	Software, skills, how-to
Live stream	Low to medium	Low to film, high to sort	Gaming, community, reactions

Talk-heavy formats clip best because every answer is a potential unit. A slow tutorial with long silent stretches clips worst. Our post on how many shorts you can get from one long video breaks the yield down by format.

Record with clipping in mind

You do not need to script for clips, but a few habits double your yield:

- **Answer in full sentences.** "The biggest mistake new runners make is…" works as a clip. "Yeah, that one" does not.
- **Restate the question.** If a guest asks something, repeat it in your answer so the clip makes sense on its own.
- **Make one point at a time.** Finish a thought before starting the next.
- **Use numbers and names.** "I lost 3 clients in one week" is clippable. "Things went badly" is not.
- **Look at the camera for the big lines.** You will want those as hooks.
- **Leave a one-second pause** before and after strong points. It gives you clean cut points.

The weekly cycle

The trick is to split the work into four jobs and never mix them. Each job uses a different part of your brain, and switching back and forth is where the hours go.

Day	Job	Time	Output
Monday	Record the pillar	60-90 min	One long video
Tuesday	Clip: find moments, cut, reframe, caption	60-120 min manual	5-8 vertical clips
Wednesday	Package: titles, captions, hashtags, covers	30-45 min	A filled-in sheet
Thursday	Schedule everything for the next 7 days	20-30 min	A full week queued

The days are only an example. What matters is that the clip session is not also the writing session.

One more rule: **stay one week ahead.** The clips you post this week should come from last week's recording. That way a sick day or a bad recording never leaves you with nothing to post. For the details of filming and editing in batches, see batch content creation.

The math: from one recording to a month

Talk-heavy content usually gives about 1 to 2 good clips per 10 minutes. That gives you a simple plan:

Weekly recording	Clips per week	Clips per month	What that covers
20 minutes	2-4	8-16	3-4 shorts a week
45 minutes	5-8	20-32	1 a day
90 minutes	9-15	36-60	1-2 a day, plus a buffer

Because the same clip goes to Shorts, TikTok and Reels, 25 clips become 75 posts. You do not need a new clip per platform.

> **TIP**
>
> Do not post every clip you cut. Post your best 5 or 6 from each recording and park the rest in a "buffer" folder. On weeks where the new recording is weak, pull from the buffer.

Same clip, three platforms

You can post one clip everywhere, but do it properly:

1. **Export one clean master file** at 1080x1920, with your own captions burned in. Never download your TikTok and re-upload it to Instagram: the file carries TikTok's watermark and looks like a repost.
2. **Upload natively** to each app rather than sharing a link.
3. **Write the caption per platform.** A searchable title on YouTube, a short line plus a few hashtags on TikTok, a slightly longer caption on Instagram. Module 6 covers this in detail.
4. **Check length.** YouTube treats square or vertical videos up to three minutes as Shorts. TikTok and Instagram have their own limits, and the specs cheat sheet keeps them on one page.

Reusing your own material is not the problem some creators fear. YouTube's monetization policy on reused content targets content taken from others without meaningful changes, and it lists "content that primarily features the uploading creator" as an example of what is allowed. Repurposing other people's videos is a different matter and needs their permission.

Link the shorts back to the long video

On YouTube, a Short can carry a **related video** link that shows under your channel handle in the Shorts player. You add it in YouTube Studio: Content, open the Short, choose a related video from your channel, save. YouTube says this needs advanced feature access, and the linked video must be public or unlisted.

If you make a Short with YouTube Studio's own **Clips and Shorts** tool (open a long video in Studio, then Clips and Shorts, then Create clip or Short), the source video is added as the related video automatically, unless the Short is private, unlisted or made for kids. On TikTok and Instagram, mention the full episode in the caption or a pinned comment and point to the link in your bio.

Manual or with a tool

You can run this whole system by hand. A typical manual clip session for a 45-minute recording looks like this:

- Watch or skim the transcript and mark 10 to 15 candidate moments (30-45 min).
- Cut the best 6, reframe them to 9:16, add captions (45-90 min).
- Export and name the files (10 min).

The next two lessons teach those steps: how to find clip-worthy moments and how to turn horizontal video into vertical.

There are faster options. YouTube Studio's Clips and Shorts tool lets you pick a segment by selecting text in the transcript, adds auto-captions where available, and in some countries and languages offers AI suggestions. An AI clipper like Short.now does the find, cut, reframe and caption steps for the whole recording at once and hands you a ranked list to review, which turns the clip session into a 15-minute review. Either way, you still choose what gets posted.

Review once a month and feed the next recording

Once a month, spend 20 minutes with your analytics:

- **Rank the month's clips** by views and by average percentage watched.
- **Note the top three topics** and the top three opening lines.
- **Spot the losers.** If every clip that starts with a long setup dies, start later in the moment next time.
- **Pick next month's pillar topics** from the winners. A clip that does well is a cheap test; the topic behind it has earned a full episode.

Write this down in one place, even a note on your phone. After three months you will have a clear picture of what your audience wants, and your long recordings will get better, which makes your clips better. Module 6 shows which numbers to look at on each platform.

What's next

The whole system depends on picking the right moments. In the next lesson, how to find clip-worthy moments in a long video, you will learn the stand-alone test, a fast transcript scan and how to judge AI suggestions.

PRACTICE

Do it now: plan your first repurposing month

1. Pick your long format: a weekly podcast, a tutorial, a live stream or a solo talk. Choose the one you can keep up for 3 months.
2. Write down 4 topics, one for each week of next month. Under each, list 3 questions or claims you want to cover.
3. Block 4 slots in your calendar: record (60-90 min), clip (60 min), package (30 min), schedule (20 min).
4. Open the clip cadence planner, enter how many clips you expect per recording, and see how many days a week that covers.
5. Pick a folder name pattern now, for example 2026-11-W1_topic, so every clip from a recording stays together.

Open the free clip cadence planner →

Check yourself

1. **You record one 45-minute talk-heavy video a week. Roughly how many clips should you plan to post from it?**

   A 1 or 2
   B 5 to 8
   C 25 to 30
   D As many as the editor can cut

2. **Why split repurposing into record, clip, package and schedule sessions?**

   A The platforms require it
   B It makes the videos longer
   C It hides that the clips come from one video
   D Each job needs a different mindset, and switching between them wastes time

3. **What is the best way to post the same clip on TikTok, Reels and Shorts?**

   A Export one clean file yourself and upload it natively to each, with a caption written for each
   B Download it from TikTok with the watermark and upload it elsewhere
   C Only post it on one platform
   D Post it as a link to the long video

4. **Which signal should decide the topics of your next long recordings?**

   A Which clips performed best last month
   B Which topics were easiest to film
   C What competitors posted yesterday
   D Random variety

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

What is content repurposing?

Content repurposing means taking one piece of content you already made, such as a podcast episode or a long YouTube video, and turning it into other formats. For short-form creators that mostly means cutting vertical clips from a long recording and posting them on YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels.

Is it OK to post the same clip on TikTok, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels?

Yes, when it is your own content. Export one clean file yourself and upload it to each app, rather than downloading a post from one app (with its watermark) and re-uploading it to another. Write a caption that fits each platform.

Does posting clips from my own long videos count as reused content on YouTube?

YouTube's reused content policy is about content taken from other creators or other online sources without meaningful changes. Its own examples of allowed content include content that primarily features the uploading creator. Policies change, so read the current monetization policy page if you are in or applying to the Partner Program.

How many shorts should I post from one long video?

Most creators post 4 to 8 per recording and spread them over one to three weeks. Posting all of them in two days makes your feed feel repetitive, and you lose the buffer for slow weeks.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Video clips and Shorts in YouTube Studio
- YouTube Help: Add a related video to your YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: Understand three-minute YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: YouTube channel monetization policies

MODULE 5 · ONE LONG VIDEO, MANY SHORTS · 10 MIN

How to Find Clip-Worthy Moments in a Long Video

How to spot the moments in a podcast, stream or long video that work as shorts on their own: the stand-alone test, a fast transcript scan, your retention data and AI scoring.

Key takeaways

- A clip-worthy moment makes sense to a stranger with no context, opens on a clear claim or question, and ends on a payoff.
- Reading the transcript is much faster than rewatching the video. Search it for signal words, numbers and questions.
- Your own data shows where viewers rewatched: retention spikes in YouTube Studio and the most-replayed graph on the watch page.
- AI scoring is a shortlist, not a decision. Check every suggestion against the stand-alone test before you post it.
- Most weak clips start too early. Cut the setup and begin on the first sentence that matters.

The best moments to clip from a long video are the ones that make sense to a stranger with no context: they open on a clear claim, question or story beat, and they end on a payoff. You find them fastest by scanning the transcript for signal words, checking where viewers rewatched in your analytics, and using AI scoring as a shortlist you then check yourself.

This lesson gives you a test for what counts as clip-worthy, three ways to find candidates, and the rules for where to start and stop each cut.

The stand-alone test

Before anything else, every candidate has to pass one question: **would this make sense to someone who scrolled into it cold?** Short-form viewers did not see the 20 minutes before. If the moment needs them, it fails.

A moment passes the stand-alone test when it has all four of these:

1. **A clear opening line.** The first sentence tells you what this is about. “The worst advice I got as a new manager was…” works. “And that’s why it matters” does not.
2. **No missing references.** No “like I said earlier”, “that guy” or “the second one” without saying what they are.
3. **One idea.** It covers a single point, story or answer, not two half-points.
4. **A payoff.** It ends on an answer, a punchline, a result or a strong opinion, not a trailing “so yeah”.

A good clip is a complete little video. The short video structure lesson explains the hook, setup, payoff shape; you are looking for moments that already have it.

Moments that usually pass

Some kinds of moments pass the test far more often than others. Look for these first:

Moment type	What it sounds like	Why it works alone
Contrarian claim	"Most people say X. I think that's wrong, and here's why."	The tension is in the first line
Specific number	"We went from 40 to 900 sign-ups in a month."	Concrete and easy to follow
Mini-story with a turn	"I was about to quit, then a stranger emailed me."	Built-in setup and payoff
One how-to step	"Here's the one setting I change on every new phone."	Useful without the rest
Mistake or confession	"I wasted $5,000 on this before I learned…"	People stay to find out what
Disagreement	Two people pushing back on each other	Conflict holds attention
Strong reaction	Real surprise, laughter, frustration	Emotion reads without context

Moments that usually fail: long explanations that build on earlier points, slides with small text, "inside" jokes, and the first few minutes of most recordings, where people are still warming up.

Method 1: Scan the transcript

Reading is much faster than watching. A 45-minute recording is around 6,000 to 7,000 words, which you can skim in 10 to 15 minutes. Get the transcript from YouTube Studio's Subtitles page, your editor's transcription feature, or any transcription tool, and paste it into a document.

Search for signal phrases

Use find (Ctrl+F or Cmd+F) for phrases that tend to start clip-worthy moments:

- "the mistake", "the biggest", "the worst", "the best"
- "nobody", "most people", "everyone thinks"
- "I was wrong", "I used to", "the truth is"
- "here's how", "the trick", "step one"
- "what happened was", "the moment I", "and then"
- question marks (a question plus a direct answer is a natural clip)
- numbers, prices and percentages

Highlight every hit, then read the two or three sentences around it. Most hits will be nothing. A few will be the start of something good.

Score your candidates

Give each candidate 0, 1 or 2 points on four things:

Score	0	1	2
Hook	Weak or slow first line	Interesting	Makes you need the answer
Stand-alone	Needs context	Mostly clear	Fully clear cold

Score	0	1	2
Payoff	Trails off	Okay ending	Strong answer, laugh or result
Energy	Flat delivery	Normal	Fast, emotional or animated

Keep anything that scores 6 or more out of 8. You will usually end up with 5 to 8 keepers from a 45-minute talk-heavy recording.

Method 2: Use the data you already have

If the video is already public, your viewers have voted on its best parts.

- **Retention spikes.** In YouTube Studio, open the video's analytics and find the audience retention graph and its key moments. YouTube describes spikes as moments that were rewatched or shared. It also warns that a spike can mean a part was confusing, so watch it before you clip it. YouTube says the video should be at least 60 seconds long and have at least 100 views for key moments to show.
- **Most-replayed graph.** On the watch page, start dragging the progress bar. A graph appears above it, and taller peaks mark the parts people rewatch most. It does not show on every video, for example if it is too new or has too few views.
- **Comments with timestamps.** Search your comments for ":" and you will find people quoting exact moments.
- **Your own memory.** Which part did a friend or guest bring up afterwards? That part usually clips well.

Method 3: Let AI score the video

AI clip finders read the transcript and listen to the audio, then rank segments by things like hook strength, pacing and energy. Two options:

- **YouTube Studio.** Open a long video, go to Clips and Shorts, and create a Short. You can choose a segment by selecting transcript text or entering timestamps. YouTube says AI suggestions and an AI outline are available only in certain countries and languages, so you may or may not see them.
- **An AI clipper.** Tools like Short.now scan the full video, return a ranked list of clips, and cut, reframe and caption them in one go. For a long recording that turns an hour of scrubbing into a 10-minute review.

Where AI gets it wrong

Treat every suggestion as a candidate, not a verdict. AI tends to miss:

- moments that are funny because of something said 10 minutes earlier
- visual moments (a reaction face, a demo result) with little speech
- the real payoff, by cutting a few seconds too soon
- tone, such as a joke that reads as serious in text

Run each suggestion through the stand-alone test, fix the start and end points, and drop the ones that fail. You will often keep half.

Where to start and stop the cut

Picking the right moment is half the job. Cutting it at the right points is the other half.

Start later than you think

Most weak clips start too early. Delete:

- “So”, “um”, “yeah, so”, “great question”
- the restating of what you are about to say
- any setup a stranger does not need

Start on the first sentence that carries the point. If the strongest line comes 15 seconds in, consider moving it to the front as a cold open, then cutting back to the start of the story.

End on the payoff

Stop on the punchline, the answer or the result. Cut the “anyway” that follows. If there is a natural line that echoes the opening, ending there makes the clip loop nicely. Our post on how to make YouTube Shorts from long videos walks through the edit once you have your timestamps.

> **TIP**
>
> Write each keeper as one line in a list: start time, end time, first five words, last five words. This list is all you need for the edit session, and it makes your picks easy to hand to an editor or check against an AI tool.

Common mistakes

- **Choosing your favorite instead of the clearest.** The part you loved most may need too much context.
- **Clips that are two ideas long.** Split them into two clips instead.
- **Skipping the payoff to hit a length.** A complete 70-second clip beats a cut-off 45-second one.
- **Clipping only the first half of the recording.** Energy often peaks later, once people relax. Scan the whole thing.
- **Posting everything the AI suggests.** Your feed gets weaker, not stronger.

What’s next

Once you have your moments, they need to fit a vertical screen. In the next lesson, how to turn horizontal video into vertical, you will learn the crop math, four layouts and how speaker tracking works.

PRACTICE

Do it now: find 5 moments in one video

1. Pick one long video or episode you already have, 20 to 60 minutes long.
2. Get its transcript (YouTube Studio > Subtitles, or your editor's transcription) and paste it into a document.
3. Search the transcript for 10 signal phrases from this lesson and highlight every hit.
4. Score your best 10 candidates with the 4-point rubric (hook, stand-alone, payoff, energy). Keep the ones that score 6 or more.
5. Write a start word and an end word for each keeper. Then compare your picks with an AI clipper's list and note where you disagree.

Compare with AI picks: long video to shorts →

Check yourself

1. **Which of these is the strongest sign that a moment will work as a short?**

   A It was the funniest part for people who watched the whole video

   B It is exactly 60 seconds long

   C It comes from the first minute of the recording

   D It makes sense to someone who never saw the rest of the video

2. **A retention spike in YouTube Studio can mean two different things. What are they?**

   A Viewers liked it or disliked it

   B The part was interesting, or it was confusing and people rewatched to understand it

   C The video was shared or deleted

   D It was an ad or a chapter break

3. **Your clip opens with 'So, um, going back to what we said earlier about pricing...'. What is the best fix?**

   A Start the clip at the first sentence that states the point about pricing

   B Add music under it

   C Make the clip longer so there is more context

   D Add a 'Part 2' label

4. **How should you use an AI tool's clip scores?**

   A Post the top 10 without watching

   B Ignore them completely

   C Use them as a shortlist, then check each clip yourself against the stand-alone test

   D Only post clips with a perfect score

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How do I know which part of my video to turn into a short?

Pick moments that make sense on their own, open with a clear claim, question or story beat, and end on a payoff. Then check your YouTube retention graph for spikes, since those are parts people rewatched or shared.

How long should a clip from a long video be?

As long as the moment needs and no longer. Most good clips from talk content land between 20 and 60 seconds. Cut at the payoff instead of padding to hit a number.

Can YouTube suggest clips from my long video?

YouTube Studio's Clips and Shorts tool can show AI suggestions and an AI outline for a video, but YouTube says this is only available in some countries and languages. Everyone can select a segment by highlighting the transcript or entering timestamps.

Are AI clip finders accurate?

They are good at finding candidates fast, especially in talk-heavy video. They are weaker at moments that depend on earlier context, visual gags or inside jokes, so review every clip before posting.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Measure key moments for audience retention
- YouTube Help: Use chapters and seeking features (most-replayed graph)
- YouTube Help: Video clips and Shorts in YouTube Studio
- YouTube Help: Create YouTube Shorts from your videos

MODULE 5 · ONE LONG VIDEO, MANY SHORTS · 10 MIN

How to Turn Horizontal Video Into Vertical (Reframe and Crop)

How to convert a 16:9 horizontal video into 9:16 vertical for Shorts, TikTok and Reels: the crop math, four layouts, speaker tracking, and free ways to do it.

Key takeaways

- To go from 16:9 to 9:16 you keep a vertical window about a third of the original width. Everything outside it is lost, so the window has to follow the subject.
- Pick the layout by content: tracked crop for one speaker, split screen for two, blurred background when the whole frame matters.
- A 1080p source gets upscaled about 1.8 times when cropped to full-screen vertical. Film in 4K if you know you will crop.
- YouTube only counts square or vertical videos as Shorts, so a horizontal upload stays a regular video.
- Put captions and key action in the middle of the frame, away from the app buttons.

To turn a horizontal video into vertical, you crop a 9:16 window out of the 16:9 frame and move that window so the person or action stays in it. When one window cannot hold what matters, you switch layouts: a split screen for two speakers, or the full frame on a blurred background. Then export at 1080x1920.

This lesson covers why vertical matters, the crop math, four layouts and when to use each, and how to do it in an editor, with a free command-line tool, or with AI speaker tracking.

Why you can’t just upload the horizontal file

A 16:9 video on a phone held upright fills less than a third of the screen. It looks small, and it signals that the video was made for somewhere else.

There is also a rule on YouTube: it categorizes videos with a **square or vertical** aspect ratio, up to three minutes long, as Shorts. A 16:9 upload stays a regular long-form video, whatever its length. TikTok’s own creative guidance for ads also tells you to orient vertically at 9:16 and keep content inside the UI safe zone, which is a good rule for organic posts too.

The crop math

Going from 16:9 to 9:16 means keeping a narrow vertical slice of the frame. The height stays, the width shrinks.

Source	Vertical window	Share of width kept	Result at 1080x1920
1920x1080 (1080p)	about 608x1080	about 32%	Upscaled about 1.8x, a bit soft
2560x1440 (1440p)	about 810x1440	about 32%	Upscaled about 1.3x, fine
3840x2160 (4K)	about 1215x2160	about 32%	Downscaled, sharp

Two things follow from this:

- **About two-thirds of the frame is thrown away.** If your subject moves, a fixed crop will lose them. The window has to follow.
- **Resolution matters.** If you know you will crop, film in 4K. From 1080p the result is usable, but faces and text look softer.

Four layouts and when to use them

Layout	What it looks like	Best for	Watch out for
Tracked crop	Full-screen vertical, window follows the speaker	One person talking, interviews where people take turns	Jittery tracking, cutting off gestures
Split screen	Two crops stacked, one on top of the other	Two people talking at once, reactions, gameplay plus face cam	Faces get small; leave room for captions
Blurred background	Whole 16:9 frame in the middle, a blurred copy fills the rest	Slides, wide shots, screen demos where the whole frame matters	Small picture; works less well for faces
Screen plus face	Screen recording on top, speaker below (or the reverse)	Tutorials, software demos, commentary	Text on screen may be too small to read

Tracked crop

This is the default for talking content. The window sits on the speaker’s face, with the eyes about a third of the way down the frame. In an interview, it jumps to whoever is talking. Jump cuts (a hard switch) usually look cleaner than a slow pan between two people.

Split screen

When both people matter at once, such as a debate or a laugh, stack them. Crop each person to a near-square box and place one above the other, so each takes half the 1080x1920 frame. Put captions on the line between the two boxes.

Blurred background

Scale the full horizontal frame to the width of the vertical frame, center it, and fill the top and bottom with a blurred, zoomed copy of the same video. It is the easiest layout and the only honest one for slides or wide shots, but the picture is small. YouTube Studio’s own Clips and Shorts tool uses a similar look: YouTube says the final Short shows the empty space as a blurred crop.

How to do it in an editor

Most editors work the same way:

1. **Create a vertical project** at 1080x1920, or change the project or sequence aspect ratio to 9:16.
2. **Drop in the horizontal clip** and scale it up until it fills the frame (about 178% for a 1080p clip in a 1080p-wide project).
3. **Position it** so the subject is in the window.
4. **Keyframe the position** wherever the subject moves or the speaker changes. For an interview, cut the clip at each speaker change and reposition each piece instead.
5. **Export** at 1080x1920, H.264, at the frame rate you filmed in.

Many editors have an automatic version of steps 3 and 4. In Premiere Pro it is called Auto Reframe, in DaVinci Resolve Studio (the paid version) Smart Reframe, and in Final Cut Pro Smart Conform. CapCut also has an auto reframe option. They all detect the subject and move the window for you; check the result and fix any frames where it drifts.

How to do it free with FFmpeg

If you are comfortable with a terminal, the free tool FFmpeg can reframe without opening an editor. These commands were tested on a 1920x1080 file.

Center crop to full-screen vertical:

```
ffmpeg -i input.mp4 -vf "crop=ih*9/16:ih,scale=1080:1920" -c:a copy vertical.mp4
```

Full frame on a blurred background:

```
ffmpeg -i input.mp4 -filter_complex "[0:v]split[a][b];[a]scale=1080:1920:force_original
```

Two speakers stacked (left half on top, right half below):

```
ffmpeg -i input.mp4 -filter_complex "[0:v]split[l][r];[l]crop=960:854:0:113,scale=1080:
```

A center crop only works if the speaker stays in the middle. For anything that moves, use an editor or a tracking tool.

Speaker tracking with AI

For podcasts and interviews, doing the window by hand means a keyframe or cut at every speaker change, which adds up fast across a batch of clips. AI speaker tracking detects faces, works out who is talking from the audio, and moves the window for you. Short.now does this as part of making each clip, along with the captions.

Whatever tool you use, check these on every clip:

- **Does it follow the right person?** Tracking can stay on a listener who nods instead of the speaker.
- **Is the motion smooth?** Small twitches from frame to frame are distracting.
- **Does it cut or pan?** A fast pan between two people can look like a camera glitch.
- **Are hands and props in frame** when they matter, such as a product demo?
- **What happens on wide shots** with three or more people? You may need a split screen or a blurred-background segment there.

Captions and safe zones after reframing

Reframing changes where you can put text. On all three apps, buttons and the caption sit on the right side and the bottom of the screen. Keep captions and important action in the middle area, roughly the center two-thirds of the height, and away from the right edge. The format specs cheat sheet has the safe zones on one page, and the size guides for YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Instagram Reels go into detail.

> **TIP**
>
> Film your next long video with the crop in mind: shoot in 4K, keep each person in their own third of the frame, leave a little headroom, and keep important props near the speaker. Every clip will reframe cleanly with almost no fixing.

Common mistakes

- **Cutting off the top of the head and the chin** by zooming too far. Leave a little room above the head.
- **Captions over the face** after a speaker change moves the window.
- **Using a center crop on a two-shot,** which leaves you staring at the gap between two people.
- **Exporting at the source resolution,** such as 608x1080, instead of 1080x1920.
- **Blurred backgrounds on talking heads,** where a tracked crop would make the face three times bigger.

What's next

You now know how to find moments and fit them on a vertical screen. In the next lesson, batch content creation, you will put it all together: film once, edit in one sitting and schedule a month of posts. If you want a refresher on picking moments, go back to how to find clip-worthy moments.

PRACTICE

Do it now: reframe one clip three ways

1. Pick a 30-60 second horizontal clip of someone talking.
2. Make a center-crop version in your editor (set the project to 1080x1920 and scale the clip to fill).
3. Make a blurred-background version of the same clip.
4. If two people are in the shot, make a split-screen version, one person on top and one below.
5. Watch all versions on your phone at arm's length. Note which one keeps faces and captions clearest, and use that layout as your default.

Try the free YouTube clip maker →

Check yourself

1. **You crop a 1920x1080 video to full-screen 9:16. About how much of the original width do you keep?**

   A About 90%
   B About two-thirds
   C About one-third
   D About 10%

2. **Which layout fits a two-person podcast where both people often talk at once?**

   A A split screen with one speaker on top and one below
   B A fixed center crop
   C The original horizontal video with black bars
   D A zoom on the table between them

3. **Why do creators who plan to crop often film in 4K?**

   A Platforms only accept 4K
   B 4K files are smaller
   C It turns on speaker tracking
   D The cropped window still has enough pixels for a sharp 1080x1920 result

4. **What happens if you upload a 16:9 horizontal video to YouTube and want it to be a Short?**

   A YouTube crops it automatically
   B It becomes a Short if it is under 3 minutes
   C It is treated as a regular long-form video, not a Short
   D It gets rejected

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How do I convert a horizontal video to vertical for free?

Use a free editor such as CapCut, set the project to 9:16 (1080x1920), and scale the clip so it fills the frame, then move it so the subject stays in view. If you are comfortable with the command line, FFmpeg can do the same crop in one command.

Will cropping a horizontal video to vertical lose quality?

It can. From a 1080p source the vertical window is only about 608 pixels wide, so it gets upscaled to fill a 1080x1920 frame and looks a bit softer. From a 4K source the result stays sharp.

What is speaker tracking or auto reframe?

It is a feature that detects faces or motion and moves the vertical crop window to follow them, so the person talking stays in frame. Many editors and AI clipping tools have it. Always check the result, since it can jitter or follow the wrong person.

Can I just upload a horizontal video to TikTok or Reels?

The apps accept it, but it shows small with empty space around it on a phone screen. Platforms recommend full-screen vertical, and on YouTube a horizontal upload is not treated as a Short.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Understand three-minute YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: Upload YouTube Shorts (computer)
- YouTube Help: Video clips and Shorts in YouTube Studio
- TikTok Ads Help: Creative best practices for performance ads

MODULE 5 · ONE LONG VIDEO, MANY SHORTS · 10 MIN

Batch Content Creation: Film Once, Post All Month

How to batch create short-form video: plan a month of ideas, film them in one session, edit with templates, write every caption at once and schedule it all ahead.

Key takeaways

- Batching means doing one kind of task many times in a row: plan all, then film all, then edit all, then schedule all.
- One planning hour and one 2-3 hour filming session can cover a month of shorts if you arrive with scripts ready.
- Templates (caption style, text styles, export presets, a caption sheet) do most of the speed-up in editing.
- Schedule ahead in each platform's own scheduler or a tool, and always keep a 1-2 week buffer.
- Leave a few open slots every week for trends, replies and anything that can't be planned.

Batch content creation means you plan a month of shorts in one sitting, film them in one session, edit them all together, and schedule them ahead, instead of doing every step every day. One planning hour and one 2 to 3 hour filming session can cover 20 to 30 posts, and the daily work drops to answering comments.

This lesson gives you a five-step batching workflow, the templates that make editing fast, how to schedule on each platform, and how to keep a batched feed from feeling stale.

What batching is and why it works

Every short you make involves the same steps: idea, script, setup, filming, editing, caption, upload. Done one video at a time, you repeat the setup every day and keep switching between thinking, performing and admin.

Batching groups the work by task:

Session	What you do	Time for a month of shorts
Plan	Pick 20-30 ideas, write short scripts	1-2 hours
Film	Record all of them, one after another	2-3 hours
Edit	Cut, caption and export the whole batch	3-5 hours manual
Package	Write every title, caption and hashtag set	1 hour
Schedule	Queue everything on each platform	30-60 minutes

You can also batch from a long recording. If you already run the one recording a week system, your filming session is the long video and the edit session is clipping it. The rest of this lesson works the same way.

Step 1: Plan the month in one sitting

Arrive at filming day with every idea decided and scripted. This is the step people skip, and it is why their filming day turns into staring at the camera.

1. **Decide the number.** How many shorts a week can you post on a normal week? Start with 3 to 5. The posting schedule lesson helps you pick.
2. **Fill the slots.** Write one-line titles for every slot. Use content pillars, two or three themes you rotate, so the month has variety. For example: Monday a tip, Wednesday a story, Friday a myth.
3. **Script each one.** Not word for word: a hook line, three bullet points and a closing line is enough. The script lesson has a template.
4. **Group by setting.** Put every desk video together, every outdoor video together, every outfit change together.

Step 2: Film everything in one session

Set up once

Use the same spot, light, camera height and mic for the whole session. Before you start, record a 10-second test, watch it on your phone with sound, and fix anything now, not after 25 takes.

Session checklist

- Phone or camera charged, at least 30 GB free
- Do Not Disturb on
- Water, a printed list of scripts in order
- Teleprompter loaded or bullet points taped next to the lens
- Two shirts if you want to change looks between groups

Run of show

Go through the scripts in order. For each one:

1. Say the title out loud at the start of the take (this is your slate, so you can find it later).
2. Do the take. If you stumble, pause, then restart from the start of the sentence. You will cut the mistake later.
3. Do a second take only if the first one felt flat.
4. Tick it off and move on. Do not watch it back now.

Take a 5-minute break every 30 to 40 minutes. Energy drops slowly, and you will not notice it until you watch the last takes. Our free teleprompter helps you keep a steady pace across many takes.

Step 3: Edit with templates

Templates do most of the speed-up in editing. Set these up once:

- **A project template** at 1080x1920 with your caption style, fonts and colors saved.
- **A text style** for the hook line on screen, saved as a preset.
- **An export preset** (1080x1920, H.264, your frame rate).
- **A naming pattern** such as `2026-11-12_tip_phone-settings.mp4`, so file names sort by date.

Then edit in passes across the whole batch rather than finishing one video at a time:

1. **Rough cut pass:** cut every video to its best take, trimming the start and end.
2. **Caption pass:** auto-caption all of them, then fix the errors.
3. **Polish pass:** add the hook text, b-roll and music where needed.
4. **Export pass:** export everything at once.

A consistent look is good for recognition, and YouTube's monetization policy says using the same intro and outro across videos is fine as long as the bulk of each video differs. The content of each short should be its own idea, not the same video with a new title. The editing lesson in Module 4 covers pacing and captions in detail.

Step 4: Write every caption at once

Make a sheet with these columns: file name, title, caption, hashtags, platform, publish date. Fill the whole thing in one sitting. Writing 25 titles in a row is easier than writing one a day, because you get into a rhythm and stop repeating yourself.

If you get stuck, the free YouTube title generator and hashtag generator give you starting points to edit.

Step 5: Schedule it all

Each platform has its own scheduler:

- **YouTube:** in YouTube Studio on a computer, you can upload up to 15 videos at once. On the Visibility step, choose Schedule and pick a date, time and time zone. YouTube says the video stays private until that time.
- **TikTok:** TikTok offers scheduling from its web upload page (TikTok Studio). When it launched, TikTok said posts could be scheduled from 15 minutes up to 10 days ahead. Check the date picker for the current limit.
- **Instagram:** scheduling is available in the Instagram app for many accounts (look for the schedule option before you share) and in Meta Business Suite on a computer. How far ahead you can go is set by Meta, so check it in the scheduler.

Doing this in three places takes time, and the shorter windows on some apps mean you have to come back every week or so. A scheduling tool that posts to all three from one queue saves that. Short.now can find the clips in your long video, then auto-post them to TikTok, YouTube and Instagram on a schedule you set (auto-posting is on the Creator plan and above).

> **TIP**
>
> Stay one to two weeks ahead. If this week's posts were filmed last week, a sick day, a bad recording or a busy month never breaks your streak. Treat the buffer as part of the system, not a bonus.

A sample month

Here is what a batch month looks like for someone posting 5 shorts a week, about 4 hours of work a week in total:

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Ongoing
1	Plan month 2 (1-2 h)	Film batch (3 h)	Edit pass (2 h)	Edit and export (2 h)	Month 1 posts going out
2	Write captions (1 h)	Schedule month 2 (1 h)	Free	Free	Comments, trends
3	Free	Review month 1 numbers (30 min)	Free	Film 2-3 trend videos	Comments, trends
4	Pick month 3 themes	Free	Free	Free	Comments, trends

The free days are not wasted. They are where you reply to comments, react to trends and make one-off videos that cannot be planned.

Keep a batched feed from feeling stale

- **Leave open slots.** Keep one or two posts a week unplanned for trends and replies to comments.
- **Vary the look.** Change your shirt, angle or spot between groups.
- **Mix formats.** Talking head, screen share, clips from your long video, a reply to a comment.
- **Check before it goes out.** Skim the next week's queue each Monday. If something has become out of date, swap it for a buffer post.
- **Review monthly.** Note which videos won, then plan more of those in the next batch.

What's next

You now have the full repurposing toolkit: a weekly system, moment picking, reframing and batching. Module 6 is about getting those posts seen, starting with how to go viral on TikTok and what you can actually control.

PRACTICE

Do it now: plan your first batch

1. Open the publishing calendar and mark how many shorts a week you will post (start with 3 to 5).
2. Write that many ideas for the next 4 weeks as one-line titles. Use your idea bank or the ideas lesson if you get stuck.
3. Group the ideas by setting: which ones you can film at your desk, which need a different spot or outfit.
4. Pick a 3-hour slot this week for filming and put it in your calendar like a meeting.
5. Create a caption sheet with columns: file name, title, caption, hashtags, platform, date.

Open the free short-form publishing calendar →

Check yourself

1. **What is the main reason batching saves time?**

   A You set up once and stay in one kind of task instead of switching
   B Platforms boost videos uploaded together
   C Videos filmed together are shorter
   D It removes the need to edit

2. **Which order gives the smoothest batch workflow?**

   A Film, then think of ideas, then schedule
   B Schedule empty slots, then film on each day
   C Edit first, then film
   D Plan and script, film, edit, write captions, schedule

3. **Why keep a few open slots in a fully scheduled month?**

   A Platforms penalize full schedules
   B To react to trends, comments and news that you could not plan
   C Schedulers can only hold 20 posts
   D So the batch looks less planned

4. **On YouTube, what happens to a video you schedule in YouTube Studio before its publish time?**

   A It is unlisted
   B It is public but hidden from search
   C It stays private until the scheduled date
   D It is posted as a draft community post

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

What is batch content creation?

It is making many pieces of content in one go, grouped by task. You plan a month of ideas in one sitting, film them in one session, edit them together and schedule them, instead of doing all four steps every day.

How many videos should I batch at once?

Start with one or two weeks of posts, for example 6 to 10 shorts. Once the process feels easy, move to a full month. A batch that is too big for your first try usually ends half-finished.

Can you schedule TikTok, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels?

Yes. YouTube Studio has a Schedule option on upload, TikTok has scheduling in TikTok Studio on the web, and Instagram posts can be scheduled in the app or Meta Business Suite. How far ahead you can schedule differs by platform and changes over time, so check the date picker in each scheduler.

Won't batched videos look the same?

Only if you let them. Change your shirt or the camera angle between groups, film in two spots, and mix formats (talking head, screen share, clip from your long video). Reusing the same intro or caption style is fine; the content itself should vary.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Schedule video publish time
- YouTube Help: Upload YouTube videos (computer)
- YouTube Help: YouTube channel monetization policies
- TikTok for Business: Introducing Video Scheduler

PUT THIS MODULE TO WORK

Practice on your own videos

Short.now turns one long video into ready-to-post Shorts, TikToks and Reels with captions. Free plan, no watermark, no card.

Try Short.now free →



MODULE 6

Publishing and growth

Post on a schedule you can keep, write titles and captions, and read your analytics.

1. How to Go Viral on TikTok: What You Can Actually Control
2. How to Grow on TikTok From Zero Followers
3. How to Get More Views on YouTube Shorts
4. Titles, Captions and Hashtags for Short Videos
5. How to Read Your Short-Form Analytics: Retention, Swipe-Away and Shares
6. How Often to Post Short Videos, and How to Stay Consistent

MODULE 6 · PUBLISHING AND GROWTH · 9 MIN

How to Go Viral on TikTok: What You Can Actually Control

Nobody can promise you a viral video, but you can control the things TikTok's For You feed rewards: a hook that stops the scroll, a video people finish, and a reason to share.

Key takeaways

- TikTok says follower count and past hits are not direct factors in what it recommends, so a new account can go viral.
- The strongest signal you control is whether people keep watching: finishing a longer video counts for more than weak signals like location.
- Win the first two seconds, cut every pause, and end in a way that makes people rewatch, comment or send it to someone.
- Reused or unoriginal clips and engagement bait are not eligible for the For You feed, so they cannot go viral there.
- Virality is a numbers game: plan 30 attempts, not one perfect video.

You go viral on TikTok when the first people who see your video watch it to the end, rewatch it and send it to friends, so TikTok keeps showing it to more people. You can’t force that, but you control the parts that cause it: a hook in the first second or two, a video with no dead time, an ending that makes people react, and enough attempts that one of them lands. Here is how each part works, based on what TikTok itself says about its For You feed.

What going viral means

A viral video is one that reaches far more people than your usual audience, almost all of them through the For You feed. There is no official view count for it. For an account that usually gets 300 views, 50,000 is viral. For an account that usually gets 50,000, it is a normal Tuesday.

This matters because it changes the goal. You are not trying to beat famous creators. You are trying to make one video that strangers enjoy more than the video before it.

Two facts from TikTok are worth knowing before you start:

- **Followers are not required.** TikTok’s newsroom explains that neither follower count nor whether an account has had high-performing videos before are direct factors in recommendations. A first video can travel.
- **Some videos can’t go viral at all.** Content that breaks the Community Guidelines is removed, and content that is not suitable for a broad audience is made ineligible for the For You feed. TikTok also says content from users under 16 is not eligible for recommendation.

How TikTok decides who sees your video

TikTok's Creator Academy describes the recommendation system in steps. It looks at what each viewer recently watched, finished, liked, skipped, commented on or saved. It picks videos that match, predicts how likely the viewer is to like, share, comment on or skip each one, ranks them, and then mixes the feed so it is not repetitive.

For you as a creator, the important part is the prediction. TikTok is guessing whether a viewer will enjoy your video, and it learns from how real viewers respond. The newsroom post adds that strong signals, like whether someone finishes a longer video, count for more than weak signals, like whether the viewer and creator are in the same country.

So the job comes down to three things:

What TikTok watches	What it means for your video	What you control
Skips and swipes	People left in the first seconds	The hook
Watch time and finishes	People stayed to the end	Pacing, length, payoff
Likes, comments, shares, saves	People cared enough to act	The idea and the ending

For the full picture of the feed, read how the TikTok algorithm works.

Win the first two seconds

Most viral attempts fail before the viewer has decided anything. They swipe because the first frame looks like every other video. Your opening has to make a promise the viewer wants kept.

A strong opening has three layers that all say the same thing:

1. **The first frame.** Start mid-action, on the result, or on your face mid-sentence. Not on a logo, not on you saying hi.
2. **The first line.** Under 8 words. State the payoff, the problem or the surprise.
3. **On-screen text.** Many people scroll with the sound low, so put the hook in text too.

Weak and strong versions of the same idea:

Weak opening	Stronger opening
"Hey guys, so today I want to talk about saving money."	"I saved $400 last month by deleting one app."
"Here's a recipe I really like."	(Shot of the finished dish) "Three ingredients. Ten minutes. No oven."
"Let me tell you about my worst job interview."	"The interviewer asked me one question and I walked out."

For more formulas, see the guide to viral video hooks or try the AI hook generator.

> **TIP**
>
> Film three different openings for the same video. It takes two extra minutes and you can post the strongest one, or test them as separate videos a few days apart.

Make people finish, then rewatch

A hook gets a viewer to second three. Everything after that decides whether they reach the end. TikTok's own advice to creators is direct: longer watch times signal compelling content, so trim lulls and use quick cuts.

A checklist you can run on every edit:

- **Cut every pause** longer than about half a second, including breaths between sentences.
- **Change something every 2 to 4 seconds**: a new angle, a zoom, a caption, a cut to the thing you're talking about.
- **Put the payoff at the end**, not the start. If you reveal the result in second 5, the viewer has no reason to stay. Show a glimpse, then make them wait for the full answer.
- **Make it as long as the idea, no longer.** A 15-second idea stretched to 45 seconds loses people in the middle. A story that needs 50 seconds is fine if every second moves.
- **End on a loop** when you can. If the last line leads back into the first ("...and that's why I never use the elevator." → "I took the stairs for a year"), many viewers watch twice without noticing.

For the full structure of a short that holds attention, read how to structure a short video.

Give people a reason to share

Watch time gets your video tested on more people. Shares and comments are what make viewers pull other people in. Ask yourself before you post: who would someone send this to, and why?

Videos people send tend to do one of these jobs:

- **"This is so you."** Relatable situations about a specific group: nurses, new parents, people who work from home.
- **"You need to see this."** A surprising fact, a before-and-after, a skill most people can't do.
- **"Settle this."** A mild disagreement with two clear sides, like whether ketchup belongs in the fridge.
- **"Save this for later."** A useful list or recipe people want to come back to.

For comments, ask a question people can answer in one word or one opinion ("Which one would you pick, left or right?"). Don't beg. TikTok's guidelines say content that tries to manipulate people into inflating likes or follows isn't eligible for the For You feed, so "like if you agree, follow for part 2" spam can work against you.

Use trends, but bring your own angle

TikTok's Creator Academy says joining trends can increase visibility and suggests balancing trendy posts with your own original ones. Trends work because people already know the format, so they understand your video faster.

The catch: a trend copied exactly is one of thousands of identical videos. What makes yours worth finishing is your niche twist. A trending sound about "things that just make sense" becomes "things that just make sense if you're a dental hygienist." Same format, new audience, and the viewer who is a dental hygienist sends it to three coworkers.

How to find trends without living on the app: scroll your For You feed for 10 minutes with a note open and write down any sound or format you see three times in a day. Then ask how it fits your topic. If it doesn't, skip it.

What stops a video from going viral

Some videos never get a fair test because TikTok doesn't put them in the For You feed at all. The most common reasons for new creators:

- **Reused content.** TikTok's guidelines state that content is ineligible for the For You feed if it includes unoriginal or reused material without anything new. Reposting someone else's clip, or a TV scene, with no commentary or edit of your own falls here.
- **Engagement bait**, as above.
- **Guideline problems**, including content not suitable for a broad audience.
- **Age.** Accounts of users under 16 are not eligible for recommendation.

If a video is stuck at almost zero views, open it in TikTok Studio and check its status. TikTok's eligibility page notes that low views don't always mean a rule was broken, and your analytics show whether a video was made ineligible. Ineligible videos can still appear in search and on your profile.

Plan 30 attempts, not one

Even well-made videos are unpredictable. A creator who posts 30 good attempts gets 30 tests with different first audiences. A creator who spends a month polishing one video gets one test.

A simple 30-day plan:

1. **Days 1-2:** Write 30 one-line ideas in your niche. Use the four "share" jobs above as prompts.
2. **Each day:** Film and post one. Spend more time on the first two seconds than on anything else.
3. **Every Sunday:** Open TikTok Studio, sort your week's videos by views, and look at the retention graph of the best and worst one. Write one sentence on what was different.
4. **Day 31:** Make three new versions of your best-performing video: same idea, new hook, new example.

Batching makes this realistic. If you already record long videos, podcasts or streams, cutting several clips from one recording gives you a month of attempts from one session. Short.now can find the strongest moments and reframe them to vertical for you, and the repurposing lesson shows the full workflow.

What's next

One viral video is a spike. Turning those viewers into followers who come back is a different skill. Next, read how to grow on TikTok from zero followers.

PRACTICE

Do it now: rebuild one video for the For You feed

1. Pick your last TikTok (or an idea you have not filmed yet) and write its first sentence. Rewrite it until it states the payoff or the problem in under 8 words.
2. Open the video in an editor and cut every pause, breath and 'um' longer than half a second.
3. Add on-screen text for the hook so it works with the sound off.
4. Change the last 2 seconds so they either loop back to the start or ask a specific question people can answer in one word.
5. Write one caption line with the search phrase someone would type to find this video.

Open the free AI hook generator →

Check yourself

1. **According to TikTok, which of these is a direct factor in For You feed recommendations?**

   A Your follower count
   B Whether your last video went viral
   C How viewers interact with the video, like watching it to the end
   D Whether you have a verified badge

2. **Your 40-second video has lots of views but most people leave at second 3. What should you fix first?**

   A The hashtags
   B The posting time
   C The video's cover image
   D The opening: the first line and first frame

3. **You download a funny clip from another creator and post it with a trending sound. Why is it unlikely to go viral on the For You feed?**

   A TikTok makes unoriginal or reused content without anything new ineligible for the For You feed
   B Trending sounds are penalized
   C Clips must be longer than 60 seconds
   D It will only work if you post at 7 PM

4. **Which ending is most likely to help a video spread?**

   A 'Follow for more!'
   B 'Comment LIKE if you agree' repeated three times
   C A cut back to the opening frame so the video loops cleanly
   D Five seconds of black screen with your logo

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How many views is viral on TikTok?

There is no official number. For a small account, a video that reaches several times more people than your usual videos, mostly from the For You feed, has gone viral for you. Compare each video to your own average instead of to famous accounts.

Can you go viral on TikTok with 0 followers?

Yes. TikTok says follower count is not a direct factor in For You recommendations, so a first video can travel if viewers watch and share it. Followers help with steady views later, not with the first push.

Do hashtags like #fyp help you go viral?

TikTok has not said that #fyp or #foryou boost reach. Hashtags and captions help TikTok understand your topic and help people find you in search, so use a few specific ones that describe the video.

Why did my TikTok get 200 views and stop?

Usually the first viewers swiped away early, so TikTok had no reason to show it to more people. Check the retention graph in TikTok Studio, find where people left, and fix that part in your next video. Also check the video was not marked ineligible for the For You feed.

Sources

- TikTok Creator Academy: Understanding the Recommendation System
- TikTok Newsroom: How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou
- TikTok Community Guidelines: Integrity and authenticity
- TikTok Community Guidelines: For You feed eligibility standards
- TikTok Creator Academy: Driving video traffic: Search

MODULE 6 · PUBLISHING AND GROWTH · 10 MIN

How to Grow on TikTok From Zero Followers

A step-by-step plan for your first 90 days on TikTok: set up a profile that converts, pick a lane, post on a rhythm you can keep, and turn one-time viewers into followers.

Key takeaways

- Growth comes from repeat viewers, not one viral video: a clear topic and a recognizable series give people a reason to follow.
- TikTok suggests setting a daily posting target you can hit consistently; pick a number you can keep for 90 days.
- Search is a second source of views: put the words people type into your captions, on-screen text and speech.
- Your profile is where viewers decide to follow, so the bio, pinned videos and playlists need to say what they will get.
- Review TikTok Studio once a week and make more of what brought new followers, not just views.

To grow on TikTok from zero followers, pick one topic, post on a schedule you can keep (TikTok suggests a daily target you can hit consistently), and give viewers a reason to come back, like a recurring series. Then use search keywords so people can find you, reply to comments with new videos, and check TikTok Studio once a week to make more of what brought followers. The rest of this lesson turns that into a 90-day plan.

Growth is a different goal from going viral

A viral video gets you a spike of strangers. Growth is when some of those strangers follow, come back for your next video, and start telling TikTok what kind of viewer likes your content. You want both, but they need different things.

Going viral	Growing an account
One video reaches many people	Many videos reach the right people
Needs a broad, shareable idea	Needs a clear, repeatable topic
Measured in views	Measured in followers and returning viewers
Can happen by luck	Happens through a system

If you haven't read it yet, the previous lesson covers how to go viral on TikTok. This one is about building the account those viewers land on.

Set up a profile that turns viewers into followers

When someone enjoys a video, they often tap your name to see what else you post. That visit is where they decide to follow. Get these four things right before you post much:

1. **Name and username.** Easy to say and spell. If your topic fits, add it: “Mia Cooks” is clearer than “mia_1998x”.
2. **One-line bio.** Who it’s for and what they get. “Budget travel for families. New city every Friday.” A promise and a rhythm in two short sentences.
3. **Profile photo.** Your face, close up, good light. People follow people.
4. **Pinned videos.** Once you have a few posts, pin your best one, your best series episode, and one that explains what your account is about.

When you have enough videos, group them into playlists by series. A viewer who finishes “Fridge rescue #4” and sees a playlist with 11 more episodes has an obvious reason to follow.

Pick a lane and a series

TikTok’s recommendation system learns from what viewers watch, finish, like and skip. If your videos jump between makeup, video games and tax tips, every video reaches a different group, and none of them sees enough of you to follow. One topic makes it easier for viewers, and for the system, to know who you’re for.

You don’t need a tiny niche. Use 2 or 3 content pillars under one topic. For a home cooking account:

- **Pillar 1:** 10-minute dinners
- **Pillar 2:** Fixing common cooking mistakes
- **Pillar 3:** Taste tests of shop-bought shortcuts

Then turn at least one pillar into a series with a name and a number: “Dinner in 10, day 14.” Series do three jobs. They make each video quicker to plan, they make viewers curious about the next episode, and they give people a concrete reason to follow instead of just liking.

Need help choosing? Read how to choose a niche and grab ideas from 75 short-form video ideas.

Post on a rhythm you can keep

TikTok’s Creator Academy says there’s no one-size-fits-all number, notes that publishers who post multiple times a day see more views and For You exposure, and suggests setting a daily target you can consistently hit. The key word is consistently. A schedule you abandon in week three is worse than a smaller one you keep.

Your time per week	Realistic target	How
2-3 hours	3 videos a week	Film all three in one session
5-6 hours	1 a day	Batch 7 on the weekend
10+ hours	2 a day	Batch, plus cut clips from longer recordings

Every post is a new test with new viewers, so more good posts means more chances to find what works. “Good” still matters: a rushed video with no hook teaches you nothing. The lesson on batch content creation shows how to film a week in one sitting, and posting schedule and consistency covers how to keep it going.

> **TIP**
>
> Keep a backlog of 5 finished videos you haven't posted. On a bad week you post from the backlog instead of breaking your streak, then refill it when you have time.

Get found in search, not just the For You feed

Plenty of people use TikTok like a search engine: “easy lunch ideas,” “how to tie a tie,” “things to do in Lisbon.” TikTok’s Creator Academy calls Search another path to views besides the For You feed, and says it values relevance over views and engagement. That’s good news for a small account. A clear video can rank even if you have 40 followers.

How to set a video up for search:

- **Say the phrase out loud** in the first few seconds: “Here’s an easy lunch idea you can make in 5 minutes.”
- **Put it in on-screen text** and in the caption, written the way people type it.
- **Use subtitles** so the words in your speech are visible.
- **Don’t stuff keywords.** TikTok warns that stacking irrelevant text will hurt your video traffic. Describe the video accurately.

To find phrases, type your topic into TikTok search and read the suggestions. If you have access, the Creator Search Insights tool in TikTok shows what people search for, and its “Content gap” tab lists searches with lots of demand but few good videos. Those are strong video ideas for a new account. The titles, captions and hashtags lesson goes deeper.

Talk back: comments, replies and stitches

TikTok lists engagement, meaning comments, shares and likes, as one of the things that helps content perform, and suggests sparking conversations. For a small account, engagement also builds the relationship that makes people follow.

Three habits that pay off:

1. **Reply to every comment for the first hour** after posting. Short and friendly is enough.
2. **Reply with a video** to the best question. TikTok shows the comment on screen, and you get a ready-made idea with built-in demand.
3. **Stitch or duet** videos in your niche when you can add something: a correction, a demonstration, a different opinion. Add your own value so it isn’t just a repost.

Spend 15 minutes a day watching and commenting on creators in your niche, too. You'll learn the formats your audience already likes, and thoughtful comments get noticed by both the creator and their viewers.

Check analytics weekly

TikTok's analytics live in TikTok Studio. In the app, go to your profile, tap the menu, select TikTok Studio, then Analytics. TikTok notes that data can be delayed for some posts, so look at videos that are at least a few days old.

Once a week, answer three questions:

1. **Which video brought the most new followers?** Not views, followers. That's your best clue about what people want more of.
2. **Where did people leave?** Open that video's retention rate and find the drop.
3. **Where did views come from?** The traffic source shows For You, search, profile and other sources. A video with a lot of search traffic is a topic to repeat.

Write one sentence each week: "Next week I'll make more of X and change Y." The short-form analytics lesson explains every metric.

Your 90-day plan

Weeks	Focus	Goal
1-2	Profile, pillars, first 10-14 videos	Find out what you enjoy making
3-6	Launch one series, add search phrases	Get your first videos that bring followers
7-10	Double down on the best pillar	Repeat what worked with new examples
11-13	Test 2 new formats, drop the weakest pillar	Keep the account focused

If filming enough videos is the bottleneck, record one longer piece a week (a talk to camera, a podcast, a stream) and cut it into several clips. Short.now finds the best moments, reframes them to 9:16 and adds captions, which can cover several posts from one recording.

What's next

TikTok is one platform. The same principles apply to YouTube, with a few differences in how views are counted and recommended. Next, read how to get more views on YouTube Shorts.

PRACTICE

Do it now: set up your account to convert viewers

1. Write a bio of one line that says who it's for and what they get, e.g. 'Easy weeknight dinners for people who hate cooking'.
2. Choose 2 or 3 content pillars and write 5 video ideas for each.
3. Name one recurring series (e.g. 'Fridge rescue #1') and plan its first three episodes.
4. Search your main topic on TikTok and write down 5 phrases from the search suggestions to use in captions.
5. Decide your posting target per day or week and put it in your calendar for the next 4 weeks.

Open the free clip cadence planner →

Check yourself

1. **A viewer loves one of your videos and taps your profile. What makes them most likely to follow?**

   A A long bio with your life story
   B A link to your other social accounts
   C A profile photo of your logo
   D A clear one-line promise plus pinned videos and series that match the video they just watched

2. **What does TikTok's Creator Academy suggest about posting frequency?**

   A Post exactly 3 times a day
   B Post once a week so each video gets attention
   C Set a daily posting target you can hit consistently
   D Frequency has no effect at all

3. **How is TikTok Search different from the For You feed, according to TikTok?**

   A Search values relevance over views and engagement
   B Search only shows videos from accounts you follow
   C Search ignores captions
   D Search only shows videos with over 10,000 views

4. **Which weekly metric best tells you a video helped your account grow?**

   A New followers gained from that video
   B Total likes
   C Number of hashtags used
   D Time of day you posted

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How long does it take to grow on TikTok?

There is no set timeline. Most new accounts need dozens of posts before they find a format that brings followers consistently. Plan for at least 90 days of steady posting before judging whether your topic works.

How often should I post on TikTok to grow?

TikTok suggests setting a daily target you can hit consistently. For most beginners, one video a day is ambitious but possible with batching; three to five a week is a fine start if that's what you can keep up.

Should I delete TikToks that get no views?

Usually no. Low-view videos rarely hurt you, and some pick up views later through search. Delete only if a video is off-topic for your new direction or you no longer want it public.

Is it better to have a personal or business account on TikTok?

Most solo creators start with a personal account. Business accounts are meant for brands and have a different set of music available, so check the sound library before switching if you rely on popular songs.

Sources

- TikTok Creator Academy: Posting cadence tips
- TikTok Creator Academy: Understanding the Recommendation System
- TikTok Creator Academy: Driving video traffic: Search
- TikTok Creator Academy: Introducing TikTok analytics
- TikTok Support: How to use TikTok Analytics

MODULE 6 · PUBLISHING AND GROWTH · 10 MIN

How to Get More Views on YouTube Shorts

YouTube ranks Shorts on whether viewers choose to watch, how long they stay and whether they enjoyed it. Here's how to improve each one, and what to do when a Short flops.

Key takeaways

- YouTube says it ranks Shorts using the share of viewers who chose to view, average view duration and average percentage viewed, plus signals like likes and surveys.
- Views now count from the moment playback starts, so use 'Stayed to watch' and engaged views to judge quality.
- Fewer impressions don't always mean your Short is bad: competition, topic interest and seasons change reach too.
- YouTube says there's no minimum posting cadence, so pick a schedule you can keep and focus on what your audience enjoys.
- Link Shorts to a related long video so viewers who like a clip can go deeper on your channel.

To get more views on YouTube Shorts, make more viewers choose to watch instead of swiping (your first second), keep them watching to the end (no dead time, payoff last), and post consistently on a topic people already want. YouTube says it ranks Shorts using the percentage of viewers who chose to view, average view duration and average percentage viewed, plus likes and surveys. Below is how to improve each, and how to diagnose a Short that didn’t take off.

How Shorts get views

When you post a Short, YouTube shows it in people’s Shorts feeds and watches what happens. Its help center says the system checks whether viewers choose to watch, ignore it, or tap “not interested,” and ranks Shorts by performance and personalization. The three numbers it names:

Signal	What it measures	What you control
% of viewers who chose to view	Did they stop scrolling?	First frame and first line
Average view duration	How long they stayed	Pacing and payoff
Average % viewed	How much of the Short they saw	Length and structure

Likes and post-watch surveys tell YouTube whether people enjoyed it. YouTube also says the system has no opinion about what type of Shorts you make. A talking head can beat a polished edit if viewers stay.

Two things outside your control also matter, and it helps to know them so you don’t misread your stats:

- **Competition.** YouTube says you may get fewer impressions if Shorts from other channels are performing even better, even when your metrics are good.

- **Topic interest and seasons.** Reach depends on how many people are watching Shorts about your topic, and viewing changes around major holidays.

For the full system, read how the YouTube Shorts algorithm works.

> **TIP**
>
> YouTube's help center says that since August 24, 2026, views are counted the moment a video starts to play. A view no longer means someone watched. Judge each Short by "Stayed to watch" and engaged views in YouTube Studio, not the public view count.

Win the swipe in the first second

The first decision a viewer makes is whether to stay. YouTube Studio reports it as the share of viewers who viewed your Short versus swiped away. You raise it with an opening that makes the topic and the payoff obvious right away.

Checklist for the first second:

- **Start with motion or a face mid-sentence.** No intro, no logo, no “hey guys.”
- **State the promise in under 8 words**, and put it on screen as text.
- **Show the subject immediately.** If the Short is about a car, the car is in frame at 0:00.
- **Make it readable on a phone.** Big text, high contrast, inside the safe zone so the buttons don’t cover it. The format cheat sheet has the safe zones.

Example openings:

- “This $3 tool fixes squeaky doors in 10 seconds.”
- “Most people hold chopsticks wrong. Here’s the fix.”
- “I tested 4 cheap mics. One is better than my $200 one.”

YouTube’s Shorts camera also has a “Get feedback” option before upload that analyzes things like your hook and pacing. It’s worth a look on a Short you’re unsure about.

Keep viewers to the end

Once someone stays, average view duration and percentage viewed decide how far YouTube pushes the Short. Most Shorts lose people in the middle, where the creator repeats themselves or explains too much.

How to tighten a Short:

1. **Write the payoff first**, then cut everything that doesn’t lead to it.
2. **Cut every pause.** Jump cuts between sentences are normal in Shorts.
3. **Change the picture every few seconds:** new angle, close-up, b-roll, text.
4. **Hold back the answer.** Show the result at the end, not in second 2.

5. **End cleanly.** No “thanks for watching” outro. A last line that leads back into the first makes the Short loop.

Length matters less than tightness. Shorts can be up to 3 minutes, but a padded 90-second Short will lose to a sharp 30-second one. See how long YouTube Shorts can be for details, and how to structure a short for a full template.

Titles, hashtags and search

Shorts also show up in YouTube search, on your channel page and in the Subscriptions feed. For search, YouTube says ranking considers how well your metadata matches what the viewer searched, and whether viewers click and watch.

Keep it simple:

- **Title (up to 100 characters):** Say what the Short is, in the words someone would search. “How to fix a squeaky door hinge” beats “You won’t believe this.”
- **Hashtags:** Add one to three relevant ones in the title or description. YouTube shows up to three above the title, and ignores all hashtags on a video that has more than 60.
- **Description:** One or two lines with the main phrase. Most viewers never open it, but search does read it.

The titles, captions and hashtags lesson has templates for all three platforms. The free YouTube title generator and hashtag generator can speed this up.

Connect Shorts to the rest of your channel

A Short that does well brings new people to your channel. Give them somewhere to go next. In YouTube Studio you can add a related video to a Short: open Content, select the Short, pick a video from your channel and save. YouTube says this needs advanced feature access, and the linked video must be public or unlisted. Viewers see it as a link under your channel name.

Good matches:

- The long video the Short was clipped from.
- A full tutorial when the Short shows one step.
- Part 2 of a story.

YouTube also says Shorts can help people discover you but can’t hurt your long video performance, so you don’t need a separate channel for Shorts.

If you already publish long videos, they’re the fastest source of Shorts. Our guide on making Shorts from long videos walks through it, and Short.now can pick the best moments, reframe them to vertical and add captions automatically.

Post consistently, without burning out

YouTube's help center states there is no minimum posting cadence required for videos to perform well, and suggests finding a schedule that suits your audience and your well-being. Every Short gets its own test, so more good Shorts means more chances. But a schedule you quit after two weeks helps nobody.

A practical start is 3 to 5 Shorts a week, filmed in one or two batches. Your Shorts also appear in the Subscriptions feed, which YouTube says shows the most recently uploaded Shorts from channels a viewer subscribes to, so a regular rhythm keeps you in front of subscribers. For timing, see the best time to post YouTube Shorts, and for building a routine, read posting schedule and consistency.

Fix a Short that flopped

Open YouTube Studio, go to Analytics, then Content, then Shorts, and open the Short. Match what you see to the likely cause:

What you see	Likely cause	Fix in your next Short
Low "Stayed to watch"	Opening didn't earn attention	New first frame and first line, text on screen
Good "Stayed to watch," steep early drop in retention	Hook promised something the video didn't deliver fast	Get to the point by second 3
Steady drop in the middle	Too long or repetitive	Cut 20-30% of the runtime
Good retention, low impressions	Topic interest or competition	Try a broader angle on the topic
Good views, no subscribers	Viewers liked the clip, not the channel	Make Shorts in a series that matches your channel

Don't judge a Short in its first hour. Look again after a few days, and compare it to your own recent Shorts rather than to other channels.

What's next

A good title or caption won't save a weak video, but a weak one can bury a good video. Next, learn how to write titles, captions and hashtags for short videos on all three platforms.

PRACTICE

Do it now: diagnose your last 5 Shorts

1. Open YouTube Studio, go to Analytics, then Content, then the Shorts tab.
2. For your last 5 Shorts, write down views and the 'Stayed to watch' (viewed vs. swiped away) percentage.
3. Open the Short with the lowest percentage and watch its first 2 seconds. Write a stronger first line.
4. Open the Short with the best percentage and look at its retention graph. Note the second where it dips most.
5. Plan your next Short using the best one's opening style and a fix for that dip.

Open the free YouTube title generator →

Check yourself

1. **Which signals does YouTube's help center say are used to rank Shorts?**

   A Percentage of viewers who chose to view, average view duration and average percentage viewed
   B Upload time and video file size
   C Number of tags and subscriber count
   D Only the number of likes

2. **Your Short has good 'Stayed to watch' numbers but fewer impressions than last month. What's a likely reason, according to YouTube?**

   A You were shadowbanned
   B Other Shorts on the topic performed even better, or interest in the topic changed
   C You used hashtags
   D Shorts always stop after 30 days

3. **Since August 24, 2026, how does YouTube count a view?**

   A After 30 seconds
   B Only when the video is watched to the end
   C From the moment the video starts to play
   D Only for logged-in viewers

4. **What's the best use of a Short's 'related video' link?**

   A Link a random popular video from another channel
   B Leave it empty so viewers stay in the Shorts feed
   C Link your newest upload every time
   D Link the long video the Short was cut from, or one on the same topic

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

Why are my YouTube Shorts getting no views?

Usually most viewers swipe away in the first second, so YouTube stops showing it. Check 'Stayed to watch' in YouTube Studio. If it's low, the opening is the problem. If it's fine but impressions are low, try a topic more people are interested in.

Do YouTube Shorts help grow a channel?

They can bring new viewers and subscribers. YouTube says Shorts can help with audience discovery but can't hurt your long video performance. Link Shorts to related long videos to move viewers to the rest of your channel.

Should I delete and re-upload a Short that flopped?

YouTube hasn't said re-uploading helps, and identical re-uploads can look like spam. It's better to make a new version with a new hook and a different first frame, then post it as a new Short.

How long should a YouTube Short be to get views?

As long as the idea needs and no longer. Shorts can be up to 3 minutes, but a tight 20-40 second Short is easier to watch to the end than a padded 2-minute one. See our guide to Shorts length for details.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Search & discovery tips for Shorts
- YouTube Help: Get started creating YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: Understand your content reach and engagement
- YouTube Help: Add a related video to your YouTube Shorts
- YouTube Help: Use hashtags for YouTube

MODULE 6 · PUBLISHING AND GROWTH · 9 MIN

Titles, Captions and Hashtags for Short Videos

What to write in the title, caption and hashtags of a Short, TikTok or Reel, with each platform's current rules, copy-ready templates, and the mistakes that cost you views.

Key takeaways

- Titles and captions don't make people watch; the video does. Their job is to tell the platform and searchers what the video is about.
- Write the phrase someone would actually search, early, in plain words.
- Instagram now allows up to 5 hashtags per post; YouTube shows up to 3 above the title and ignores all hashtags if a video has more than 60.
- On TikTok, put keywords in your speech, on-screen text and caption; TikTok warns that stacking irrelevant keywords hurts traffic.
- Use 1 to 5 specific hashtags that describe the video, not generic tags like #fyp or #viral.

For a short video, the title or caption should say what the video is about in the words people search, and the hashtags should be 1 to 5 specific tags that describe it. They won’t make a weak video work, because in a feed people decide from the video itself. But they help the platform understand your topic, show you in search, and set the right expectation. The rules also differ: Instagram allows up to 5 hashtags, YouTube ignores all hashtags on a video with more than 60, and TikTok warns against stuffing keywords.

What each piece of text does

There are four places to put words on a short video. They do different jobs.

Text	Where it shows	Main job
On-screen hook	On the video, first seconds	Stop the scroll
Subtitles	On the video, all the way through	Keep sound-off viewers watching
Title / caption	Below or beside the video	Tell the platform and searchers the topic
Hashtags	In the title, caption or description	Group the video with a topic

The on-screen text does most of the work in the feed. The title, caption and hashtags matter most for search, for the video’s page, and for helping the platform understand what kind of viewer might like it. Write the hook first, then write metadata that matches it.

For subtitles, see how to add captions to videos automatically.

The one rule for all three platforms

Write the phrase a real person would search, early, in plain words.

People don’t search “you won’t believe this hack.” They search “how to remove a stripped screw.” So a title that uses that phrase can be found. A title that’s all mystery can’t.

How to find the phrase in two minutes:

1. Type your topic into the YouTube search bar and the TikTok search bar.
2. Read the autocomplete suggestions. Those are real searches.
3. Pick the one that matches your video exactly.
4. Use it near the start of the title or first caption line.

You can still add curiosity after the keyword: “How to remove a stripped screw (the rubber band trick).”

Before and after, across a few niches:

Before	After
”This is insane 🤯 "	"How to fold a fitted sheet in 20 seconds"
"Day 4"	"Day 4 of learning guitar: my first barre chord"
"You need this"	"Best free budgeting app for students (I tried 5)"
"POV"	"POV: your first day as a night-shift nurse"
"Wait for the end"	"Cheap vs expensive running shoes: 10 km test”

Notice what the “after” versions have in common. Each one names the topic, a specific detail (20 seconds, 10 km, 5 apps) and, where it helps, who it’s for. A searcher can tell in one glance that the video answers their question, and a viewer in the feed knows what they’ll get if they keep watching. Specific numbers also make a promise you can check, which helps people trust that the video isn’t clickbait.

When the title doesn’t need a keyword

Some videos aren’t searchable: a joke, a story, a reaction. For those, the title’s job is to set up the video without spoiling it. Name the situation and leave out the punchline: “My landlord’s response to the leaking ceiling.” Keep at least one plain word about the topic so the platform still knows what it is.

YouTube Shorts: titles and hashtags

YouTube Shorts have a title of up to 100 characters and a description. Hashtags can go in either.

What YouTube’s own rules say:

- **Up to 3 hashtags** that YouTube considers most engaging can appear by your video title. All of them still show in the description.
- **More than 60 hashtags** and YouTube ignores every hashtag on the video. Over-tagging can also get a video removed from search.
- **Hashtags must relate to the video.** Misleading hashtags, or hashtags that harass, contain hate speech or are sexual, break the policy.
- **No spaces** inside a hashtag: #TwoWords, not #Two Words.

Title templates that work for Shorts:

- **How-to:** “How to [result] in [time]” → “How to peel garlic in 5 seconds”
- **Mistake:** “[Common thing] you’re doing wrong” → “The way you’re storing bread is wrong”
- **Test:** “I tried [thing] for [time]” → “I tried waking up at 5 a.m. for 30 days”
- **Comparison:** “[A] vs [B]: [the answer]” → “Air fryer vs oven fries: one clear winner”

Keep the important words in the first 40 or so characters, since long titles get cut off on phone screens. For long videos, the free YouTube title generator, description generator and tag generator can draft options. For more on Shorts, read how to get more views on YouTube Shorts.

TikTok: captions and keywords

TikTok’s Creator Academy says Search values relevance over views and engagement, and tells creators to use relevant keywords in the video, subtitles and captions. It also says covers and titles should show the topic clearly, and warns that irrelevant text stacking will hurt your video traffic.

So on TikTok, keywords live in three places at once:

1. **Your speech.** Say the topic in the first few seconds: “Here’s how I meal prep for the week on $40.”
2. **On-screen text.** The same phrase in the hook text.
3. **The caption.** Open with a plain sentence, then 2-4 hashtags.

A good TikTok caption:

> Meal prep for the week on $40, five lunches, no reheating needed. #mealprep #budgetmeals #lunchideas

A weak one:

> omg 😭😭 #fyp #foryou #viral #trending #foryoupage

The first tells TikTok and searchers exactly what the video is. The second says nothing. TikTok’s caption limit has changed several times, so check the current maximum in the app; you rarely need more than two sentences anyway.

> **TIP**
>
> If TikTok's Creator Search Insights is available on your account, open its "Content gap" tab. It lists searches with plenty of demand but few good videos. Use the exact phrase as your caption's first line.

Instagram Reels: captions and the 5-hashtag limit

Instagram's help center now says you can use **up to 5 hashtags** on a post. If you add more than 5 tags to a single photo or video, Instagram says your comment won't post. Older advice to use 30 hashtags is out of date.

Instagram's creator tips also say to include relevant keywords in your content, caption, bio and hashtags, so people can find you through search.

A Reel caption that does both:

> 3 stretches for lower back pain after sitting all day. Save this for your next work break. #backpain #deskstretches #mobility

Notes for Instagram:

- **First line matters most.** Only the start of the caption shows before "more."
- **A soft call to action is fine** ("save this," "send this to a friend who sits all day"). Instagram's ranking explanation lists the likelihood of a reel being reshared among its most important predictions.
- **Don't post with another app's watermark.** Instagram says it's less likely to recommend content with noticeable watermarks.

How to choose hashtags

Use 1 to 5 hashtags. Pick them in layers:

Layer	Example (home workout video)	Why
Topic	#homeworkout	What the video is about
Specific	#noequipmentworkout	The exact angle
Audience or format	#beginnerworkout	Who it's for

Skip:

- **Generic tags** like #fyp, #viral, #trending, #explore. None of the platforms say they help reach.
- **Unrelated popular tags.** YouTube's policy bans misleading hashtags, and TikTok says irrelevant keywords hurt.
- **The same block on every post.** Choose for each video.

The free hashtag generator gives starting points; always delete the ones that don't match your video.

Mistakes that cost views

- **Title promises something the video doesn't deliver.** Viewers swipe away when they realize, which hurts the numbers that matter.

- **Mystery-only titles** (“This changed everything”) that no one would ever search.
- **Hook text and title say different things.** It confuses viewers and the platform.
- **Keyword stuffing**: “workout workout gym fitness exercise home workout fit.” Write a sentence instead.
- **Copying one caption to all three platforms** without checking the rules. A caption with 10 hashtags will fail on Instagram.

If you cross-post clips, Short.now generates a title, description and hashtags for each clip from its transcript, which gives you a draft to edit per platform rather than a blank box.

What’s next

Once your videos have titles and captions that fit, you need to know which ones worked and why. Next, learn how to read your short-form analytics: retention, swipe-away rate and shares.

PRACTICE

Do it now: write metadata for your next video

1. Write down the one question or problem your next video answers.
2. Type it into YouTube and TikTok search and note the autocomplete phrasing people use.
3. Write a title or first caption line under 60 characters that uses that phrasing.
4. Pick 3 hashtags: one for the topic, one for the specific sub-topic, one for the format or audience.
5. Check the on-screen hook text says the same thing as the title in different words.

Open the free YouTube hashtag generator →

Check yourself

1. **What is the main job of a short video's title or caption?**

   A Telling the platform and searchers what the video is about
   B Making the video go viral on its own
   C Fitting as many hashtags as possible
   D Hiding the topic to create curiosity

2. **How many hashtags can you use on an Instagram post, according to Instagram's help center?**

   A Up to 30
   B Unlimited
   C Up to 5
   D Exactly 1

3. **What happens on YouTube if a video has more than 60 hashtags?**

   A Only the first 60 count
   B The video is promoted more
   C Nothing changes
   D YouTube ignores all of its hashtags

4. **Which TikTok caption is best for search?**

   A 'wait for it 😂 #fyp #foryou #viral #trending #xyzbca'
   B 'Easy 10-minute pasta for busy weeknights #pastarecipe #easydinner'
   C 'part 3'
   D 'cooking cooking recipe pasta food food dinner easy quick'

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How many hashtags should I use on YouTube Shorts?

One to three relevant hashtags is plenty. YouTube shows up to three above the title, and if a video has more than 60 hashtags YouTube ignores all of them. YouTube's Shorts upload guide doesn't ask for a #shorts tag; vertical videos up to 3 minutes are uploaded as Shorts.

Does #fyp help on TikTok?

TikTok has never said #fyp or #foryou increase reach. They don't describe your video, so they give TikTok and searchers nothing to work with. Use hashtags that say what the video is about.

Should hashtags go in the caption or the comments on Instagram?

Instagram lets you add hashtags in the caption or a comment, but the help center says you can use up to 5 tags on a post. Putting them in the caption is simplest and keeps your keywords in one place.

What's the difference between a caption and subtitles?

The caption is the text under or beside the video in the app. Subtitles (also called closed captions) are the spoken words shown on the video. Both help: subtitles keep people watching with sound off and also show your keywords on screen.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Use hashtags for YouTube
- YouTube Help: Get started creating YouTube Shorts
- TikTok Creator Academy: Driving video traffic: Search
- Instagram Help Center: Use hashtags on Instagram
- Instagram: Instagram Ranking Explained
- Instagram for Creators: Tips for improving your reach

MODULE 6 · PUBLISHING AND GROWTH · 11 MIN

How to Read Your Short-Form Analytics: Retention, Swipe-Away and Shares

Where to find the numbers that matter in YouTube Studio, TikTok Studio and Instagram Insights, what each one means, and a 20-minute weekly routine to turn them into better videos.

Key takeaways

- Every platform answers the same three questions: did people stop, did they stay, and did they act.
- On YouTube the swipe metric is 'Stayed to watch' (also shown as viewed vs. swiped away); on TikTok look at retention rate, average watch time and watched full video; on Instagram, average watch time and shares.
- Views now count from the first frame on YouTube and include replays on Instagram, so view counts alone say little about quality.
- Compare each video to your own recent videos, not to other creators, and wait a few days before judging.
- A weekly 20-minute review that ends in one change for next week beats checking stats every hour.

Short-form analytics answer three questions: did people stop scrolling, did they keep watching, and did they do something afterwards. On YouTube, the first answer is “Stayed to watch” (the viewed vs. swiped away percentage) in YouTube Studio. On TikTok, look at retention rate, average watch time and watched full video in TikTok Studio. On Instagram, check average watch time, shares and follows in a reel’s insights. This lesson shows where each number lives and what to do with it.

The three questions behind every metric

The three apps use different names, but they measure the same things.

Question	What it tells you	What fixes it
Did they stop?	The first second worked	First frame, first line, on-screen hook
Did they stay?	The pacing and payoff worked	Editing, length, structure
Did they act?	The video made them care	The idea, the ending, the series

A video can fail at any one of these, and each needs a different fix. That’s why total views on their own are not enough: two videos with 5,000 views can have opposite problems.

TIP

Views are a weak signal now. YouTube's help center says that since August 24, 2026 views count the moment a video starts to play, and Instagram counts every start and replay of a reel. Always pair views with a stay or watch-time number.

YouTube Studio: Shorts metrics

Where to find them: sign in to YouTube Studio, select **Analytics** in the left menu, then **Content**, then the **Shorts** chip. Click any single Short for its own analytics.

The Shorts tab shows these cards: key metrics (views, likes, subscribers), how viewers find your Shorts, how viewers engaged, top Shorts and top remixed.

The metrics to know:

- **Stayed to watch.** YouTube defines it as the percentage of times viewers viewed your Shorts versus swiped away. This is the most important number for your opening. YouTube has also labeled the same number “Viewed vs. swiped away” and “How many chose to view,” so you may see any of the three names depending on the screen.
- **Shown in feed.** How many times your Short appeared in the Shorts feed. Together with Stayed to watch, it shows whether a Short struggled to get shown or got shown and lost people.
- **Engaged views.** How many times viewers stayed past the first seconds, not counting loops. YouTube keeps this in Advanced mode. It’s a better quality measure than plain views.
- **Average view duration and average percentage viewed.** How long people stayed. YouTube’s Shorts tips say these, along with the share who chose to view, are used to rank Shorts.
- **Audience retention graph.** On a single Short, it shows where viewers left. Look for sharp drops, not the slow slope that every video has.
- **Subscribers.** Gained from that Short. The best sign that it brought people to your channel.

Also check **traffic sources** on the Short (Shorts feed, search, channel pages and others). A Short with a lot of search traffic is a topic you can repeat for long-term views.

TikTok Studio: video analytics

Where to find them: in the TikTok app, go to **Profile**, tap the **menu**, choose **TikTok Studio**, then **Analytics**. On a computer, open TikTok Studio and choose the Analytics tab on the left. You can pick the last 7, 28, 60 or 365 days, or a custom range.

The account tabs:

- **Overview:** post views, profile views, likes, comments, shares, and traffic source, including search queries that led to your videos.
- **Content:** your top posts and per-video stats.
- **Viewers:** unique and returning viewers, inferred demographics, and **most active times**.
- **Followers:** follower demographics and when they’re active.

Tap a single video for the three numbers TikTok tells creators to watch:

TikTok metric	TikTok's definition (in short)	Use it to
Retention rate	The percentage of your video that viewers watched, shown over time	Find drop-off points
Average watch time	Average time viewers spent watching	Compare videos of similar length
Watched full video	Your finish rate: viewers who reached the last few seconds	Check whether the ending lands

TikTok's advice on retention is specific: look at what was on screen at the drop-off point, including text or other elements that might have lost people. It also notes that the watched full video rate changes with video length, so compare a 15-second video to other 15-second videos.

TikTok says analytics data can be delayed for some posts, so wait a few days before deciding a number is wrong.

Instagram Insights: Reels metrics

Where to find them: go to the **Reels** tab on your profile, open a reel, and tap **View insights**. You need a public account (personal or professional). Reel insights cover reels posted since May 14, 2021, for up to two years. Account-level insights cover any range within the last 90 days.

The reel metrics, as Instagram defines them:

- **Views:** the number of times your reel starts to play or replay.
- **Watch time:** total time it was played, including replays.
- **Viewers:** unique accounts that saw the reel on screen at least once. Instagram marks this as estimated and in development.
- **Average watch time:** watch time divided by initial views. Your main stay number on Instagram.
- **Follows:** accounts that followed you from this reel.

In the app, reel insights usually also list interactions such as likes, comments, shares and saves. Shares matter on Instagram: in Instagram's own ranking explanation, the likelihood that someone reshares a reel is listed among the most important predictions. Some versions of the app also show a retention graph or a skip rate for reels. If yours does, read it like the YouTube and TikTok versions: the first seconds tell you about the hook.

Audience demographics need a preset date range and more than 100 viewers reached or engaged, so small accounts may not see them yet.

Same question, three apps

What you want to know	YouTube Studio	TikTok Studio	Instagram Insights
Did they stop scrolling?	Stayed to watch (viewed vs. swiped away)	Retention rate, first seconds	Retention or skip rate if shown; average watch time
Did they stay?	Average view duration, % viewed, retention graph	Average watch time, watched full video	Average watch time, watch time
Did they act?	Likes, subscribers	Likes, comments, shares, new followers	Shares, saves, follows
Where did views come from?	Traffic sources	Traffic source, search queries	Account insights
When are viewers online?	Audience tab	Viewers: most active times	Account insights

How to diagnose a video

Pick the problem in the left column and follow it across.

What you see	What it usually means	Try next time
Many swipe away in the first second	The opening didn't make a promise	Start on the result or mid-action; add hook text
People stay past the hook, then drop around second 5-10	The setup took too long	Get to the point faster
Slow steady drop, low finish rate	Too long for the idea	Cut 20-30% of the runtime
Sharp drop at one moment	Something on screen lost them	Remove or shorten that part
Good watch time, few shares or follows	Enjoyable, but nothing to act on	Add a clear ending, or make it part of a series
Low impressions despite good numbers	Competition or low topic interest	Try a broader angle on the same topic

For editing fixes, see how to edit short-form videos. For opening fixes, see how to structure a short.

A 20-minute weekly review

Do this once a week, on videos that are at least three days old:

1. **List the week's videos** with four numbers: views, the stay number, average watch time and followers gained. A simple spreadsheet works.
2. **Sort by the stay number.** Watch the first three seconds of the top and bottom video back to back. The difference is usually obvious.
3. **Open the retention graph** of your best video and find its biggest drop. Note what happens there.

4. **Check followers per video.** Which one turned viewers into followers?
5. **Write one change** for next week. One, not five, so you can tell whether it worked.

If you post the same clip to all three platforms, compare the same video across apps. A clip that holds people on TikTok but not on Shorts often just needs a different first second for each audience.

Mistakes to avoid

- **Judging in the first hour.** Short videos can pick up days later, and TikTok and Instagram data can lag.
- **Comparing yourself to big creators.** Compare to your own last 10 videos.
- **Changing everything at once.** If you change the hook, length and topic together, you won't know which one mattered.
- **Chasing views over followers.** A video that brings 50 followers from 2,000 views did more for your account than one that brought 3 from 20,000.

What's next

Analytics tell you what to make. The last step is making it reliably. Next, read how often to post and how to stay consistent.

PRACTICE

Do it now: run your first weekly review

1. Pick one platform and open its analytics (YouTube Studio, TikTok Studio or Instagram Insights).
2. List your last 5 videos with views, the stay/swipe or retention number, average watch time, and followers gained.
3. Mark the best and worst video on the stay number. Watch the first 3 seconds of each back to back.
4. Open the retention graph of the best video and find its biggest drop. Write what happens on screen at that second.
5. Write one sentence: 'Next week I will keep ___ and change ___.'

Open the free short-form publishing calendar →

Check yourself

1. **In YouTube Studio, which metric tells you how many people watched your Short instead of swiping past it?**

   A Shown in feed
   B Stayed to watch (viewed vs. swiped away)
   C Subscribers
   D Top remixed

2. **On Instagram, what does a reel's 'Views' count include?**

   A Each time the reel starts to play or replays
   B Only people who watched to the end
   C Only followers
   D Only unique accounts

3. **Your TikTok's retention graph drops sharply at second 12, where you start a long explanation. What's the best next step?**

   A Post it again at a different time
   B Add more hashtags
   C In the next video, cut or shorten that part and show instead of tell
   D Ignore it, retention doesn't matter

4. **Video A got 20,000 views and 3 followers. Video B got 2,000 views and 60 followers. What does this tell you?**

   A Video A is better in every way
   B Followers don't matter
   C Video B was posted at the wrong time
   D Video B's topic or format made people want more from you, so make more like it

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

What is a good viewed vs. swiped away percentage on YouTube Shorts?

YouTube doesn't publish a target, and it varies by topic and format. Use your own channel as the benchmark: find your average over your last 10 Shorts and aim to beat it. A Short well above your average is a format worth repeating.

What is a good average watch time on TikTok?

TikTok doesn't give a target, and it depends on video length. Compare average watch time to the video's length, and compare videos of similar length to each other. TikTok notes the watched full video rate also changes with video length.

Why don't I see analytics on TikTok or Instagram?

TikTok says Analytics isn't available to everyone yet and data can be delayed by a few days. Instagram needs a public account, and demographics only show once you've reached or engaged more than 100 viewers.

How often should I check my analytics?

Once a week is enough for most creators. Numbers in the first hours swing a lot, and TikTok and Instagram can lag. A weekly review on videos that are at least a few days old gives you steadier patterns.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Understand your content reach and engagement
- YouTube Help: Content tab analytics tips (Shorts)
- TikTok Creator Academy: Introducing TikTok analytics
- Instagram Help Center: View insights on your Instagram reels
- Instagram Help Center: View account and content insights
- Instagram: Instagram Ranking Explained

MODULE 6 · PUBLISHING AND GROWTH · 9 MIN

How Often to Post Short Videos, and How to Stay Consistent

How many Shorts, TikToks and Reels to post per week as a beginner, what YouTube and TikTok say about frequency, and a simple system to keep posting when life gets busy.

Key takeaways

- The best posting frequency is the highest one you can keep for at least 3 months without the quality dropping.
- YouTube says there is no minimum posting cadence for Shorts to perform; TikTok suggests setting a daily target you can consistently hit.
- For most beginners, 3 to 5 short videos a week, filmed in one or two batches, is a realistic start.
- Keep a buffer of finished videos and schedule them, so a busy week doesn't break your streak.
- Post at a regular time your audience is online, but don't let timing delay posting.

Post as often as you can keep up for at least three months without the videos getting worse. For most beginners, that’s 3 to 5 short videos a week. YouTube says there is no minimum posting cadence for Shorts to perform well, and TikTok suggests setting a daily target you can consistently hit. Pick your number, film in batches, keep a buffer of finished videos, and schedule them so a busy week doesn’t stop you.

What the platforms actually say

There’s a lot of advice about posting frequency, and most of it is people’s personal experience. Here’s what the platforms themselves say:

- **YouTube:** “There is no minimum posting cadence required for your videos to perform well.” Its help center suggests choosing a schedule that suits your audience and your well-being. YouTube does show new Shorts from subscribed channels in the Subscriptions feed, so regular uploads keep you visible to subscribers.
- **TikTok:** Its Creator Academy says there’s no one-size-fits-all answer. It notes that publishers who post multiple times a day see more views and For You exposure, and suggests setting a daily target you can consistently hit.
- **Instagram:** Instagram doesn’t publish a recommended number for Reels.

So nobody official tells you to post three times a day. What they agree on is that each video is a new chance, and that consistency matters more than bursts.

Pick a number you can keep

The right frequency depends on your time, not on what a big creator does. Count everything: planning, filming, editing and posting. A simple talking-to-camera Short can take 30 to 60 minutes start to finish for a beginner.

Time you have per week	Start with	How to make it work
1-2 hours	2 videos a week	Film both in one session
3-5 hours	3-5 videos a week	One batch day, simple formats
6-10 hours	1 a day	Two batch sessions, or clip a long recording
10+ hours	1-2 a day	Batching plus repurposing long videos

Rules of thumb:

1. **Start lower than you think.** Raising your target after a month feels good. Cutting it after two weeks feels like failure.
2. **Commit for 90 days.** You need enough posts to see patterns in your analytics.
3. **Quality floor first.** Every video still needs a real hook and no dead time. Ten rushed videos teach you less than five good ones.

The free clip cadence planner turns your recordings and posting days into a production plan.

Choose your posting days and time

A regular time helps you as much as the algorithm. It turns posting into a habit, and your returning viewers start to expect you.

To pick a time, use your own data once you have it:

- **YouTube Studio:** the Audience tab shows when your viewers are on YouTube.
- **TikTok Studio:** the Viewers tab shows your viewers' most active times.
- **Instagram:** account insights show when your followers are active.

Until you have enough viewers for that data, pick a slot you can always hit, like weekday evenings in your main audience's time zone. Don't wait for the perfect hour. A video posted at an average time beats one that sits in your drafts. For typical time windows and a way to test them, see the best time to post YouTube Shorts.

Batch, then build a buffer

Consistency breaks when filming depends on having a good day. Batching fixes that: you film several videos in one session, edit them in another, and post them through the week.

A simple weekly rhythm for 4 videos a week:

Day	Task	Time
Sunday	Write 4 hooks and outlines	30 min
Monday	Film all 4	60-90 min
Tuesday	Edit and add captions	90 min
Tuesday	Schedule all 4	15 min
Wed / Thu / Sat / Sun	They post on their own; reply to comments	10 min a day

Then build a **buffer**: one or two weeks of finished videos you haven't posted yet. Build it by doing one extra batch in a quiet week. When you get sick, travel or just have a bad week, you post from the buffer. Most creators who quit do it in their first missed week, and a buffer stops that week from happening.

> **TIP**
>
> Repurposing is the fastest way to fill a buffer. One 30-minute talk, podcast or stream can hold several clip-worthy moments. The lesson on batch content creation shows a full batching day, and the repurposing system shows how to get a month of shorts from one recording a week.

Schedule your posts

Scheduling means your videos go out on time even when you're busy. You can schedule in each platform's own tools: YouTube Studio lets you set a video to go public at a set date and time, TikTok Studio on the web lets you schedule posts, and Instagram professional accounts can schedule reels. Scheduling limits change, so check the options in each app.

If you post the same clips to all three platforms, scheduling each one by hand adds up. Short.now can auto-post clips to TikTok, YouTube and Instagram on a schedule you set (on the Creator plan and up), so a batch session ends with the whole week queued.

To keep track of what's ready, what's scheduled and what's posted, the free short-form publishing calendar template gives you one place for every clip.

Posting to three platforms at once

Posting the same video to YouTube Shorts, TikTok and Reels triples your chances for little extra work. A few rules make it work:

- **Upload the original file to each app.** Don't download a TikTok with its watermark and post it to Instagram. Instagram says it's less likely to recommend reels with noticeable watermarks.
- **Rewrite the caption** for each platform. Hashtag rules differ: Instagram allows up to 5, for example. See titles, captions and hashtags.
- **Check the format** fits all three: 9:16, important text inside the safe zones. The format cheat sheet covers it.

- **Stagger if you like.** Same day is fine; some creators post to one platform first to see which version of the hook works.

Staying consistent when motivation drops

Motivation fades for everyone around week three or four, when the first excitement is gone and the views haven't arrived yet. Plan for it:

- **Have a minimum week.** Decide in advance what you'll post when life is busy, like 2 videos instead of 5, from the buffer.
- **Use recurring formats.** A weekly series ("Monday mistake," "Friday Q&A") removes the "what do I post?" question.
- **Keep an idea list** on your phone. Add every question a viewer or friend asks you.
- **Track the streak, not the views.** Mark each posted video in your calendar. You control the streak; you don't control the views.
- **Look at the long run.** Compare this month to last month, not today to yesterday.

When to change your schedule

Change your frequency on purpose, not out of frustration. Good reasons:

- **After about a month of data**, your analytics show a format or day that clearly does better.
- **Quality is slipping**: hooks are weaker, edits rushed. Post less, but better.
- **You're burning out.** YouTube itself mentions your well-being when talking about cadence. A smaller schedule you keep for a year beats a big one you quit in March.
- **You have more time** and a full buffer. Then add one more video a week, and hold it for a month before adding another.

Use your weekly analytics review, covered in how to read your short-form analytics, to make the call.

What's next

You now have a system for making and publishing short videos every week. The next module covers earning from them, starting with how to monetize YouTube Shorts.

PRACTICE

Do it now: set your posting system

1. Write how many hours a week you can honestly spend on short videos, including editing.
2. Pick a weekly target from the table in this lesson and the days you'll post.
3. Block one batch session in your calendar for this week to film at least that many videos.
4. Set up a simple publishing calendar for the next 4 weeks and fill in the topics.
5. Schedule the first video in YouTube Studio, TikTok Studio or Instagram so it's already queued.

Open the free clip cadence planner →

Check yourself

1. **What does YouTube's help center say about posting frequency for Shorts?**

   A There is no minimum posting cadence required for videos to perform well
   B You must post daily
   C Post exactly 3 times a week
   D Posting more than once a day is penalized

2. **A beginner has 4 hours a week for short video. Which plan is most realistic?**

   A Three posts a day, every day
   B One video a month, heavily edited
   C Post whenever inspiration strikes
   D 3 to 4 videos a week, filmed in one batch session

3. **Why keep a buffer of finished videos?**

   A Platforms reward old videos
   B So a busy or sick week doesn't break your schedule
   C Buffers improve video quality automatically
   D So you can post them all at once

4. **When should you change your posting schedule?**

   A After one week with low views
   B Every time a video flops
   C After about a month of data, or if the schedule is hurting quality or your health
   D Never

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How many times a day should I post on TikTok?

TikTok doesn't give a fixed number. It suggests setting a daily target you can consistently hit, and notes that publishers who post several times a day see more views. For a beginner, once a day is ambitious; a few times a week is a fine start.

Is it bad to post every day on YouTube Shorts?

No. YouTube says there's no minimum cadence, and each Short is shown on its own merit. Daily posting only hurts if it makes your Shorts worse or makes you quit.

Can I post the same video on TikTok, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels?

Yes, as long as it's your own video. Upload the clean original to each app rather than a download with another platform's watermark, since Instagram says it's less likely to recommend reels with noticeable watermarks.

What if I miss a day?

Nothing breaks. None of the platforms penalize a missed day. Post the next video from your buffer and get back to your normal rhythm.

Sources

- YouTube Help: Search & discovery tips for Shorts
- TikTok Creator Academy: Posting cadence tips
- TikTok Creator Academy: Introducing TikTok analytics
- Instagram Help Center: View account and content insights
- Instagram for Creators: Tips for improving your reach

PUT THIS MODULE TO WORK

Practice on your own videos

Short.now turns one long video into ready-to-post Shorts, TikToks and Reels with captions. Free plan, no watermark, no card.

Try Short.now free →



MODULE 7

Making money

The realistic ways short-form creators earn: platform payouts, brand deals, clipping and your own offers.

1. How to Monetize YouTube Shorts: Requirements, Revenue Share and the 2027 Changes
2. How to Make Money on TikTok: Every Official Program and What It Takes
3. How to Get Brand Deals as a Small Creator: Media Kit, Pitch, Rates and Disclosure
4. What Is Clip Farming? And How to Become a Clipper (Honestly)

MODULE 7 · MAKING MONEY · 10 MIN

How to Monetize YouTube Shorts: Requirements, Revenue Share and the 2027 Changes

What you need to earn money from YouTube Shorts, how the Shorts revenue pool and 45% share actually work, what changes on February 1, 2027, and how to earn before you qualify.

Key takeaways

- Shorts earn ad money only through the YouTube Partner Program (YPP). Today the Shorts route into full YPP is 1,000 subscribers plus 10 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days.
- A lower YPP level opens at 500 subscribers, 3 public uploads in 90 days and 3 million Shorts views in 90 days (or 3,000 long-form watch hours). It gives fan funding and Shopping, not ad revenue.
- Shorts ad money is pooled. You get a share of the Creator Pool based on your share of engaged views, and you keep 45% of that share, with or without music.
- From February 1, 2027, YouTube raises the entry bar for new applicants and requires 10 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days each month to earn Shorts ad and Premium revenue. Accept the new terms in YouTube Studio by January 31, 2027.
- Reused or unoriginal Shorts don't earn, so build on original content, and earn from brand deals and long-form while you grow.

You monetize YouTube Shorts by joining the YouTube Partner Program (YPP) and accepting the Shorts Monetization Module. Today the Shorts route into full YPP is **1,000 subscribers and 10 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days**. Once you're in, you get a share of a monthly Shorts ad pool and keep **45%** of it. A smaller YPP level at 500 subscribers gives you fan funding and Shopping first.

Every number in this lesson comes from YouTube's own help pages and blog as they read in November 2026. YouTube changes these rules, and it has already announced changes for February 1, 2027, which are covered below. Before you plan around any number, check the YPP eligibility page and the Earn tab in YouTube Studio.

The two YPP levels

YPP has two entry points. The lower one is called the expanded YouTube Partner Program, and it's only open in certain countries. YouTube keeps the list on its expanded YPP page, and it includes the US, UK, Canada, India, Brazil, Germany, Japan and many others.

	Expanded YPP (fan funding and Shopping)	Full YPP (adds ad and Premium revenue)
Subscribers	500	1,000
Recent uploads	3 valid public uploads in the last 90 days	not listed

	Expanded YPP (fan funding and Shopping)	Full YPP (adds ad and Premium revenue)
Shorts route	3 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days	10 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days
Long-form route	3,000 qualified watch hours in the last 12 months	4,000 qualified watch hours in the last 12 months
What you can earn	Memberships, Super Chat, Super Stickers, Super Thanks, Jewels and gifts, Shopping	Everything on the left, plus Shorts Feed ads, Watch Page ads and YouTube Premium revenue

On top of the numbers, YouTube asks for the same basics on both levels:

- Follow the YouTube channel monetization policies.
- Live in a country or region where the program is available.
- Have no active Community Guidelines strikes.
- Turn on 2-Step Verification for your Google account.
- Have one active AdSense for YouTube account linked to your channel, or set one up in YouTube Studio when you apply.

The full YPP page also asks you to have advanced features access on YouTube.

What “qualified” means

Qualified Shorts views are views of **public** Shorts that appear in the Shorts Feed. Views of private, unlisted or deleted Shorts don’t count, and neither do views from ad campaigns or Image Posts in the Shorts Feed.

One trap catches a lot of people: watch hours from Shorts views in the Shorts Feed **don’t count** toward the 4,000-hour long-form threshold. Shorts views and long-form watch hours are two separate routes. You can’t mix them.

What changes on February 1, 2027

On August 10, 2026, YouTube announced the first big YPP changes since 2018. Here is what YouTube’s own pages say, and nothing more:

- **New terms.** To keep fully monetizing, review and accept the updated terms in YouTube Studio by **January 31, 2027**. They take effect February 1, 2027.
- **Higher entry bar for new applicants.** New creators applying for ads and Premium revenue sharing will need **8,000 qualified watch hours in the last 365 days, or 20 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days**. YouTube says this won’t affect creators already in YPP. The post doesn’t mention the subscriber requirement, so check the help page for the subscriber number when you apply.
- **A monthly Shorts threshold.** To earn a share of Shorts ad revenue from the Creator Pool and YouTube Premium revenue for a given month, you’ll need **at least 10 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days**. YouTube measures this over the 90 days ending on the 15th of the month before the month being paid. Channels below the line stay in YPP, keep earning on long-form, and start earning from Shorts again automatically once they’re back above 10 million.

- **Fan funding and Shopping stay the same.** YouTube says the entry thresholds for fan funding and Shopping products are unchanged.
- **Targeted Shorts ads.** Shorts ads targeted to small groups of 5 or fewer channels will earn direct revenue, and creators keep 45% of the net revenue from that ad.
- **New incentive programs.** For channels below 10 million views, YouTube says it will add milestone-based incentives, such as bonuses for YouTube Shopping, incentives for brand deals, and boosts for starting trends. It says details will come later.

You'll find other numbers online, but if YouTube's pages don't say it, don't plan around it.

> **TIP**
>
> If you're close to the current bar, the date matters. The new entry thresholds apply to new applicants from February 1, 2027. Check the Earn tab now, and if you qualify, apply before then.

How the Shorts revenue share works

Shorts ads play between videos in the feed, not on one specific video. So YouTube doesn't pay per ad. It pools the money. The Shorts monetization policy describes four steps:

1. **Pool.** Each month, revenue from ads between videos in the Shorts Feed is added together. It pays creators and covers music licensing.
2. **Fill the Creator Pool.** For a Short with no music, all the revenue linked to its views goes into the Creator Pool. With one music track, half goes to the pool and half to music licensing. With two tracks, one third goes to the pool.
3. **Allocate.** The Creator Pool is split by each monetizing creator's share of engaged views in each country. If you have 2% of the engaged views, you get 2% of the pool.
4. **Apply the 45%.** You keep 45% of your allocation, whether or not you used music.

Music only shrinks the pool. It doesn't shrink your slice. You're always credited with 100% of your engaged views.

A worked example (made-up numbers)

This example is ours, to show how the math works. It isn't a real rate.

- In one country this month, the Creator Pool is $50,000 and monetizing creators' Shorts got 250 million engaged views.
- Your Shorts got 500,000 engaged views there, which is 0.2% of the total.
- Your allocation is 0.2% of $50,000 = $100.
- You keep 45%, so you earn **$45** from that country.

Then YouTube repeats this for every country your viewers are in. That's why two creators with the same view count can earn very different amounts.

YouTube Premium works the same way. YouTube pays 45% of the net Premium (and Premium Lite) revenue allocated to creators for Shorts, based on your share of subscriber Shorts views in each country.

What isn't paid

Even inside YPP, some views don't earn:

- Views from before you accepted the Shorts Monetization Module.
- Non-original Shorts, such as unedited clips from movies or TV, reuploads of other creators' videos, or compilations with nothing original added.
- Fake views from bots.
- Shorts that break the advertiser-friendly guidelines.
- Shorts over one minute that contain claimed content. These are blocked, so be careful with other people's audio.

Don't let reused content sink your channel

YouTube's reused content policy is checked across your whole channel, not one video at a time. If YouTube can't tell that you made the content, it can remove monetization from the entire channel. YouTube says this policy applies **even if you have permission** from the original creator. Permission solves copyright, not originality.

What passes: commentary, a critical review that uses clips, your own face or voice adding something, real editing that makes the video your own. What fails: clips stitched together with little or no story, and short videos copied from other social sites.

The safest way to make Shorts in volume is to cut them from your own long videos, podcasts or streams. Short.now does that part: paste your long video, and it finds the moments, reframes them to 9:16 and adds captions. You still choose what to post. The repurposing system lesson shows the weekly workflow, and this guide covers the cutting itself.

How to earn before you qualify

At 0 to 1,000 subscribers you can't earn from ads, but you can still earn:

- **Brand deals.** Small, focused channels get sponsorships. YouTube requires you to tick the paid promotion box on any video with a sponsor. See How to get brand deals.
- **Your own product or service.** A coaching call, a template, a local business. A Short that sends 20 people to your offer can be worth more than months of pool revenue.
- **Fan funding at 500 subscribers.** In expanded YPP countries, memberships, Super Thanks, Super Chat and Jewels open before ad revenue does.
- **Long-form.** Long videos earn Watch Page ad revenue once you're in YPP, and YouTube's blog lists a 55% creator share on Premium revenue for long-form. Shorts that point viewers to a full video help with both.

How to apply, step by step

1. In YouTube Studio, click **Earn** in the left menu. If you're not eligible yet, select **Get notified**.
2. When you're eligible, select **Apply Now** and accept the base terms.

3. Set up an AdSense for YouTube account in Studio, or link an active one. Only create a new one from inside YouTube Studio.
4. When the Get Reviewed step shows **In Progress**, YouTube has your application. Reviews typically take about a month.
5. Once you're accepted, accept the **Shorts Monetization Module** in the Earn tab. Shorts views only start counting toward revenue from the day you accept it.

If you're rejected, YouTube lets you appeal within 21 days, or reapply after 30 days. After a repeat rejection, you wait 90 days. Also note that YouTube may turn off monetization for channels that haven't uploaded or posted for 6 months.

A realistic plan from zero

The 10 million view bar is high. Treat it as a result of good habits, not a goal you can push straight at.

- **Months 1 to 3:** Post 4 to 7 Shorts a week. Check retention in YouTube Analytics to learn what holds attention. Aim for the 500-subscriber level if it's available in your country.
- **Months 3 to 6:** Double down on the 2 or 3 formats that beat your average. Add one long video a week and cut Shorts from it.
- **Ongoing:** Earn from a sponsor or your own offer while views build. Use How to get more views on YouTube Shorts to raise your average.

One more check: everything here can change. Before you make a decision that depends on a threshold, open YouTube's help page and the Earn tab, and trust those over any blog post, including this one.

What's next

YouTube is one income stream. TikTok pays in very different ways, through a rewards program for longer videos, subscriptions, LIVE gifts and Shop commissions. Continue with How to make money on TikTok.

PRACTICE

Do it now: find your monetization gap

1. Open YouTube Studio, click Earn in the left menu, and select Get notified so YouTube emails you when you become eligible.
2. In Analytics, set the date range to the last 90 days and write down your subscribers and your Shorts views. Then check your public long-form watch hours for the last 365 days.
3. Compare your numbers with the table in this lesson. Write down which level is closest and how far away you are, for example '320 subs and 1.1M views short of the 500-sub level'.
4. Turn on 2-Step Verification for your Google account now, so it isn't what holds up your application later.
5. Divide the views you still need by 90 to get a daily target, then plan how many Shorts a week you need in the clip cadence planner.

Open the free clip cadence planner →

Check yourself

1. **You have 1,200 subscribers and 4 million Shorts views in the last 90 days, and almost no long-form watch time. Under today's rules, what can you apply for?**

   A Full YPP with Shorts ad revenue

   B The 500-subscriber YPP level with fan funding and Shopping, if it's available in your country

   C Nothing, Shorts views never count

   D Only YouTube Premium revenue

2. **How does adding one licensed music track to a Short change what you are paid?**

   A You lose half of your own allocation

   B Nothing at all changes anywhere

   C It reduces how much revenue goes into the Creator Pool, but your allocation and your 45% share are not affected

   D The Short is blocked from monetizing

3. **Your channel joined YPP in 2025. On March 1, 2027 you had 6 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days. What happens, according to YouTube?**

   A You stay in YPP and keep earning on long-form, but don't share in Shorts ad and Premium revenue until you are back above 10 million

   B You are removed from YPP

   C Nothing changes for existing members

   D You must re-apply with 20 million views

4. **Which of these Shorts is most at risk of earning nothing even inside YPP?**

   A A talking-head tip you filmed yourself

   B A Short that uses one licensed song

   C A clip cut from your own podcast

   D An unedited clip from a TV show reuploaded as-is

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How many views do you need to monetize YouTube Shorts?

To get into the full YouTube Partner Program through Shorts, you need 1,000 subscribers and 10 million qualified Shorts views in the last 90 days. The expanded level, which gives fan funding and Shopping but not ad revenue, needs 500 subscribers, 3 public uploads in 90 days and 3 million qualified Shorts views in 90 days. YouTube has announced higher entry thresholds for new applicants from February 1, 2027.

How much does YouTube pay for 1 million Shorts views?

There is no fixed rate. Shorts ad revenue is pooled each month per country, split by each creator's share of engaged views, and you keep 45% of your allocation. What a view is worth depends on the country, the season, and how much was earned from ads in the Shorts Feed that month, so check your own estimated revenue in YouTube Analytics.

Do Shorts views count toward the 4,000 watch hours?

No. YouTube says watch hours from Shorts views in the Shorts Feed don't count toward the 4,000 qualified watch hours threshold. Shorts views count toward the separate Shorts view threshold instead.

Can I make money on Shorts without being in YPP?

Not from YouTube ads. YouTube says only monetizing partners who have accepted the Shorts Monetization Module earn ad and subscription revenue from Shorts, even though ads may run on your Shorts before that. You can still earn from brand deals, affiliate links you are allowed to share, and your own products.

Sources

- YouTube Help: YouTube Partner Program overview & eligibility
- YouTube Help: YouTube Shorts monetization policies
- YouTube Help: Overview of the expanded YouTube Partner Program
- YouTube Blog: New opportunities to earn and changes to the YouTube Partner Program (Aug 10, 2026)
- YouTube Help: YouTube channel monetization policies (reused content)

MODULE 7 · MAKING MONEY · 10 MIN

How to Make Money on TikTok: Every Official Program and What It Takes

The real ways TikTok pays creators, with each program's requirements as TikTok states them: Creator Rewards, Subscription, LIVE Gifts, TikTok Shop affiliate and brand deals in TikTok One.

Key takeaways

- TikTok pays through several separate programs, and each has its own rules. TikTok Studio's Monetization tab shows which ones your account can join.
- The Creator Rewards Program pays for original videos over 1 minute. You need to be 18+, have a Personal Account in an eligible country, and have 10,000 followers and 100,000 views in the last 30 days.
- Brand deals start much earlier. TikTok One projects need at least 1,000 followers as a baseline, plus whatever each brand adds.
- LIVE Gifts, Subscription and Shop commissions reward a loyal audience more than raw views. Only users 18+ can receive Gifts with monetary value.
- Ads and sponsored videos don't earn Creator Rewards, and every paid post needs TikTok's commercial content disclosure toggle.

You make money on TikTok through its official programs: the **Creator Rewards Program** for original videos over a minute, **Subscription**, **LIVE Gifts**, **TikTok Shop** affiliate commissions, and paid brand deals in **TikTok One**. The Creator Rewards Program needs you to be 18+ and have 10,000 followers and 100,000 views in the last 30 days. Brand deals in TikTok One start at a 1,000-follower baseline.

The requirements below are quoted from TikTok's Creator Academy and legal pages as they read in November 2026. TikTok changes them often and they vary by country. The final word is always what TikTok Studio shows for your account: go to your profile, tap the menu (≡), open **TikTok Studio**, and look at the Monetization section.

The programs at a glance

Program	Who can join (per TikTok)	How you earn
Creator Rewards Program	18+, Personal Account, eligible country, 10,000 followers, 100,000 views in last 30 days	Rewards per qualified view on original videos over 1 minute
Subscription	Requirements shown in TikTok Studio when you join	Monthly fee from subscribers. You get 70% after app store fees
LIVE Gifts	Must be 18+ to go LIVE, plus follower requirements TikTok doesn't publish as a fixed number	Viewers send Gifts, you collect Diamonds

Program	Who can join (per TikTok)	How you earn
TikTok Shop affiliate	18+, with a community on TikTok. Other requirements vary by market	Commission on products sold through your videos, LIVEs and showcase
TikTok One (brand deals)	18+ (or the age of majority where you live), supported region, at least 1,000 followers for projects	Paid branded or sponsored posts

Creator Rewards Program

This is TikTok's main way of paying for views. It replaced the older Creativity Program Beta, and TikTok moved those members over automatically.

Who can join

According to TikTok's Creator Academy, you need to:

- Be based in, and have an account registered in, the **United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, South Korea, France, Mexico or Brazil**.
- Have an account in good standing under the Community Guidelines and Terms of Service.
- Use a **Personal Account**. Business Accounts and government or political accounts don't qualify.
- Be at least **18**.
- Have at least **10,000 followers** and **100,000 video views in the last 30 days**.

To join, go to TikTok Studio, then Creator Rewards Program, and apply. TikTok says you'll hear back within three days.

Which videos earn

Being in the program isn't enough. Each video also has to qualify:

- Original, high-quality content **over 1 minute** long.
- At least **1,000 views on the For You feed**.
- Not a Duet or Stitch, and not made with Photo Mode.
- Not an ad, paid promotion or sponsored content.
- Following the program terms, Community Guidelines, Creator Code of Conduct and Copyright Policy.

TikTok also lists what makes content ineligible. Two items matter most if you work with clips: **unoriginal** content (copied from others, or with minimal original input or edits) and **low quality** content, such as split screens, meaningless reactions or slide videos.

How views turn into money

TikTok only pays for qualified views. A qualified view has at least 5 seconds of watch time and comes from one of the program's countries. Repeat views from the same account count once. Views where someone tapped "Not interested" don't count, and neither do fraudulent or paid views. From search, a view needs at least 30 seconds of watch time.

Your total is a **Standard Reward** plus an **Additional Reward**. TikTok gives the Additional Reward to videos that are well-crafted, engaging and specialized, and it names watch time as a key factor. It also asks for 1080p or higher. Your dashboard shows your **RPM**, which TikTok defines as average gross revenue per 1,000 qualified views. TikTok says a higher RPM usually means higher quality, longer watch time, or more views from eligible regions.

TikTok doesn't publish a standard RPM, so don't trust anyone who promises one. Payouts can be redeemed on the 15th of each month once you pass the **$50 USD** minimum and have finished onboarding, including tax information.

> **TIP**
>
> Videos just over a minute are not automatically better. The 1-minute rule only gets you in. Watch time drives the Additional Reward, so a tight 70-second video beats a padded 2-minute one. Check where people drop off using How to read your analytics.

Subscription

Subscription lets fans pay you a monthly fee for perks: subscriber-only videos, a subscriber badge in comments, up to 35 custom stickers, and perks you design, like letting subscribers vote on your next topic.

What TikTok's Subscription guide states:

- **Price:** the default is $5.99 a month. You can choose from tiers between $2.99 and $99.99 USD. Fans pay in their local currency.
- **Your share: 70%** of revenue after app store fees.
- **Bonus:** an extra 20%, for up to 90% in total, if in that month you have over 10k followers, over 100k video views in the last calendar month, follow the rules, and post sub-only videos (your first one if you've never posted any, or at least three valid ones if you have). TikTok checks this every month.
- Sub-only posts can't be Duets, Stitches or sticker creations, and can only use copyright-free sounds.

To join, open TikTok Studio, go to the Monetization tab, select Subscription, then Join Subscription. TikTok walks you through your account's eligibility from there.

Subscription works best once you have a core of fans who comment on every video. A creator with 5,000 loyal viewers can earn more here than one with 50,000 casual ones.

LIVE Gifts

When you go LIVE, viewers can buy Coins and send Gifts. You collect **Diamonds** based on how popular your LIVE is, and you can withdraw them under TikTok's rules. TikTok also offers LIVE Match battles with other creators, a weekly Gift Gallery, and video Gifts that fans can send in your comments.

The rules, in TikTok's own words:

- TikTok's newsroom says creators must be **at least 18 to go LIVE**, and their account must meet other criteria, including follower requirements. TikTok doesn't publish one fixed follower number, so check whether the LIVE button appears for you.
- TikTok's Virtual Items Policy says only users **18 or older** (or the age of majority where they live) can buy Coins and Gifts, send Gifts, receive Gifts with monetary value, or earn and withdraw Diamonds.

LIVE takes stamina. A one-hour LIVE that does well is often a regular schedule (same time, same format) with a reason to stay, like a Q&A, a challenge or a tutorial done live.

TikTok Shop affiliate

With TikTok Shop, you earn a commission when people buy products through your videos, your LIVEs or the product showcase on your profile. You don't hold any stock. You pick products that fit your content and add a product link.

TikTok's overview says that if you're **over 18** and have a community on TikTok, you can sell products in-app. Follower minimums and which markets have Shop differ by country and change often, so check your Shop or affiliate option in TikTok Studio, not a number from a blog.

Shop rewards trust. A creator who has reviewed kitchen gadgets honestly for a year can sell a product with one video. Treat every Shop video as an ad: be honest about what you didn't like, and never review a product you haven't used.

Brand deals and TikTok One

For most small creators, the first real TikTok money is a brand deal. TikTok One (it took over TikTok Creator Marketplace and Creative Challenge) is the in-app place where brands find you, send you projects and pay you.

From TikTok's TikTok One guide:

- Be **18 or older** (or the age of majority where you live), follow the Community Guidelines and Branded Content Policy, and be in a supported region.
- Open it from your profile: TikTok Studio, then **Creator Marketplace**, which takes you to TikTok One.
- Projects need **at least 1,000 followers** as a baseline, and each brand can add its own requirements.
- Fill in your profile: email, languages and an **expected rate**. Advertisers and agencies can see this.
- **Branded posts** go on the brand's account (they can boost them with Spark Ads). **Sponsored posts** go on your own account with a "Sponsored" tag.

You can also land deals outside TikTok One. Whenever you post paid content, TikTok's Branded Content Policy requires you to turn on the **commercial content disclosure toggle**. The full process, from media kit and pitch to rates, is in How to get brand deals.

Which program to chase first

Where you are	Focus on
0 to 1,000 followers	Consistency and one clear niche. Look at How to grow on TikTok. Sell your own service or product if you have one.
1,000 to 10,000	Set up TikTok One and pitch brands. Try LIVE if you have access. Test Shop if it fits your niche.
10,000+ with 100k monthly views	Apply to Creator Rewards and start making more original videos over a minute. Add Subscription once fans ask for more.

A note on clips

If you already film long content (a podcast, a stream, tutorials), it can feed TikTok. Clips from your own long videos are original content, and clips that run a little over a minute can qualify for Creator Rewards. Short.now cuts long videos into vertical clips with captions and can post them to TikTok on a schedule, which saves time, but you're still the one who decides which clips are good enough. Reuploading someone else's video, or a split screen with a reaction on top, is what TikTok calls unoriginal or low quality, and it won't earn.

What's next

Brand deals usually pay before any creator fund does, and they're open to much smaller accounts. Next, learn how to build a media kit, pitch brands and disclose correctly in How to get brand deals.

PRACTICE

Do it now: map your TikTok income options

1. In the TikTok app, go to your profile, tap the menu (≡), then TikTok Studio, then the Monetization section. Screenshot which programs show as available and which show requirements.
2. Check your account type in Settings. If it's a Business Account and you want Creator Rewards, note that TikTok only accepts Personal Accounts.
3. Write down your followers and your video views for the last 30 days from TikTok Studio analytics. Compare them with the table in this lesson.
4. Pick one program you can join in the next 90 days and one thing to do this week toward it, for example 'post three 70-second explainers' or 'set an expected rate in TikTok One'.
5. If you film long videos, cut 3 clips that run just over a minute and post them as original TikToks.

Turn a long video into clips for free →

Check yourself

1. **You have 25,000 followers, 300,000 views in the last 30 days, and you post 40-second videos. Why aren't your videos earning Creator Rewards?**

   A You need 100,000 followers

   B Videos must be original and over 1 minute long to be eligible

   C Only Business Accounts are paid

   D Creator Rewards only pays for LIVE

2. **Which views count as qualified views in the Creator Rewards Program?**

   A Every play, including repeat plays from the same person

   B Paid views from Promote

   C Views with at least five seconds of watch time, counted once per account, from eligible countries

   D Only views from your followers

3. **A brand pays you to post a video from your own account. What does TikTok require when you post it?**

   A Turn on the commercial content disclosure toggle

   B Nothing if you mention the brand by name

   C Only add #ad to your bio

   D Post it as a Duet

4. **Which TikTok income source is open to the smallest accounts?**

   A Creator Rewards Program

   B Subscription's 20% bonus

   C None, every program needs 10,000 followers

   D TikTok One projects, which start at a 1,000-follower baseline

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How many followers do you need to make money on TikTok?

It depends on the program. The Creator Rewards Program needs 10,000 followers and 100,000 video views in the last 30 days. TikTok One brand projects start at a baseline of 1,000 followers. Other programs show their requirements in TikTok Studio, and they vary by country.

How much does TikTok pay per 1,000 views?

TikTok doesn't publish a fixed rate. In the Creator Rewards Program your dashboard shows your RPM, the average gross revenue per 1,000 qualified views, which TikTok says is affected by quality, watch time and how much of your audience is in eligible regions. Check your own dashboard rather than numbers you see online.

When does TikTok pay Creator Rewards?

TikTok says you can redeem rewards on the 15th of each month if they meet the $50 USD minimum payment threshold, and after you finish onboarding, including tax information.

Can I join the Creator Rewards Program outside the US?

TikTok lists the program as open to creators based in, and with accounts registered in, the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, South Korea, France, Mexico and Brazil. Outside those countries, brand deals, LIVE and Shop may still be available to you, so check TikTok Studio.

Sources

- TikTok Creator Academy: Creator Rewards Program
- TikTok Creator Academy: Getting started with Subscription
- TikTok Creator Academy: How to set up TikTok One
- TikTok Creator Academy: Monetization offerings overview
- TikTok: Virtual Items Policy
- TikTok: Branded Content Policy

MODULE 7 · MAKING MONEY · 11 MIN

How to Get Brand Deals as a Small Creator: Media Kit, Pitch, Rates and Disclosure

A step-by-step way for small short-form creators to land paid sponsorships: what brands check, a one-page media kit, a pitch email you can copy, how to price, and the FTC disclosure rules.

Key takeaways

- Brands pay for a specific audience and believable content, not only follower count. A clear niche with steady views beats a big but random audience.
- A one-page media kit with real analytics screenshots, and a short pitch with one concrete video idea, gets more replies than a long deck.
- Price each deal by its parts: the video, the usage rights, paid boosting (like Spark Ads), exclusivity and revisions. Ask for the brand's budget before you name a number.
- Under FTC guidance, any paid or free-product deal needs a clear disclosure inside the video itself, both spoken and on screen, not only in the description or a hashtag pile.
- Turn on the platform's paid promotion setting too: YouTube's paid promotion box and TikTok's commercial content disclosure toggle. Platform labels don't replace your own disclosure.

To get brand deals as a small creator: pick a clear niche, make a one-page media kit with real numbers, and pitch brands you already use with one concrete video idea. Price by what they get (the video, usage rights, exclusivity), get it in writing, and disclose every deal clearly inside the video. You don’t need a big following. You need an audience a brand wants to reach and proof that your videos get watched.

This lesson goes through each step and finishes with the disclosure rules, which are the part most new creators get wrong.

What brands look for

When a brand checks your profile, it’s asking three questions:

1. **Is this my customer?** A 6,000-follower channel about budget meal prep is worth more to a grocery app than a 60,000-follower channel of random memes.
2. **Do the videos get watched?** Views per video and watch time matter more than total followers. A small account with steady views looks safer than a big one with one lucky viral hit.
3. **Will this creator make an ad people don’t skip?** Brands look at whether your normal videos are clear, well-lit and confident, and how you would mention a product without breaking the mood.

TikTok’s Creator Academy says the same in its own brand-deal advice: follower count matters, but niche expertise and consistent quality often matter more. If you haven’t settled on a niche yet, do How to choose a niche first. Pitching is much easier when your channel is about one thing.

Build a one-page media kit

A media kit is your channel's résumé. One page is enough. Brands skim it in seconds.

What goes on it

- **Name, handle and one line about the channel.** For example: "Quick, cheap dinners for students, 3 Shorts a week."
- **Platforms with followers and average views per video** over the last 30 days. Use average views, not your best video.
- **Audience:** top countries, age range and gender split, copied from your analytics.
- **Engagement:** average watch time or retention, and comments or shares per video if they're strong.
- **Three example videos** with links, ideally including one where you showed a product naturally.
- **What you offer:** for example, "a dedicated 30 to 45 second short", "a 10 to 15 second mention in a regular video", "a LIVE segment".
- **Past brands**, if any. If none, leave this out. Don't invent any.
- **Contact email.**

Put screenshots of your analytics in an appendix or second page. Real screenshots build more trust than numbers you typed. Update the kit every month. Learn what each metric means in How to read your analytics.

> **TIP**
>
> No sponsors yet? Make one "spec" video: a product you actually use, filmed the way you'd film a paid post, with no payment and with an honest note that it's not sponsored. It shows brands exactly what they would get.

Find brands worth pitching

Start close to home. The best first sponsors are:

- **Products you already use and talk about.** Your recommendation is believable, and you already know the selling points.
- **Brands already sponsoring creators in your niche.** They have a budget for creators. Look at the "paid promotion" and "Sponsored" labels on videos in your niche.
- **Small and mid-sized brands.** A local coffee roaster or a new app often decides faster than a global brand with an agency.
- **Platform marketplaces.** On TikTok, set up TikTok One from TikTok Studio, then Creator Marketplace. Fill in your email, languages, expected rate and content categories so brands' matching tools can find you, and browse open projects. Projects start at a baseline of 1,000 followers.

Aim for a list of 20 to 30 brands. Expect most pitches to get no reply. That's normal, not a sign you're doing it wrong.

Write the pitch

Keep it under 150 words. Make it about their customer, not your dream. Here's a template:

> **Subject:** Video idea for [Brand]: [one-line hook]
>
> Hi [Name],
>
> I make short videos about [niche] for [who] on [platforms]. My last 30 days: [X] average views per video, mostly [country, age range].
>
> I've used [product] for [time], and I have an idea: [one or two sentences describing the video, e.g. "a 40-second 'dinner for 2 euros' where your spice mix saves a boring dish"].
>
> Here are two videos that show my style: [link], [link]. My media kit is attached.
>
> Do you have budget for creator content this quarter? Happy to send options.
>
> [Your name]

Follow up once after 5 to 7 working days, with one short line and the idea repeated. Then move on.

Set your rate

There's no official rate card for creators. Public "rate per follower" tables vary a lot, and many come from agencies selling something. Build your price from what the brand actually gets:

Part of the deal	What it means	How it affects price
The video	One short made and posted by you	Your base price: your time plus what your typical views are worth to them
Usage rights	The brand reposts your video on its own channels	Add for each platform and month
Paid usage	They run your video as an ad (for example TikTok Spark Ads or YouTube ads)	Usually the biggest add-on. Always set an end date
Exclusivity	You can't work with competitors for a period	Charge for the deals you're giving up
Revisions and scripts	Rounds of changes, script approval	Agree on a number, such as 1 round included
Extra platforms	Same video also on Reels or Shorts	Add per platform

How to handle the money talk: ask for their budget first ("What budget did you have in mind for this?"). If they ask you to go first, quote a package with a clear base and add-ons. Your first deals are partly about getting proof that you deliver, so it's fine to start modest. Raise your price after every deal that performs well, and keep notes on the results.

Free product only? That's fine when you would buy the product anyway. But a free product is not payment for your work, and the disclosure rules below still apply.

Get it in writing

Even for a small deal, get an email or contract that covers:

- **Deliverables:** how many videos, which platforms, rough length, deadlines.
- **Approval:** whether they review before posting, and how many revisions.
- **Usage:** where and for how long they can use the video, and whether paid ads are included.
- **Exclusivity:** which competitors and for how long, if any.
- **Payment:** amount, currency, when (for example, 50% upfront, 50% on posting, within 30 days), and what happens if they cancel.
- **Disclosure:** that you will label it as an ad. A good brand will want this too.

Disclose it the way the FTC says

If you're paid, or get a free or discounted product, or have any business or family link to a brand, US law treats it as a **material connection**, and you have to disclose it. The FTC's Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers and its Endorsement Guides FAQ (the guides were revised in 2023) say:

- **Put it in the video.** For video, the disclosure should be in the video itself, not only in the description.
- **Match the format.** If you talk about the product on camera and show it, disclose it both out loud and on screen. Saying it and showing it at the same time is clearest.
- **Make it hard to miss.** Not in your bio, not at the very end, not behind a "more" tap, and not buried in a pile of hashtags.
- **Use plain words.** "Ad", "Sponsored", "Advertisement", or "Thanks to XYZ for the free product" all work. The FTC calls "sp", "spon", "collab" and a standalone "thanks" or "ambassador" unclear.
- **Repeat it on LIVE.** In a livestream, disclose again from time to time, because people join late.
- **Affiliate links need it too.** Say clearly, near the link, that you earn a commission on purchases.
- **Stay honest.** You can't talk about a product you haven't tried. If you thought a product was bad, you can't be paid to call it great. You also can't make claims, such as health claims, that the brand can't back up.
- **Outside the US?** The FTC says US law applies to posts from abroad when it's reasonably foreseeable they'll reach US consumers. Your own country's rules may apply too.

Turn on the platform labels too

- **YouTube:** in the video details, tick **paid promotion**. YouTube then shows a disclosure label at the start of the video. YouTube's help page says you have to do this for sponsorships, endorsements and other commercial relationships.
- **TikTok:** TikTok's Branded Content Policy says you must turn on the **commercial content disclosure toggle** in the content disclosure settings when you post. TikTok then labels the video.
- **Instagram:** use Instagram's branded content tools for paid posts. Check help.instagram.com for the current setup.

The FTC is clear that platform tools alone may not be enough. Use the label and also say and show “ad” in the video. A simple pattern for a short: open with the words “Ad:” on screen while you say “This is sponsored by XYZ”, then go on with your normal hook. If you’re not sure what fits in 45 seconds, see How to write a short video script.

What’s next

Brand deals pay you to make content. There’s another way to earn with short-form video: cutting other creators’ long videos into clips, with their permission, for pay. Learn how it works and what it really pays in What is clip farming and how to become a clipper.

PRACTICE

Do it now: make your media kit and send one pitch

1. Screenshot your last 28 to 30 days of analytics on each platform: views, average watch time, audience countries, age and gender.
2. Make a one-page media kit (a Google Doc or Canva page is fine) with the sections from this lesson. Put three links to your best videos at the top.
3. List 10 brands whose products you already use and that fit your niche. For each, find a marketing or partnerships email on their site or LinkedIn.
4. Write one video idea per brand that would only work on your channel. Then send the pitch template from this lesson to the top three.
5. Time a 10 to 15 second sponsor mention in the script timer so you know what you can offer inside a 45-second short.

Open the free script timer →

Check yourself

1. **A brand sends you a free product with no payment and no request to post. You love it and post about it. Does the FTC expect a disclosure?**

   A No, you weren't paid

   B Yes, free or discounted products are a material connection

   C Only if you have over 10,000 followers

   D Only if the brand asked for a post

2. **Where should the disclosure go in a sponsored short?**

   A In the description only

   B In your profile bio

   C In the video itself, ideally both said out loud and shown on screen

   D In a comment after the video is posted

3. **A brand offers $300 for a TikTok video and also wants to run it as a paid ad for 6 months. What's the best response?**

   A Accept, ads are free promotion for you

   B Price the ad usage separately from the video and agree the time limit in writing

   C Refuse all paid usage

   D Ask them to just repost it without telling TikTok

4. **Which line is the clearest disclosure on a sponsored video?**

A #sp #collab #fitness #gym
B Thanks to my friends at XYZ
C #ambassador
D 'Ad: XYZ paid me to try this' said and shown at the start

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

How many followers do you need to get brand deals?

There's no universal number. Brands care about who your audience is and whether your videos get steady views. Inside TikTok's own marketplace, TikTok One projects need at least 1,000 followers as a baseline, and each brand can add more. Outside platform marketplaces, small niche creators land deals by pitching directly.

How much should a small creator charge for a sponsored post?

There is no official rate card. Work out a price from your typical views, the time the video takes, and what the brand gets on top, such as paid ad usage, exclusivity or extra platforms. Ask for the brand's budget first, then quote a package. Raise your price as your results improve.

Do I need to disclose sponsored content if I'm not in the US?

The FTC says US law applies to posts made from abroad if it's reasonably foreseeable that they will affect US consumers, and your own country's laws may also apply. Platform rules apply everywhere too: YouTube requires you to tick the paid promotion box and TikTok requires its commercial content disclosure toggle.

Is using the platform's 'paid partnership' label enough?

The FTC says not to assume a platform's built-in disclosure tool is good enough on its own. Use the platform label and also say and show a clear disclosure in the video.

Sources

- FTC: Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers
- FTC: FTC's Endorsement Guides: What People Are Asking
- YouTube Help: Add branded content restrictions & disclosure labels
- TikTok: Branded Content Policy
- TikTok Creator Academy: How to set up TikTok One

MODULE 7 · MAKING MONEY · 10 MIN

What Is Clip Farming? And How to Become a Clipper (Honestly)

Clip farming means two things: streamers staging moments to get clipped, and the paid job of clipping other creators' videos. How both work, what clippers really earn, and why permission comes first.

Key takeaways

- 'Clip farming' has two meanings: a streamer doing outrageous things on purpose so they get clipped, and the job of cutting other creators' videos into shorts for pay.
- Paid clipping usually works per 1,000 views. A creator or brand sets the rate and budget, you post clips on your own accounts, and you're paid only for clips they approve.
- Public pay examples are small per view: Whop's own docs use $3 per 1,000 views as an example, and Tubefilter reported streamers paying $40 to $50 per 100,000 views. Income depends on volume and on campaigns not running out of budget.
- Only clip with the creator's permission, through a campaign or in writing. Permission covers copyright, but YouTube's reused content policy still applies, so platform ad money is not the business model.
- The skills that make a good clipper (finding moments, strong first seconds, clean captions) are the same ones that grow your own channel.

“Clip farming” means two different things. In streaming slang, it’s when a streamer does something outrageous on purpose so people clip it and share it. It’s also used for the job of **clipping**: cutting other creators’ long videos into shorts and getting paid, usually per 1,000 views, by the creator or a brand. You can do the second one from zero followers. The rule that matters is simple: **only clip with the creator’s permission.**

This lesson covers both meanings, how paid clipping campaigns work, what the public pay examples actually show, and how to start without getting scammed or banned.

Two meanings of clip farming

	Clip farming (streamer slang)	Clipping (the job)
Who does it	The streamer	A clipper, often working for the streamer or podcaster
What it is	Staging moments that are made to be clipped	Finding the best real moments and cutting them into shorts
Tone	Usually an insult	A normal paid job
Goal	Go viral off the stunt	Views for the creator, pay for the clipper

Clip farming as a streamer tactic

The Cambridge Dictionary blog added “clip farming” as a new word in February 2026. It defines it as doing something outrageous or startling in a video so that short pieces get cut out and spread online. Its example sentence compares it to clickbait done live.

Viewers call it out because it feels fake: a rage moment that’s obviously planned, a “shocking” reveal with nothing behind it, a public prank built for the clip. It can work for a while, but it has costs:

- **Trust drops.** Once viewers think you’re faking, your real moments get less credit.
- **Rules still apply.** Harassing strangers or staging dangerous stunts can break platform guidelines however many views it gets.
- **It doesn’t build a reason to stay.** A clip of a stunt brings views, not fans who come back.

If you stream, the better version is to plan *structure*, not fake drama: segments, challenges, guests, strong opinions you actually hold. Those make honest clip-worthy moments. How to find clip-worthy moments explains what makes a moment work on its own.

Clipping as a job: how it works

Creators pay clippers because many accounts posting good clips can spread a creator’s name much faster than one channel can. The common setup is a **campaign**:

1. A creator or brand publishes a campaign with rules: which videos you can clip, which platforms, what to include (such as a credit or a link), and a **rate per 1,000 views**.
2. You cut clips and post them on **your own** accounts.
3. You submit the links. The campaign owner reviews and approves or rejects each one.
4. You’re paid for the views on approved clips, until the campaign’s budget runs out.

Whop’s Content Rewards documentation, written for the businesses running campaigns, shows the moving parts:

- The campaign owner **sets the rate** per 1,000 views, and a total budget.
- There can be a **minimum payout**: in Whop’s example, a $3 rate with a $6 minimum means a clip needs about 2,000 views before it can be reviewed.
- There can be a **maximum payout** per video: in Whop’s example, a $3,000 cap at $3 per 1,000 views stops at 1 million views.
- An optional **flat fee** can be added on top for each approved clip.
- Owners choose which platforms count. Whop names TikTok, YouTube Shorts, X and Instagram Reels for clipping.
- **Only approved posts are paid.** Whop then pays the clipper automatically based on views.

Other creators skip platforms and hire clippers directly, for a flat monthly fee, a per-clip fee or a per-view rate.

What clippers really earn

Be careful with income screenshots. They show the best months of the best clippers. Here are the public examples we could find with a source. They're **examples, not typical pay**:

Source	What it shows	Per 1,000 views
Whop Content Rewards docs	Example campaign rate of $3 per 1,000 views	$3.00
Tubefilter, April 2026	Kick streamer N3on paying $40 per 100,000 views, sometimes $50	$0.40 to $0.50
Tubefilter, April 2026	MrBeast paying personal clippers $50 per 100,000 views	$0.50

Tubefilter also reported N3on paying more than $1.4 million to 303 clippers in one five-week period, and said his top clippers can earn over $100,000 a month. That works out to roughly $4,600 per clipper on average over those five weeks, but an average hides a lot: a few top accounts likely took a large share, and many earned much less.

Do the math before you start

At $1 per 1,000 views, 1 million approved views pays $1,000. At $0.50, it pays $500. Most clips don't get anywhere near 1 million views. Income depends on:

- **Volume:** experienced clippers post many clips a day across several accounts.
- **Approval:** a rejected clip pays nothing, however many views it got.
- **Budget:** when a campaign's money is spent, more views earn nothing.
- **Caps:** a cap per clip limits what one viral clip can pay.

Treat clipping as a way to earn while you build a valuable skill, not as a guaranteed income.

Permission comes first

Posting someone else's video without permission can break copyright law and every major platform's rules. It can get your clips taken down and your accounts removed. Only clip when:

- The creator runs an official campaign that covers the videos you're clipping, or
- You have written permission (an email or a contract) that says what you can post and where.

Then follow their rules on credit, links and what's off-limits.

Permission doesn't make it "original" to the platforms

This surprises many new clippers. YouTube's monetization policy says its reused content rule applies **even if you have permission** from the original creator, because it's about originality, not copyright. Clips "edited together with little or no narrative" are among the examples that can't monetize. TikTok's Creator Rewards rules likewise exclude unoriginal content copied from others with minimal edits.

So a clip account usually won't earn platform ad money on its clips. The pay comes from the creator or brand who wants the reach. That's why the campaign model exists.

Disclose paid promotion

If a campaign asks you to promote a product, a brand, a paid course or a discount code, you're making an ad. The FTC's influencer guidance says financial relationships must be disclosed clearly, in the video itself. Use the platform's paid promotion setting too. If the campaign tells you to hide that it's paid, don't take it.

How to start, step by step

1. **Pick a lane.** Choose one niche you understand: a podcast genre, a game, a type of streamer. You'll spot good moments faster.
2. **Make dedicated accounts** for your clips, clearly labelled as a clips page, so viewers aren't misled.
3. **Find campaigns.** Look at Whop's Content Rewards listings, creators who post clipping programs on their own sites or Discords, and creators you could pitch directly.
4. **Learn the moment.** A good clip has a clear start, one idea, and a payoff in under 60 seconds. The moment-finding lesson goes deeper, and How to structure a short covers the first seconds.
5. **Work fast but carefully.** Reframe to 9:16 with the speaker in frame, add accurate captions, write a hook line. The basics of cutting a clip are in How to clip a YouTube video. An AI clipper like Short.now can find candidate moments, track the speaker and caption the clip in minutes, which matters when you're paid by volume. You still check every clip before posting it.
6. **Track everything.** Keep a sheet of clip link, campaign, post date, views and approval status. Submit on time.

Pitching a creator directly

Small and mid-sized podcasters and streamers often have no clipper yet. Send a short message with a link to your 3-clip sample (from this lesson's exercise), one line on why each clip works, and a simple offer, such as a fixed number of clips a week for a flat fee or a per-view rate. Ask for written terms before you post anything.

Red flags to avoid

- **You pay to join.** Real campaigns pay you. An upfront "team fee" or "course you must buy" is a warning sign.
- **Guaranteed income** claims with no written rate.
- **No permission** from the actual creator: someone "running a campaign" for content they don't own.
- **Hidden ads:** being asked to promote something without disclosing it.
- **View-buying:** any advice to boost clips with fake views. Platforms filter them and campaigns reject them.

TIP

The best clippers often end up clipping for themselves. If you get good at finding moments, record your own long-form show and use the same skills on it. You keep all of the upside, and your clips are 100% original.

What's next

That's the end of the money module. If you want to use your clipping skills on your own channel, go back to the repurposing module and start with How to find clip-worthy moments in a long video, then set up a weekly repurposing system.

PRACTICE

Do it now: make a 3-clip sample pack

1. Pick one creator in a niche you know well who either runs a clipping campaign or whose videos you could pitch to clip. Check their channel or Whop page for clipping terms.
2. If you don't have permission yet, practice on your own long video, or on a video whose campaign terms allow it. Don't post someone else's content without permission.
3. Watch one long video at 1.5x and write down timestamps for 5 moments that make sense without context: a strong opinion, a story with a payoff, a surprising fact.
4. Cut the best 3 into 20 to 45 second vertical clips with captions, and rewrite the first line of each as a hook.
5. Put the 3 clips in a shared folder with a one-line note on why each one works. That's your sample to send with a pitch.

Try the free clipping tool →

Check yourself

1. **A streamer pretends to fall off a chair three times in one stream, hoping someone clips it. What is this called?**

   A Clip farming, the streamer slang meaning
   B A clipping campaign
   C Content ID
   D Repurposing

2. **On a campaign paying $2 per 1,000 approved views, your clip gets 150,000 views and is approved. If there's no cap and no budget issue, what do you earn?**

   A $2
   B $30
   C $300
   D $150

3. **You have written permission to clip a podcaster's videos. Can your clip channel join YPP and earn ad revenue on those clips?**

   A Yes, permission makes them original

   B Not safely: YouTube says its reused content policy applies even with the creator's permission, unless you add real original value

   C Yes, if you post at least 10 a day

   D Only if you use music

4. **Which is a red flag in a clipping offer?**

   A The rate per 1,000 views is written in the campaign

   B The creator reviews clips before paying

   C You have to pay an upfront fee to join the 'clipping team'

   D There's a cap per clip

Check your answers and get your certificate online →

Questions people ask

What does clip farming mean?

It has two meanings. In streaming slang it means staging outrageous or shocking moments on purpose so viewers clip and share them, and it's usually an insult. It's also used for the job of clipping other creators' long videos into short clips and posting them for pay.

How much do clippers get paid?

Most clipping campaigns pay per 1,000 views on approved clips, and the creator or brand sets the rate. As public examples, Whop's documentation uses $3 per 1,000 views, and Tubefilter reported streamers paying $40 to $50 per 100,000 views. Some clippers earn a lot, but many earn little, because pay depends on views, approval and campaign budgets.

Is clipping someone's content legal?

Posting someone else's video without permission can break copyright law and platform rules, and it can get your account removed. Clip only through a creator's official campaign or with written permission, and follow their rules on credit, watermarks and what you can post.

Do you need followers to become a clipper?

Usually you post clips on accounts you create for the job, so you can start from zero. What matters is whether your clips get views. Each campaign sets its own rules, so read them before you start.

Sources

- Cambridge Dictionary blog: New words, 2 February 2026 (clip farming)
- Whop Docs: Content Rewards
- Tubefilter: N3on is spending millions on stream clippers (Apr 29, 2026)
- YouTube Help: YouTube channel monetization policies (reused content)
- TikTok Creator Academy: Creator Rewards Program (unoriginal content rules)
- FTC: Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers

PUT THIS MODULE TO WORK

Practice on your own videos

Short.now turns one long video into ready-to-post Shorts, TikToks and Reels with captions. Free plan, no watermark, no card.

Try Short.now free →

You finished the course. Now make your first Shorts.

Short.now turns one long video into ready-to-post Shorts, TikToks and Reels with captions. Start on the free plan, no card needed.

Try Short.now free →

Pass the quizzes at short.now/academy to get your free certificate.

© 2026 Short.now · short.now