The big picture

When your title, thumbnail and description form a cohesive package, they act as a billboard to help viewers find your videos.

You'll learn

- What makes a compelling thumbnail?
- How do you craft a strong title?
- What's the benefit to having a strong title, thumbnail and description combination?
- How do you know if your title, thumbnail and description are working?
Best practices

Thumbnails, titles and descriptions act like billboards to attract new fans to your channel. Design them to help audiences discover your videos and channel on YouTube.

☑ Irresistibly clickable custom thumbnails

Thumbnails are usually the first thing viewers see when they find one of your videos. Be sure you’ve got a strong, vibrant thumbnail that looks great large and small and conveys the most important information about your video. It’s a good idea to think about your thumbnail even before you shoot so that you’ve got several options when you upload. Remember, thumbnails show up in different sizes across YouTube and external sites that embed YouTube videos so you’ll want to be sure your thumbnail looks good on mobile and desktop.

YouTube will automatically offer you thumbnail image options when you upload a video. But if your account is verified and in good standing, you can also create your own custom thumbnail to better showcase what your video is about and compel your audience to click on it.

Guidelines

- Design thumbnails that accurately portray the content in the video. Creating thumbnails that attract clicks but don’t match your content, could result in lower audience retention--and it violates our policies.

- Create a unique thumbnail for each of your videos so that viewers can tell the difference between them.

- High resolution and high contrast close-ups often outperform the rest.

- Specs: 1280x720 (16:9 ratio) as a .JPG, .GIF, .BMP, or .PNG under 2MB. Check to make sure it looks good on mobile and desktop.

- Be sure the thumbnail adheres to YouTube’s community guidelines.

See it in action

Thumbnails should illustrate the context of your video. Viewers clicking on this thumbnail might expect a video about cities or flight, and could be disappointed when it starts talking about shadow weight--causing them to stop watching.

This thumbnail is better, but it’s still pretty hard to decipher; your audience would probably have a hard time determining what your video is all about with this thumbnail too.

This thumbnail is slightly more interesting, but looks like it could have been screenshot chosen as an afterthought, not a deliberate image designed to capture audience attention and convey information.

Will it look great at all sizes?
While this thumbnail provides some potentially useful visual info, it isn’t ideally suited to the video’s core subject (how much shadows weigh). Also, the size of the book’s title is small and may not be legible if audiences encounter it on mobile.

Is it high quality?
Even well framed images like this one can become easy for potential audiences to ignore if they aren’t high quality; notice how blurry this one looks. It’s a good idea to keep framing, contrast and resolution in mind when creating thumbnails.

This thumbnail does it all.
This thumbnail is high quality, visually compelling, well-framed, works well at smaller sizes and gives audiences a good idea of what the video is about. Aim for thumbnails that have each of these elements!

Enticing video titles
Titles should work with your thumbnails to tell a cohesive and captivating story about your videos. A catchy, newspaper-like headline can help you hook viewers and get that click. If your video's title and thumbnail showed up in a search, would you click on it?

Guidelines
- Create catchy titles that represent your content accurately and reinforce your thumbnails.
- Misleading titles, like thumbnails, can cause audience drop-offs that negatively impact viewership and watch-time and may violate YouTube’s policies.
- Consider putting descriptive and relevant keywords earlier in the title to help viewers see what
your video is about and for more accurate placement in YouTube search results. Save supplementary information, like branding and episode numbers, closer to the end. You want your title to offer context to your video and attract viewers, not be a stream of keywords.

- Keep titles short so they don’t get cut-off. Remember, when viewers watch from mobile devices—fewer characters appear in the title field.

See it in action

Searchable and detailed
Meghan Trainor - All About That Base *PARODY*! Key of Awesome #92

Intriguing and descriptive
100 Years of Beauty: Aging I Cut Has A Field Day

Tell a story with your title and thumbnail

How do the titles change your impression of a video with this yellow thumbnail? Which one interests you the most?

- “My room color” (perhaps a DIY or how-to video)
- “This is NOT yellow” (perhaps a science video)
- “Mustard factory explosion” (perhaps a comedy video)
See it in action

A steep decline can indicate...
A steep decline can indicate that the story of the thumbnail and title is inconsistent with the beginning of the video. Or, that there is a slow-moving intro (i.e., not getting to the point of the video quickly, a long graphical sequence or misleading/spammy content).

A gradual decline can indicate...
A gradual decline can indicate that your audience thinks your title, thumbnail, and description are telling a cohesive story and accurately representing your video.

Descriptions offer context

Descriptions are meant to give extra context to your videos. Consider what information is most important and highlight it at the beginning of the description so that is appears above the “show more” fold. This section appears in Search Results, on your channel home page, in My subscriptions and on many social sites. Prioritize what you want potential viewers to see there, like details about your video or links, because anything below the fold requires viewers to click to see more.

When a user clicks “show more”, the box expands and displays more lines of text. This is an appropriate place to include additional information to encourage viewers to subscribe, watch related videos, check out your merchandise or details like credits, lyrics, recipes, time codes, etc.

Guidelines

- Write one or two sentences describing your video to help give viewers more context or provide supplementary information. Tags or irrelevant content should be avoided here because it may violate our policies.

- Be sure your description is consistent with the story of your thumbnail and title; all three--thumbnails, titles and descriptions--are seen together in many placements.
Activities

Put your new knowledge to work in the activity below!

View questions

Pick your latest video and find a still image that best illustrates the story. Try uploading the image as a custom thumbnail, and review your views and audience retention reports in YouTube Analytics to see if people are clicking and watching your video. Share the link to this video below.

Find a video you think has a great title. Share the title below and indicate why it intrigued you. Think about what strategies you can use when you’re deciding on your next video title.

Check your knowledge

1) Which of the following elements contribute to a compelling thumbnail?

- Close-ups, in-focus, high resolution, accurately represents content, looks good large or small.
- Multiple images, low resolution, minimal contrast, any content.
- Close-ups, low resolution, looks good large, in-focus.
- High resolution, accurately represents content, multiple images.

2) Which of the following should you include at the beginning of your title?

- Keywords
- Branding
- Episode numbers
- Date recorded
3) Why should titles, thumbnails and descriptions be considered together?

- Because they each tell a different part of the story.
- They should not, because each has a unique purpose.
- The title is more important than the description and the thumbnail so it should be considered first.
- Thumbnails, titles and descriptions tell a cohesive story encouraging viewers to click and watch.

Follow up

How effective are the thumbnails and titles for your individual videos?

Use the Audience Retention report in YouTube Analytics and focus on the beginning of the absolute audience retention graph. A steep decline can indicate:
- That the story of the thumbnail and title is inconsistent with the beginning of the video.
- A slow-moving intro (i.e., not getting to the point of the video quickly, a long graphical sequence or misleading/spammy content).

Try it now →