

The #1 Rule: Viewer satisfaction comes first. Every optimization should enhance the viewing experience, not interrupt it. YouTube's algorithm rewards videos that keep viewers engaged and coming back. Use this checklist to ensure each video is set up for maximum discoverability.

1 Before You Film

- Identify your target keyword phrase** — What will people actually search?
- Research search intent** — Are they looking for a tutorial, review, or comparison?
- Plan to say your keyword phrase early** — Within the first 15-30 seconds of speaking
- Script your opening hook** — Communicate value immediately, no fluff

Pro Tip: A bad intro causes viewers to bounce. Get to the value fast and save introductions for after you've hooked them.

3 Description

- Front-load with value** — First 2-3 lines appear in search results
- Include primary + secondary keywords** — Naturally woven into sentences
- Communicate what viewers will learn/gain** — Match their search intent
- Add relevant links** — Resources, related videos, your website

5 Captions & Transcript CRITICAL

- Upload custom captions** — YouTube's auto-captions have errors
- Use accurate transcription tools** — Whisper, Descript, or similar
- Fix technical terms & names** — Especially industry-specific words

Pro Tip: Custom subtitles are non-negotiable for consistent ranking. The transcript is how YouTube understands your content.

✓ Final Quality Check

- Title, thumbnail, and content align** — No clickbait mismatch
- All links work correctly** — Test before publishing

2 Title Optimization HIGH IMPACT

- Include your primary keyword** — Naturally, near the beginning
- Make it click-worthy** — Ranking without clicks = losing rankings
- Match the search intent** — "How to" for tutorials, clear value for others
- Consider adding the year** — Signals fresh, relevant content

Pro Tip: Don't sacrifice clickability for keywords. A perfectly optimized title no one clicks on won't rank.

4 Thumbnail HIGH IMPACT

- Add relevant text overlay** — Reinforces what the video is about
- Show recognizable visuals** — Logos, faces, or outcomes
- Ensure mobile readability** — Test at small sizes
- Name file descriptively** — Use keywords in the filename before upload

6 Chapters & Timestamps

- Add manual chapters** — They take precedence over auto-generated
- Name chapters descriptively** — Reflect what's actually in each section
- Start first chapter at 0:00** — Required for chapters to work
- Consider if chapters help this video** — Not every video benefits from them

- Video delivers on its promise quickly** — Value within first minute
- Scheduled at optimal time** — When your audience is active