



Optimizing YouTube Performance

■ Queuing up long-term success for YouTube channels and content

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Being the second largest search engine in the world gives YouTube a great deal of influence. The platform commands such an impressive stream of traffic that optimizing our content for performance on the platform is essential to the success of our educational videos. There are many options to customize your channel and your individual video content will help you get the most from this robust search engine.

Setting Up Your Channel

Click *Customize Channel* and follow the tabbed sections to provide the requested information.

■ Layout tab options

Video Spotlight: You can upload up to two videos, one geared towards returning subscribers and one for new or returning channel visitors who haven't yet subscribed to the channel. It is okay if these videos are the same.

Featured Sections: Use this space to create up to 10 different sections, highlighting selected playlists or featured videos. There is also an option for *Featured Channels* that allows you to highlight other official Illinois Extension YouTube channels.

■ Branding tab options

Channel branding provides organization cues to viewers.

- Profile picture (98x98 pixels)
- Banner image (2048x1152 pixels)
- Video watermark (set to display the entire video)

■ Basic Info tab options

Channel name and description: Be robust, explaining the purpose of the channel. Include 2-3 keywords that are the foundation of the content in the first few sentences.

Channel URL: YouTube will auto-generate a channel URL. In order to create a customized channel URL, accounts need to meet certain eligibility requirements.

Links: Add links to relevant sites you would like to direct your audience toward, such as your website or social media profiles.

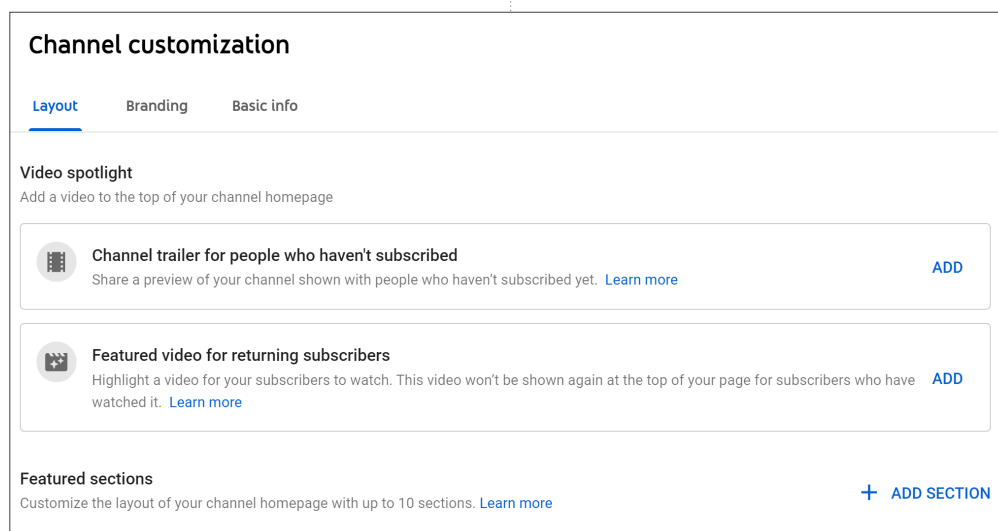
Links on Banner: Indicate how many links you would like to display on your banner image.

■ Keyword settings

Add a broad array of keywords for your channel on the left-hand menu under Settings. Select Channel and then input broad keyword tags for the channel content. These tags are channel-level, and do not replace video-level keyword tags.

■ Resources

- [Google Support: Customize and Manage Your Channel](#)
- [Google Support: Get a Custom URL](#)



Uploading Videos

How you upload videos to YouTube will have a dramatic impact on how your content performs for search engine optimization (SEO). This matters for how your video is included in searches done within YouTube, as well as general searches done through a search engine such as Google. Pay attention to these details for best SEO success.

■ File name

Name your video file using full words and include target keywords related to the video's content. Names of uploaded files can play a role in SEO. This filename could even look like the title of your video, for example, if the video is about washing your hands with soap or sanitizer, the filename might be "Handwashing_Soap_Sanitizer". Or if your video is about pruning conifer trees, you could use "Pruning_Conifer_Trees".

■ Title (required)

The title of the video is one of the most significant influences about whether someone clicks on your video or not, so inserting your keyword into the title is important. But be careful to avoid stuffing your title so full of keywords that it becomes nonsensical; it should still read fluently, even with keywords layered in. If the video is part of a series, list the title of the video first, followed by name of webinar series.

■ Description

Explain what the video is about and the type of content a viewer can expect to discover. Because the YouTube algorithm prioritizes the beginning of the description, include keywords early in the description. This is also what viewers see first when they search for content.

- Use various keywords that explain the same concept: garbage, waste, output.
- Be truthful and make sure you do not promise something that isn't included in the video.
- Promote the brand at the end of the description. Use the Extension boilerplate and relevant links related to your program, including social media. You can set up a default description that auto-populates every time you upload a new video.
- Include timestamps in the description when discussing a new topic or section in the video. Timestamps can be written as minute:seconds, and for longer videos, hour:minutes:seconds. This allows viewers to skip to the content that is relevant to them and provides more information in the description to support SEO performance.
- Provide a list of links to resources referenced in the video.
- Credit your sources. If you use copyright free music, include it in the description. Remember: you must have permission to use the asset, even if it's royalty free. If the content is copyrighted and we do not have permissions to use it, citing does not absolve you of wrongdoing.

■ Thumbnails

Always include a user-generated thumbnail that is clear and bold. The goal is to create an image that is compelling, provides a preview to prospective viewers, and draws attention. Never use deceptive or misleading images to trick viewers into clicking on content that is considered 'clickbait.'

Thumbnail dimensions should be 1920x1080 pixels. File size should be smaller than 2 MB.

The screenshot shows the YouTube video upload interface with four tabs: Details, Video elements, Checks, and Visibility. The 'Details' tab is active. It contains the following fields:

- Title (required):** A text box containing "4H | Outro 1".
- Description:** A text box with the placeholder text "Tell viewers about your video".
- Thumbnail:** A section with the instruction "Select or upload a picture that shows what's in your video. A good thumbnail stands out and draws viewers' attention. [Learn more](#)". Below this are three thumbnail preview boxes, the first of which has an "Upload thumbnail" button.

On the right side of the interface, there is a "Processing video..." status bar. Below it, the "Video link" is displayed as "https://youtu.be/QZpEQCtYlrc" with a copy icon, and the "Filename" is shown as "_4H_I_Outro_1.mp4".

Audience

Is this video made for kids? (required)

Regardless of your location, you're legally required to comply with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and/or other laws. You're required to tell us whether your videos are made for kids. [What's content made for kids?](#)

i Features like personalized ads and notifications won't be available on videos made for kids. Videos that are set as made for kids by you are more likely to be recommended alongside other kids' videos. [Learn more](#)

Yes, it's made for kids

No, it's not made for kids

Audience (Made for Kids)

We are not interested in trying to find a way to slide around these requirements. Be honest and direct in your evaluation of whether or not this label should apply to your video. The label exists to protect children from being exposed to content that is developmentally or thematically inappropriate. Failing to select this box can result in a mismatch between content and audience. It also leaves the door open for inappropriate advertisements to be introduced to young viewers by using our videos as a vehicle.

This section CANNOT be overlooked nor taken for granted. If your video content is clearly developed for an audience that includes children age 13 and younger, then you must mark the video as Made for Kids. This also applies if the video has an emphasis on kids' characters, themes, toys, or other kid-oriented content.

If you have any questions, contact the state Extension Communications team.

Paid Promotion

You can skip this section if you have not accepted anything of value from a third party to make your video.

Tags

Add tags to your content if there are common misspellings or terms that are often confused with one another. Tags don't

contribute significantly to SEO, so you don't need to keyword tag your video content here, as it will have minimal impact.

Resources

- [Hootsuite: How to write the best YouTube descriptions](#)
- [YouTube Support: Default upload settings](#)
- [YouTube Support: Add video thumbnails](#)
- [YouTube Creator Academy](#)
- [YouTube Help: Set your channel or video's audience](#)
- [YouTube Blogs: Protecting kids' privacy on YouTube](#)
- [YouTube Support: What is turned on and off](#)
- [YouTube Support: Complying with COPPA](#)
- [YouTube Support: Features impacted by COPPA](#)
- [FTC: Is your content directed to children?](#)
- [Hubspot: YouTube Tags and Why They Are Important](#)
- [YouTube Support: Add tags to videos](#)

Video Elements

Add an End Screen

End screens are a great way to easily link people back to other videos in your channel that are relevant to the topic just shared. While this section is not critical, it is a great asset to your overall look, feel, and performance of your YouTube channel.

Utilizing Illinois Extension's video bumper (found in our brand assets folder) leaves plenty of space to include an end card and any relevant contact information. The bumper must be added to the video before it is uploaded to YouTube.

Cards

Cards point people to other videos, playlists, and associated URLs during certain points or throughout your video. This is especially useful if the video is part of a series that is captured in a playlist. Directing the user to the playlist helps keep them engaged in your content.

Details
Video elements
Checks
Visibility

Video elements

Use cards and an end screen to show viewers related videos, websites, and calls to action. [Learn more](#)

Add an end screen

Promote related content at the end of your video

IMPORT FROM VIDEO ADD

Add cards

Promote related content during your video

ADD

Resources

- [YouTube Support: Add end screens to videos](#)
- [Illinois Extension brand assets](#)
- [YouTube Support: Add cards to videos](#)
- [YouTube Creator Academy: Let cards and end screens do the work](#)

Visibility Settings

Control the visibility of your video, including using the public, unlisted, and private status options. You can also pre-schedule the release of new video content.

Resources

- [YouTube Help: Change video privacy settings](#)

Closed Captioning

Closed captioning is a required element of any video created by Illinois Extension. Luckily, when videos are uploaded to YouTube, captions are auto-generated by a built-in AI transcription function. It can take a few minutes to a few hours to process the transcription file; while not a perfect estimate, it usually takes about as long to create the transcription file as the original video length.

Language, subtitles, and closed captions (CC)
Select your video's language and, if needed, a caption certification

Video language Select	Caption certification [?] None
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UPLOAD SUBTITLES/CC [?]

Auto-generated transcription

YouTube's AI-driven transcription service is fairly powerful and advanced and it is improving every day. For longer videos, the auto-generated captions are usually sufficient. The greatest potential for trouble with the AI transcription often has to do with the names of people, especially last names, and the scientific names of plants and animals. If your video includes those kinds of references, you will need to complete a manual review and clean-up to correct poorly transcribed terms.

Manual transcription

For shorter videos (less than ten minutes), or videos that specifically showcase a "how-to" effort, Illinois Extension requires that captions be edited manually for accuracy.

Importing transcription files

It might be possible that you have a closed captioning file prior to video upload. YouTube accepts a variety of closed caption file formats. See resources for acceptable file types, instructions for uploading caption files, and details about edit captions after the video has been processed.

Detailed guidelines and standards regarding closed captioning will be released in a separate best practice guide.

Resources

- [YouTube Support: Translate video and captions](#)

