

The Order of Operations

DO THIS FIRST

Do not script a video you have not packaged. Title and thumbnail are the first decision gate.

THE BUILD ORDER

Idea → Title → Thumbnail → Script → Shoot → Autopsy

Make the click worth earning before you invest in production.

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| 1. IDEA | → 30 ideas on a list, no filtering |
| 2. TITLE | → write 10 titles for the best 5 ideas |
| 3. THUMBNAIL | → sketch (badly, on paper) for the surviving titles |
| 4. KILL GATE | → does the packaging pass the phone test? If no → dead |
| 5. CONCEPT | → what actually happens, in 5 bullets |
| 6. SCRIPT | → hook first, then payoff, then fill the middle |
| 7. SHOT LIST | → including the thumbnail shot, staged on purpose |
| 8. SHOOT | → overshoot b-roll 3x what you think you need |
| 9. EDIT | → assembly → retention → polish → audio |
| 10. PACKAGE | → thumbnail, title, description, chapters, end screen |
| 11. PUBLISH | → scheduled, with a first-24-hours plan |
| 12. AUTOPSY | → within 48 hours, written down |
| 13. OPTIMIZE | → swap thumbnail/title, retro-link, re-share |

Why the title and thumbnail come first. If you write a script and then hunt for packaging, you're doing marketing archaeology on a video that was never designed to be clicked. If you can't write a title and sketch a thumbnail *you personally* would

click on while distracted, do not make the video. This is the highest-leverage rule in this document.

Why the thumbnail shot goes in the shot list. The most common amateur mistake is finishing an edit and then digging through footage for a frame that might work. Real thumbnails are staged and shot deliberately — different lighting, different expression, different composition than anything in the video. Budget 15 minutes on set.

Why you write the payoff before the middle. The middle exists to delay the payoff productively. If you don't know the payoff, the middle becomes filler, and filler is where retention dies.

Ideas — the 50% Nobody Works on

IDEA FILTER

If you cannot name the visual, the stake, and the share sentence, the idea is not ready.

2A. Where ideas come from

- **Escalation of your own winners.** Your best video, but bigger, more extreme, or more specific. This should be roughly 40% of your slate.
- **Format transplant.** A proven format from a *different* niche applied to yours. "Blind ranking" from food → cars. "\$1 vs \$10,000" from travel → guitars.
- **Comment mining.** Read the top 50 comments on your last five videos and your three biggest competitors'. The most-liked question is a video.
- **Search and suggestion mining.** YouTube autocomplete, "people also ask," Reddit sorted by top/month. Look for *emotionally charged* questions, not informational ones.
- **The thing you'd tell a friend at a bar.** If you naturally lean in when you tell it, it's a video.
- **Extremes and superlatives.** Most expensive, cheapest, oldest, rarest, first, last, biggest, smallest, fastest. The most reliable idea generators in existence.
- **Constraint invention.** Take a normal activity and add a rule. No money. 24 hours. Blindfolded. Only strangers' choices.

- **The Format Library (Part 4).** The most reliable source of all. Pick a proven format and pour your niche into it. Fifty of them, categorised, start on the next page.

2B. The Idea Bank

One running document. Every idea gets a row.

Idea	Title draft	Thumbnail concept	Engine(s)	Effort 1-5	Ceiling guess	Status
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Rules:

- Add five ideas a week, unfiltered. Bad ideas are compost for good ones.
- Never make a video that isn't already in the bank. No impulse shoots.
- Re-read the bank monthly. Ideas that still excite you after 30 days are the real ones.

2C. Validation — run before writing a script

1. **Has this been made before?** Search it. If it exists and did well, that's proven demand — a green light, not a red one, provided you can do it bigger, better, or differently.
2. **Can I explain it in seven words?** If the concept needs a paragraph, the thumbnail can't carry it.
3. **Is there a visual?** Every big video has a thing you can point a camera at. "I learned about card grading" is not visual. "I put a \$50,000 card into a machine that decides if it's worth \$500" is.
4. **What's the stake?** Money, time, reputation, pain, a relationship, risk of loss. No stake, no tension, no retention.

5. **Who is the viewer?** One sentence, specific. "A 22-year-old who watched Pokémon as a kid, doesn't collect now, but wonders whether the binder in his mom's attic is worth anything."
6. **What's the share sentence?** Write the actual text message someone sends: *"bro this guy found a card in a thrift store worth more than my car."* If you can't write it, rework the idea.
7. **Can I deliver it?** Don't title it \$1M if you spent \$80K. Overpromising is the fastest way to tank retention and poison your comments.

2D. Kill criteria — abandon the idea if

- You can't write a title you'd click after ten attempts
- The thumbnail concept needs text to explain it
- The payoff is "and it was fine" or "about what you'd expect"
- The most interesting moment is in the first 20 seconds and nothing tops it
- It's a topic *you* find boring — energy is not fakeable on camera
- Effort is a 5 and the ceiling guess is low. Do the high-ceiling one instead.

Killing an idea at the title stage costs 90 seconds. Killing it in the edit costs a week. Kill early, kill often, kill without ego.

2E. The escalation ladder

When something works, don't move on — build the ladder.

V1: "I bought a \$500 card"	→ 200K views
V2: "I bought a \$5,000 card"	→ 600K (10x stake)
V3: "I bought a \$50,000 card"	→ 2M (10x again)
V4: "I bought a \$50,000 card... and destroyed it"	→ new emotional axis
V5: "I gave a \$50,000 card to a stranger"	→ new emotional axis

Two axes: **magnitude** (bigger number, bigger risk) and **emotion** (loss, generosity, betrayal, sacrifice). When magnitude becomes financially unsustainable, switch to emotion. Emotion is free.

Shorts vs Long-form

CHOOSE THE GAME BEFORE YOU WRITE

Shorts

- Fast payoff
- Completion + rewatches

Long-form

- Nested story loops
- Watch time + sessions

The algorithm rewards different behaviors for each. Know which game you're playing before you write a word.

	Shorts	Long-Form
Optimizing for	Completion rate, rewatches, swipe-through	Average view duration, session time
Hook window	0-1.5 sec visual, 0-3 sec verbal	0-15 sec (packaging already did 50% of the work)
Structure	One idea, one loop, fast payoff	Nested loops, re-hooking every 60-90 sec
Editing pace	Cut every 1-2 sec	Cut every 3-6 sec
Re-watchability	Design for it — loop the ending into the beginning	Design for session stacking — push to your next video
Death trap	Slow build before the promise lands	A hook that isn't re-confirmed, so people drift

	Shorts	Long-Form
Discovery	Pure feed push, no click required	Click required — packaging is the gate
What failure looks like	High swipe-away in the first 2 sec	Low CTR (nobody clicked) or high CTR + low AVD (bad video)
Iteration speed	Fast — 3-5/week, learn quickly	Slow — 1-2/week, each is a bigger bet
Revenue per view	Very low	High
Audience building	Weak — Shorts viewers subscribe and return less	Strong
Shelf life	Long tail, can resurface for months	Long tail on search topics, short on trend topics

The strategic relationship. Shorts build reach; long-form builds an audience and revenue. For most channels the winning structure is Shorts as top of funnel, long-form as the destination — and Shorts should be designed to make your long-form more clickable, not to stand alone.

A Short that overperforms is a validated long-form concept. If a 40-second version got 2M views, the 12-minute version has proven demand. This is the cheapest idea validation available and almost nobody uses it deliberately.

The Format Library — 50 Repeatable Video Ideas

BUILD A FRANCHISE

Pick two or three formats you can repeat. Familiar mechanics build an audience faster than one-offs.

A FORMAT IS A MACHINE

Format + Fresh subject = Repeatable series

Use a proven mechanic to reduce creative guesswork and build audience recognition.

How to use this library

A format is not an idea. A format is a machine that produces ideas.

"I rank the ten most expensive cards" is an idea — you can make it once. "The Tier Board" is a format — you can make it two hundred times, in any niche, with a different topic each time, and it gets *better* with repetition because the audience learns the rules and comes back for the game rather than the subject.

This is the difference between a channel that has to invent something new every week and a channel that has a franchise.

The four rules of format selection

1. **Pick two or three. Not fifty.** The value of a format compounds with repetition. Running all fifty once produces a channel with no identity. Running three of them fifty times each produces a franchise.
2. **Pick formats you can physically execute.** A format that requires a crowd is worthless if you don't have access to crowds. A format that requires strangers is worthless if you hate approaching strangers. Match the format to your actual life.
3. **Pick formats with an infinite topic supply.** The best format in the world dies if you run out of things to put in it. Before committing, list twenty episodes. If you can't, pick a different format.
4. **Number them.** "Tier Board #1," "Tier Board #23." Episode numbering turns a video into a series, sets the expectation of a return visit, and makes bingeing possible — which is session time, which is what the algorithm actually rewards.

Stacking formats

The strongest videos combine two formats. A few reliable combinations:

- **Street format + Ranking format** → strangers build the tier list on camera
- **Challenge format + Social experiment** → the challenge has public stakes
- **Educational + Reaction** → an expert reacts, and teaches while reacting
- **Transformation + Time constraint** → restore this in 24 hours

The format scorecard

Before you commit to a format, score it honestly:

Question	Why it matters
Can I list 20 episodes right now?	Topic supply
Can I shoot one in a single session?	Sustainability
Does it have a built-in visual?	Thumbnail supply

Question	Why it matters
Does it produce an argument or an opinion?	Comment supply
Can I cut 3+ Shorts out of one episode?	Repurposing
Does it get better if I do it 50 times?	Franchise potential
Four or more yes answers, it's a format worth building on.	

CATEGORY A — STREET & CROWD FORMATS

Highest effort, highest ceiling. Real people produce unscripted reactions you cannot write, and strangers give a video instant credibility and stakes. Conventions, expos, meetups, city centres, gyms, campuses, and trade shows are all crowds.

1. The Tier Board

The mechanic: You carry a large physical board marked with tiers (S/A/B/C/D or your own labels) into a crowd. You hand each person a magnet, velcro patch, or sticker representing an item, topic, or opinion, and ask them to place it where they think it belongs. You keep going, person after person, and the board fills up in real time. The finished board is the payoff.

Why it works: the board is a visual scoreboard that changes with every person, so there's a continuously updating open loop. Placements create instant disagreement, which creates comments. And the physical object makes an unmistakable thumbnail.

In any niche: *Trading cards* — rank sets or eras. *Fitness* — rank exercises by how much people actually hate them. *Cooking* — rank fast food chains. *Cars* — rank manufacturers. *Music* — rank albums or subgenres.

Best as: Long-form primary, with three to six Shorts cut from the most controversial placements.

Make or break: the board has to look good on camera. Big, high contrast, readable labels, sturdy enough to hold up in wind. Build it properly once and use it for a hundred videos.

2. Man on the Street Quiz

The mechanic: One question, asked of many strangers in sequence. Cut the answers together into a montage — wrong ones, funny ones, then the one person who nails it.

Why it works: the viewer plays along silently, which is participation without effort. Wrong answers create superiority; right answers create surprise. Both are satisfying.

In any niche: *Tech* — "what does this port actually do?" *Cooking* — "name this ingredient." *Fashion* — "guess the decade." *Finance* — "what's a 401k, actually?"

Best as: Both. Shorts thrive on this format.

Make or break: the question must be answerable in under ten seconds but not obvious. If everyone gets it right, there's no video; if nobody does, it's monotonous.

3. The Impossible Question

The mechanic: You ask one genuinely difficult question — the kind with no clean answer — and then cycle through completely different audiences with it. Experts, beginners, kids, professionals, people from a different niche entirely. You collect the answers, offer your own, and let the contrast be the content.

Why it works: the same question producing wildly different answers *is* the payoff. It's a natural series, since the question stays fixed and only the audience changes. And it invites the viewer to answer in the comments, because a question with no clean answer is an invitation.

In any niche: *Trading cards* — "what actually makes a card valuable?" *Fitness* — "what's the single best exercise?" *Music* — "what makes a song good?" *Business* —

"when should you quit?"

Best as: Long-form for the full cycle, Shorts for individual answers.

Make or break: the question must be *specific enough to answer* but *open enough to disagree about*. "What's the best card?" is too vague. "What's the most overrated card of the last decade?" produces real answers.

4. Street Style / Fit Check

The mechanic: You approach people at an event and ask them to show off and explain their thing — their outfit, their setup, their collection, their build, their gear. They talk; you showcase.

Why it works: people are delighted to talk about something they've invested in, so you get genuine enthusiasm for free. Visual variety is automatic. And it's a format the subject wants to share, which is free distribution.

In any niche: *Conventions* — cosplay and collections. *Cars* — walk a meet and cover builds. *Tech* — desk setups at a coworking space. *Fitness* — gym bag contents. *Music* — pedalboards at a show.

Best as: Both — this format cuts into Shorts more cleanly than almost any other.

Make or break: ask about the *story*, not the object. "How long did that take?" and "what's the part nobody notices?" get far better answers than "what is it?"

5. Guess the Price

The mechanic: You show a person an item and they guess what it costs. Reveal the real price. Repeat with items of wildly different values.

Why it works: loss aversion and numbers shock in one move. The gap between guess and reality is the payoff, and it's automatic.

In any niche: *Cards* — guess the card value. *Fashion* — thrift item vs. designer. *Food* — guess the restaurant bill. *Real estate* — guess the rent. *Tech* — guess the build cost.

Best as: Both. Extremely strong as Shorts.

Make or break: the spread. Include at least one item that's far cheaper than it looks and one that's absurdly expensive. Predictable pricing kills it.

6. Expert vs. Public

The mechanic: Ask the same question to random members of the public and then to a verified expert. Cut them against each other.

Why it works: authority transfer plus the comedy of the gap. It teaches something real while remaining entertaining, which is a rare combination.

In any niche: *Health* — a doctor answers what strangers guessed. *Cars* — a mechanic vs. drivers. *Cooking* — a chef vs. home cooks. *Law* — a lawyer vs. public assumptions.

Best as: Long-form, with Shorts from the biggest gaps.

Make or break: the expert has to be genuinely credentialed and genuinely interesting. A boring expert sinks the format.

7. Ask 100 People

The mechanic: Volume as the spectacle. One question, one hundred people, a running tally on screen, and a final statistic.

Why it works: the counter is a visible progress indicator, which exploits the brain's need for completion. The final number is a shareable statistic.

In any niche: any question in any niche. *"I asked 100 lifters what their max is."* *"I asked 100 people if they'd sell their collection for \$10k."*

Best as: Long-form. The scale *is* the value proposition.

Make or break: actually get to 100. Faking or padding the count is obvious and it's the one thing that destroys trust in this format.

8. The Stranger's Choice

The mechanic: You surrender your decisions to strangers. They pick what you buy, what you eat, where you go, what you build. You have to honor it.

Why it works: you've created stakes you don't control, which is genuine tension. The viewer wants to see whether it goes badly.

In any niche: *Cards* — strangers pick which pack you buy. *Cooking* — strangers pick your ingredients. *Travel* — strangers pick your destination. *Fashion* — strangers dress you.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: you must visibly honor bad choices. The moment the audience suspects you'd override a bad pick, the format is dead.

9. The Floor Tour Hunt

The mechanic: Walk a convention, market, expo, or store with a single mission: find the most expensive, the rarest, the weirdest, the oldest. Narrate the hunt. The search *is* the structure.

Why it works: a built-in open loop — will you find it? — plus continuous visual novelty, plus a natural escalation as each find has to beat the last.

In any niche: any event in any niche. Flea markets, trade shows, conventions, auctions, thrift stores.

Best as: Long-form primary, Shorts from individual finds.

Make or break: the mission must be stated in the first ten seconds and referenced constantly. Without a stated mission it's just footage of you walking.

10. Blind Test With Strangers

The mechanic: Strangers test, taste, or judge items without knowing which is which — typically cheap vs. expensive — then you reveal.

Why it works: it directly challenges a belief the audience holds, which is argument fuel. And the result is often genuinely surprising, which drives shares.

In any niche: *Food and drink* — the classic. *Audio* — cheap vs. expensive headphones. *Tools* — budget vs. pro. *Fashion* — fast fashion vs. designer. *Cards* — real vs. counterfeit.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: the blind must be genuinely blind and visibly so. Show the process of concealing, or the comments will accuse you of faking it.

CATEGORY B — RANKING & JUDGMENT FORMATS

Lowest production cost of any category, highest comment rate. A ranking is an opinion, and opinions get argued with. These can be shot in a single session at a desk.

11. The Tier List

The mechanic: The studio version of the Tier Board. You rank items into tiers on screen, explaining each placement.

Why it works: every placement is a small payoff, and every controversial placement is a comment. Structurally, it's a countdown that never runs out.

In any niche: anything with more than ten members. Products, techniques, eras, people, tools, songs, movies, exercises.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: commit to controversial placements and defend them. Safe rankings generate no discussion, and discussion is the entire point of this format.

12. Bracket Tournament

The mechanic: Sixteen or thirty-two contenders, head-to-head elimination, one winner. Can be one video or a multi-episode series.

Why it works: the single strongest open-loop structure available. Nobody leaves a tournament unfinished. Each matchup is its own micro-video with its own payoff.

In any niche: *Music* — best album bracket. *Food* — best snack. *Cars* — best engine. *Gaming* — best mechanic. *Cards* — best set.

Best as: Long-form, or a series. Individual matchups make excellent Shorts.

Make or break: let the audience vote on at least some matchups via Community polls. It converts viewers into participants and gives you free content between uploads.

13. Ranking My Own Stuff

The mechanic: You rank your own collection, work, purchases, or past decisions — honestly, including the failures.

Why it works: vulnerability plus parasocial investment. Admitting your worst purchase builds more trust than showing your best.

In any niche: *Creators* — ranking your own videos. *Collectors* — ranking your collection. *Fitness* — ranking programs you've run. *Business* — ranking your worst decisions.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: genuine self-criticism. A ranking where everything you own is great is an advertisement, and it reads like one.

14. Order the Prices

The mechanic: Items laid out; arrange them from cheapest to most expensive. You, a guest, or a stranger attempts it. Reveal the true order.

Why it works: it's a puzzle the viewer plays along with, and being wrong is entertaining rather than punishing.

In any niche: anything with a price. Works especially well where price and appearance diverge.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: include at least one item whose price is genuinely counterintuitive. That item is your thumbnail.

15. Rating Viewer Submissions

The mechanic: The audience submits their work, setups, collections, or attempts. You rate them on camera.

Why it works: it's the strongest loyalty mechanic in this document turned into an entire format. People submit, then return to see if they were featured, then tell their friends. It also solves your content supply problem permanently.

In any niche: *Fitness* — form checks. *Music* — mix feedback. *Design* — portfolio reviews. *Collecting* — collection reviews. *Cooking* — plating critiques.

Best as: Long-form, as a recurring numbered series.

Make or break: be genuinely useful and genuinely kind. Cruelty gets views once and kills submissions forever.

16. The Definitive List

The mechanic: "The ten best X" — but with *stated criteria* you defend, rather than an arbitrary opinion.

Why it works: stating criteria converts a lazy listicle into an argument, and arguments get comments. It also positions you as an authority.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form. Strong search longevity — these rank for years.

Make or break: state your criteria in the first thirty seconds. Without criteria it's just a list, and lists are commodity content.

17. The Re-Ranking

The mechanic: Revisit a ranking you made a year ago and change your mind on camera, explaining what you learned.

Why it works: growth is a story. It also directly recirculates traffic to the original video, and it's proof you're a real person with evolving views rather than a content machine.

In any niche: any niche where you've already made a ranking.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: actually change your mind on something significant. A re-ranking that changes nothing has no reason to exist.

CATEGORY C — CHALLENGE & CONSTRAINT FORMATS

Add a rule to an ordinary activity and it becomes a video. The constraint supplies the tension, the structure, and usually the title.

18. The Budget Ladder

The mechanic: The same thing at three or four wildly different price points. \$1 vs \$100 vs \$10,000. Compare directly.

Why it works: built-in escalation, built-in comparison, and a decision-utility payoff. The viewer learns something and gets spectacle.

In any niche: universal. Meals, guitars, cameras, haircuts, hotels, cards, tools, tattoos.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: the cheap option must be given a genuine chance. Rigging it so expensive always wins is boring and transparent.

19. The Time Constraint

The mechanic: Do the thing, but with a clock. 24 hours, one hour, ten minutes, sixty seconds.

Why it works: an on-screen timer is a permanent visible open loop. Urgency makes ordinary activity watchable.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: the timer must be visible on screen almost continuously, and the deadline must be real. Fake urgency is felt immediately.

20. Trade Up

The mechanic: Start with something worthless and trade your way up to something valuable, through as many trades as it takes.

Why it works: every trade is a micro-payoff with escalating stakes, and the ending is genuinely unknown. One of the most structurally sound formats that exists.

In any niche: *Cards* — common to grail. *Fashion* — thrift to designer. *Tech* — broken to working. *Cars* — beater to project.

Best as: Long-form or a series.

Make or break: show the failed trades. The rejections are what make the successes land.

21. Random Selection

The mechanic: A wheel, dice, dart, or generator decides what you do, buy, make, or attempt. You have to honor it.

Why it works: the randomiser removes your authorship, which removes the audience's suspicion that you rigged it. Genuine unpredictability.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: spin on camera, unbroken, in one shot. Any cut around the randomiser destroys the credibility the format depends on.

22. Beginner vs. Expert

The mechanic: The same task attempted by a total beginner and a genuine expert, side by side.

Why it works: two audiences at once — beginners see themselves, experts see craft. The contrast is inherently visual and inherently funny.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form, with a strong Shorts cut of the biggest gap.

Make or break: the beginner must be a real beginner and must be treated with respect. Humiliation content ages badly.

23. Doing It Wrong On Purpose

The mechanic: Deliberately break every rule of your niche and document what happens.

Why it works: it teaches the rules by violating them, which is far more memorable than stating them. It's also comedy and education simultaneously.

In any niche: *Cooking* — every technique wrong. *Fitness* — worst possible form (carefully). *Photography* — every setting wrong. *Business* — every red flag.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: be explicit about safety and about which mistakes are genuinely dangerous. Some niches have real consequences.

24. The Streak

The mechanic: Do the same thing every day for N days and document it. Thirty days, one hundred days, a year.

Why it works: transformation over time is inherently satisfying, and the day counter is a built-in progress indicator. It also generates daily Shorts from a single ongoing commitment.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form summary plus daily Shorts. The best repurposing ratio of any format here.

Make or break: film day one properly. You cannot recreate a genuine "before," and a weak before ruins the after.

25. Last One Standing

The mechanic: Elimination or endurance. Multiple participants, one winner, or one person against a clock.

Why it works: competition plus a visible countdown of remaining contenders. Every elimination is a payoff.

In any niche: universal wherever you can gather three or more people.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: clear, stated rules up front. Ambiguous rules make the ending feel arbitrary, and an arbitrary ending kills the payoff.

CATEGORY D — REACTION & COMMENTARY FORMATS

The cheapest category to produce and the fastest to publish. The source material does the heavy lifting; your value is the perspective.

26. The Setup-and-React

The mechanic: Take a video, claim, or moment that already performed well — ideally something controversial in your niche. Lead with the original clip or its premise, let it play, and then react, correct, or build on it.

Why it works: you're borrowing a proven hook. The original content already demonstrated that people will stop scrolling for it; you're attaching your perspective

to demand that already exists. Controversy supplies the comments automatically.

In any niche: universal. Viral claims, bad advice, industry drama, a competitor's take.

Best as: Both. Shorts especially — lead with the clip, cut to your reaction at the turn.

Make or break: add genuine value, don't just watch. Reaction without perspective is content theft, and platforms treat it accordingly. Your take must be the reason the video exists.

27. Pro Reacts to Amateurs

The mechanic: An expert watches amateur attempts and gives real feedback.

Why it works: education wrapped in entertainment, with authority transfer built in. The amateur content is free and abundant.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: get permission or use content that's clearly submitted for critique. Punching down at someone who didn't consent is a reputational cost that isn't worth the views.

28. Reacting to My Old Work

The mechanic: Watch your own earliest content and critique it honestly.

Why it works: parasocial gold. It shows growth, invites nostalgia from long-time viewers, and gives new viewers a reason to explore your back catalogue.

In any niche: any creator with a history.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: be genuinely critical. False modesty is transparent and unappealing.

29. The Debunk

The mechanic: Take a widely believed claim in your niche and systematically dismantle or verify it.

Why it works: insight plus controversy plus common enemy. It positions you as the person who tells the truth, which is a durable brand.

In any niche: every niche has myths.

Best as: Long-form. Excellent search longevity.

Make or break: be right. Evidence, sources, and demonstrable tests. A debunk that's wrong is the worst possible outcome for your credibility.

30. Responding to the Comments

The mechanic: A whole video built from your own comment section — questions, criticism, corrections, and the ridiculous ones.

Why it works: it's the loyalty mechanic as a format. It generates more comments on every future video, because commenting now has a visible chance of being featured.

In any niche: universal once you have a comment section.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: include the critical comments, not just the flattering ones. Cherry-picking praise is obvious.

31. The Blind Reaction

The mechanic: Genuinely experiencing something for the first time, on camera, unedited in the moment.

Why it works: authentic reaction cannot be faked, and audiences are extremely good at detecting when it has been.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: protect the blind. Don't research it, don't preview it, and set the camera up before you know anything.

32. The Reply Video

The mechanic: Directly respond to another creator's video, claim, or challenge.

Why it works: you borrow their audience and their momentum. Creates two camps, which creates engagement.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: argue the idea, not the person. Personal attacks get you a spike and a reputation you don't want.

CATEGORY E — EDUCATIONAL & EXPLAINER FORMATS

Lower ceiling per video, far higher return-viewer rate and search longevity. These accumulate views for years while trend content dies in a week.

33. The Mistake List

The mechanic: "Five things you're doing wrong" — common errors, why they're wrong, and the fix.

Why it works: unresolved problems plus loss aversion. Nobody wants to be the person making the obvious mistake.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: the mistakes must be genuinely common and genuinely non-obvious. "Don't forget to practise" is filler.

34. Levels of Difficulty

The mechanic: The same thing at escalating levels of complexity, from absolute beginner to master.

Why it works: built-in escalation, and it serves every skill level in your audience simultaneously. Each level is a micro-payoff.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: the top level must be genuinely impressive. The whole video is a build-up to it.

35. The Anatomy Of

The mechanic: Take one single thing and break it down in obsessive detail — every component, every decision, every layer.

Why it works: depth is a differentiator in a shallow feed, and obsessive detail signals genuine expertise.

In any niche: a card, a recipe, a song, an engine, a contract, a building, a scene.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: visual breakdown, not narration over a static image. If you can physically disassemble it, do that on camera.

36. Myth vs. Fact

The mechanic: Rapid-fire true/false through common beliefs in your niche.

Why it works: the viewer plays along and scores themselves. High pace, high information density.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Both. Excellent as Shorts.

Make or break: include at least one that surprises even experienced people. That one is your hook and your thumbnail.

37. The Speedrun Tutorial

The mechanic: Teach the entire fundamentals of something in sixty seconds or five minutes. Aggressively compressed.

Why it works: time compression as an explicit promise — "know more than 90% of people in one minute" — is one of the strongest value propositions available.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: genuinely deliver the whole thing. A speedrun that's actually an ad for a longer course betrays the promise.

38. The Iceberg

The mechanic: Start with what everybody knows and descend progressively into the obscure, the technical, and the genuinely unknown.

Why it works: it's a structural open loop — the viewer stays to see how deep it goes. Rewards the hardcore audience while remaining accessible at the top.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: the bottom tier has to be genuinely obscure. If your deepest secret is common knowledge, the format collapses.

39. The Real Cost Breakdown

The mechanic: Itemise what something actually costs — every line, including the ones people forget.

Why it works: utility plus numbers shock. Highly shareable because it's genuinely useful information.

In any niche: *Cards* — the true cost of grading. *Fitness* — the real cost of a year of training. *Business* — what a product actually costs to make. *Creators* — what a video costs to produce.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: total it on screen and let the final number land. The total is the payoff.

CATEGORY F — SKIT & CHARACTER FORMATS

Fastest to shoot, highest volume potential, strongest relatability. These are Shorts engines — one location, one camera, one afternoon can produce a month of content.

40. Types of People

The mechanic: Play every archetype in your niche. The know-it-all, the newcomer, the gatekeeper, the one who only owns gear.

Why it works: identity recognition. Everyone sees themselves or someone they know, and tagging that person is a share.

In any niche: universal — every niche has archetypes.

Best as: Shorts.

Make or break: affectionate, not contemptuous. You're describing your own audience; mock them and they leave.

41. POV

The mechanic: Put the viewer inside a specific situation in your niche, shot from their perspective.

Why it works: situational relatability at maximum intensity. The specificity is what makes it land.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Shorts.

Make or break: hyper-specific beats broadly relatable. "POV: your card comes back a 9" outperforms "POV: you collect cards."

42. Expectation vs. Reality

The mechanic: Split screen or hard cut between how something is supposed to go and how it actually goes.

Why it works: the structure is a joke with a built-in punchline. Instantly readable.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Shorts.

Make or break: the reality side must be genuinely, specifically true. Generic disappointment isn't funny.

43. The Recurring Character

The mechanic: Invent a character who appears across many videos — a persona, an alter ego, a fictional expert.

Why it works: the strongest format-recognition device available. Viewers return for the character, not the topic, and that's an audience rather than traffic.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Shorts, appearing as a segment in long-form.

Make or break: absolute consistency. Same costume, same framing, same catchphrase, every single time. Recognition is the entire mechanic.

44. Overheard At

The mechanic: Dramatise real things people actually say in your niche — at the shop, the gym, the convention, the office.

Why it works: in-group recognition. If you've been there, you've heard it, and that recognition is the joke.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Shorts.

Make or break: use real overheard lines. Invented dialogue always sounds invented.

CATEGORY G — TRANSFORMATION & PROCESS FORMATS

The highest average view duration of any category. Humans are compelled to see a process completed.

45. Restoration / Rescue

The mechanic: Take something damaged, neglected, or broken and restore it to its best state.

Why it works: the before/after is the entire payoff and it's guaranteed. Satisfaction plus a perfect thumbnail, every time.

In any niche: *Cards* — restoring a collection. *Cars* — restoration. *Tech* — repair. *Furniture* — refinishing. *Fitness* — a comeback story.

Best as: Long-form, with a strong before/after Short.

Make or break: shoot the "before" properly, in good light, from the angles you'll need for the comparison. You get exactly one chance.

46. Build From Scratch

The mechanic: Construct something from nothing, documenting the full process.

Why it works: a process with a known endpoint but unknown obstacles — a naturally structured open loop.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: show the failures and the mistakes. A build with no problems has no story.

47. The Makeover

The mechanic: Transform someone or something else — a person's setup, collection, technique, space, or look.

Why it works: transformation plus generosity plus a second person's genuine reaction. The reaction shot is the payoff.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form, with the reveal cut as a Short.

Make or break: the subject's reaction must be captured unscripted and in one take. That single shot carries the whole video.

CATEGORY H — SOCIAL EXPERIMENT & STAKES FORMATS

Highest share rate of any category. These are the videos people send to each other.

48. The Giving Format

The mechanic: Give something meaningful to someone who needs or deserves it, and capture the real reaction.

Why it works: the highest share rate of any structure in this document. Warmth is contagious, and generosity content makes the sharer look good for sharing it.

In any niche: universal, and it scales down — this does not require a big budget. A \$50 gift to the right person outperforms a \$5,000 gift to the wrong one.

Best as: Both.

Make or break: never make the recipient feel like a prop. If the video is about you being generous rather than about them, the audience will feel it and turn on you.

49. The Public Bet

The mechanic: Commit publicly to a consequence. "If I can't do X, I'll do Y." Then attempt it.

Why it works: you've created real, verifiable stakes. The audience returns specifically to see whether you have to pay.

In any niche: universal.

Best as: Long-form, often as a two-parter.

Make or break: actually pay the consequence on camera when you lose. Losing and paying is a better video than winning.

50. Undercover

The mechanic: Enter your own niche in disguise — an expert posing as a beginner, or a beginner in an expert space — and document how you're treated.

Why it works: insider access plus a justice angle. It exposes something real about the niche, which is highly shareable within it.

In any niche: *Cards* — pro visits shops with a valuable card and sees who lowballs. *Fitness* — trainer takes beginner classes. *Music* — professional busks anonymously. *Retail* — expert shops for advice.

Best as: Long-form.

Make or break: be fair to the people you film. Setting people up to look bad is a format with a short shelf life and a real cost.

The format selector

If you want...	Use these formats
Maximum shares	48 Giving · 50 Undercover · 10 Blind Test · 49 Public Bet
Maximum comments	11 Tier List · 1 Tier Board · 29 Debunk · 16 Definitive List
Maximum retention	45 Restoration · 12 Bracket · 20 Trade Up · 46 Build
Fastest to produce	40 Types of People · 41 POV · 42 Expectation vs Reality · 30 Comments
Search longevity	33 Mistake List · 16 Definitive List · 29 Debunk · 35 Anatomy Of
Best Shorts supply	24 The Streak · 4 Street Style · 2 Street Quiz · 44 Overheard
No budget at all	11 Tier List · 40 Types of People · 30 Comments · 28 Old Work
You have crowd access	1 Tier Board · 3 Impossible Question · 4 Street Style · 9 Floor Tour
Building an audience, not traffic	15 Viewer Submissions · 43 Recurring Character · 30 Comments
A guaranteed thumbnail	45 Restoration · 5 Guess the Price · 18 Budget Ladder · 1 Tier Board

Turning a format into a franchise

A format becomes a franchise when it acquires these five things:

1. **A name.** "Tier Board" is a name. "The video where I rank stuff" is not. Say the name on camera every episode.
2. **Episode numbers.** In the title and thumbnail. It signals there's more and makes the back catalogue bingeable.
3. **A fixed opening.** The same setup line every time — five seconds, not thirty. Recognition is the point.
4. **Consistent packaging.** Same thumbnail template family, same colours, same title structure. A viewer should identify your format in the feed without reading a word.
5. **A rule the audience knows.** Every good format has a rule the audience can hold you to — you must honor the trade, you must place every item, you must pay the bet. The rule is what converts watching into participating.

Once all five are in place, each episode makes the next one easier to click, and the format compounds.

Titles

The title is half your packaging, and it's the half you can change after publishing — YouTube re-tests when you do.

5A. Rules

1. **Under 60 characters** so it doesn't truncate on mobile. Under 50 is better.
2. **Front-load the interesting word.** Mobile cuts the end. "I Spent \$1M On Pokémon Cards," not "Here's What Happened When I Spent \$1M On Pokémon Cards."
3. **Specific numbers beat vague scale.** "\$47,000" outperforms "a fortune." Odd, precise numbers read as true.
4. **The title and thumbnail must never say the same thing.** They are two halves of one curiosity gap. Thumbnail = *what*. Title = *the twist, stake, or consequence*.
5. **No promise you can't cash.** Overpromising creates a retention cliff at the exact moment the viewer figures it out.
6. **Write ten, pick one.** The first title is never the best. Titles seven through ten are where it gets good.
7. **Say it out loud.** If it sounds like a press release, rewrite it. Titles should sound like a person talking.

5B. Formulas

Formula	Example
I [did extreme thing]	I Spent 100 Hours In A Card Shop
I [did thing] So You Don't Have To	I Graded 100 Cards So You Don't Have To
[Number] [Things] That [Surprising Claim]	10 Cards Worth More Than Your House
[Thing] vs [Thing]	\$1 Card vs \$1,000,000 Card
Why [Common Belief] Is Wrong	Why Grading Your Cards Is A Mistake
The [Superlative] [Thing] In The World	The Rarest Pokémon Card On Earth
I [Did Thing] And It [Went Badly]	I Bought A \$50K Card And Got Scammed
What Happens When You [Unusual Action]	What Happens When You Cut Open A Graded Card
[Extreme Situation], [Time Constraint]	Finding A \$10K Card In 24 Hours
Nobody [Does This]. So I Did.	Nobody Opens 1999 Booster Boxes. So I Did.
I Gave [Person] [Thing]	I Gave A Stranger A \$20,000 Card
The [Thing] That [Bad Consequence]	The Card That Cost Me My Savings
[Number] Levels Of [Thing]	7 Levels Of Card Collecting
I Tried [Thing] For [Duration]	I Tried Reselling Cards For 30 Days

5C. Anti-patterns

- Questions the viewer doesn't care about ("Is Grading Worth It?")
- Your own name or brand in the title — nobody's searching for you yet
- Vague superlatives: insane, crazy, you won't believe
- ALL CAPS SHOUTING — reads as spam

- Emoji spam
- Titles that only make sense after watching
- Series markers at the front. Put "Part 3" at the end, if at all.

5D. Titles for Shorts

Different job. Shorts titles are barely read — they're collapsed behind the UI. Their real function is **topic classification and search**. So:

- Put clear topic keywords in the first 30 characters
- Keep it short so it doesn't collapse behind "...more"
- The real headline of a Short is the **on-screen text in frame one**. Treat that as your title.

Thumbnails

THUMBNAIL RULE

At phone size, three clear elements beat a crowded masterpiece every time.

THE THREE-ELEMENT TEST

Face + Object + Context

If it needs more than this to explain itself, simplify the idea.

The single highest-ROI skill in long-form. Most creators are far better at making videos than at making thumbnails, which means the thumbnail is the bottleneck on everything else they do.

6A. The mental model

A thumbnail is not a poster. It is a **one-second emotional question** displayed at roughly postage-stamp size, competing against twenty others, on a phone, while the viewer is half paying attention. Design for that, not for your 27-inch monitor.

6B. The five rules

Rule 1 — Three elements maximum

Subject + object + context. Every additional element halves the read speed.

- Face (shocked) + card + stack of cash ✓
- Face + card + cash + arrow + circle + text + logo + border + collage ✗

Rule 2 — Legible at 10% size (the squint test)

Shrink to **160×90 pixels**. Then squint. Then look at it from across the room.

If you can't instantly identify *what the subject is* and *what emotion is being expressed*, it fails, no matter how much work went in. This test kills about 70% of first drafts.

Practical method: design at 1280×720 with a 160×90 preview open beside your canvas at all times.

Rule 3 — One dominant saturated color

Pick a hero color and let it own the frame, then use its complement on the subject.

- Warm subject (orange/yellow rim light) against a **cool** background (teal/blue) — the classic, works nearly universally
- Cool subject against a warm background — inverted, reads more premium
- **Avoid pure YouTube red and pure white as your dominant** — they blend into YouTube's own interface and disappear
- Avoid muddy, desaturated, "tasteful" palettes. Tasteful loses to loud at stamp size.

Test in both light and dark mode. A white-background thumbnail vanishes in light mode; a near-black one vanishes in dark mode. Give the thumbnail a rim of contrast so its *edges* are always visible against the page.

Rule 4 — Line theory: lead the eye to one point

- **Diagonal composition** creates energy. Flat horizontal/vertical compositions read as static and get skipped.

- **Leading lines** — an arm, a table edge, a road, a light streak — should point at the subject.
- **Clean silhouette.** The subject must separate from the background: rim light, background blur, background darkening, or a cut-out with a subtle stroke or glow.
- **Three layers of depth** — foreground (a partially cropped element), midground (subject), background (blurred or darkened context). Flat thumbnails read as amateur.
- **Rule of thirds** — eyes on the upper third line, hero object on a third intersection.
- **Negative space** on one side gives the eye somewhere to rest and makes the subject pop.

Rule 5 — Thumbnail and title reveal DIFFERENT halves of the gap

The most important rule here, and the one most people break.

Redundant ✗	Complementary ✓
Thumb: cash stack. Title: "I Spent A Lot Of Money"	Thumb: cash stack + shocked face. Title: "It Was A Scam"
Thumb: a rare card. Title: "The Rarest Card"	Thumb: a rare card being cut in half. Title: "This Was A \$200,000 Mistake"
Thumb: "\$1,000,000" text. Title: "I Spent \$1,000,000"	Thumb: "\$1,000,000" text. Title: "And I Lost It All In 3 Days"

Diagnostic: cover the title — does the thumbnail raise a question? Cover the thumbnail — does the title raise a *different* question? If either answer is no, redesign.

6C. Faces

Faces outperform no-faces in most niches, but only when the emotion is legible.

- **Emotion must read in silhouette:** wide eyes, open mouth, raised brows. Subtle expressions are invisible at thumbnail size.
- **Exaggerate about 30% past natural**, not 300%. Full-cartoon shock faces have become a negative signal in many niches — they promise clickbait. Read your specific niche.
- **Eyeline matters.** Looking at camera = connection and confrontation. Looking at the object = directs the viewer's eye to the object. Use the second when the object is the story.
- **Face occupies 20-35% of the frame** for a person-led video. Bigger reads desperate; smaller loses the emotion.
- **Light the face separately** and brighter than the background. Hard rule.
- **No face is fine** when the object *is* the spectacle. Don't force a face into a frame that doesn't need one.

6D. Text on thumbnails

- **0-4 words. Three is ideal.** More than four and nobody reads it at scale.
- **Never repeat the title.**
- Words are the **emotional punch or the number**, not a description: \$1,000,000 • IT BROKE • FAKE? • DAY 100
- Heavy sans-serif, high stroke width, contrasting outline *and* a soft drop shadow so it survives any background.
- Keep the **bottom-right ~20% clear** — the duration badge sits there, and a progress bar sits along the bottom edge on watched videos.
- Some of the best thumbnails have **zero text**. If the image tells the story, delete the words.

6E. Process

1. **Sketch ten concepts on paper in ten minutes.** Ugly stick figures. This is thinking, not designing.
2. **Build the best three properly** in Photoshop, Figma, Canva, or Photopea.
3. **Shoot the thumbnail on purpose** — separate setup, separate lighting, multiple expressions, headroom for cropping. Twenty frames of the expression, not two.
4. **Squint test all three** at 160×90.
5. **Drop them into a mock feed.** Search your topic, screenshot the results grid, paste your thumbnail in. **You must look like the odd one out.** If everyone uses a dark background with a face on the right, go bright and centered. Contrast against competitors matters more than absolute quality.
6. **A/B test** with YouTube's Test & Compare, which runs up to three thumbnails against live traffic and reports a winner. Use it on every video that matters.
7. **Iterate after publishing.** If CTR is below your channel average after 24–48 hours, swap it. The algorithm re-tests. This is free upside almost nobody uses.

6F. Specs

Spec	Value
Resolution	1280×720 (16:9), minimum 640px wide
File size	Under 2MB
Format	JPG, PNG, or WEBP
Safe zone	Keep critical content out of the bottom-right corner and bottom ~10%
Design against	A 160×90 preview

6G. Mistakes that kill click-through

- Too many elements — the number one killer
- Low contrast between subject and background
- Text too small or too long
- Using a random frame from the video — video frames are exposed for motion, not for stills, and will look flat and badly lit
- The same style as everyone else in your niche
- Composition that only reads at full size
- Emotion that doesn't match the title's tone
- Promising something the video doesn't deliver — a short-term click win and long-term channel damage, because low satisfaction is penalized hard

6H. Thumbnails for Shorts

Shorts do have a thumbnail — on your channel's Shorts shelf, in search, and in the Shorts tab grid. But **in the feed, frame one of the video is the thumbnail**. So:

- Design frame one to work as a still: subject, implied motion, on-screen hook text
- Set a custom Shorts thumbnail where the platform allows it, for the grid and search
- Never open on black, a slow fade-in, a logo animation, or an establishing wide shot. All four are Short-killers.

The Hook

HOOK STANDARD

Frame one needs motion, a subject, and a promise—before a viewer can swipe.

STACK THE FIRST THREE SECONDS

Visual

Audio

On-screen text

Spoken promise

One hook layer is easy to ignore. Four synchronized layers force attention.

Four layers fire in the same 1–3 seconds: **visual, audio, text-on-screen, spoken words**. Beginners nail one. Virality comes from stacking all four so a scrolling thumb physically stops.

7A. Text and speech formulas

1. "I spent \$[X] on [thing], here's what happened"
2. "I tried [X] for [Y] days so you don't have to"
3. "Nobody talks about this but [surprising claim]"
4. "This is the [best/worst/most expensive] [thing] I've ever seen"
5. "You've been doing [common task] wrong your entire life"
6. "I asked [expert] one question and it changed everything"
7. "What \$[X] actually gets you in [category] will shock you"

8. "I found the [rarest/most illegal/most expensive] [thing] on the internet"
9. "3 things I wish I knew before [action]"
10. "This [object] is worth more than [relatable comparison]"
11. "I broke into [industry] and here's what's really going on"
12. "The [industry] doesn't want you to know this"
13. "I let [X] happen for 24 hours and this is what I got"
14. "Someone offered me \$[X] for [thing] — here's why I said no"
15. "I bought the cheapest vs the most expensive [thing]"
16. "This one decision made me \$[X] / cost me \$[X]"
17. "If you own [common item], check this immediately"
18. "I've never shown anyone this before"
19. "Watch what happens when I [unexpected action]"
20. "This is illegal in [X] countries and I have one"

7B. Visual hooks

The first frame must show conflict, money, danger, or motion — never a static talking head.

1. Ripping open a pack, box, or envelope
2. A literal stack of cash before you spend it
3. A dramatic zoom-in on the prize object
4. The end result first, then cut to "but let's start at #10"
5. A countdown graphic overlaid on screen
6. Smashing, breaking, or destroying something of value
7. A safe or vault opening

8. Two items side by side — cheap vs. expensive
9. A shocked reaction shot *before* you explain why
10. A close-up of a price tag or receipt
11. A fast whip-pan into the subject
12. Pulling something out of a bag the viewer can't see into
13. A "before" shot that looks broken, teasing a transformation
14. Someone else's jaw-drop inserted first — social proof
15. A blurred or censored object with "wait for it"

7C. Audio hooks

Sound triggers an involuntary attention response before words register.

1. A rip, tear, or crinkle
2. A cash register or coin drop
3. A record scratch
4. A heartbeat or ticking clock
5. Glass shatter or a dramatic thud
6. A whoosh or riser synced to a zoom
7. Trending audio relevant to your niche
8. A gasp or crowd reaction
9. **Silence** — a full beat of dead air right before the reveal
10. An orchestral stab, movie-trailer style
11. Your own voice pitched or distorted for one word
12. A camera shutter click
13. An alarm or siren for danger framing

14. A game notification or level-up sound
15. A slowed, deepened version of your intro line for gravity

7D. The curiosity gap

A curiosity gap is a **promise with a withheld answer**. It must be specific. "You won't believe what happens" is weak. "The tenth card sold for more than a house" is strong.

1. Reveal the reward, withhold the mechanism
2. Reveal the mechanism, withhold the reward
3. Numbered countdowns — forces the wait for #1
4. "But first" bridges — delay a satisfying moment with a smaller one
5. Comparative anchors — worth more than your house, your car, your college fund
6. Open a story mid-action — "so right as I was about to hand over the check..."
7. Directly address a myth — "everyone thinks the rarest card is X. It's not."
8. A visual tease that's partially blocked or blurred
9. A ticking countdown timer on screen
10. "I'll show you in a second, but first you need context" — justifies the wait
11. Promise a twist explicitly
12. Ask a question you don't answer immediately
13. A false ending, then "but wait—"
14. A reaction shot without showing what caused it
15. **Stack two gaps** — a small one resolved mid-video, a bigger one saved for the end. This is what keeps both formats watched to completion.

7E. Hook mistakes that kill videos

- **Greeting the audience.** "Hey guys, welcome back to the channel" is the most expensive sentence on YouTube. Cut it. Every time.
- **Explaining what the video will be about** instead of starting the video.
- **Intro animations and logo stings.** Delete them. If you must, put it at 0:30 after the hook lands, under two seconds.
- **A wide establishing shot.** Nobody needs geography. Start close and tight.
- **Burying the number.** If the video is about \$1M, say \$1M in the first five words.
- **Asking a question the viewer answers "no" to.** "Ever wondered how grading works?" — most people: no. Assert, don't ask.
- **Promising what you can't deliver.**
- **Too much hook.** A 45-second hook is an intro. Fifteen seconds max for long-form, three for Shorts.
- **Opening on a filler word.** Trim to the first hard consonant.

7F. Hook testing

- Record **three to five opening lines** per video at different energy levels. Costs four minutes on set.
- For long-form, pick the one that survives watching cold 24 hours later with your finger on the swipe.
- For Shorts, publish variants of the same content with different hooks a week apart. Shorts are cheap enough to genuinely A/B test.
- The scoreboard is **retention at the 30-second mark**. Nothing else grades your hook.

The 20 Psychology Triggers

Why hooks work. Pick two or three per video and lean hard. Stacking all twenty makes a video that feels like a seizure.

- 1. Future pacing** — the best part is still coming. "The last card on this list will make you rethink collecting entirely."
- 2. Unresolved problems** — name the pain before the solution. "Most collectors overpay because they don't know this one thing."
- 3. Situational relatability** — speak their internal monologue. "You know that feeling when you find something in your attic and wonder if it's worth anything?"
- 4. Context framing** — show the ending first. Open with the \$1M card, then "here's how we got here."
- 5. Stories** — narrative arcs people need resolved. "We almost didn't buy this collection — here's what happened."
- 6. Controversy** — create two camps. "Grading companies are ruining this hobby. Fight me."
- 7. Novelty** — a new angle on an old topic. "Nobody's ever unboxed a collection this way."
- 8. Insight** — reframe how they see something. "You're pricing your cards wrong. Here's the formula dealers actually use."

9. Five senses — make it cinematic. The smell of old cardboard, the sound of the rip, the weight of the box.

10. Common enemies — rally a tribe. "Scalpers ruined this hobby for everyone."

11. Social proof and scarcity. "Only three of these exist." "Even [known collector] doesn't own this."

12. Identity reinforcement — speak to who they already think they are. "If you call yourself a real collector, you need to see this."

13. Loss aversion — fear of loss beats hope of gain. "This mistake cost me \$50,000." "You might be sitting on a fortune without knowing it."

14. Pattern interrupt — break an expectation instantly. Start mid-sentence, mid-action, or with something visually wrong.

15. Authority transfer — borrowed credibility. "PSA themselves told me this is one of twelve in existence."

16. Reciprocity — give value before asking for anything. Front-load the single most useful thing in the video. Counterintuitive, but it kills the "is this worth my time" objection immediately.

17. Vicarious experience — let them live something they never will. Most viral content is a rented life. Your viewer's interest is tourism, not education. Lean into it.

18. Justice and karma — setup and payoff of fairness. The scammer gets caught. The underdog wins. The arrogant get humbled. One of the highest share-rate structures that exists.

19. Incompleteness (the Zeigarnik effect) — the brain hates open loops. People return to unfinished tasks. "Card 7 of 10" on screen makes the brain want closure. This is the mechanical basis of countdowns.

20. Parasocial investment — they're watching for *you*, not the topic. Feed it with real reactions, real stakes, and admitting when things go wrong. The only trigger that compounds over time, and the reason established channels can make "boring" videos that still perform.

Super Hooks — Advanced Formulas

1. **Effort condensed:** "I did the thing that takes 1,000 hours so you can learn it in 8 minutes"
2. **Public failure:** "I lost \$[X] doing this — learn from my mistake"
3. **Credibility arbitrage:** "I'm not an expert, so I paid one \$10,000 to teach me"
4. **Access:** "I'm the first person allowed to film inside [place]"
5. **Constraint:** "I had to do this with \$0 / in 24 hours / blindfolded"
6. **Contrarian take:** "Everything you've been told about [X] is wrong"
7. **Insider access:** "I got into [place/data] most people never see"
8. **Time compression:** "In the next 60 seconds you'll know more than 90% of people"
9. **Confession:** "I have to admit something I've never told anyone"
10. **Numbers shock:** "Only 0.001% of people will ever own one of these"
11. **Reverse mentorship:** "Here's what my biggest failure taught my mentor"
12. **Challenge framing:** "I gave myself 24 hours to find the rarest card in the world"
13. **Comparison:** "I compared the cheapest and most expensive version of X"
14. **Prediction:** "This will be worth 10x in five years — here's why"
15. **Reveal-then-explain:** "This sold for \$5.2 million. Let me tell you why."

The 18 Content Engines

Every video that performs runs on at least one of these. **Strong videos stack two or three.** Weak videos run on none — they're just information delivery.

#	Engine	Core emotion	Best format	Stacks with
1	Extreme / stunts	Awe, disbelief	Both	Competition, transformation
2	Controversy	Anger, tribalism	Long-form	Investigation, review
3	Comedy	Joy, surprise	Shorts	Relatability, prank
4	Storytelling	Tension, catharsis	Long-form	Investigation, transformation
5	Transformation	Satisfaction	Both	Storytelling, ASMR
6	Competition	Suspense	Long-form	Extreme, storytelling
7	Investigation	Curiosity	Long-form	Controversy, storytelling
8	Reaction	Social bonding	Shorts	Comedy, nostalgia
9	List / countdown	Completion drive	Both	Review, extreme
10	Relatability	Recognition	Shorts	Comedy, nostalgia
11	Prank	Tension, comedy	Shorts	Comedy, reaction
12	Review	Decision utility	Long-form	List, controversy

#	Engine	Core emotion	Best format	Stacks with
13	Nostalgia	Warmth, longing	Both	Relatability, reaction
14	ASMR / sensory	Calm, satisfaction	Shorts	Transformation
15	Generosity / giving	Warmth, hope	Both	Storytelling, transformation
16	Education / how-to	Empowerment	Long-form	Investigation, list
17	Behind the scenes / process	Curiosity, intimacy	Both	Transformation, education
18	Documentary / deep dive	Immersion	Long-form	Investigation, storytelling

Notes on the less obvious ones:

- **Generosity** has an extremely high share rate and is surprisingly cheap to execute at small scale.
- **Education** has a lower ceiling but the highest return-viewer rate and the best search longevity.
- **Behind the scenes** is the reliable way to make a boring topic visual. "How it's made" is evergreen.
- **Documentary** is the highest-AVD format that exists, longest to produce, longest tail.

Before writing a script, name your engines out loud: "This is investigation plus controversy." If you can't name one, the video has no motor and you're relying entirely on packaging.

Scripting & Structure

11A. The long-form beat sheet

Write in this order, not in chronological order.

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|--|
| 1. HOOK | (0:00–0:15) | The promise. Written first. |
| 2. PAYOFF | (~85%) | What they came for. Written second. |
| 3. STAKES | (0:15–1:30) | Why it matters. What can be lost. |
| 4. COMPLICATION | (~40–50%) | Something goes wrong. Non-negotiable. |
| 5. ESCALATION | (50–85%) | Stakes raise. Pacing slows, emotion rises. |
| 6. TWIST | (~90%) | The payoff has a cost or reversal. |
| 7. AFTERMATH | (~95%) | The "and then." One more beat. |
| 8. CTA | (last 30s) | One ask, with a reason. |

Something must go wrong in the middle. Videos without a complication have flat, declining retention curves. If nothing actually went wrong, find the smallest real friction and dramatize it honestly.

11B. The Shorts beat sheet

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|--|
| 0:00–0:02 | HOOK | Visual + audio + text + speech, all four |
| 0:02–0:05 | PROMISE | What they'll get, specifically |
| 0:05–0:40 | PAYOFF | Escalating micro-payoffs every 2–4 sec |
| 0:40–0:50 | CLIMAX | The biggest single moment |
| 0:50–0:55 | TWIST | Optional reversal or loss frame |
| 0:55–end | LOOP SEAM | Flow the last frame into the first |

11C. Scripting rules

- **Write for the ear, not the eye.** Read every line out loud. If you stumble, rewrite.
- **One idea per sentence.** Subordinate clauses lose people.
- **Cut every word that doesn't change meaning.** "I decided to go ahead and buy" → "I bought."
- **Show, then explain — never explain, then show.** Explanation before payoff is the leading cause of mid-video drop-off.
- **Never say a number without putting it on screen.**
- **Write the re-hooks explicitly** into the script at 60-90 second intervals. Don't hope you'll remember.
- **Scripted vs. loose:** script the hook and the re-hooks word for word. Bullet-point the rest so your delivery stays alive.
- **Read time $\approx$ 150 words per minute.** A 10-minute video is roughly 1,400–1,600 spoken words.

The Middle — Retention Mechanics

RETENTION WARNING

Never let every curiosity loop close at once. Open the next question before resolving the current one.

OPEN-LOOP STACKING

Question A

Question B

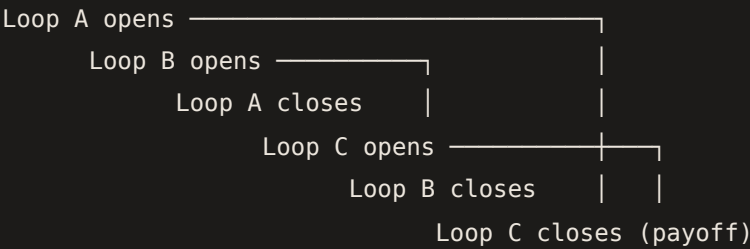
Question C

Before one payoff lands, seed the next reason to stay.

The hook gets the click. The middle decides if they finish.

Core principle: open loop stacking

Never let all curiosity gaps close at once. Open a new one before or as you close the old one.



At no point is there zero unanswered question. That's the whole trick.

12A. Shorts

1. **One core loop only.** Shorts die when they try to cover too much.
2. **Micro-payoffs every 2-4 seconds** — a number, a fact, a visual change.
3. **Escalating stakes** — #10 impressive, #1 shocking.
4. **Jump cuts and zoom punch-ins on every key word.**
5. **Captions in short bursts synced to speech**, never full sentences.
6. **Text asks questions your voice hasn't answered yet** — "but how much...?"
7. **The loop seam.** Design the last frame to flow into the first. Rewatches count as views and push retention past 100%. The single biggest Shorts multiplier.
8. **No dead frames.** If a frame could be removed without loss, remove it.
9. **Front-load your best visual.** If the most striking shot is at 0:22, move it to 0:02 and rebuild around it.

12B. Long-form

1. **Re-hook every 60-90 seconds** — restate the promise.
2. **Chapter breaks with their own mini-hook** — "next up, the card almost nobody has heard of."
3. **B-roll storytelling.** Don't just talk; show the process.
4. **Emotional pacing.** Alternate high energy (reveal) with low (explanation) so viewers don't fatigue.
5. **Callback loops.** Reference minute one again at minute ten.
6. **Pattern interrupts.** Change camera angle, location, or energy every few minutes.

7. **Comment bait.** A direct, easy, opinion-based question mid-video — and actually reply.
8. **Humor beats** every couple minutes to reset attention.
9. **Three-act minimum.** Setup → complication → resolution.
10. **Raise stakes at the midpoint.** The most reliable fix for the classic 50% sag.
11. **Never explain before you show.**
12. **Cut your first three minutes by 40%.** Almost every amateur long-form video is far too slow in the first third.
13. **Watch your rough cut at 1.5x.** Anything that still feels slow at 1.5x is fatally slow at 1x.
14. **The ten-second rule.** Every ten seconds should contain a reason to watch the next ten.

12C. Reading the retention curve

Shape	Diagnosis	Fix
Cliff in the first 15 sec	Hook doesn't match the packaging promise, or the open is slow	Rewrite the first 15 sec; deliver on the thumbnail immediately
Steady steep decline throughout	Pacing too slow, no open loops	Tighter cuts, more re-hooks, cut 20% of runtime
Sag in the middle, recovery at the end	Middle has no stakes	Add a complication; raise midpoint stakes
Sharp drop at one timestamp	Something specific happened — a sponsor read, a tangent, a slow section	Watch that exact moment and cut it
Spike upward	People rewound or clipped it	Your most valuable data point. Do more of that.

Shape	Diagnosis	Fix
Flat and high	You have a format	Escalate it (Part 2E)
Drop at the start of the outro	Normal	Ignore, unless it's before your CTA — then move the CTA earlier



The Payoff

1. **Deliver the promise fully.** The reveal should *exceed* what the hook promised, not merely meet it.
2. **Twist the payoff.** "We spent \$1M... and then lost it." Loss framing hits harder than a clean win.
3. **Full-circle callback.** Return to the opening visual or line so the video feels closed.
4. **Emotional peak, not just informational peak.** Show your genuine reaction, not just the fact.
5. **The "and then" beat.** After the payoff lands, one more beat: a consequence, a reaction, a reversal, a cost. Videos that just *stop* after the reveal underperform.
6. **Show the aftermath.** What changed because of what just happened?
7. **Give a verdict.** "Was it worth it? Honestly, no." A clear opinion drives comments harder than any question.
8. **Cliffhanger for a series.** End mid-story to justify Part 2.
9. **Recap in ten seconds max** for long-form before the CTA.

Engineering shareability

Retention gets you served. Shares get you scaled. Shares come from a payoff that gives the *sharer* something:

- **Status** — "I knew about this first." Novelty, insider info, rare footage.

- **Identity signaling** — "This is so me / so us."
- **Argument fuel** — a clear position someone wants to defend or attack.
- **Utility** — "you need to see this, it'll save you money."
- **Emotional contagion** — awe, outrage, warmth, or joy strong enough to want company.

The test: write the exact text message a viewer sends with this video. If you can't, add one of the five above.

Call to Action

1. **Place it immediately after the emotional peak**, never before. Attention is highest post-payoff.
2. **Give a reason.** "Subscribe" is ignored. "Subscribe — part two is where we try to make the money back" converts. Always attach the ask to a promise.
3. **One CTA per video.** Subscribe *or* comment *or* click the next video. Stacking three gets you zero.
4. **Never CTA in the first 30 seconds.** You haven't earned it and it's a retention cliff.
5. **Tease part two explicitly** if there is one.
6. **Comment bait tied to the content**, not a generic "what do you think?"
7. **End screen: two elements maximum** — your best-retaining related video plus subscribe. More causes decision paralysis and they leave instead.
8. **The last 20 seconds should make the next video sound more interesting than the one they just watched.** This drives session time, which is what YouTube optimizes for.
9. **Sponsor placement:** never in the first 60 seconds, never right after a re-hook. Best spot is immediately after a payoff moment when goodwill is highest. Under 60 seconds, with a hard visual transition in and out so it doesn't feel like the video ended.
10. **Shorts CTA: minimal.** A verbal "part two on my channel" and nothing else. Any CTA that interrupts the loop costs more in completion rate than it gains.

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the research and the objectives of the study. It then presents a literature review of the existing research on the topic. The second part of the paper describes the methodology used in the study, including the data collection and analysis techniques. The third part of the paper presents the results of the study, and the fourth part discusses the conclusions and implications of the findings. The paper concludes with a summary of the main points and a list of references.

The research was conducted using a quantitative approach, with data collected from a survey of 100 participants. The data was analyzed using statistical software, and the results were presented in a series of tables and graphs. The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between the variables being studied, and that the results have important implications for the field of research.

The study was limited by a number of factors, including the sample size and the potential for bias. However, the results of the study are consistent with the findings of other research in the field, and the study provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of the topic.

The research was funded by the National Science Foundation, and the results of the study are available to the public. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the research community, and the results of the study are presented in a clear and concise manner.

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Filming & Production

PRODUCTION PRIORITY

Audio clarity is a higher-return upgrade than a more expensive camera body.

15A. Audio is more important than camera

The single biggest technical difference between amateur and professional content is sound, not image.

- **Get the mic within 6-12 inches.** Room reverb is the number one audio tell.
- **Record in a soft room** — carpet, curtains, a closet. Bad rooms cannot be fixed in post.
- **Always record a backup track** at a lower level in case of clipping.
- **Record 30 seconds of room tone** at every location. It saves edits.
- **Monitor with headphones while recording.** Discovering a dead mic in the edit is a lost shoot.
- A \$100 lavalier or shotgun mic beats a \$3,000 camera with onboard audio. Every time.

15B. Lighting

- **One big soft key** at roughly 45° to the face, slightly above eye level.

- **Fill** on the opposite side — a second soft source or a bounce card — to lift shadows.
- **Separation light** behind the subject, hitting the shoulders and hair, so you don't merge into the background.
- **Never overhead-only.** Ceiling lights create raccoon eyes.
- **Expose for the face,** protect highlights.
- **Bright and clean beats moody** for almost all YouTube content. Moody reads as "hard to see" at phone size.
- **Light the background separately** — even a cheap practical lamp or a colored LED adds depth.

15C. Shoot for the edit

- **Get coverage.** Wide, medium, and close of every important moment. Without coverage you can't cut, and without cuts you can't pace.
- **Always be rolling.** The real reactions happen between takes.
- **Overshoot b-roll 3x.** Every noun you say should have a visual. Ten seconds of each insert, not two.
- **Shoot the thumbnail deliberately** as its own setup.
- **Shoot the same moment twice** — once as it happens, once as a clean insert.
- **Shoot inserts of hands, faces, objects, and details.** These are what let you hide cuts.
- **Continuity:** same wardrobe and same location for pickups. Note where things sit.

15D. Camera settings

Setting	Guidance
Resolution	4K if your pipeline handles it — gives you crop and reframe room, and a better delivery codec
Frame rate	24 or 30fps standard; 60fps+ only if you'll use slow motion
Shutter	Roughly double your frame rate (1/50 at 24fps, 1/60 at 30fps)
Aperture	f/2.8–f/4 for a subject; stop down if you need focus latitude
ISO	Lowest clean value your camera has; add light instead of gain
White balance	Set it manually and lock it. Auto WB shifts mid-shot and ruins matching.
Focus	Check it every take. Soft footage is unusable footage.
Profile	Standard or slightly flat. Full log only if you'll actually grade.

15E. Vertical capture

- **Either shoot native 9:16**, or shoot 4K 16:9 and crop with room to reframe.
- If cropping, **frame with vertical in mind while shooting** — keep the subject centered and leave headroom.
- **Handheld motion adds energy** for Shorts. A gimbal or tripod reads cleaner for premium content.
- **Watch the safe zones while shooting** (Part 17B) — don't put action where the UI will cover it.

15F. On-camera delivery

- **Energy on camera reads about 30% lower than it feels.** Push harder than feels natural.

- **Talk faster than you would in conversation.** You can always slow down in the edit; you can't add pace.
 - **Look down the lens,** not at the screen.
 - **Do three takes of the hook** at different energy levels.
 - **Don't restart from the top** when you flub — pause, breathe, and pick up from the start of the sentence. Faster to shoot and easier to cut.
 - **Say numbers clearly and land on them.** They're your emphasis points.
-

Running Street & Crowd Shoots

Street and convention formats have the highest ceiling in the library and the highest failure rate, because everything that can go wrong is outside your control. This part is the operational discipline that makes them repeatable.

16A. Before you go

- **Get permission where permission exists.** Conventions, expos, malls, and private venues have rules about filming. A press pass or a media badge is often free if you ask in advance, and it changes what you're allowed to do. Turning up and hoping is how you get removed two hours into a shoot.
- **Contact the organiser by email** and keep the reply. A written yes ends most on-site disputes instantly.
- **Ask vendors before filming their booth or stock.** Ten seconds of courtesy prevents the one confrontation that ends your day.
- **Scout the space** for a quiet corner with decent light. You'll want somewhere to pull people aside for longer conversations.
- **Know the local rules for public filming.** They vary by country and by state, and they differ for public streets versus privately-owned public spaces like malls and plazas.

16B. Consent and releases

Treat this as production discipline, not paperwork. It protects the people you film and it protects you.

- **Ask before you roll**, clearly: who you are, what it's for, and where it will be posted. "I'm filming for YouTube, is it alright if I ask you a couple of questions?" Record their yes on camera.
- **Use a release for anything substantial** — anyone who's a significant part of the video, not a passing face in a crowd. A simple one-page release or a photographed QR-code form on your phone is enough for most purposes.
- **Minors need a parent or guardian's consent.** No exceptions, and this matters enormously at conventions where the crowd skews young.
- **Honor withdrawal.** If someone asks to be cut afterwards, cut them. The cost of a re-edit is trivial next to the cost of the alternative.
- **Blur anyone who declined** but ended up in frame.
- **Be more careful, not less, when someone is enthusiastic.** People agree to things in a fun moment that they regret when it has two million views. If a clip makes someone look foolish, ask yourself whether they understood that was the deal.

If your channel grows into a business, get a lawyer to give you a release template for your jurisdiction. Until then, written consent and good faith cover most of it.

16C. The kit

Item	Why
Wireless lavalier or a handheld mic	Crowds are loud. Onboard camera audio is unusable in a hall.
Dead cat / wind protection	Outdoors, wind noise ruins takes you can't reshoot

Item	Why
Backup batteries and cards	You cannot pause a convention
A second camera or a phone	Reaction angles, and insurance against a failure
Something to make you approachable	A visible board, a prop, a branded shirt. People approach <i>you</i> , which changes everything.
Small giveaway items	Stickers or similar. Reciprocity makes strangers say yes.
A monopod or gimbal	Walk-and-talk footage that isn't nauseating
Headphones	Check audio between subjects, not at home

The prop matters more than it sounds. A large tier board, a strange object, or a sign inverts the dynamic — instead of approaching strangers, strangers approach you, and people who approach you are already willing participants.

16D. Approaching strangers

The skill that decides whether these formats work at all.

- **Lead with the ask, not with yourself.** "Can I get your opinion on something?" beats a thirty-second explanation of your channel.
- **Make it fast and low-commitment.** "Thirty seconds, one question." People say yes to small asks.
- **Approach people who are already stopped** — waiting, browsing, sitting. Never intercept someone walking with purpose.
- **Approach groups.** Groups say yes more than individuals, they perform for each other, and you get better energy.
- **Look like something is happening.** A camera plus a visible prop reads as an event. A camera alone reads as surveillance.

- **Take no gracefully and instantly.** "No worries, have a good one." Never push. The person watching you get rejected is your next subject.
- **Expect a low hit rate.** One in three or four is normal. Plan your day around the number of usable answers you need, not the number of people you'll ask.

16E. Getting good answers

Most street footage is boring because the questions are boring.

- **Ask for a story, not a fact.** "How long have you collected?" gets a number. "What's the one you'd never sell?" gets a story.
- **Ask for an opinion with a stake.** "What's the most overrated thing in this hobby?" produces real answers.
- **Use the follow-up.** The first answer is a reflex; the second is the real one. Always ask one more: "why that one?"
- **Let silence work.** Don't fill the pause. People fill it themselves, and what they add is usually the usable part.
- **Never ask yes/no questions** unless you immediately follow with "why?"
- **Ask the same question to everyone.** Consistency is what makes the montage cut together.
- **Get a clean restate.** Ask them to answer in a full sentence — "the most overrated thing is..." — so the clip stands alone without your question in it.
- **Film their hands, their item, their face.** You need cutaways to edit around the awkward parts.

16F. Shooting for the edit

- **Get a clean ten seconds of room tone** at each location.

- **Shoot the wide establishing shot of the venue once**, early, before it gets crowded.
- **Get b-roll of everything you'll mention** — booths, crowds, the item, the board filling up.
- **Film your own reactions separately**. You won't have them in the moment, and you'll need them to cut between subjects.
- **Record the hook on location** while the energy is real. Hooks recorded at home the next day always sound flat.
- **Shoot the thumbnail deliberately** at the venue, while the crowd and the light are there.
- **Log the good ones as you go**. A note on your phone — "green shirt guy, great answer" — saves hours in the edit.

16G. Editing crowd footage

- **Lead with your single best answer**, not with chronology. The best thing anyone said is your hook, regardless of when it happened.
- **Cut ruthlessly**. Twenty subjects becomes six in the final edit. Nobody owes you screen time for having filmed them.
- **Cut your own question out** wherever the answer stands alone.
- **Use the board, the tally, or the counter as your spine** — it gives the viewer a sense of progress through what is otherwise a series of disconnected people.
- **Keep the failures**. Refusals, awkward moments, and the one person who gives a completely unhinged answer are usually the most memorable part.
- **Vary your framing** between subjects or the montage becomes visually monotonous.

Editing — Shorts

17A. Captions

The highest-impact editing decision in short-form. Most Shorts are watched with sound on but attention split, and captions are what hold the eye.

Rule	Specification
Words on screen	1-2 words. Three maximum. Never a full sentence.
Position	Horizontally centered. Vertically at 45-55% of frame height — above the platform UI and near where the eye rests.
Timing	Synced word by word to speech. Two frames of drift feels wrong.
Case	ALL CAPS for high energy; sentence case for calm or storytelling.
Font	Heavy sans-serif — Montserrat ExtraBold, Poppins Bold, Inter Black, or a rounded bold. Never thin, serif, script, or default.
Size	Cap height roughly 7-10% of frame height. Readable at arm's length on a phone.
Stroke	Black outline 8-14px at 1080p, plus a soft drop shadow. This is what makes it readable over anything.
Animation	Pop-in: scale 88% → 100% over 2-3 frames. No fades — fades read as slow.

Rule	Specification
Emphasis	Highlight one key word per phrase in a contrasting color. One highlight per 3–5 words maximum.
Never	Auto-generated captions left unedited. They will misspell your niche's vocabulary.

Advanced moves:

- **Scale the emphasis word to 130%** and let it punch, paired with a sound effect
- **Shake the text** on impact words
- **Color-code by speaker** in multi-person content
- **Number counters** that rapidly count up to the final figure instead of appearing statically

17B. Safe zones

Platform UI covers part of your frame. Content placed there is invisible. Frame is 1080×1920; approximate unusable areas:

Platform	Bottom	Right	Top
YouTube Shorts	~300–360px (title, channel, description)	~130px (action buttons)	~110px
TikTok	~450px (caption, music bar)	~180px (buttons)	~120px
Instagram Reels	~380px	~150px	~130px

Practical rule: keep all critical content — captions, faces, key objects, graphics — inside the **middle 60% vertically** and **left 85% horizontally**. Put a translucent guide layer in your project template.

Check on an actual phone before publishing. Every time.

17C. Pacing and cuts

- **Average shot length 1-2 seconds.** If a shot runs past three without a zoom, cut or move.
- **Never a static frame.** Add a slow constant push-in (100% → 104% across the shot) to every locked-off shot. This is why professional edits feel alive.
- **Zoom punch-ins on key words** — snap to 110-120% for 4-8 frames, then back.
- **Cut on the beat** of the music where possible. Even loose beat-matching makes an edit feel intentional.
- **Remove every gap.** Cut silences over ~0.2 sec, all breaths, all "um / uh / like / so." A Short should feel breathless.
- **Speed ramp anything repetitive** — a 20-second process becomes three seconds at 6x with a whoosh.
- **Whip pan and motion-blur transitions** between sections. Free energy.
- **Never cut to black.** A black frame reads as "video over" and triggers a swipe.

17D. The loop seam

Design the ending so it flows into the beginning:

- Match the last frame's composition to the first frame's
- End on the same audio tone the video opens with
- End mid-sentence so the first words feel like the continuation
- Or simply end on the highest-energy visual so a rewatch feels rewarding

17E. Export settings

Setting	Value
Resolution	1080×1920 (9:16); 4K vertical if the source allows
Frame rate	30fps standard; 60fps for motion-heavy
Bitrate	15–20 Mbps at 1080p
Audio	48kHz stereo, integrated loudness around –14 LUFS
Codec	H.264, MP4
Length	Under 60 sec unless it truly needs more. 20–40 sec is often the completion-rate sweet spot.

17F. Shorts editing checklist

- ☐ Frame one has motion, a subject, and hook text
- ☐ No black frames anywhere, especially the start
- ☐ Captions 1–2 words, centered, above the UI
- ☐ Every silence over 0.2 sec removed
- ☐ Zoom or motion on every shot — no static frames
- ☐ Sound effect on every graphic, transition, and reveal
- ☐ Music ducked ~12dB under speech
- ☐ Checked on a real phone for safe-zone collisions
- ☐ Ending loops into the beginning
- ☐ Watched once at full speed pretending to be a stranger

Editing — Long-form

18A. The four-pass edit

Don't do everything at once.

1. **Assembly pass** — get the story in order. Ugly. No music, graphics, or color. Just: does the story work? If the assembly is boring, polish will not save it.
2. **Retention pass** — the important one. Delete anything that isn't a new fact, a laugh, a visual, or an emotional beat. **Target: cut 25-40% of the assembly runtime.**
3. **Polish pass** — b-roll, graphics, text, transitions, zooms.
4. **Audio pass** — music, sound design, mix, loudness.

18B. Pacing

- **Average shot length 3-6 seconds** for talking content; 2-4 for high energy.
- **Never hold one angle past 8 seconds** without a cutaway, zoom, graphic, or angle change.
- **B-roll max 3 seconds per shot** unless something is actively happening in it.
- **Cut the first three minutes hardest.** That's where you lose people.
- **Watch the rough cut at 1.5x.** Anything still slow at 1.5x is fatally slow at 1x.

18C. Cutting techniques

Technique	What it does
J-cut (audio leads video)	Makes cuts feel invisible; pulls viewers forward
L-cut (audio trails video)	Smooths scene changes, keeps momentum
Jump cut + reframe	Hides a cut in the same shot by shifting scale/position 10–15%
Match cut	Cut on similar shapes or motion — feels cinematic and expensive
Cutaway	Hides an edit, adds information, resets attention
Speed ramp	Compresses boring process, punctuates impacts
Freeze frame + label	Introduces people or objects, buys a beat of comprehension
Split screen	Comparisons — before/after, cheap/expensive
Picture-in-picture reaction	Adds a second emotional layer to a static shot
Whip pan / motion transition	Section changes with energy
Screen shake on impact	Cheap and effective. Use sparingly.
Invisible cut	Cut hidden behind a pan or an object crossing frame

18D. Graphics and text

- **Progress indicators** — "Card 7 of 10" or a corner progress bar. Exploits the Zeigarnik effect; people stay to complete the set. One of the most underused retention tools available.
- **Number pop-ups** for every stat, price, or figure you say aloud.
- **Lower thirds** for people and places, under three seconds.
- **Countdown timers** for challenges and constraints.

- **Text emphasis** on key phrases — not full captions, just the punchline of the sentence.
- **Money counters** that tick up. Extremely effective for anything with a running total.
- **A consistent design system.** Same font, same two or three colors, same animation style across every video. This is what makes a channel look professional and creates format recognition.

18E. Captions for long-form

Two valid approaches:

Selective emphasis (recommended for most). Burn in text only for key phrases, numbers, and punchlines — three to six words at a time, in the lower third or beside the speaker. Keeps the frame clean while holding attention.

Full burned captions. Every word, Shorts-style, throughout. Works for high-energy fast-cut content and anything likely to be watched muted. Costs frame real estate and can feel frantic in slower content.

Either way, always upload a proper .srt closed-caption file. It's free accessibility and free search indexing that most creators skip.

18F. Color

- **One consistent LUT or grade** across all your videos. Consistency is a branding asset.
- **Slight S-curve contrast and +10-20% saturation** over flat footage. YouTube compression eats contrast, so grade slightly hotter than looks right on your monitor.

- **Match your shots.** Nothing screams amateur like cutting from warm to cool between two angles of the same scene.
- **Skin tones are the priority.** If skin looks wrong, everything looks wrong.

18G. Export settings

Setting	Value
Resolution	1080p minimum; 4K if possible — YouTube gives 4K uploads a better codec, so even 1080p viewers see a cleaner image
Frame rate	Match source. 24fps cinematic, 30fps standard, 60fps action
Bitrate	1080p: 20-30 Mbps. 4K: 60-80 Mbps.
Audio	48kHz stereo, ~ -14 LUFS integrated, true peak under -1 dBTP
Codec	H.264 (MP4) for compatibility

18H. Long-form editing checklist

- ☐ First 30 seconds delivers on the thumbnail promise
- ☐ No intro animation before the hook
- ☐ Cut 25%+ during the retention pass
- ☐ No shot held past 8 seconds without change
- ☐ Re-hook every 60-90 seconds
- ☐ A complication exists in the middle
- ☐ Stakes raise at the midpoint
- ☐ Every spoken number appears on screen
- ☐ Progress indicator if the structure is countable

- ☐ Music energy changes at every segment boundary
 - ☐ Audio mixed and loudness-normalized
 - ☐ Color consistent shot to shot
 - ☐ One CTA, after the emotional peak, with a reason
 - ☐ End screen: two suggestions max
 - ☐ Watched it once, start to finish, at 1x, without touching anything
-

Sound Design & Music

Sound is half of perceived production quality and almost nobody works on it.

19A. The mix hierarchy

1. **Voice** — always clearly on top, never fighting anything
2. **Sound effects** — punctuation, roughly 6–12dB under voice
3. **Music** — atmosphere, roughly 12–18dB under voice when speech is present

19B. Music

- **Change the track or the section at every segment boundary.** Ten minutes of one flat loop is the fastest way to make a video feel long.
- **Match energy to the emotional beat.** Quiet, sparse music during reveals beats loud music.
- **Duck music under speech** with sidechain compression or auto-ducking.
- **Drop the music entirely** for a beat before a major reveal. Silence is the most underused tool in editing.
- **Build to the payoff.** The music should peak exactly when the payoff lands.
- **Use licensed libraries** — Epidemic Sound, Artlist, Musicbed, YouTube Audio Library. A copyright claim on a video that's taking off costs real money.

19C. Sound effects

Put an effect on **every** text appearance, transition, zoom punch-in, number reveal, graphic animation, and impact moment.

If something moves on screen and doesn't make a sound, it feels cheap. But keep every effect subtle — the viewer should *feel* them, not consciously notice them.

19D. Voice processing chain

Noise reduction (light) → EQ (high-pass around 80Hz, gentle presence lift at 3–5kHz) → compression (about 3:1, ~6dB reduction) → limiter.

Then normalize to roughly **–14 LUFS integrated** with true peak under –1 dBTP.

Louder gets crushed by platform normalization; quieter makes viewers turn up and then get blasted by the next video.

Remove mouth noise, breaths, and plosives. Tedious, and it's the difference between listenable and grating.

Publishing — the Upload Itself

PUBLISHING IS PRODUCT

The upload is not administrative work. Packaging, chapters, and the first-hour plan affect performance.

The 15 minutes most people rush. Every item here is measurable upside.

20A. The description

Your description does four jobs: sell the click in search, help YouTube classify the topic, hold your links, and drive session time. Structure it in this order.

Lines 1-2 — the only lines most people see. Roughly the first 120-150 characters appear above "show more" and in search results. Treat this as ad copy. Restate the hook and promise, with your main keyword phrase in it naturally.

We spent \$1,000,000 on Pokémon cards — and three days later we'd lost most of it. Here's exactly what happened.

Lines 3-6 — a real summary. Two to four sentences of genuine description. This is what YouTube reads to understand what the video is about and who to show it to. Write for a human; the keywords will happen naturally.

Then chapters. Timestamps, one per line, **starting at** 0:00. Minimum three chapters, minimum ten seconds each, or YouTube won't render them. Chapters

improve navigation, reduce abandonment when someone wants a specific part, and give you extra surface in search.

```
0:00 The $1,000,000 collection
1:30 How the deal happened
3:15 Cards #10 through #7
6:40 The card that came back damaged
8:00 The top 3
11:00 The #1 card
13:00 How we lost it all
```

Then your primary link. One. Placed after the summary and chapters, not in the first two lines — those are too valuable to spend on a URL.

Then a "watch next" block with two or three links to your own videos. This is a direct session-time play and it costs nothing.

Then boilerplate — socials, gear, business email, affiliate disclosures, music credits.

Then 3-5 hashtags. The first three appear above your title. Use relevant ones, not thirty.

Description rules

- **200-400 words is plenty.** There's no bonus for 2,000.
- **Don't keyword-stuff.** It doesn't work and can hurt you.
- **Never bury a required disclosure.** Sponsorship and affiliate disclosures go in the description *and* verbally in the video, visibly, not hidden.
- **Template the boilerplate.** Eighty percent of every description is reusable — save it and paste.
- **Update it later** if the topic evolves or a link changes. Descriptions are editable forever.

20B. Links — description vs. pinned comment

This is a genuine strategic choice, and the answer is usually "both."

	Description	Pinned comment
Visibility on desktop	Moderate — requires expanding	High — top of comments
Visibility on mobile	Low — most viewers never open it	High — appears without expanding
Editable after publishing	Yes	Yes
Good for	Permanent links, disclosures, chapters, SEO	The one link you actually want clicked
Clickability	Lower	Higher

Practical policy:

- Put your important link in **both** the description and a pinned comment.
- **Say it out loud in the video** — "link's in the pinned comment." Verbally referencing a link multiplies click-through versus a silent link.
- **One primary link.** Multiple links means no clicks. If you need many, use a single landing page.
- Heavy off-platform linking does pull viewers away, which works against session time. Use links purposefully, not reflexively.
- For **Shorts**, descriptions are barely visible — the pinned comment and your channel-level links matter much more.

20C. Pinned comment strategy

The pinned comment is prime real estate. Pick **one** job for it:

1. **The comment-bait question** — drives replies, which drives distribution
2. **Context or a correction** — "yes, I said 1998, I meant 1999" heads off a hundred identical comments
3. **The link/CTA**
4. **A teaser for the next video**
5. **A story that didn't make the cut** — rewards the people who scroll down

Pin it within minutes of publishing, before the comment section fills up.

20D. Chapters, cards, end screens, playlists

- **Chapters** — as above. Always. Free navigation and search surface.
- **Cards** — one or two, placed right after a moment where a viewer would naturally want a tangent.
- **End screen** — two elements maximum: your best-retaining related video plus subscribe. Point to the video most likely to *keep* them, not your newest.
- **Playlists** — add every video to a relevant playlist. Playlists drive autoplay and session time. Put the best-retaining video first in each playlist; playlist titles and descriptions are themselves searchable.

20E. Upload checklist

Long-form:

- ☐ Title final, under 60 characters, front-loaded
- ☐ Custom thumbnail, squint-tested, checked against the competitor grid
- ☐ First two description lines written as ad copy with the keyword phrase
- ☐ Real summary paragraph

- ☐ Chapters starting at 0:00, three or more
- ☐ Primary link in description *and* pinned comment
- ☐ "Watch next" links to your own videos
- ☐ 3-5 hashtags
- ☐ Tags — low impact, but five to ten relevant ones cost nothing
- ☐ End screen with two elements
- ☐ Added to a playlist
- ☐ .srt captions uploaded
- ☐ Scheduled, not manually published
- ☐ Pinned comment ready to paste
- ☐ Thumbnail A/B test set up if available

Shorts:

- ☐ Vertical 9:16, safe zones respected
- ☐ Title with clear topic keywords, front-loaded
- ☐ Custom thumbnail set where available
- ☐ 2-3 relevant hashtags
- ☐ No watermark from another platform — actively down-ranked
- ☐ Audio original or platform-licensed

Timing — When to Publish

21A. Find your actual peak

Stop guessing. **YouTube Studio** → **Audience** → "**When your viewers are on YouTube**" gives you a heat map of your real audience's activity by day and hour, already adjusted to their time zones. Use that, not a blog post's generic advice.

21B. Publish 2-4 hours before peak

You want the video to have already accumulated its earliest signals — clicks, watch time, comments — by the time your largest wave of traffic arrives. Publishing *at peak* means the algorithm is still figuring out who to show it to during your best hour.

21C. Consistency beats optimality

Same day, same time, every week. Two reasons:

1. **Your audience learns when to look for you.** Habitual viewers are far more valuable than notified ones.
2. **You get clean comparative data.** If every video goes out Saturday at 10am, differences in performance are about the video, not the timing.

A consistent mediocre slot beats a perfect slot you hit randomly.

21D. Format-specific notes

Long-form. Common starting hypotheses: weekdays mid-afternoon, or weekend mornings, in your dominant audience's time zone. Treat these as a hypothesis to test against your own heat map, not a rule.

Shorts. Timing matters far less. The Shorts feed has a long tail and will push a video over days or weeks. Don't over-engineer it — post consistently and let volume do the work. Three to five per week is a reasonable target.

Search-driven content (tutorials, reviews, how-tos). Timing barely matters at all — these accumulate over months. Publish when convenient.

Trend-driven or news-pegged content. Timing is everything. Same day, ideally within hours. A day late is worthless.

21E. Other timing considerations

- **Be present for the first hour.** Don't publish and disappear. If you can't be around to reply to comments, schedule it for when you can.
- **Check the competitive calendar.** Don't drop your biggest video the same hour a major event or a much larger creator in your niche does.
- **Always schedule rather than publish manually.** It forces you to prepare the thumbnail, description, chapters, and end screens calmly instead of at 2am with the upload bar moving.
- **Premieres** build anticipation and give you a live chat crowd at $t=0$ — good for a big tentpole video, unnecessary overhead for routine uploads.
- **Don't rely on the notification bell.** Only a fraction of subscribers get and act on notifications. Packaging in the home feed does the real work.
- **Seasonality is real.** Q4 has higher ad rates and more competition; January has high viewership and low competition. Plan tentpoles accordingly.

The First 24 Hours

Early engagement velocity is a distribution signal. It's also the window where cheap fixes are still possible.

T-24h	Community post teaser – a still, a poll, or a question
T-1h	Final check: thumbnail, description, chapters, end screen, captions
T-0	Publish (scheduled). Pin your comment immediately.
T+0–2h	Reply to EVERY comment. Heart everything. Be present.
T+2h	Share to your other platforms – natively, not as a link dump
T+6h	Second pass on comments; reply to new ones
T+24h	Check CTR and 30-sec retention. Swap the thumbnail if CTR is below average.
T+48h	Full retention autopsy, written down (Part 25)
T+7d	Real numbers read. Decide the next video from the data.

Post-publish optimization — the part almost nobody does

- **Swap the thumbnail** if CTR is under your channel average after 24–48 hours. Free upside. The algorithm re-tests.
- **Rewrite the title** if it's still underperforming after a few days. Also re-tested.
- **Retro-link.** Add end screens and cards on your top five older videos pointing at the new one. Your back catalog is your best traffic source and it costs ten minutes.
- **Add it to playlists**, including any "official series."
- **Re-share to the Community tab** about a week later for the people who missed it.

- **If a Short pops, immediately make two more like it** while the algorithm is warm on that topic and audience.
 - **Never delete an underperformer.** It still contributes watch time and can resurface months later. Unlist only if it's actively damaging.
-

Comments & Audience Interaction

Comments do two things: they're an engagement signal that affects distribution, and they're the mechanism by which viewers become an audience. Most creators treat the comment section as a chore. It's the cheapest growth lever you have.

23A. The first two hours

- **Reply to every single comment.** Two reasons: engagement velocity affects distribution, and every reply notifies that person, who often comes back and comments again.
- **Heart (♥) comments generously.** It costs nothing, sends a notification, and generates disproportionate loyalty.
- **Reply with a question, not "thanks!"** A reply that ends in a question restarts the conversation and can double your comment count. "Thanks!" ends it.
- **Reply fast and reply human.** Short, specific, in your actual voice.

23B. Asking the right question

The comment-bait question determines whether you get 40 comments or 4,000.

Bad questions: "What do you think?" · "Let me know below!" · "Did you enjoy?" — no cognitive hook, no stake, no easy answer.

Good questions have three properties: easy to answer, opinion-based, and tied to something specific in the video.

- "Would you have paid \$10K for that card — yes or no?"
- "Which of the ten would you have kept?"
- "Was I wrong to sell it? Be honest."
- "What should I do with the \$2,000 I have left? Top comment wins."

That last pattern — **giving the comment section actual power over your next video** — is the strongest version. It converts commenting from a gesture into a stake.

23C. The loyalty mechanics that actually work

Ranked by impact:

1. **Feature comments in your next video.** "This guy said I should do X, so I did."
This is the single strongest loyalty mechanic that exists, because it teaches your audience that their comments have consequences. Do it every video and your comment volume compounds.
2. **Pin a viewer's comment**, not just your own. Extremely high-value reward, and it makes everyone else try harder.
3. **Reply to the top comment on your own video** — it's the most-read piece of text on the page after your title.
4. **Make videos out of comment requests** and say so on camera.
5. **Reply to comments on old videos.** It resurfaces the video and delights people who assumed nobody was listening.
6. **Remember names.** Recognizing a repeat commenter creates a genuine fan.

23D. Handling criticism

- **Reply graciously to fair criticism.** Your whole audience is watching how you handle it, and handling it well converts skeptics.
- **Correct factual errors publicly,** in a pinned comment. Trying to bury a mistake always costs more than owning it.
- **Don't argue.** You will not win, and the argument becomes the story.
- **Don't delete criticism.** Delete spam, hate, and harassment — nothing else. A visibly sanitized comment section reads as untrustworthy.
- **Use moderation tools** — blocked words, held-for-review, trusted moderators — so real comments don't drown in spam.
- **Ignore bad-faith engagement bait.** Not every comment deserves your time.

23E. Comments as a research instrument

Your comment section is free, high-signal market research:

- **The most-liked question is your next video.**
- **What people talk about tells you what actually landed** — it's often not what you thought.
- **Repeated confusion means a structural problem** in how you explained something. Fix it in the next video.
- **Timestamps people quote** are your strongest moments. Make more of those.
- **Track your comment-to-view ratio** as a channel health metric. Rising means your audience is becoming an audience.

23F. Off your own videos

- **Comment on other creators' videos in your niche as your channel** — but *thoughtfully*. Not "great video!" Add something genuinely useful or funny. A good comment on a big video in your niche can be seen by hundreds of thousands of

exactly the right people. This is real, free discovery, and it's one of the most underrated tactics available to small channels.

- **Never comment-spam your own links.** It reads as desperate and gets you blocked.
 - **Participate in niche communities** — Reddit, Discord, forums — genuinely and for months before you ever link anything. Communities can smell an extraction attempt instantly.
-

Community, Platform & Owned Audience

24A. The Community tab

Underused and effectively free reach. Post two to four times a week between uploads.

- **Polls are the highest-engagement format** and double as free market research. Test title concepts and thumbnail options *before you shoot*. Your audience will happily tell you which video to make.
- **Post a teaser the day before an upload** to prime the audience.
- **Post 24 hours after an upload** linking the video for people who missed it.
- **Behind-the-scenes stills, questions, and one-off jokes** keep you in the home feed on days you don't publish.
- **Resurface old videos** — a community post can revive a video from a year ago.

24B. Cross-platform

- **Post Shorts natively to TikTok and Reels** — re-export without watermarks. Cross-platform watermarks are actively down-ranked.
- **Make platform-specific versions:** different first two seconds, different caption styling, different audio. Fifteen extra minutes per platform, materially different performance.

- **Twitter/X and Instagram** for clips, stills, and industry visibility.
- **Don't spread thin.** Two platforms done well beats six done badly.

24C. The audience you own

Algorithms change. An email list doesn't.

- **Start an email list from video one,** even if nobody signs up for months. It's the only audience you own outright.
- **Discord** builds a hardcore core, but it's a real time sink. Only start one if you'll actually show up.
- **A newsletter with behind-the-scenes material** converts casual viewers into people who'll watch everything you make.

24D. Collaborations

The fastest legitimate growth mechanism that exists.

- **Target creators roughly 1-3x your size.** Much bigger and you're a guest; much smaller and there's no lift.
- **Lead with a specific idea,** not "want to collab?"
- **Make the video good for their audience,** not for yours. That's what gets you a second one.
- One good collaboration can outperform three months of solo uploads.

Metrics & the Autopsy

USE EVIDENCE

CTR diagnoses packaging. Early retention diagnoses the hook. Change the right variable.

READ THE SIGNAL, THEN FIX IT

Low CTR

Packaging

Early drop

Hook

Mid-video sag

Stakes + pacing

Share spike

Make more of it

You cannot improve what you don't measure.

25A. The metrics that matter

Long-form

Metric	What it tells you	Working range
Click-through rate	Is the packaging working?	4-10% typical. Under 3% = packaging problem. Over 12% = you found something; escalate it.
Average view duration	Is the video good?	Beat your own channel average. The absolute number matters more than the percentage.

Metric	What it tells you	Working range
Average percentage viewed	Good relative to length?	40%+ is solid for 10+ minutes; 50%+ is strong
30-second retention	Is the hook working?	70%+ good. Under 55% means rewrite your openings.
Session time / viewers brought	Are you helping YouTube?	The metric YouTube actually optimizes for
Shares	Ceiling indicator	A share spike predicts a breakout
Returning viewers	Audience or just traffic?	Rising over time = you have a channel

Shorts

Metric	What it tells you	Working range
Viewed vs. swiped away	Did frame one work?	Aim for 70%+ viewed
Average percentage viewed	Retention	80%+ for sub-30s; can exceed 100% with looping
Shares per 1,000 views	Ceiling indicator	The best single predictor of a Short going big
Likes per 1,000 views	Sentiment	Compare to your own baseline
Subscribers per 1,000 views	Is this building anything?	Shorts convert poorly; above 1 is good

Do not chase absolute benchmarks. Chase your own rolling average. A 4% CTR is a disaster on one channel and a triumph on another. Track your last-20-videos average for every metric and measure each new video against that.

25B. The retention autopsy

Mandatory, within 48 hours, on every long-form video. Studio → the video → Analytics → Engagement.

1. **What was 30-second retention?** Compare to the last five videos.
2. **Where's the first sharp drop?** Watch that exact moment. Why did they leave?
3. **Where's the biggest sustained decline?** That's a pacing problem, not a moment problem.
4. **Is there a spike?** People rewound or clipped it — your most valuable data point. Do more of that.
5. **How did CTR compare?** Packaging problem or content problem?
6. **What did the comments actually talk about?** That's what landed.
7. **One sentence: what will I do differently next video?**

Keep every autopsy in one running append-only document. After ten videos you'll have a personalized playbook worth more than anything written here.

25C. Diagnosing a video that flopped

Low views

- |
 - └ Low impressions? —————→ TOPIC/FORMAT problem. The algorithm couldn't find an audience to test on.
Fix: narrower, more proven, more searchable topic. Verify demand exists.
- |
 - └ High impressions, low CTR? → PACKAGING problem.
Fix: new thumbnail, new title, now, on the live video.
- |
 - └ Good CTR, low 30s retention? → HOOK problem, or the video doesn't match the packaging.
Fix: rewrite openings; stop overpromising.

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25D. When to judge

- **Shorts:** 48–72 hours tells you most of it, but Shorts resurface for months. Never delete one.
- **Long-form:** seven days for the first read, 28 days for the real number. Search content can take months to find its floor.
- **Never judge on day one.** Never delete a video because it started slow.

Channel Systems

26A. Format over content

Channels that compound don't make good videos — they make a **repeatable format** and vary the content inside it. A format is:

- A recognizable structure ("I try X for 30 days")
- A consistent visual identity — same fonts, colors, edit style, thumbnail template family
- A consistent tone
- A predictable *type* of payoff

Why it matters: when a viewer recognizes your format in the feed, the decision to click takes about 200 milliseconds instead of two seconds. That recognition is worth more than any single video.

26B. Cadence

- **Pick a cadence you can hold for twelve months.** One good video a week beats three rushed ones, burnout, then nothing.
- **Batch.** Shoot three or four Shorts in one session. Write three scripts in one sitting. Context-switching is the hidden tax on solo creators.
- **Stay two videos ahead.** A buffer is the only thing that stops you publishing something you know is bad because it's Thursday.

26C. The production system

Stage	Artifact
Ideas	Idea Bank spreadsheet, always open
Packaging	Title options + thumbnail sketches, same doc
Script	One doc per video, hook written first
Shot list	Including the staged thumbnail shot
Footage	Dated, consistently named folders
Project	A template project with your fonts, LUT, caption presets, SFX, and music pre-loaded
Autopsy	One running append-only findings doc

The single biggest speed unlock is that template project. It removes 30-60 minutes of setup from every single video.

26D. When to hire

In order of return:

1. **Editor** — biggest time sink, most delegatable once you have a format
2. **Thumbnail designer** — high skill ceiling, low time cost, huge CTR impact
3. **Researcher/writer** — once the format needs real research
4. **Producer** — once shoots involve other people or locations

Don't hire before you have a format. You'll be paying someone to guess.

26E. The 90-day ramp

Days 1-30 — volume and calibration. Three to five Shorts a week, one long-form a week. The goal is not views; it's reps. Learn your tools, find your on-camera voice, build the template.

Days 31-60 — pattern finding. Look at your top three performers. What do they share — topic, format, thumbnail style? Make three more videos deliberately in that direction.

Days 61-90 — escalate and systematize. Double down on what worked. Build the format. Start the escalation ladder. Run the autopsy on every upload.

Reality check: most channels see nothing meaningful before 20-30 videos. The strongest single predictor of eventual success is not quitting before video 50.

The Repurposing Pipeline

One shoot should produce many assets. This is how small teams compete with large ones.

ONE LONG-FORM SHOOT

- |
- ├→ 1 long-form video (10–20 min)
- ├→ 3–8 Shorts (best moments, each re-hooked)
- ├→ 1 behind-the-scenes or commentary video
- ├→ 5–10 stills for thumbnails, socials, community posts
- └→ A written recap for newsletter or community tab

Cutting Shorts out of long-form

1. **Never just crop and export a clip.** A moment that worked at minute eight with full context will die in isolation.
2. **Re-hook every clip.** Add a new first two seconds that supplies the standalone context. This is 80% of the work and 100% of the difference.
3. **Find self-contained moments** with a setup and payoff inside 30 seconds.
4. **Reframe, don't crop.** Use subject tracking or keyframe the crop so the subject stays centered. A static center crop of 16:9 cuts people's heads off.
5. **Re-cut the pacing.** Long-form pacing is too slow for Shorts.
6. **Rebuild the captions.** Long-form caption style doesn't work vertically.
7. **The Short's job is to sell the long-form.** End on a moment that raises a question the long-form answers.

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Platform Differences

Vertical video is not one format. Same clip, different edit per platform.

	YouTube Shorts	TikTok	Instagram Reels
Audience intent	Discovery, adjacent to long-form	Pure entertainment, fastest scroll	Social and aesthetic
Optimal length	20-60 sec	15-60 sec	15-45 sec
Hook window	~1.5 sec	~1 sec — the harshest	~2 sec
Caption style	Bold, functional	Native-looking, trend-aware	Cleaner, more designed
Trending audio	Low importance	Very high	High
Other-app watermarks	Down-ranked	Down-ranked	Down-ranked
Converts to long-form	Best — same platform	Poor	Poor
Search value	High — indexed on YouTube and Google	Growing	Low
Comment culture	Reactive	Highly participatory; comments drive reach	Lower volume

Myths

Myth	Reality
"The algorithm is suppressing me"	The algorithm shows videos to people who might like them. Low views means it tested you and people didn't click or didn't stay. That's data, not punishment.
"You need expensive gear"	Audio matters more than camera. A \$100 mic beats a \$3,000 camera. Phones shoot broadcast-quality video.
"Post at exactly 3pm Tuesday"	Timing matters a little. Packaging matters vastly more.
"Longer videos always get more watch time"	Only if retention holds. A tight 8 minutes beats a padded 18.
"Subscribers are the goal"	Session time and returning viewers are the goal. Subscribers are a lagging indicator.
"Clickbait is bad"	<i>Unfulfilled</i> clickbait is bad. A compelling promise you actually deliver is just good marketing.
"Just be authentic and it'll work"	Authenticity is necessary, not sufficient. Structure is what makes authentic content watchable.
"Tags and hashtags drive discovery"	Marginal. Thumbnail, title, and retention drive discovery.
"You need to go viral"	One viral video with no format converts almost nothing. A consistent format compounds forever.

Myth	Reality
"I need a niche before I start"	You find your niche by publishing 30 videos and seeing which three worked.
"Deleting flops helps the channel"	It doesn't. They still contribute watch time and can resurface.
"More links means more conversions"	More links means fewer clicks. One link, referenced verbally, beats five.



Trend Surfing & Timely Content

Trends are borrowed demand. Used well they're the cheapest reach available; used badly they build an audience that doesn't care about you.

30A. The trend window

Every trend has four phases. Which one you enter in decides everything.

Phase	Signal	Should you?
Emerging	A few posts, growing fast, no big accounts on it yet	Yes — this is the whole game. Highest reward, highest uncertainty.
Peak	Everyone in your niche is posting it	Only with a genuinely new angle. The feed is saturated.
Saturated	Mainstream brands are using it	No. You'll look late.
Dead	It's being mocked	Only as a joke about being late.

The money is in **emerging**, which means you need to be watching daily, not weekly. By the time a trend reaches a "trending sounds" list, you're in peak at best.

30B. Finding trends early

- **Watch your own feed as a viewer**, deliberately, ten minutes a day. Not as a creator — as a consumer, so the algorithm shows you what's actually rising.

- **Watch adjacent niches, not your own.** Formats migrate. A trend that peaked in fitness three weeks ago is fresh in your niche today, and you'll look original.
- **Track the creators one tier above you.** What they tried last week is what works next week.
- **Sort by "recent" not "relevance"** when searching a topic. Relevance shows you what already won; recent shows you what's rising.
- **Comment sections of big videos** surface the next thing before search does.

30C. Using a trend without becoming disposable

The failure mode is building an audience for the trend rather than for you. Rules that prevent it:

1. **Attach the trend to your existing format.** Don't abandon what you do — run the trend *through* your format. The trend supplies reach; your format supplies retention and identity.
2. **Add the thing only you can add.** Your niche expertise, your access, your character. A generic execution of a trend gets generic results.
3. **Never let trend content exceed ~20% of your slate.** Trend viewers rarely convert; evergreen content is what builds the channel.
4. **Move fast or don't move.** A trend video that takes two weeks to produce is a saturated-phase video. If you can't ship in 48 hours, skip it.

30D. News-pegged and reactive content

For anything tied to an event, a release, or a controversy in your niche:

- **Same day, ideally within hours.** Being first with a mediocre take beats being third with a great one.

- **Have a "fast lane" setup** — a lighting and camera configuration you can be rolling on in five minutes, no set dressing.
 - **Keep a stock of evergreen b-roll** so you're not shooting inserts under deadline.
 - **Say what you don't know.** Early reactive content is always incomplete. Acknowledging that is what protects you when facts change.
 - **Be prepared to be wrong publicly** and to correct it in a pinned comment. Reactive speed and accuracy trade against each other; own the trade instead of pretending it doesn't exist.
-

Rights, Music & Fair Use

Not legal advice — this is production discipline that keeps your channel alive. For anything with real money attached, talk to a lawyer in your jurisdiction.

31A. Music

The single most common cause of a demonetized video.

- **Licensed libraries are the answer.** Epidemic Sound, Artlist, Musicbed, Soundstripe, or the YouTube Audio Library. Pay the subscription; it's cheaper than one claim on a video that takes off.
- **"No copyright" music on random channels is not a license.** Much of it is mislabelled and you inherit the problem.
- **Keep your license receipts and IDs.** You'll need them to dispute a false claim, and false claims on library music are routine.
- **Platform-provided audio in Shorts is licensed for that use only** — it does not clear the audio for the same clip on your long-form video or on another platform.
- **A claim is not a strike.** A claim redirects revenue; a strike threatens the channel. Know which one you're looking at before panicking.

31B. Using other people's footage

Reaction and commentary formats live here, so understand the shape of the risk.

- **Transformation is what matters.** Commentary, criticism, and analysis that add genuine perspective are defensible. Playing a clip and nodding is not.
- **Use the minimum necessary.** Short excerpts that serve your point, not the whole thing.
- **Don't substitute for the original.** If someone can watch your video instead of the source, you're in the danger zone.
- **Fair use is a defence, not a permission.** It's decided after a dispute, not before. Doctrine varies by country and "fair dealing" elsewhere is narrower than US fair use.
- **When you can, just ask.** Creators often say yes, and a written yes ends the question.

31C. People, places, and brands

- **Releases for anyone substantial in your video** (Part 16B).
- **Private venues can set filming rules.** Being asked to stop is not negotiable, regardless of what the law allows.
- **Trademarks:** showing a product is fine. Implying endorsement, or using a logo as your own branding, is not.
- **Don't film people's faces in sensitive contexts** — medical, legal, financial, or anything that could embarrass them — without explicit, informed consent.

31D. Disclosure

- **Paid promotion must be disclosed** — in the platform's disclosure setting, verbally, *and* visibly on screen. This is a legal requirement in most jurisdictions, not a courtesy.
- **Affiliate links must be disclosed** in the description and ideally verbally.

- **Gifted products count as paid promotion** in most regimes, even without cash.
- **AI-generated or synthetic content** may require disclosure depending on platform and jurisdiction, especially if it depicts real people or events.

Disclosure costs you nothing in performance. Getting caught not disclosing costs you the audience.

Money — How Channels Actually Earn

Views are not income. Understanding the revenue stack changes which videos you choose to make.

32A. The revenue stack, worst to best

Source	Typical scale	Notes
Shorts ad revenue	Tiny per view	Shorts monetize poorly by design. Treat Shorts as marketing, not revenue.
Long-form ad revenue	Modest, varies enormously by niche	Finance, business, tech, and real estate earn multiples of gaming, entertainment, and comedy — the difference can be 10x for identical view counts
Affiliate	Moderate, scales with trust	Best where your content already drives purchase decisions — reviews, comparisons, gear
Sponsorships	The main income for most mid-size channels	Priced on views, not subscribers
Your own product	The highest ceiling by far	Courses, merch, software, services, community. You keep nearly all of it.
Licensing your footage	Occasional windfall	Viral clips get licensing requests. Don't sign away exclusivity cheaply.

The strategic point: ad revenue rewards *views*, but products and sponsorships reward *trust*. A 20,000-view video watched by exactly the right people can out-earn a

2,000,000-view video watched by nobody who'd ever buy anything. Choose your videos knowing which you're building.

32B. Monetization requirements

Platform thresholds change regularly — **verify current requirements directly with the platform** rather than trusting any document, including this one. As a general shape, YouTube has historically required a subscriber minimum plus either a watch-hours threshold on long-form or a views threshold on Shorts, with a lower tier that unlocks fan-funding features earlier.

Practical implication: don't optimize for the threshold. Optimize for a format that works, and the threshold arrives on its own.

32C. Sponsorships

When to start. You can sell sponsorships far earlier than most people think, if your audience is *specific*. A 5,000-subscriber channel with a tightly defined niche audience is more valuable to the right advertiser than a 500,000-subscriber general entertainment channel.

How pricing works. Sponsors pay against **expected views**, not subscribers, usually quoted as a rate per thousand views. Rates vary enormously by niche — audiences that make expensive purchase decisions command multiples of general entertainment audiences. Before quoting, ask other creators in your niche what they charge; nothing else gives you an accurate number.

Rules for not getting exploited:

- **Quote on your median views over the last 10-20 videos**, not your best video ever. Sponsors check.

- **Charge more for an integration than a pre-roll read.** Integrations perform better and cost you more to make.
- **Never accept "we'll pay you in exposure."**
- **Never accept affiliate-only deals** as your first offer from a brand that can afford flat fees.
- **Get a deposit or full payment terms in writing** before you shoot.
- **Keep the right of refusal on scripts.** If you can't say what you actually think, don't take the deal.
- **Cap exclusivity tightly.** A broad category exclusivity can block every future deal in your niche.

Rules for not losing the audience:

- **Only promote things you'd use.** One bad sponsor read costs more trust than the fee is worth.
- **Placement after a payoff moment,** never in the first 60 seconds (Part 14).
- **Under 60 seconds,** with a hard visual transition in and out.
- **Make it entertaining.** A sponsor read in your format, with your humor, retains. A read-aloud script does not.
- **Tell the audience it's a sponsor.** They already know. Pretending otherwise is the only thing that annoys them.

32D. The product ladder

The highest-leverage move for most channels is owning something to sell:

Free content → Email list → Low-cost product → High-cost product
 (the channel) (the asset) (a guide, presets, merch, templates) (a course, service, software, community)

Each step should genuinely serve the one before it. A product that isn't the natural next step for someone who liked your videos won't sell, no matter how good the videos are.

32E. Diversify before you need to

Any single-platform, single-revenue-source channel is one policy change away from zero. The order of resilience: your own product > email list > sponsorships > ad revenue > a single platform's algorithm. Build downward from the top as early as you can.

The First 10 Videos

NEW CREATOR FOCUS

The first ten videos are deliberate reps. Learn faster by repeating a format and reviewing the data.

Most of this playbook assumes you have data. For your first ten videos you don't — no retention baseline, no comment section, no Community tab, no audience to test against. Different rules apply.

33A. What the first ten videos are actually for

They are not for growth. They are for:

1. **Finding your on-camera voice.** It takes roughly ten videos before you stop performing and start talking.
2. **Building your template** — the project file, the caption preset, the LUT, the thumbnail family.
3. **Finding out which format you can actually sustain.** The format you *think* you want and the one you'll still enjoy at video thirty are often different.
4. **Getting fast.** Video one takes 40 hours. Video ten should take 12.

Judge these ten videos on *whether you finished them and learned something*, not on views. Nearly every channel's first ten videos are bad, including the ones with millions of subscribers now — go look.

33B. Rules for the first ten

- **Pick one format and repeat it.** Ten videos in one format teaches you more than ten different videos. It also gives the algorithm a consistent signal about who to show you to.
- **Go narrow, then narrower.** "Cooking" is not a niche. "Cooking for people with a shared kitchen and no equipment" is. Narrow is how a tiny channel gets found; you can broaden later, and broadening is easy. Narrowing later is hard.
- **Make videos that are searchable,** not just browsable. Search traffic doesn't require an audience — it requires answering a question people are already typing. Search-driven videos are how a channel with no subscribers gets its first thousand.
- **Ship on a fixed schedule.** Weekly, same day. Consistency matters more than quality at this stage because you're training a habit in yourself.
- **Don't buy anything.** No new camera, no lights, no microphone upgrade beyond a basic mic. Gear is the most popular form of procrastination in this hobby. Buy something only when a specific limitation has actually blocked you twice.
- **Watch every one of your videos back completely,** the day after. It's excruciating and it's the fastest improvement mechanism that exists.
- **Don't ask friends and family for feedback.** They will lie kindly, and kind lies at this stage are expensive.

33C. Getting your first real viewers

With no audience, the standard playbook doesn't apply. What does:

- **Answer a question people are searching.** Check that the search demand exists, then be the clearest answer.
- **Post genuinely useful comments on large videos in your niche.** Not links — value. This is the single most effective free discovery tactic for a channel with

zero subscribers.

- **Participate in the communities where your niche lives** — Reddit, Discord, forums — for months before you link anything.
- **Make the video that a specific person asked for.** One real request from one real person beats ten guesses.
- **Go where the format already works.** If a format is thriving in your niche, do a version of it. Proven demand is a gift, not a compromise.

33D. What to measure before you have data

You can't benchmark against a channel average that doesn't exist. Measure these instead:

- **Did I finish it?** Completion rate of *projects* is the metric that matters at this stage.
- **Is video 10 better than video 1?** Watch them back to back. If yes, the system is working regardless of the view count.
- **How long did it take?** Production time should fall steadily.
- **Did anyone I don't know watch it to the end?** One stranger finishing your video is a real signal.

At video ten, look at your top three performers, find what they share, and point videos eleven through twenty in that direction. That's when the rest of this playbook switches on.

On-camera Presence

The most under-practised skill in the whole pipeline. Two people can read the same script and one is watchable.

34A. Energy

- **Camera energy reads about 30% lower than it feels.** What feels like too much is usually correct. Watch your footage back with this in mind and you'll see how flat "normal" looks.
- **Start each take slightly higher than you think,** then settle. Editing can trim excess energy; it cannot add it.
- **Energy is not volume.** It's pace, variation, and commitment. Shouting is not energy.
- **Vary your pace deliberately.** Fast through setup, slow on the important line. Monotone pacing is what makes long videos feel long, even at high energy.

34B. Voice

- **Talk faster than in conversation.** You can slow down in the edit; you can't create pace.
- **Land on your numbers and your key words.** These are your emphasis points and they're what the caption highlights.
- **Drop your pitch at the end of statements.** Upward inflection on every sentence reads as uncertainty.

- **Cut filler before it happens** by pausing instead. A cut pause is invisible; a cut "um" leaves a click.
- **Read the hook out loud ten times** before rolling. The hook deserves more rehearsal than the rest of the video combined.

34C. Body and eyes

- **Look down the lens**, not at the screen or the flip-out display. Eye contact is the whole illusion.
- **Use your hands.** Restricted hands make a person look uncomfortable and the viewer feels it.
- **Move, or frame tighter.** A static person in a wide frame is the least engaging shot in video. Either move within the frame or get closer.
- **Reset your posture between takes.** Fatigue shows in the shoulders within twenty minutes.

34D. Being watchable

- **Have an opinion.** The most common reason a competent creator is boring is that they refuse to say anything anyone could disagree with.
- **React honestly.** Your genuine surprise, disappointment, or delight is the thing no competitor can copy.
- **Be specific.** Specificity is charisma. "It was good" is nothing; "it tasted like the inside of a cinema" is a person.
- **Let yourself be wrong on camera.** Being wrong and saying so builds more trust than being right.
- **Stop performing "YouTuber."** The affected delivery — the voice, the shouting, the constant smiling — is a phase most people go through. The sooner you drop it, the sooner people can actually like you.

34E. If you don't want to be on camera

Entirely viable. Faceless channels work in most niches.

- **Your voice becomes the personality.** Invest twice as much in audio quality and delivery.
- **Hands, objects, and process** carry the visual load. Overhead shots, close-ups, screen recordings.
- **The format has to be stronger** to compensate for the missing parasocial layer — lean on transformation, education, and process formats.
- **Consistency of voice and editing style** becomes your recognition device instead of a face.

Working with an Editor

The first hire for most creators, and the one most often botched. A bad brief produces a bad edit, and creators usually blame the editor.

35A. Before you hire

- **Have a format first.** Hiring before you have one means paying someone to guess.
- **Edit ten videos yourself.** You cannot brief or judge work you've never done.
- **Write your style down** — pacing, caption style, music energy, what you never do. If it only lives in your head, it can't be delegated.

35B. The brief

Send this with every project, not once at the start:

```
VIDEO:           [title + the promise it makes]
RUNTIME:         [target] – cut to this, don't preserve footage
FORMAT:          [which format from Part 4] – episode #
HOOK:            [exact timecode of the take to use]
STRUCTURE:       [beat sheet with approximate timings]
RE-HOOKS:        [where the promise gets restated]
MUST KEEP:       [timecodes of the moments the video exists for]
CUT ENTIRELY:    [timecodes of what's dead]
TONE:            [energy level, humor, music direction]
DELIVERABLES:    [1 long-form + N Shorts + thumbnail stills]
```

The two lines that matter most are **MUST KEEP** and **CUT ENTIRELY**. They save more revision cycles than everything else combined.

35C. Systems that make it work

- **A shared style guide** with your fonts, colors, caption preset, LUT, SFX library, and music folder. One document, updated as you refine.
- **Reference videos.** "Pace it like this one, at this timestamp." Concrete beats adjectives.
- **Consistent footage handoff** — same folder structure, same naming, every time. Label the good takes as you shoot.
- **Two revision rounds maximum**, agreed up front. Unlimited revisions is how both sides come to resent the arrangement.
- **Pay per video, not per hour**, once you know the scope. It aligns incentives toward efficiency.
- **Give feedback with timecodes.** "It drags" is useless. "2:40–3:10 drags, cut it to 10 seconds" is actionable.

35D. What to keep for yourself

Never fully delegate these, even at scale:

- **The idea and the format**
- **The title and thumbnail** — this is 30% of the outcome
- **The hook** — write and perform it yourself
- **The retention pass decisions** — an editor can execute the cuts; you decide what the video is
- **The comment section for the first two hours**

Delegate the labor. Keep the judgment.

Sustainability

More channels die from exhaustion than from bad content. This part is a production system, not a wellness aside.

36A. Why creators quit

- **The schedule outruns the enthusiasm.** Daily upload commitments made in month one are unpayable by month four.
- **Every video is invented from scratch.** Without a format, each video is a fresh crisis.
- **Views become the only scoreboard.** A metric you don't control is a bad source of self-worth.
- **No separation.** Filming your life means never being off.
- **Growing before the systems exist.** Success creates more work than failure does.

36B. What prevents it

- **Pick a cadence you can hold on your worst week,** not your best. Once a week, sustained for two years, beats daily for six weeks.
- **Batch aggressively.** Shoot four Shorts in one session. Write three scripts in one sitting. Context-switching is the hidden tax.
- **Stay two videos ahead.** The buffer is what lets you take a sick week without breaking the chain.

- **Have a format.** This is a mental-health intervention disguised as a strategy. Removing "what do I make?" from every week removes most of the stress.
- **Templates for everything** — project file, description, thumbnail, brief. Every decision you make once is a decision you never make again.
- **Schedule days off and defend them.** Put them in the calendar as real commitments.
- **Separate making from measuring.** Check analytics on a fixed day, not continuously. Refreshing view counts is not work.

36C. Judge yourself on inputs

Views are an output you don't control. Inputs you do control:

- Did I publish on schedule?
- Did I run the autopsy?
- Did I apply one lesson from the last video?
- Is this video better made than the last one?

Four yeses is a good month regardless of what the numbers did. This is the single most useful mental reframe available to a creator, and it's also just accurate — the outputs follow the inputs on a lag you can't observe in real time.

36D. Plateaus

Every channel plateaus. It is not a signal to quit; it's a signal that your current format has found its ceiling.

Options, in order of cost: escalate the format (Part 2E) · add a second format · widen the topic slightly · collaborate outward · change the packaging style on the same content. Rebuilding from scratch is the last resort, not the first.

The Tool Stack

Tools do not make videos good. But the wrong tool costs hours a week, and hours a week is the difference between sustainable and not.

37A. What you actually need

Job	What matters when choosing
Editing	That you know it well. The best NLE is the one you're fast in. Switching costs months.
Captions	Auto-transcription with a customizable style preset. Manual captioning is the biggest avoidable time sink in short-form.
Thumbnails	Layer support, text with stroke and shadow, background removal. Web tools are fine.
Music	A subscription library with clear licensing and license receipts.
Sound effects	A tagged library you can search fast. Build your own folder of the 30 you actually use.
Analytics	The platform's own Studio first. Third-party tools add convenience, not new information — don't pay until Studio is genuinely limiting you.
Idea capture	Anything you'll actually open. One document beats a perfect system you abandon.
Storage and backup	Two copies minimum, one off-site. You will eventually lose a drive.

37B. The rules that matter more than the tools

1. **One template project** with fonts, LUT, caption preset, SFX, and music pre-loaded. Biggest single speed unlock available.
2. **Proxies for 4K.** Editing full-resolution footage on an inadequate machine wastes more time than any other technical choice.
3. **Consistent file naming and folder structure.** Same every project, no exceptions.
4. **Back up before you edit,** not after.
5. **Learn ten keyboard shortcuts properly.** Ripple delete, blade, zoom to fit, mark in/out, and nudge will cover most of your editing life.
6. **Don't upgrade to solve a problem you haven't hit twice.** Gear acquisition is procrastination with a receipt.

37C. On AI tools

Useful for the labor, dangerous for the judgment.

Reasonable: transcription and captions, rough cuts and silence removal, brainstorming variations of a title you've already drafted, upscaling and noise reduction, translation and dubbing, thumbnail background removal, research summarization.

Be careful: fully generated scripts (they read as generic, and generic is the one thing that guarantees failure), synthetic voice for your main narration (the parasocial layer is the point), generated thumbnails of things that don't exist in the video (that's a promise you can't cash), and anything that removes your specific perspective — because your perspective is the only thing a competitor can't copy.

Always disclose synthetic media where the platform or the law requires it, especially anything depicting real people or events.

Full Applied Example

THE FULL SYSTEM IN ONE VIDEO

Package

Promise

Complicate

Pay off

Learn

SHORTS VERSION (45-60 sec)

[0:00-0:01] Visual + audio hook. Hard rip sound, close-up of a card being pulled from a toploader, whip-pan to a stack of cash.

[0:01-0:04] Verbal hook. *"We just spent \$1 million on Pokémon cards — here are the top ten most expensive, and #1 is worth more than your house."*

- On-screen text, word by word, centered at ~50% height: **\$1,000,000 → TOP 10 → MORE THAN YOUR HOUSE**

[0:04-0:40] Middle. Fast countdown, ~3-4 sec per card.

- #10 → #6: quick reveal, price stamp graphic, one line on why it's valuable, whip-zoom to next
- #5 → #3: raise stakes verbally — "this next one, only twelve people on Earth own"
- #2: a beat of silence before the number
- Progress indicator in the corner throughout: 10 → 1

[0:40-0:50] Payoff. Reveal #1 and the price. House-price comparison graphic. Genuine shocked reaction.

[0:50-0:55] Twist. *"...and two days later, we sold it for a loss. Full story on my channel."*

[0:55-0:60] Loop seam. Cut back to the same close-up rip from 0:00 so a rewatch is seamless.

Editing notes: every cut under two seconds. Cash-register SFX on every price. Music drops to silence for 0.4 sec before #1. Captions one to two words, ALL CAPS, key numbers highlighted and scaled to 130%.

LONG-FORM VERSION (10-15 min)

Packaging

- **Title:** We Spent \$1,000,000 On Pokémon Cards And Lost It All
- **Thumbnail:** shocked face on the left third, the #1 card held up centre, a defocused wall of cash behind. Text: \$1,000,000. Warm rim-lit subject against a cool teal background. *The title says "lost it all"; the thumbnail says "\$1,000,000" — two different halves of the gap.*

[0:00-0:15] Hook. *"We just spent one million dollars on Pokémon cards. Today I'm counting down the ten most expensive cards we bought — and I promise you, the very last one is worth more than most houses in America. Stick around, because by the end of this, we lose money on all of it."*

[0:15-1:30] Segment 1 — the setup. How the deal came together, who you bought from, the moment you first saw the collection. B-roll: opening boxes, driving to the meet, texts building tension. Progress graphic introduced.

[1:30-8:00] Segment 2 — the countdown. Cards #10 → #4, 60-90 sec each.

- Re-hook line every two cards: "we're getting closer to the one worth more than a house"
- Comment bait mid-segment: "*Which of these would YOU have kept? Top comment decides what we buy next.*"
- Humor beat every couple of minutes
- **Complication at ~4:30:** one card comes back from grading damaged. Stakes change. This is what prevents the mid-video sag.

[8:00-11:00] Segment 3 — the top three. Slower pacing, closer camera, quieter music — signals "this matters more." Music drops out entirely before #1. Callback to Segment 1.

[11:00-13:00] Segment 4 — the reveal. Full reveal plus real appraisal and grading proof (authority transfer). Comparison graphic against house prices. Genuine unscripted reaction.

[13:00-14:00] The twist. Despite the value, a specific event caused the loss — paying off the damage planted at 4:30 and the title's promise. Then the "and then" beat: what you're doing about it.

[14:00-15:00] CTA. One-sentence recap of the biggest surprise. One ask: "*Part two is where we try to make the money back — subscribe so you don't miss it.*" End screen with two videos, leading with your best-retaining one.

Publishing. Description opens with "*We spent \$1,000,000 on Pokémon cards — and three days later we'd lost most of it. Here's exactly what happened.*" Seven chapters. Pinned comment: the "top comment decides what we buy next" question. Scheduled for three hours before the audience heat-map peak, on the same day and time as every other upload.

Shorts from this shoot: the #1 reveal, the damaged-card moment, the house-price comparison, the negotiation, the reaction to opening the first box. Five Shorts, each with its own new two-second hook.

MASTER CHECKLIST

Before you shoot

- ☐ The idea is in the Idea Bank and still excites me
- ☐ I wrote ten titles and picked one
- ☐ I sketched ten thumbnails and built three
- ☐ The thumbnail passes the squint test at 160×90
- ☐ Thumbnail and title reveal different halves of the gap
- ☐ My thumbnail is the odd one out in the competitor grid
- ☐ I can name the viewer in one sentence
- ☐ I can write the share text message
- ☐ I know which format from Part 4 this is, and its episode number
- ☐ I can name two or three content engines
- ☐ There's a real stake and a real visual
- ☐ The payoff exceeds the promise
- ☐ The thumbnail shot is on the shot list

Hook

- ☐ Frame one creates visual intrigue before any words
- ☐ Visual + audio + text + speech all stacked
- ☐ The curiosity gap is specific, not vague

- ■ No greeting, no logo sting, no "in this video"
- ■ The number or stake is in the first five words
- ■ Under 15 sec long-form, under 3 sec Shorts

Middle

- ■ Re-hooks every 60–90 sec, or micro-payoffs every 2–4 sec
- ■ Something goes wrong
- ■ Stakes raise at the midpoint
- ■ A specific, easy, opinion-based comment question
- ■ No loop closes without another already open
- ■ Progress indicator if the structure is countable
- ■ Cut 25%+ in the retention pass

Edit

- ■ Captions: one to two words centered (Shorts) or selective emphasis (long-form)
- ■ Safe zones respected — checked on a real phone
- ■ No static frames, no black frames, no dead air
- ■ SFX on every graphic, transition, and reveal
- ■ Music energy changes at every segment boundary
- ■ A beat of silence before the biggest reveal
- ■ Audio at roughly –14 LUFS
- ■ Color consistent shot to shot

Ending

- ☐ Payoff exceeds the promise
- ☐ A loss or stakes angle, not just a flex
- ☐ Callback to the opening
- ☐ One "and then" beat after the payoff
- ☐ One CTA, after the emotional peak, with a reason
- ☐ End screen: two suggestions max

Publish

- ☐ First two description lines written as ad copy
- ☐ Real summary paragraph
- ☐ Chapters from 0:00
- ☐ Primary link in description *and* pinned comment, referenced verbally
- ☐ "Watch next" links to my own videos
- ☐ Hashtags, tags, playlist, .srt captions
- ☐ Scheduled 2-4 hours before the audience peak, on my consistent slot
- ☐ Pinned comment ready to paste

After

- ☐ Pinned the comment within minutes
- ☐ Replied to every comment in the first two hours
- ☐ Shared natively to other platforms
- ☐ Swapped the thumbnail if CTR is below average at 24-48h
- ☐ Retro-linked from my top five older videos

- ■ Retention autopsy written down within 48 hours
- ■ Next video chosen from the data, not from vibes

THE THREE-LINE VERSION

1. **Packaging first.** Title and thumbnail before the script. If you can't make them good, kill the idea.
2. **Cut everything that isn't a new fact, a laugh, a visual, or a feeling.** Value density is the whole game.
3. **Run the autopsy every single time.** Ten honest autopsies will teach you more than this entire document.

A living document. The most valuable version is the one where Part 25's autopsy findings are your own. Append after every upload.