YouTube Publishing & SEO Checklist

This checklist follows the steps of YouTube Studio's upload process in order, so you can keep it open beside your screen as you publish. It focuses on the upload itself and the search optimization that goes with it. Chapters 10 and 11 explain each item in detail.

YouTube occasionally renames or rearranges the upload screens, but the settings themselves rarely change much. If a label below doesn't match what you see, look for the closest equivalent.

BEFORE YOU OPEN YOUTUBE STUDIO

Have these ready before you begin, so the upload goes smoothly:

- ☐ **Final video file**, exported at the right resolution and aspect ratio (16:9 for long-form, 9:16 for Shorts)
- ☐ **Thumbnail image** (long-form, requires a verified account, Chapter 9): 16:9, high contrast, one focal point, five words or fewer
- ☐ **Alternative titles or thumbnails** for A/B Testing (optional, up to two more of each)
- ☐ **Final title**, main keyword near the start, honest, under about 60 characters
- ☐ **Description** drafted (Prompt 35, Appendix A)
- ☐ **Chapter timestamps** drafted, starting at 0:00 (Prompt 36)
- ☐ **Three to five hashtags** chosen
- ☐ **Content-source record** complete (Chapter 19)
- ☐ **Companion website post** drafted, if you're publishing one the same day (Chapter 12)

STEP 1 - DETAILS

Title

- ☐ Main keyword phrase appears early
- ☐ Clear, specific benefit or promise
- ☐ Most important words fit within the first 60 or so characters
- ☐ Title accurately reflects the video, with no clickbait

Description

- ☐ First two lines summarize the value and include the main keyword
- ☐ Short paragraph on what the video covers, using natural keyword variations
- ☐ **Disclosures placed before any affiliate or sponsored links** (Chapters 12 and 18)
- ☐ Links: companion article or website, related video or playlist, and any books or products
- ☐ Music or image attributions, if your licenses require them (Chapter 19)
- ☐ Chapter timestamps, starting at 0:00, with at least three chapters of at least 10 seconds each
- ☐ Three to five relevant hashtags, not dozens

Thumbnail

- ☐ Custom thumbnail uploaded (not an auto-generated frame)
- ☐ Alternative titles or thumbnails added for **A/B Testing**, if available to your channel
- ☐ Text readable at phone-screen size

Playlists

- ☐ Added to at least one playlist named the way viewers would search

Audience

- ☐ **"Made for kids" answered correctly.** This setting is required by law in the United States and elsewhere. Choose "made for kids" only if children are the primary intended audience. Doing so disables certain features, including personalized ads and comments. When in doubt, read YouTube's guidance on this setting before answering.
- ☐ Age restriction set only if the content is unsuitable for viewers under 18

Additional settings (usually under "Show more")

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- ☐ **Altered or synthetic content** answered correctly: "Yes" if the video contains realistic AI-generated or altered people, places, or events (Chapter 19)
- ☐ **Branded content** box checked if a company paid you or provided something for the video (Chapter 18)
- ☐ **Tags** (optional): a few, mainly for common misspellings of your topic. Tags play only a small role in discovery.
- ☐ **Language** set for the video and title
- ☐ **Captions**: auto-captions will be generated. Plan to review and correct them after upload.
- ☐ **Category** chosen (such as Education, Howto & Style, or Travel & Events)
- ☐ **Comments** turned on, with the moderation level you prefer
- ☐ **Shorts remixing**: allow or restrict others creating Shorts from your video

STEP 2 - MONETIZATION (Partner Program members only, Chapter 17)

- ☐ Monetization turned **on**
- ☐ Ad types selected (all standard formats is simplest)
- ☐ **Mid-roll ads** enabled for videos 8 minutes or longer, placed automatically or at natural breaks you choose
- ☐ **Self-certification questionnaire** answered honestly about the video's content

STEP 3 - VIDEO ELEMENTS

- ☐ **Subtitles:** review auto-captions after processing, or upload your own caption file
- ☐ **End screen** (final 5--20 seconds): a subscribe element plus one or two videos or a playlist. Make sure your video's final seconds leave room for it.
- ☐ **Cards** added at relevant moments, linking to related videos or playlists (or your approved website, once you're in the Partner Program)

STEP 4 - CHECKS

- ☐ **Copyright check** shows no issues. If a Content ID match appears, review it before publishing: trim, replace, or dispute only if you have the rights (Chapter 19).
- ☐ **Ad suitability check** reviewed, if you're monetized

STEP 5 - VISIBILITY

- ☐ Choose one:
  - **Public:** publish now
  - **Schedule:** choose a date and time when your audience is most active (see the Audience tab in Insights, formerly Analytics)
  - **Unlisted:** share privately for review before going public
  - **Private:** only you can see it
- ☐ **Premiere** (optional): schedule a live first showing with a countdown and live chat

AFTER YOU CLICK PUBLISH

Within the first hour

- ☐ Watch the published video once to confirm everything plays correctly
- ☐ Check that links in the description work
- ☐ Add a **pinned comment** with a specific question or link (Prompt 38)
- ☐ Link the companion website post, and add the video to your website's Videos library page (Chapter 12)

Within the first day

- ☐ Review and correct auto-captions, especially names and specialist terms
- ☐ Publish related Shorts, or confirm they're scheduled, and link each to this video (Chapter 14)
- ☐ Share on your social platforms and in your email list, if used (Chapter 18)
- ☐ Reply to early comments

Within one to two weeks

- ☐ Review CTR, average view duration, and the retention graph (Chapter 20)
- ☐ Use **A/B Testing** to try a new title or thumbnail if CTR is well below your channel's typical level

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- ☐ Note search terms viewers used to find the video, and consider adding them to the description
- ☐ Add this video to end screens and cards on older related videos
- ☐ Update your content calendar and repurposing tracker

SHORTS: QUICK UPLOAD CHECKLIST

Shorts have a simpler upload process. Check these each time:

- ☐ Vertical 9:16 format
- ☐ Strong hook in the first one to three seconds
- ☐ Captions or bold on-screen text for viewers watching without sound
- ☐ Clear, short title with the topic keyword
- ☐ **Related video** linked to your long-form video
- ☐ Altered or synthetic content answered correctly
- ☐ Music from a licensed source (the YouTube Audio Library or YouTube's in-app Shorts audio library)
- ☐ Added to a playlist, if relevant

SEO QUICK REFERENCE

Keep these principles in mind for every upload (Chapter 11):

Element	Key rule
Search intent	Match what the searcher actually wants, and deliver it quickly
Title	Keyword early, clear benefit, honest, about 60 characters
Thumbnail	One focal point, high contrast, adds to the title rather than repeating it
Description	Value and keyword in the first two lines
Chapters	Descriptive titles a searcher would understand
Hashtags	Three to five, relevant and specific
Playlists	Named the way viewers search
Retention	The opening 30 seconds matter most
CTR + retention	Judge them together, never alone
Old videos	Improve packaging instead of deleting

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