

YouTube

Make videos and Shorts for an audience and earn from ads, sponsors and fans. Most channels never get paid.

TYPICAL INCOME

\$0

a year, varies widely

INCOME RANGE

\$0 to \$100k

most to the successful few

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 5 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Home, a small studio, on location, anywhere with a camera

How you get there

- 1 Pick a topic you can make 100 videos about**
A narrow subject you know well beats general vlogging. Check that people search for it. A few weeks
- 2 Make and publish, a lot**
Your first 50 videos are practice. Study which ones held viewers and why. 6 to 18 months
- 3 Reach the first threshold**
500 subscribers, 3 uploads in 90 days and 3,000 watch hours or 3 million Shorts views opens fan funding. Often 1 to 2 years
- 4 Join the YPP (YouTube Partner Program) for ad money**
1,000 subscribers plus 4,000 watch hours in 12 months, or 10 million Shorts views in 90 days. Review takes about a month. Often 1 to 3 years
- 5 Add sponsors and your own products**
This is what turns a paid channel into an income. Many keep a job until it reliably covers rent. 2 to 5 years in

Pros and cons

- + Anyone can start for almost nothing
- + You own your work and your schedule
- + Videos can earn for years after you post them
- Most channels never earn a living
- Income swings with the algorithm and ad seasons
- No paid time off, health plan or retirement match

Good to know

3% of channels get 85% of the views

A study by Mathias Bärthel of a random sample of YouTube channels over 10 years found that about 3% of channels collected about 85% of all views. Attention, and so money, is extremely concentrated.

Most small channels never reach 1,000 subscribers

vidIQ tracked 32.9 million channels under 1,000 subscribers for a year. About 500,000 of them, roughly 1.5%, crossed 1,000. Channels that uploaded every week did far better than the rest.

Optional boosts

Scriptwriting and hooks. Thumbnail and title design. Selling sponsorships. Editing.

Where these numbers come from

YouTube Help: YouTube Partner Program overview and eligibility

YouTube Help: expanded YouTube Partner Program (500 subscribers)

YouTube Help: Shorts monetization policies

Mathias Bärthel, YouTube channels, uploads and views: a statistical analysis of the past 10 years (2018)

Numbers checked October 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise.

Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/youtuber>



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