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YouTube: A Complete Guide

Quick Help, Tips and Entertainment from the World's Largest Video Library!

This article shows you how to:

- Find your way around the YouTube website
- Locate the video you want (and many more like it)
- Discover useful tips for playing and controlling videos

Do you need help mending a radiator that won't heat up or fixing an unexpected paragraph indent in a Word document? Perhaps you want to know how to prune a bonsai tree or make a soufflé? Or maybe you're nostalgic for Torvill and Dean at the 1994 Olympics or Dana winning the 1970 Eurovision Song Contest?

Whether you're looking for helpful tips and instructions or pure entertainment, the place to turn is YouTube, the largest video library on the planet. With over 5 billion videos available, you can be fairly sure that what you want is there – somewhere! Read on to learn how to find it and watch it.



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YouTube by Numbers: It's Huge!

An instant success There's no doubt about it, YouTube has been an Internet phenomenon. It started from nothing in 2005, and the following year it was bought by Google for an impressive \$1.65 billion.

Over 5 billion videos to watch, free So what is it? In case you haven't come across YouTube, it's a website where people publish their own videos to be watched by others. A simple idea, certainly, but an absolutely huge operation: the site contains over 5 billion videos, uploaded by around 50 million users. Every minute, another 400 hours of video is uploaded, and each year we watch a combined total of 46,000 years'-worth of YouTube videos.

Like TV and film, YouTube has even produced its own 'stars' who can earn hundreds of thousands of pounds a year from their videos (chiefly as a result of promoting products to their viewers).

Home-made and commercial videos So, what can you find at YouTube? Quite simply, just about anything you can imagine:

- Clips from feature films and TV programmes (or even entire episodes).
- Music videos from well-known artists, rising stars and enthusiastic amateurs.
- Reviews of products such as electronics, cosmetics and children's toys.
- Creative videos by artists, photographers, filmmakers and musicians hoping to get their work noticed.
- The latest news and sports footage (as well as much older clips). An awful lot of breaking news is posted to YouTube as it happens, by onlookers with mobile phones, before the news crews have even got in their vans.

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- Homemade clips which vary enormously in quality, such as those shot with digital cameras and mobile phones (but not necessarily any less interesting or entertaining for that).
- Helpful videos made by companies as a service and/or an advertisement, and from individual users who want to share their discoveries or experience.

As you can tell, YouTube is an excellent place to visit for entertainment and a spot of nostalgia. But even better, it's somewhere you can find help, answers and solutions that you can actually watch rather than simply reading.

A great place for help and tips...

And all this is available for free. The only 'cost' is that you'll have to put up with the odd advertisement. YouTube is owned by Google, and Google makes its money from advertising, so you'll find ads at the beginning of some of the videos and on the pages of the website itself. But that's a small price to pay for such a useful resource.

... at the expense of a few ads

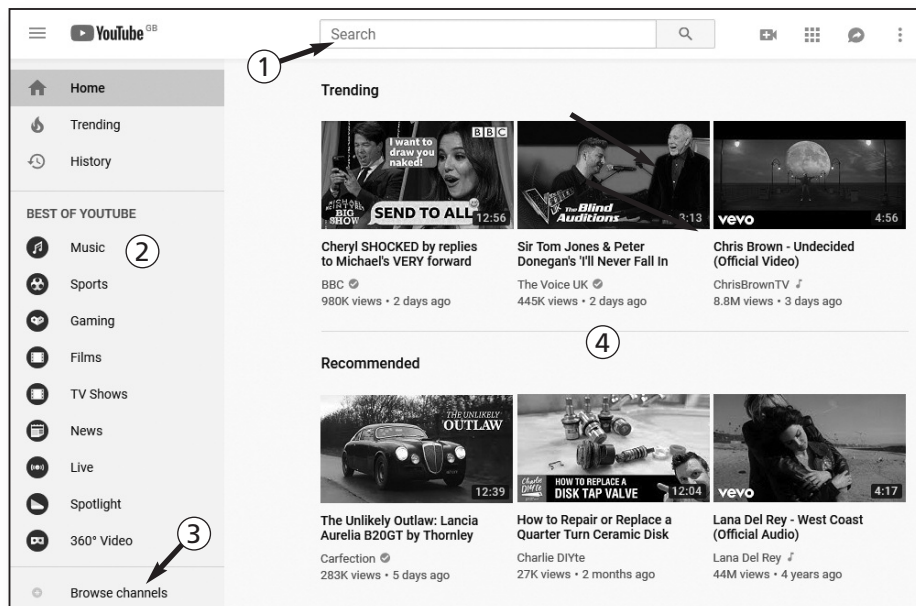
Take A Quick Tour of YouTube

As you might expect from such a large and popular website, there's a huge amount you could learn about YouTube if you wanted to. Rather than being just a simple catalogue of videos, it's grown to become a social-networking site of sorts: you can 'follow' video makers whose work you enjoy, add your own comments to videos, create lists of your favourite videos, and so on.

You can sign up and sign in...

Fortunately, though, all that is entirely optional and there's very little you really need to know in order to use YouTube effectively. Start your favourite web browser, visit www.youtube.com and we'll take a tour of its front page, where you'll quickly get a feel for the basics:

... but that's not necessary



Search for videos

① **Search box:** this really is the key to using YouTube. In this box, type any word, phrase or name relating to the type of video you want to find and YouTube takes you to a new page containing the results of your search.

Browse by category

② **Best of YouTube:** if you just fancy browsing around and seeing what you discover, a good way to start is by clicking one of the genres in this list.

Explore popular YouTube channels

③ **Browse channels:** a 'channel' is just the slightly-fancy name for the collection of videos posted by one particular user. Click this link and you'll reach a page listing a variety of genres (Tech, Comedy, Cooking & Health, Music and so on) and showing the most popular channels in each genre: click a 'channel' to visit it and see the videos posted by that user.

Choose from popular videos

④ **Recommended videos:** the main area of the page shows an eclectic mix of recommended and currently-

popular ('trending') videos. As you use YouTube more, you'll notice that many of these are closely related to what you've watched in the recent past.

At the top of the page, you'll see that you can sign into YouTube using your Google account (creating an account along the way if you don't yet have one). When you're signed in, you can do things that casual visitors can't such as uploading your own videos (and starting your own 'channel'), adding comments to videos, and subscribing to your favourite channels so that you'll receive notifications when new videos are added to that channel.

For our purposes, though, being a 'casual visitor' is absolutely fine: there's no need to sign in unless you really do feel compelled to do any of those things!



How to Find What You're Looking For

As I explained above, there are various ways you can simply browse around YouTube and see what you stumble upon. But in most cases you'll arrive here in search of something in particular, so let's take a look at how to find what you want.

We'll take a practical example: you've got a radiator that won't heat up, and after trying the usual solutions (bleeding it, thumping it, cursing it), your suspicion has fallen on its thermostat. Could that be the culprit? And if so, what can you do about it?

For situations like this, YouTube is ideal: rather than simply reading about what to do, you can see it all happening. Let's find a helpful video:

1. At YouTube's front page, or at any YouTube page you've reached, click in the search box at the top

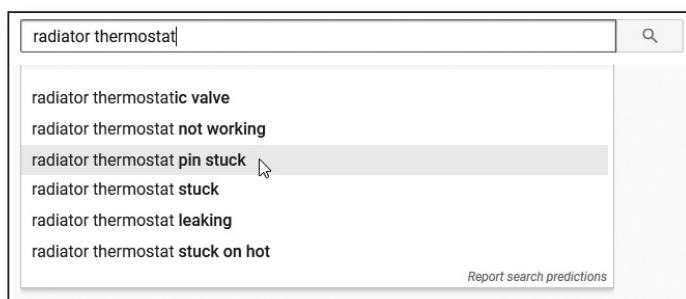


Find and follow instructions

and type a few words to describe what you're looking for.

Type search keywords

- As you're typing, a box will list popular matches for what you've typed so far. In the screenshot below, I've got as far as typing **radiator thermostat** and I can see several likely-looking items. If one of these seems suitable, you can click it; if not, carry on typing and press **Enter** when you've finished.



Check details of the videos

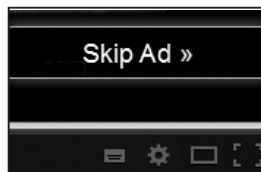
- Now you'll arrive at the first page of search results: a list of videos each consisting of a still-frame from the video with text to the right. From here, you could simply click the first video in the list to watch it. However, it's worth taking a quick look through the list to see what's on offer, using the information alongside each still picture as a guide:



- Length of video* • **3:26**: in the bottom-right corner of the still picture, these figures tell you the length of the video in minutes and seconds. This can help you decide whether a video is worth a look: a 30-second video

probably won't give you enough detail about how to get at the workings of that thermostat, whereas a 15-minute video might be doing more chatting than repairing.

- **How to fix a thermostatic radiator valve...:** this is the title of the video, which should summarise what it's about (although it won't necessarily live up to expectations!). *Video title*
 - **dereton33:** this is the name of the YouTube user who uploaded (and perhaps also made) this video. You can click this name to visit this user's channel and see what other videos have been uploaded by the same user. *YouTube channel*
 - **510k views:** this tells you how many times this video has been watched ('k' meaning 'thousand'). A high number of views for this video compared to others in the search results might suggest that this is one of the more helpful videos on this topic. *Number of views*
 - **5 years ago:** this tells you when this video was uploaded to YouTube and might help you decide how current and relevant the video will be (although the age of the video is irrelevant in the case of our radiator thermostat example). *Age of video*
 - **If you have a radiator not heating up...:** a short description of what the video is intended to cover, written by the YouTube user who uploaded it. *Brief description*
4. Based on the details explained above, if a particular video seems to be worth watching, click on its picture or title. You'll be taken straight to the web page containing that video, and the video starts playing automatically.

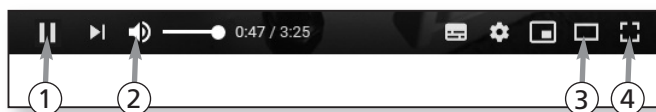


Skip any ad that appears

5. In some cases, before the video itself starts playing, you'll see an advertisement. After the first few seconds of the ad, you'll usually see a **Skip Ad** button in the bottom-right corner of the video window: clicking this will take you past the ad and start playing the video you wanted to watch. (If you don't skip the ad, your video plays as soon as the ad finishes.)

Adjust video playback

6. You'll see a row of buttons and controls at the bottom of the video, and for now there are four worth knowing about:



Pause or resume playback

- ① **Play/Pause:** if you want to pause the video, click this button. When you're ready to continue, click it again. (More simply, perhaps, you can click anywhere in the video itself to pause and resume playback.)

Adjust the volume

- ② **Volume:** move the mouse over this loudspeaker icon and a volume slider will appear to its right: drag the knob on the slider to the left or right to decrease or increase the volume respectively.

Enlarge the video window

- ③ **Cinema mode:** click this button to switch to the grand-sounding 'Cinema mode', in which the video window expands in size to fill as much of your browser's width as possible, giving you a larger clearer view of the video without having to resize your browser's window. To return to the normal-sized mode, click the same button again.

Watch at full-screen size

- ④ **Full screen:** click this button and the video expands to fill your entire screen, covering your taskbar and everything else to give you a television-like view. To return to a normal-sized video again, press the **Esc** key on your keyboard or click the **Exit full screen** button in the bottom-right corner of the screen.

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When you've finished watching the video (or if you decide it's not actually worth watching all the way through), click your browser's **Back** button to go back to the list of search results and try something else. Alternatively, if you want to search for something different, you can use the search box at the top of the current page rather than having to go back.

What next?

Track Down Similar or Better Videos

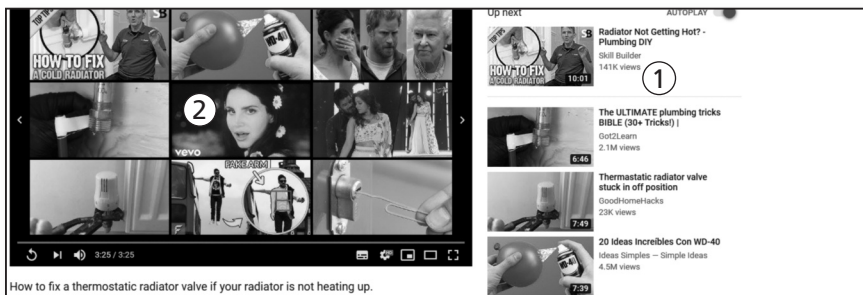
You've just finished watching a video at YouTube, and as mentioned above you could go back to the search results if you want to watch another of the videos in the results list. But besides doing that, there are several other ways to find more videos:

Find more videos

- **Click a suggested video:** while you're watching a video, you'll find a list of similar videos running down the right-hand side of the page ① (along with a few 'recommended' videos based on what else you've watched recently). You could click one of those when the current video ends, or before that if you don't want to see the rest of the video.

Pick from the list at the right

When the video ends, you'll see preview pictures of some related videos in the video window itself ② and you can click one of those to play it.



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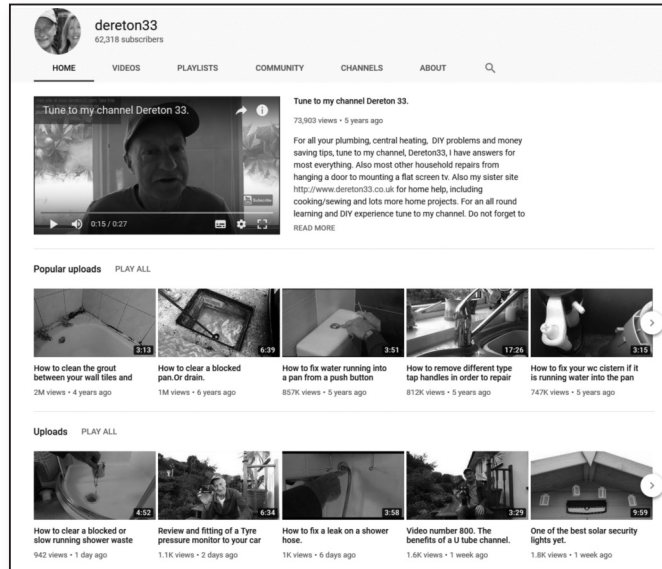
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See more from the same YouTube user (channel)

- Visit a user's channel:** if you've just watched and enjoyed a video, you might like to visit the channel of the user who uploaded it and see what else that user has on offer. Just below the video window and title of the video, click the user's name to visit that channel ③.



Similarly, if you return to the list of search results, you can click the username shown below the title of any video to visit that user's channel. The channel page can be laid out in a few different ways, but it will always give you access to all the videos uploaded by that user.



- Try different keywords for the search:** rather than 'radiator thermostat' you could try searching for

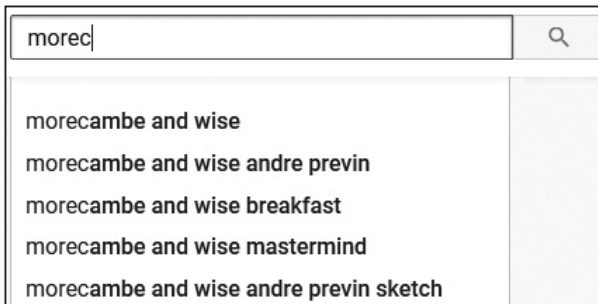
'repair radiator' or 'radiator not heating up'. This should give you a slightly-different set of results from the ones you saw before, and perhaps lead you to a solution you didn't find on the first attempt.

Save and check the result

Playback Tips: How to Control the Video

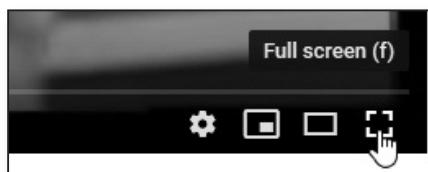
Let's take another example to look at a few other useful options you can use when playing videos at YouTube. We'll assume you're looking for some entertainment and go in search of Morecambe and Wise clips:

1. Click in YouTube's search box and start typing 'morecambe and wise' (since, as always when searching, there's no need to bother with capital letters).
2. As you can see below, you don't have to type much before YouTube guesses what you're after. Click anything that takes your fancy in this list of suggestions, then click a video to watch in the search results.



3. You'll arrive at the video page and the video begins playing. To watch it at a size that fills your entire screen, click the **Full screen** button in the bottom-right corner of the video window:

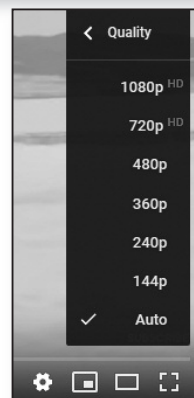
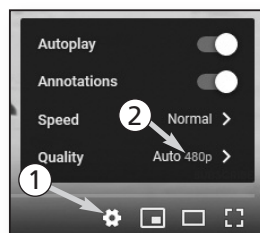
Switch to full screen



Note that the buttons and controls at the bottom of the video disappear after a few seconds, so as not to spoil your enjoyment of the video. Just move the mouse over the video and they'll reappear.

Adjust the video quality

- Now check the video quality being used to play this video: towards the bottom-right of the video window, click the cog-shaped icon ① and a menu appears. At the bottom of this menu, alongside the word **Quality** you'll see the current video resolution ②. In this case it's **480p**, meaning each frame of the video consists of 480 horizontal lines. Not bad, but a far cry from High Definition ('HD', which is 720p) and 'Full HD' (1080p). In other words, the current picture quality may not be marvellous, especially if you're watching at a size that fills your screen.



- Let's see if there's a better-quality option available. Click that word **Quality** or the **Auto 480p** beside it and another menu appears. This menu lists all the possible resolutions for this video: if you see a better quality listed than the one currently being used, feel free to click it and enjoy higher-quality playback.

There are two quick points worth noting about the choices of video quality:

First, for many old videos (such as our nostalgic Morecambe and Wise examples), there won't be a high-quality option available because the original recording dates from the pre-HD era: no-one can add detail to the picture that wasn't ever there to begin with!

Second, higher-quality playback involves downloading more data as the video plays. These days, that shouldn't cause your broadband connection any problem, so you're unlikely to get pauses and stutters, but if your broadband provider imposes a monthly download limit, you'll be pushed towards that limit more quickly by watching in high definition.



- Perhaps you receive a phone call while watching the video, or the soundtrack consists only of background music and you don't want to hear it: with a quick click on the loudspeaker icon you can mute the sound. A line strikes through the icon to indicate that sound is turned off: to switch it back on, click the loudspeaker again.

Temporarily mute the sound



- At the end of the video, you'll quite likely see a countdown in the centre indicating that another video is about to play: you'll see its title above the countdown and you can click **Cancel** if you don't want to play it. However, it'll continue to happen at the end of each video you watch. If that gets on your nerves you can put a stop to it: click the cog icon again, as you did in step 4 above, and you'll see a switch beside the word **Autoplay** that's currently set to 'On'. Click the switch to turn it off and YouTube will stop trying to play new videos automatically.

Prevent the automatic 'Up Next' video



There's one extra option you might find useful, although it's not available for all videos, and that's **subtitling**. Look out for the icon indicated



to the right when you're watching a video with dialogue or commentary: if you see it, click it and subtitles will be superimposed over the bottom of the video.

Keep track of the list of videos!

- When you've finished watching a video, press **Esc** to exit full screen mode (if necessary). You'll probably find yourself glancing at the list of suggested videos in the column at the right of the page, and these really can lead you on an enjoyable tour. The trouble is, perhaps there are several videos in this list you'd like to watch: if you click one of them, you won't see the same list on the next page! So here's a tip worth remembering: hold **Ctrl** as you click a video to open it in a new browser tab. When you've finished watching that video, close this new tab and you've still got that list of videos available in the first tab.

Miniplayer: watch a video while exploring YouTube

- Finally, there's one other YouTube feature you might like: the 'Miniplayer'. If you click the **Miniplayer** icon indicated below while watching a video, the video pops out into a small box at the bottom of your browser window and you're taken back to the YouTube home page where you can continue watching your video while looking around the website or searching for other videos. The Miniplayer stays in place until you click another video to watch (although, rather oddly, the new video won't appear in the Miniplayer itself). If you're watching in the Miniplayer and you'd like to go back to the full-page view of the video, just click the video title in the Miniplayer box.

