



Video Viewer Study 2021

Why people start, stop, and keep watching instructional and informational videos

DR. JANE BOZARTH





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A word from Wendy Hamilton, our CEO



Wendy Hamilton,
CEO of TechSmith

When TechSmith conducted our first video viewer study back in 2012, it was meant for internal use only. We wanted to learn everything we could about watching and creating videos to inform our Snagit and Camtasia product roadmaps. When we saw the results, we realized we had to share the data because it would help our video creation customers be successful. The positive feedback from readers like yourself has led us to repeat and publish the TechSmith Video Viewer Study several times since then. We continue to learn from the research, and I am excited to share the results of the 2021 TechSmith Video Viewer Study with you. I hope you find it as insightful and helpful as we do.

Introduction

From how-to tutorials to remote conferencing to TikTok dance demonstrations, video is incredibly popular. There are many questions around the use of video for information and instruction: How long should videos be? What should the quality level be? Should there be an on-screen speaker or not? When should I use animation, interactive elements and quizzes? And what elements matter most and least?

In a world where video is easy to create and deploy, and in which it is more often the expectation than the exception, TechSmith wanted to find answers to these questions and to perhaps the biggest question of all:

How do we create videos that get watched?

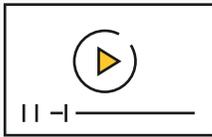


Highlights

Want to share these highlights? Just take a screenshot!

83%

of respondents prefer watching video to accessing instructional or informational content via text or audio.



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Most respondents view videos

2-4 times

per week.

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Despite changes in how and where people work, much of the 2021 data, such as number of viewing sessions, were consistent with data collected in 2018.



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First impressions are important. Clear titles, good descriptions, and compelling thumbnails matter.

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is the most popular place to watch instructional and informational videos.



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Respondents preferred videos of between 5-6 and 10-19 minutes long.



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The most common reason for viewing an instructional or informational video is: "I was trying to learn new skills or abilities to try at my job." This is highest among respondents in Germany and lowest among those in the US.

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Methodology

To learn more about viewer habits, TechSmith offered a survey to 914 unique respondents in 6 markets (the US, the UK, France, Germany, Australia, and Canada). The recruitment and delivery of the survey were conducted in June 2021 by independent research partner Qualtrics. Participants represented more than 20 professional fields, including healthcare services, retail, manufacturing, software development, and finance. Respondents answered between 16-20 multiple-choice and 3-6 open-ended questions about their viewing habits and preferences and were asked to describe a “great” video they had recently viewed.

Instructions to respondents asked them to focus on two types of videos: Instructional and informational.



For the duration of this survey, please think about specific types of videos you have watched in the past three months for the purpose of learning something to help you at work, rather than watching something just for entertainment.

Instructional: A video that teaches a process, such as a step-by-step tutorial or how-to video.

Informational: A video that delivers facts, ideas, or any information. Examples include animated explainer videos, recordings of meetings, and recorded PowerPoint presentations.

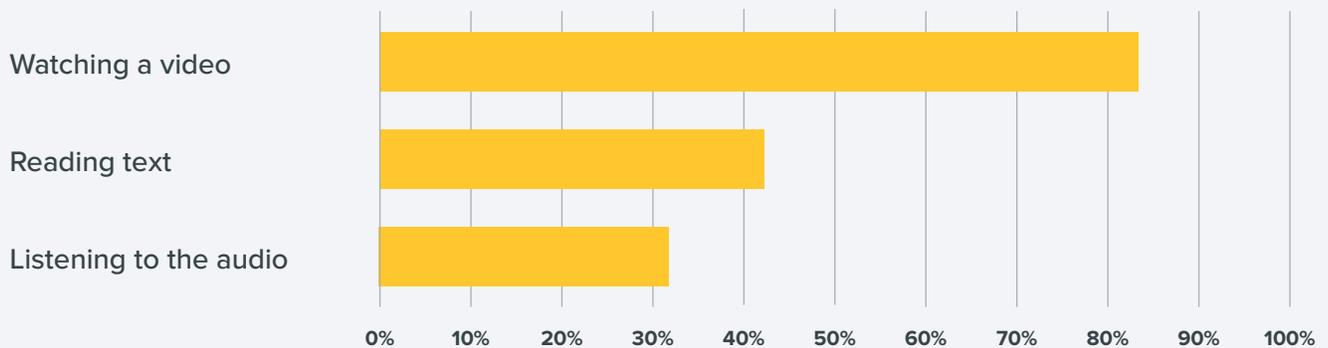
Participation required respondent viewing of any of these types of videos for work-related purposes in the past three months.

People prefer video

People prefer video

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Q: How do you prefer to consume instructional or informational content? (select all)



n=914

2021 TechSmith Video Viewer Study

- When asked for their preference, a whopping 83% of respondents chose video. Text lagged far behind, with audio the least preferred method of accessing instructional and informational content.
- The preference for video was clear regardless of viewer location. Responses for “Watching a video” were high across all markets, spanned from 78% (France) to 86% (Canada).
- Additional examination of the data revealed length as a possible factor in preference. Those who prefer a video to be three minutes or greater tend to have a higher preference towards “watching a video” than those who select their preferred video length to be less than three minutes. Every viewer is different; individual tastes play a large role in choosing and consuming instructional and informational content.



Top tip for delivering information

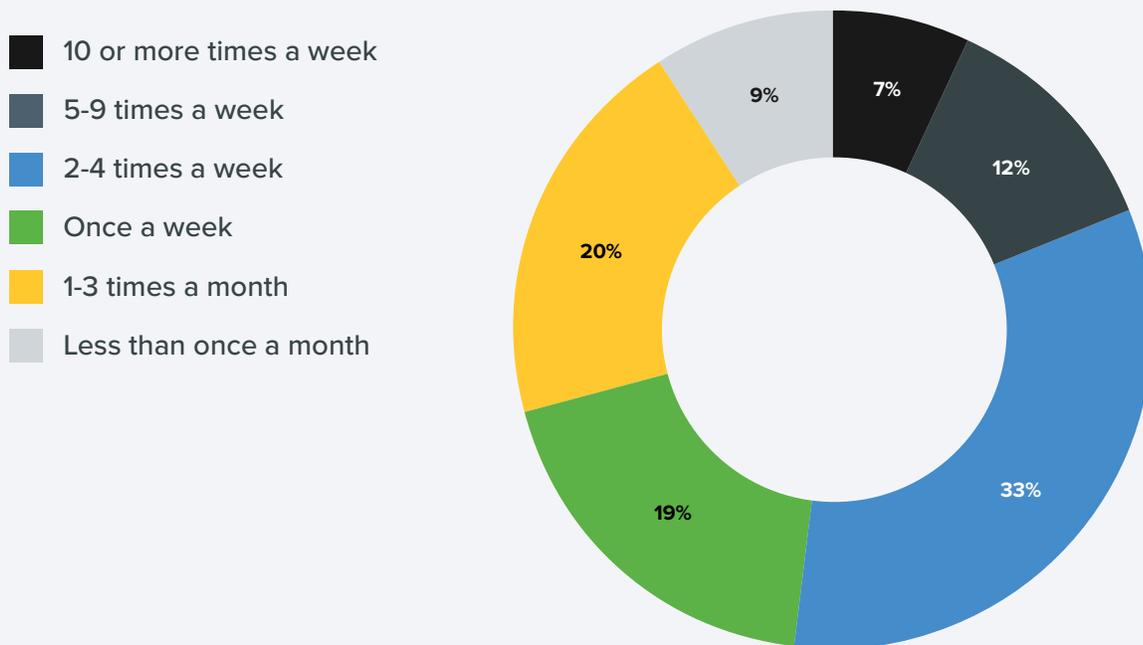
Leverage the popularity of video and create content in the format that people prefer to consume.

How often do people watch instructional or informational videos?

Most common viewing frequency is 2-4 times per week

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Q: How often do you watch instructional or informational videos?



n=914

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91% of viewers watch instructional or informational videos at least once per month. The most common frequency is 2-4 times per week; some engage in as many as 10 or more video watching sessions per week.



Learn more: [The Ultimate Guide to Easily Make Instructional Videos](#)

Why do people watch instructional and informational videos?

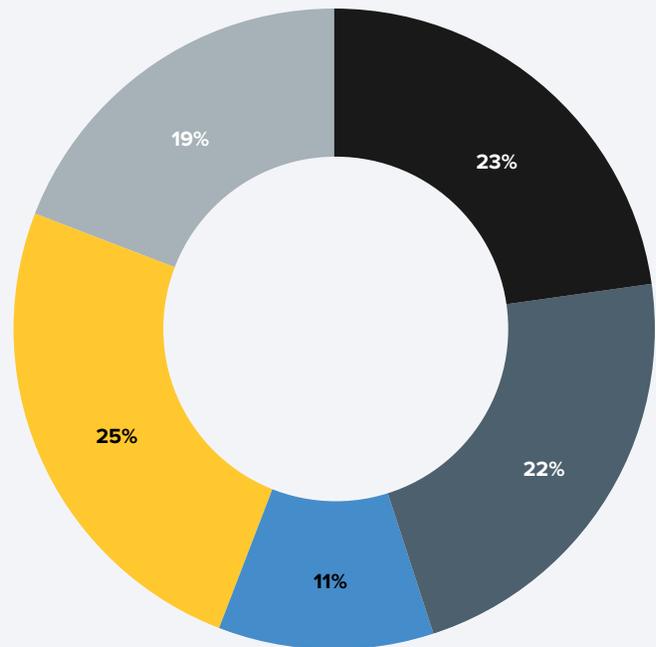
Top reasons for watching a video

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Q:

Which of the following best fits why you were watching an instructional or informational video:

- I was interested in generally learning more about the topic
- I wanted to learn more about a specific part of the topic (e.g. about product features, etc.)
- I had an immediate problem I needed to solve
- I was trying to learn new skills or abilities to try at my job
- I was required to watch it



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2021 TechSmith Video Viewer Study

- While some people watched a video because it was required, most described self-directed motivations for viewing. A quarter wanted to learn new skills to apply to their jobs, and nearly as many had an interest in learning more about a topic.
 - Length plays a role in the reasons for watching. For instance, those who were viewing because they wanted to know more about a topic tended to prefer longer (20-30 minute) videos. And what about those who prefer videos of 2 minutes or less? 19% said “I was required to watch it.”
- » Video length will be discussed further on [page 15](#) of this report.

Where do people watch videos?

Where do people watch videos?

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Q:

Of the videos you have watched in the past 3 months, which of the following locations have you used to find and watch them: (choose all that apply)

YouTube or other public video site
(e.g. Vimeo, etc.)

Social media site (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.)

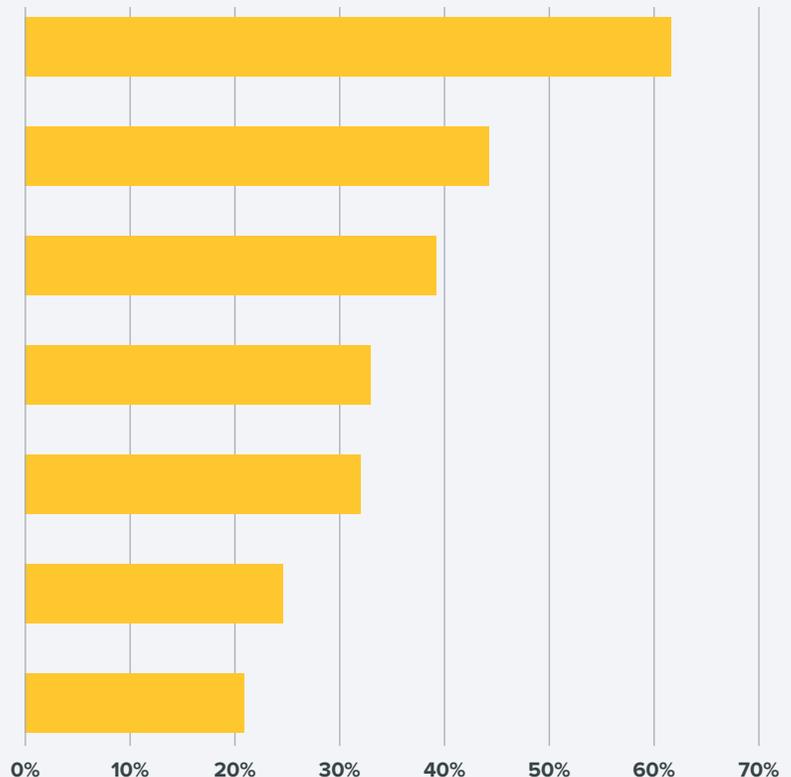
Sent directly from another person
(via email, messaging system, etc.)

An online course or academy
(e.g. LinkedIn Learning, Pluralsight, Thinkific, etc.)

Internal network (e.g. Sharepoint, Yammer, Confluence, Internal wiki, etc.)

Internal Learning Management System

Online expertise group (e.g. Slack groups, online forum, Reddit communities, etc.)



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Respondents had a clear preference for YouTube and similar public video sites, followed by social media. Corporate environments, course platforms, direct communication (sent via another person), and groups are also important destinations.

“

If there's one thing that's helped me increase my audiences' engagement with my content, it's video. Now, video creation is the number one priority for my content strategy.”



Tim Slade

Award-winning eLearning Designer | www.timslade.com

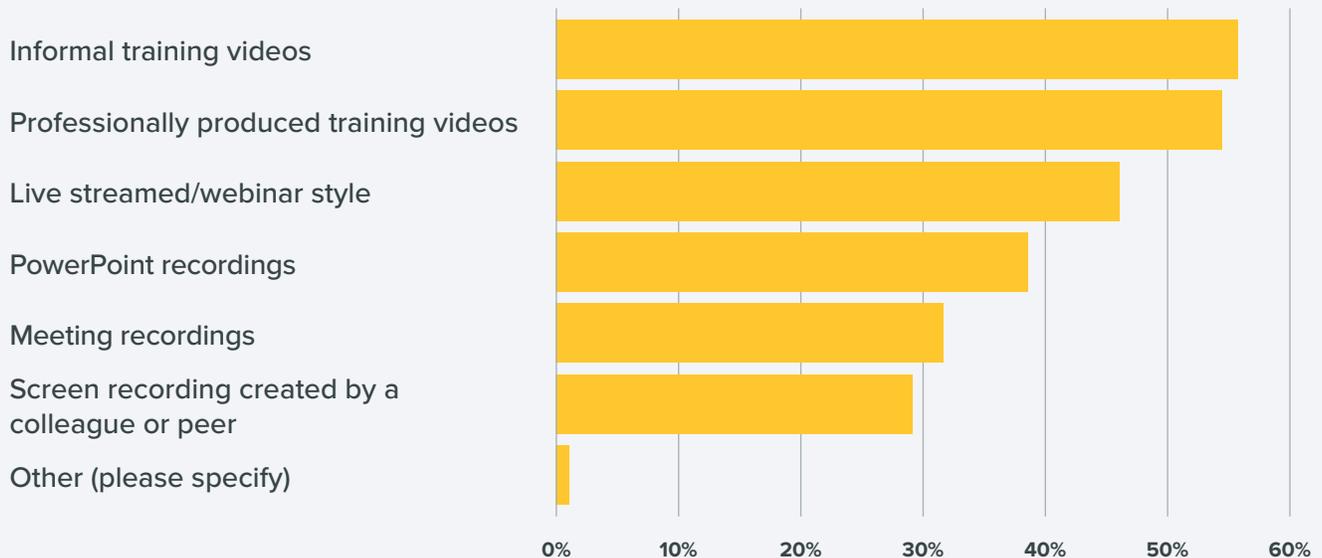
What types of instructional and informational videos do people watch?

Informal training videos are the most watched

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What types of video have you watched in the past month? (select all)



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- Overall, viewers watched more informal training and professionally produced videos in the month preceding the survey, followed by live streamed/webinar videos, PowerPoint recordings, meetings, and screen recordings created by a colleague.
- While data discussed in subsequent pages provides detail about preferences around quality, it seems worth noting that the most frequent type of video watched is “informal training videos.” This suggests that a desire for quality does not necessarily mean the expectation of perfection.



Global insight

- Australian respondents chose videos in nearly every category more often than those in any other group; respondents living in France chose the fewest.
- Respondents in Canada (52%) chose streaming/webinar-type content far ahead of those in France (35%). Those living in Germany more often selected PowerPoint presentations.

Why do people choose a particular video?

Reasons to choose a video

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Q:

Please think of the most recent instructional or informational video that you viewed. What made you click on that video? (Please select up to 3)



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It's clear from the data that first impressions are important. A good description is critical, as is an interesting or intriguing title and, to a lesser extent, a compelling thumbnail.

The viewer's idea about "acceptable" length also matters, as they associate length of a video with their reason for viewing. For instance, those who said they were interested in learning more about a topic tended to choose longer (20 minutes or more) videos. Those with an immediate problem to solve preferred videos of shorter (up to nine minutes) length.

Tempting titles and vivid descriptions

39% of respondents said they chose to watch a particular video because of the description, and nearly a quarter chose based on the title. Per the data on why they are watching videos, they are likely looking for information to help them do their jobs or learn more about a particular topic. Titles and descriptions are critical to helping them choose which videos to watch. Use words that convey the content of videos in a short, concise manner to the potential viewer. Both titles and descriptions should be clear, informative, and easily understood.

Tips for creating effective titles

- Look at the competition, or at least those who offer content on similar topics. Are the titles descriptive, specific, and clever?
- If the title is clever or intriguing, is it clear what the video is about? Perhaps people will click — but will they stay?
- Don't make promises you can't keep. "Building a great team in fifteen minutes," "The best-kept secret about PowerPoint" (when it is a well-known feature), and "How to build a refrigerator from scratch for free" may get clicks, but viewers will likely be annoyed and stop watching when they realize they're being misled.
- What keywords will the viewer be searching for? Type some keywords into Google's search box and see what titles it generates.
- If it's content that is likely to go out of date — such as a particular version of a software product — include that information and remember to update the video as the product changes.
- Use headline analyzer and SEO tools to help you tighten your titles.
- Make it snappy: What if you had to pay \$1,000 per word?

Useful descriptions

- Tell people what to expect and start with the most important information.
- Include detailed information about specifics like software versions, e.g. "How to encrypt email in Outlook 2019 for Mac and Outlook 365" rather than "How to encrypt email in Outlook."
- Pay attention to what's above the fold: What do viewers see without having to scroll?
- Add timestamps to the description to help with orientation, especially to videos longer than a few minutes.
- Add hashtags if applicable.
- Write like a human.



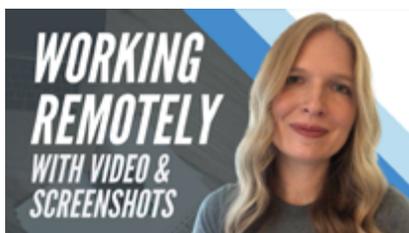
Top tip for effective titles:

Keep the title succinct and on-topic.

Eye-catching thumbnails

The video's thumbnail image is the first thing the potential viewer sees. A good thumbnail provides context about the video.

- Thumbnails can provide a clear snapshot of the topics/content.
- Product recognition and branding are supported by logos and colors.
- Consistent design across a series helps with branding and draws viewers to additional videos.
- A well-designed thumbnail conveys a sense of professionalism and communicates the promise of a good viewing experience.



“First impressions matter! Viewers see a thumbnail before they read the title of a video.”



Katie Eidelson
Video Production
Specialist | TechSmith

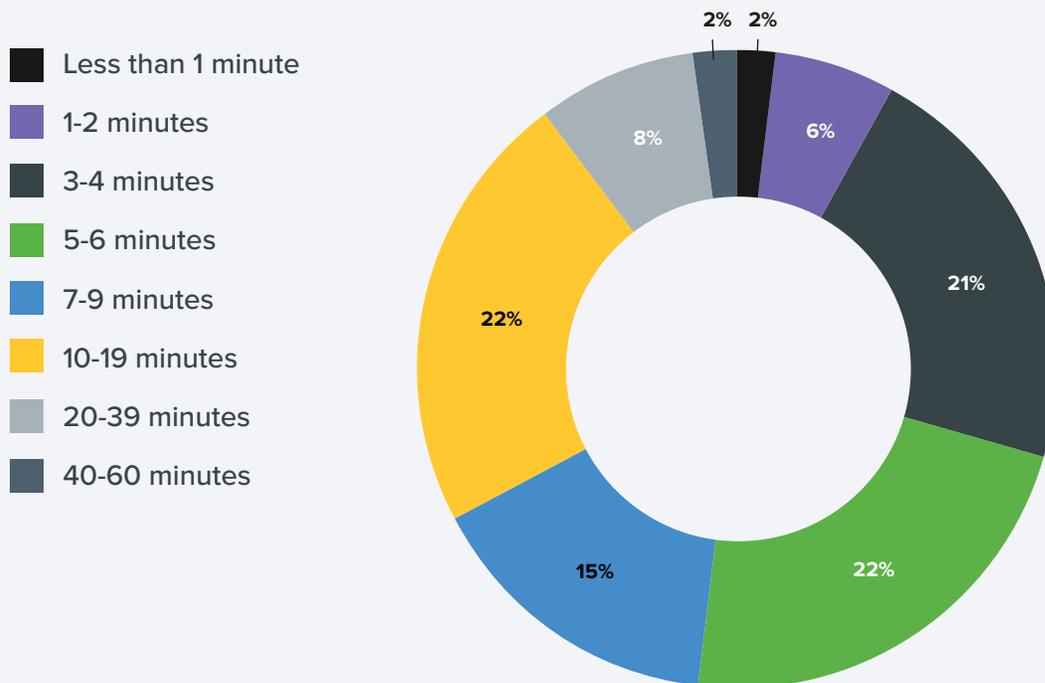
What's the optimal length for a video?

Viewers prefer videos of between 3-6 and 10-19 minutes in length.

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Q:

How long do you prefer instructional or informational videos to be?



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Of all the questions that interest content creators, “What is the perfect video length?” is among the most common. Respondents preferred instructional or informational videos to be 3-19 minutes long and tended to favor either end of that range, with fewer falling into the 7-9 minute option.

Additional data revealed that the perceived value of videos of less than 2 minutes was diminished; a quarter of those who selected that option also chose ‘reading text’ as their preferred method of consuming content. This may be of special interest to those creating “microlearning” type content.

Bottom line? **The best video is as long as needed, but as short as possible.**

Optimal video length? It depends.

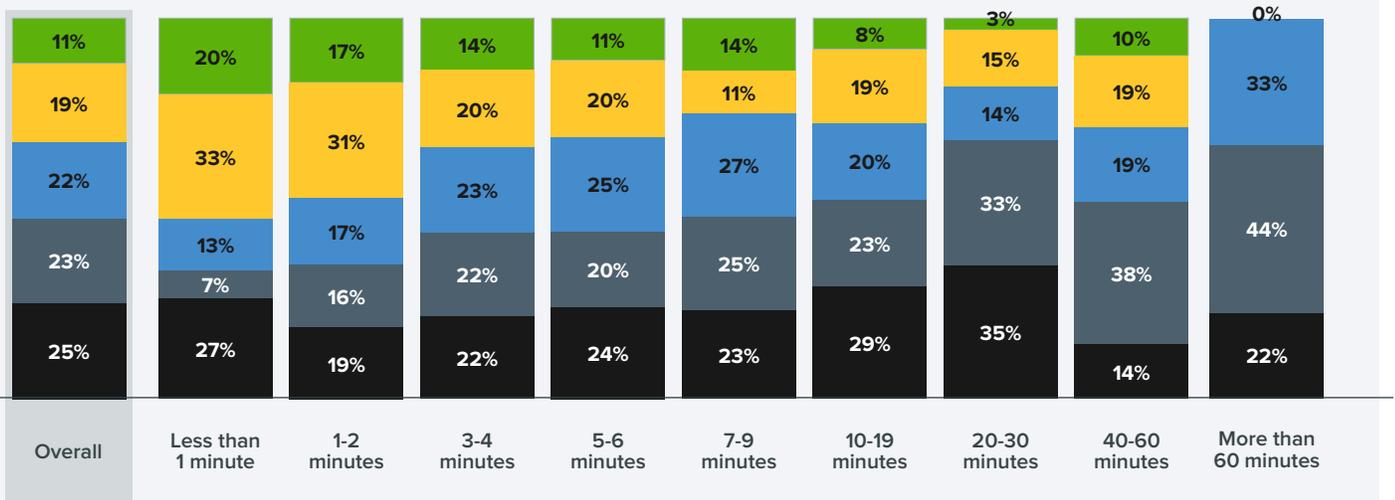
When required to watch, viewers prefer shorter videos

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Q:

Which of the following best fits why you were watching an instructional or informational video... (single select)

- I had an immediate problem I needed to solve
- I was required to watch it
- I wanted to learn more about a specific part of the topic
- I was interested in generally learning more about the topic
- I was trying to learn new skills or abilities at my job



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The optimal length of a video really depends on context and viewer needs. Those who prefer 7-9 minute videos are more likely to have watched informal training videos than those who prefer something only 1-2 minutes long. Live streamed/webinar style videos would naturally be much longer.

81% of respondents watched videos of 40-60 minutes long in the month preceding the survey. Viewers who prefer longer videos — 20 minutes or more — said they were motivated by an interest in learning more about the topic, or a specific part of a topic.

Note that the 19% who said “I was required to watch it” also preferred videos that were 2 minutes or less.

A bit more about video length...

While there is much discussion about the optimal length of a video, it's generally focused on "How short can videos be?" to deliver a message or maintain attention.

But people watching longer-format videos, such as meeting or webinar recordings, academic instruction in a lecture format, or those selecting a video because they are interested in learning more about a topic (or a specific part of a topic) likely go in with different expectations of what a "good" viewing experience will offer than those watching a video only a few minutes in length.

Among those who had recently watched videos more than 60 minutes long, the most common reasons for stopping were work distractions and poor quality. In other words: They didn't stop watching because they were bored or because the video was too long.



“Don't think about what you can include in your video. Instead, ask what you can leave out of it without compromising the message.”



Jonathan Halls

Award winning author and consultant

www.jonathanhalls.com



Why do people keep watching an instructional or informational video?

What keeps viewers watching?

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Q:

Please select all video elements that keep you interested in and watching an instructional or informational video: (multiple select)



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Viewers stay with well-organized material that is easy to follow: Half of respondents selected this as a reason for continuing to watch. They want content that is relatable and current with an engaging presenter/presentation.

More detailed data breakdowns offered some interesting insights:

- Viewers with a preference for videos between 7-39 minutes rated interactive elements as a more important factor.
- Nearly twice as many respondents in France selected “Has a good story/ storytelling” than those in Germany.

Describe an engaging video

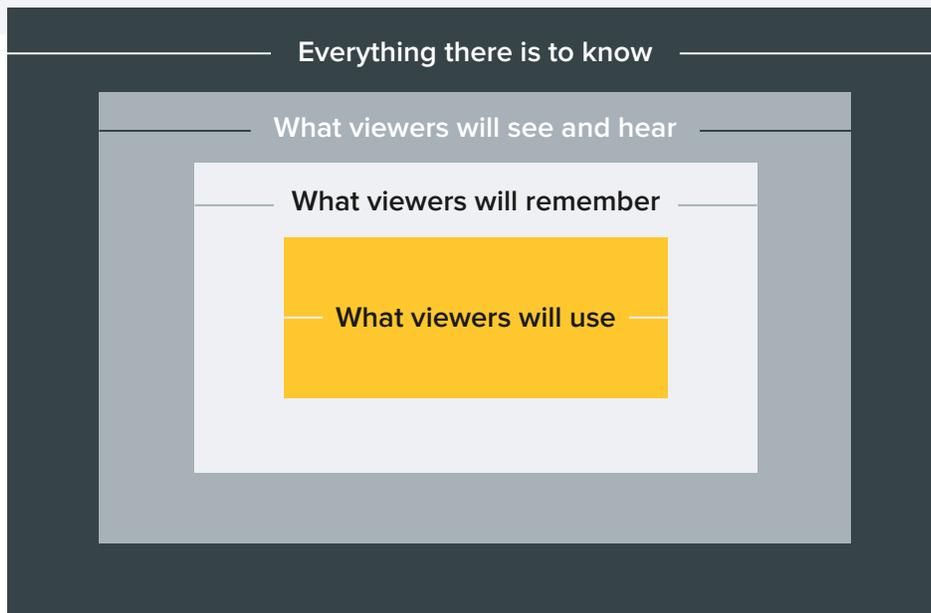


Respondents were asked to describe a recently-viewed video they found particularly engaging. Viewers love clear, relatable content, a speaker/presenter with an engaging, knowledgeable affect, and content offered in a format that's easy to follow. The words “fun” and “innovative” came up time and again.



Top tip for engaging video:
Be passionate and make your video concise, relatable, and visual.

Focus: Find your 20%



Adapted from Bozarth, 2008, From Analysis to Evaluation. Wiley.

Viewers prefer content that is focused, easy to follow, and covers the promised topic.

It's easy for video projects to turn into runaway trains, and it's tempting to keep adding just "one more thing" to the script. Unfortunately, providing too much information can lead to viewer dropout. When asked why they stopped watching videos, respondents said "There was too much off-topic banter," "The intro was too long," and, "There was too much empty talk that had nothing to do with the title."

Laser-focused content

Find your 20%. Many people approach messaging with a view of forcing everything there is to know into a video, which adds length and sometimes causes the content to veer off topic.

Think of the content as a big box: Rather than start from the outside and try to fit it all in, start in the small box at the center. What key points must the viewer receive? What will drive someone to buy a product, or drive more safely, or help them repair the washing machine, or remember the causes of the Battle of Hastings? What will keep a worker from getting hurt, or fired? What will spur a viewer to visit the furniture sales website? Focus on these key things and build out from there.



Top tip for maintaining focus:
Title your video before you start creating it

Crafting content best practices

Once you've identified your critical 20%:

- Arrange your key ideas in a logical order. First this, then that... Making an outline can help.
- Offer a brief introduction to the topic — why you want to share the information, why it will help the viewer, or what question it will answer. Be clear about what you're covering; for instance, are you offering tips for using any microphone, or just a lavalier? Limit the amount of time you spend introducing the topic.
- Provide an overview of equipment or supplies. If the topic involves using tools, kitchen implements, or products like fabric, flour, antiseptic spray, or glue, make that clear before you begin.
- Prepare a basic script and read it aloud several times. The way it sounds in your head is different than the way it will feel when you speak it aloud.
- Be careful of wandering off topic or inserting side comments. Think about what the audience needs to know, not what you find interesting.
- Use clear transitions to let viewers know you are moving to the next step or topic.
- Proofread your material, especially titles and other onscreen text. Have a colleague or friend double-check. Misspellings and other errors are unprofessional and can be distracting.

As noted earlier, clear, easy-to-follow content is important to viewers, and one of the best ways to keep them engaged.



Tip: Choose a topic that interests you, like “How to create a pivot table in Excel,” “How to crochet a waffle stitch,” or “How to repair drywall,” and search YouTube or a similar site for some videos. Watch a few. Notice the ways presenters do — or don't — organize information. What is effective? Which videos are easier to follow, and why?

Read [this article](#) for further advice on creating great tutorial videos.

Positive presence

“The person who was talking looked like they didn't want to be doing the video and that they were forced.”

“They didn't capture my imagination or interest.”

“The speaker was enthusiastic, interested in the topic, and was knowledgeable and credible.”

When describing a video they felt was particularly engaging, respondents had a great deal to say about the quality of the presenter/instructor and presentation. A good presenter can go a long way toward making content relatable and easy to follow. This can mean more than an on-screen speaker: Narrators, voiceovers, and other elements also play into overall effect.

Viewers selected videos because they wanted information or instruction, preferably in an entertaining, innovative, or interesting way. Presenting content with a positive, helpful tone will support the video's perceived effectiveness. It doesn't need to be an artificially enthusiastic or insincere approach; go for a helpful manner, convey genuine interest in the topic, and, if appropriate to the content, a fun tone. The overall feel of an instructional or informational video should be, “I want to help you.”



Tip: Use the advice in this free [TechSmith Academy course](#) to get better in front of the camera.

Why do people *stop* watching an instructional or informational video?

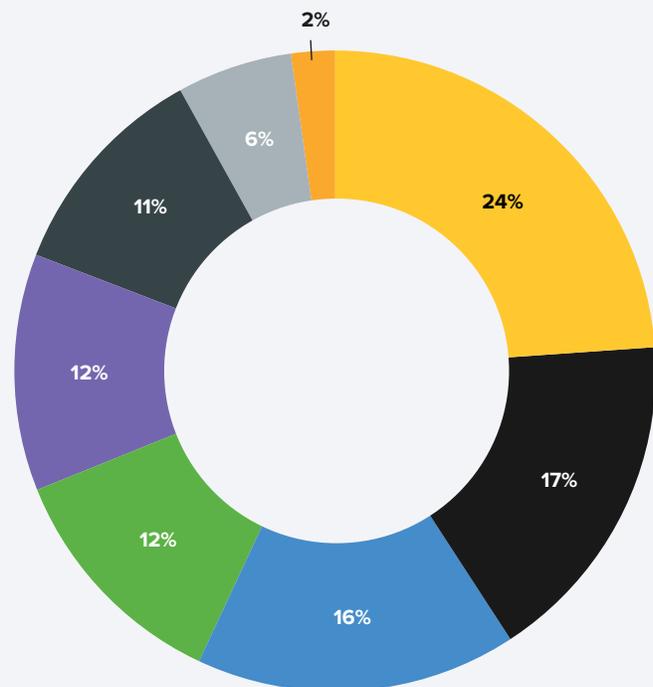
Reasons why people stop watching videos

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Q:

Think of the most recent time you stopped watching an instructional or informational video before it was over. Why did you stop watching that video?

- I received the information I needed
- I was not getting the information I expected
- I was bored/it wasn't interesting
- I got distracted by the other work tasks
- It didn't cover the right topic
- The quality was poor
- Not working in the office and getting distracted by at-home influences
- Other (please describe)



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Good news: The most common reason for stopping is “I received the information I needed,” which mattered to viewers even more than interesting content.

The next most common reason for stopping? “I wasn't getting the information I expected.” Attending to better titles, descriptions, and thumbnails can help overcome this.

Distractions played a role as well. 12% of respondents said work tasks were a problem here, which is double the number of those who said distractions happened while viewing at home.

Important style and content characteristics

Q:

What visual style/content characteristics do you feel are most important to have in a video? Rank order your top 3.

What	Total Rank
Clear audio quality	1
Camera video was clear	2
Professional style/graphics (e.g. text overlays, lower thirds, etc.)	3
Speaker/person appearing on screen	4
Focus indicators to know where to look (e.g. mouse cursor in a screen recording, etc.)	5
Visible speaker in the recording or picture-in-picture used	6
Video from multiple angles	7
Background music	8
Large amounts of motion (e.g. changes/movement in video, switching between clips, etc.)	9
Transition effects	10
Animated characters or sequences	11
Whiteboard drawings	12

Production values matter. While viewers aren't necessarily looking for perfection, they expect a professional effort. Factors like crisp audio, clear video, a clean, professional background, and good use of graphics are not expensive or time-consuming to execute. The use of focusing indicators and effects can help to focus and guide your viewer's attention.

Viewers also value the presence of a speaker or person in the video.

Further, you can use transition effects, changes between views, switch between clips, etc. to break up an unending, static view.

Respondents like well-thought-out graphics that illustrate points — in close-up detail where appropriate — and relate to real-world examples.

Creating video can be a time-consuming and, depending on choices, expensive undertaking. When thinking about how to best invest resources, look at how respondents rated assorted factors. They had a clear preference for clear audio and video, so good equipment and skill at using it seems to be a given.

There are many other elements that can help make your video engaging and effective. Which of these you choose depends on the goal of the video, your skill, and even available time. Pick and use elements wisely and selectively — you don't necessarily need to use them all.

Audio excellence

As noted on the previous page, the single most important characteristic is audio quality. Follow these audio recording best practices to make sure your message is heard:

Tips for audio:

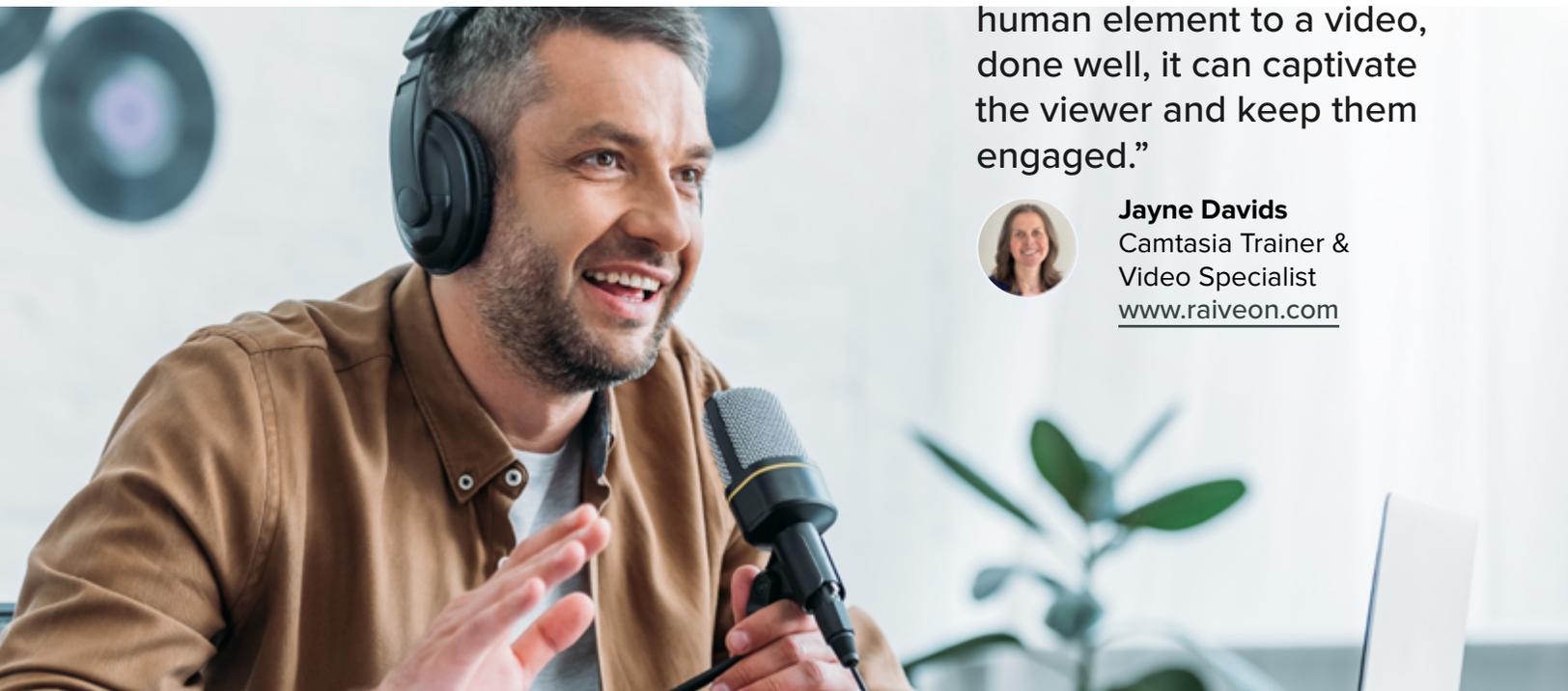
- Use quality recording equipment. Invest in a good microphone and learn how it works.
- Try to record in a space that is conducive for audio with minimal ambient noise and echo.
- Work to reduce the echo in addition to eliminating outside noises. Avoid lots of hard surfaces, or put blankets, padding, or foam on the walls, or work in an area with a lot of books, clothes, or soft surfaces.
- Use audio editing software or effects to clean up the audio and remove any remaining background noise.
- Make sure the audio output levels aren't too low or too high. Level the sound in the video, and if possible, across videos. Video software like Camtasia can do this automatically.
- Test your audio before you publish. Listen in all the variety of ways that your viewers will: Headphones, computer speakers, mobile phone or tablet speaker, etc.



“Voice narration brings a human element to a video, done well, it can captivate the viewer and keep them engaged.”



Jayne Davids
Camtasia Trainer &
Video Specialist
www.raiveon.com



Musical interlude

“The background music is so boring it makes me feel tired.”

While viewers tend not to care for background music (what the Rapid eLearning Blog’s Tom Kuhlmann calls “auditory wallpaper”), music can be an effective design element.

The right choice of music, when used strategically, can excite and spur action, generate energy, or soothe and reassure. It can also signal a transition, so consider using it as intro or outro music or to indicate a shift to a new topic or setting rather than as continuous background sound.

Music can create and activate prior knowledge, focus a viewer’s attention, and foster a positive attitude towards learning. It can also support memory — think of advertising jingles or songs that help children learn the alphabet.

When used thoughtfully, music can be an excellent tool in enhancing the viewer’s overall experience.

“When I started adding music to my Excel tutorials, viewers complained that it was too much. They didn’t complain that it was there. So, I had to learn to be tasteful and judicious in how I used music..”



Oz du Soleil
Microsoft Excel MVP
and Author
www.ozdusoleil.com



Learn: [How to add music to a video](#)

Across international markets: differences

While data across surveyed markets turned out to be rather similar, several significant differences did appear:

- Overall, the most common reason for watching a video was “I was trying to learn new skills or abilities to try at my job.” There was a gap here between German respondents, at 31%, and respondents in the United States, at 19%.
- 31% of respondents in France preferred shorter videos of 3-4 minutes, while those in the UK tended to like longer videos of 10-19 minutes.
- Viewers in France and the US watch with the greatest frequency; those in the UK watch the least. This is a change from past data: Germany has moved up in viewing frequency.
- When choosing a video to watch, “The description matched what I wanted to learn about” was important across markets. Interesting or intriguing titles are more important to respondents in Canada, but matter little to viewers in Germany. More than all other markets, respondents in the US chose “I was bored” as the reason for selecting a video.



Conclusion

Industry reports¹²³⁴ indicate that people across the world currently consume more than a billion hours of video a day. Understanding viewer habits can help content creators feed this appetite: Viewers looking for information or instruction want relevant, easy-to-follow material that will help them meet their goals of doing their jobs more effectively and learning more about topics that interest them. A focus on clear presentation, quality production, and compelling descriptions all help craft videos that get watched.



1 <https://www.youtube.com/howyoutubeworks/progress-impact/trends>
2 <https://www.statista.com/topics/1137/online-video>
3 <https://techjury.net/blog/video-consumption-statistics>
4 <https://blog.hootsuite.com/youtube-stats-marketers>

About the author



Dr. Jane Bozarth, director of research for The Learning Guild, is a veteran classroom trainer who transitioned to eLearning in the late 1990s and never looked back. In her previous job as leader of the State of North Carolina’s award-winning eLearning program, Jane specialized in finding low-cost ways of providing online training solutions. She is the author of several books, including eLearning Solutions on a Shoestring, Social Media for Trainers, and Show Your Work: The Payoffs and How-To’s of Working Out Loud. Jane holds a master’s degree in technology-based training and a doctorate in training and development.

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