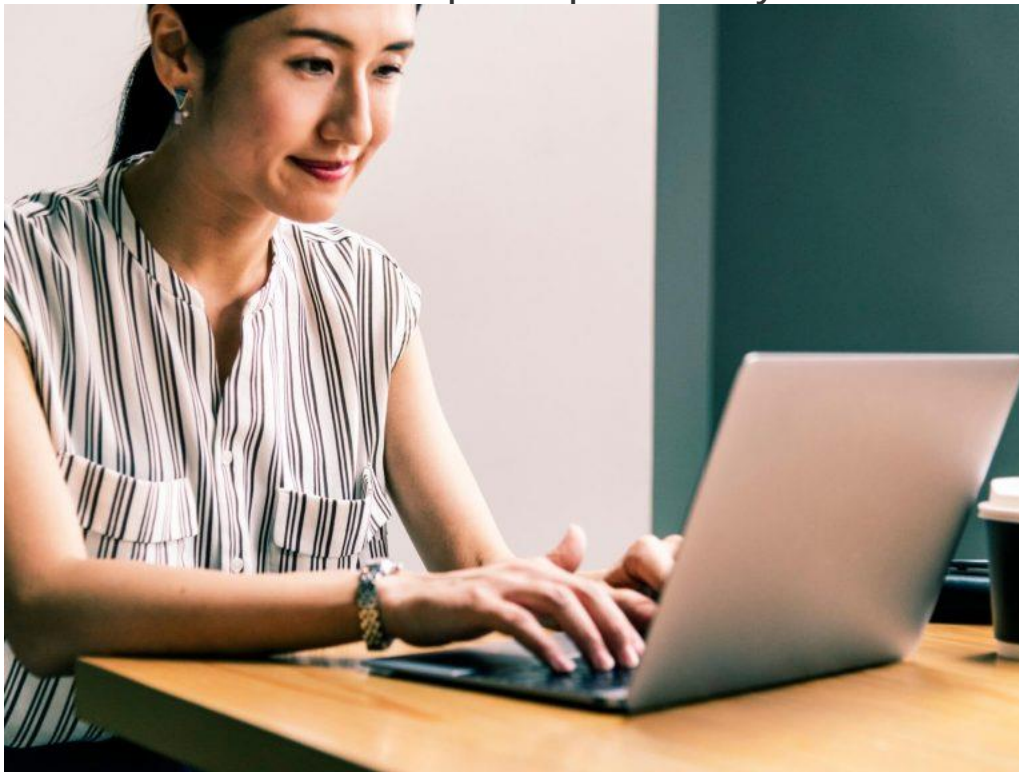


# The 7 Essentials of a Good Tutorial Video

Consider what it means for something to be “good.” Two sandwiches made of completely different ingredients, perhaps a Philly...



Consider what it means for something to be “good.” Two sandwiches made of completely different ingredients, perhaps a Philly cheesesteak and a club sandwich, can be equally good. Some people might prefer one or the other, but that is a matter of taste.

In the same way, two instructional videos can be equally good. A tutorial video on using a table saw can be good and so can one on making pivot tables in Microsoft Excel.

But, there are also some poor tutorials out there. Just because you explain something to someone doesn't automatically make it a solid tutorial. Just like throwing random ingredients between two slices of bread doesn't necessarily make a delicious sandwich.

## So, what makes a good tutorial video?

At TechSmith, while we may not be sandwich artists, we know a thing or two about making video tutorials — including the essential elements that help make any tutorial video, training video, or software demo a good one.

And we're going to share them with you, along with some key questions to help you out along the way.

### 1. Clarity



**Key Question:** *Is the instruction clear, easy to follow, and to-the-point?*

Tutorials must be easy to consume, and learning is best achieved when information is delivered clearly.

Ensuring your tutorial meets a high standard of clarity begins with planning. When you start working on a tutorial, set specific learning objectives for the viewer. Write these objectives out, making sure they identify the actions or concepts that users need to know to be successful after watching your tutorial.

Use a phrase like “Viewers will know...” or “Users will understand...” to express your objectives.

**Here are a few sample tutorial objectives:**

- Viewers will know the equipment needed to build a bench
- Users will know how to start a screen recording
- Viewers will understand why file format is important to completing a project

While there’s no universal limit on the number of objectives a tutorial should have, keep the number to a logical amount and remember that, in many cases, less is more.

A short tutorial should have one to three objectives. If you find yourself getting to five or more, review your objectives and determine if all truly are objectives. While there are often a number of things that need to be covered in a video, not all of them are learning objectives.

Once objectives are finalized, use them as the guides around which you build the tutorial. Each part should be designed to ensure that the learning objective is achieved without meandering from the focus.

Having objectives and a focus on clarity allows you to move to the next essential: Flow.

## 2. Flow



**Key question:** *Do the ideas flow smoothly from one to the next?*

In all good tutorials, each section flows naturally from one to the next. Design your tutorial so that you present things in the order that a viewer would need to use them to perform the task.

Where no set order exists, group together similar concepts or processes. Are a few steps normally done in conjunction with one another? It's likely those should be taught in succession. Setting up your tutorial this way helps you show how different steps or features relate to or even depend on one another.

Once you have the flow of your tutorial figured out, consider the pacing.

## 3. Pacing

# PACING

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**Key question:** *Is the instruction delivered at a comfortable and appropriate pace?*

Pacing is the speed at which you deliver the instruction. There are three key factors in pacing.

First, when writing your script, make sure each step gets the right amount of attention. If a step is more complex, spend a little extra time, a sentence or two, explaining the context. If it is simple, don't go into too much detail.

Second, consider your voice over. Many people (me and most of my colleagues at TechSmith) prefer to record narration separately from screen recording. This allows more flexibility when setting the tutorial's pace. Speak naturally as you record, but be aware of your speed. Many people accelerate as they read so you may need to be deliberate about slowing down and maintaining a consistent pace. Don't worry if it feels slow, that's normal.

As you record the script, consider how you want each part to sound in the video. It often takes longer to demonstrate something on-screen than it does to describe the action.

The challenge here is inflection.

While you may read a sentence as though it leads right into another, the video may require more time to show the action. This can make for awkward pauses or the need to rush the video. Take a pause at the end of each sentence, step and substep. This makes it easier to add time into the narration when you edit the video.

The third element of good pacing happens when you record and edit your video. If you plan to use video of a screen recording, make sure to use smooth, easy-to-follow cursor movements when recording. They can always be sped up in the finished recording.

When you have a draft or even a portion complete, watch your video. Stop to listen to each part and consider if it feels natural. The cool thing about video editing is you have full control over pacing and can always change the amount of time between sentences, steps, and even sections.

## 4. Cognitive Load



**Key question:** *Does the cognitive load seem appropriate for the audience?*

Cognitive load, simply put, states that working memory is limited and can be overwhelmed. When this happens, learning new ideas, concepts, or processes becomes difficult — or even impossible.

Imagine a glass filling with water. The glass can handle up to a certain amount of water before overflowing. The information in your video is the water and your viewers are the glass. Don't overflow their minds to the point where they miss critical information.

Of course, your viewers are not drinking glasses and minds are not of finite size like normal drinking cups.

Assessing your audience's appropriate cognitive load requires determining their familiarity and skill level. Novices will likely need more context and groundwork to cement key concepts. More advanced viewers can likely handle a higher cognitive load with regard to the subject.

Keep in mind you can also err on the side of not providing enough information, leaving your viewers thirsty for more or, at worst, unprepared to move forward with their learning or unable to complete the task.

Ultimately, getting this right requires a good understanding of your audience. Knowing their skill level, prior knowledge, and even the level of interest will help you assess the appropriate cognitive load and provide the proper amount of content.

If this has you interested to learn more about cognitive load, here is a good read that goes into deeper detail.

## **5. Appeal**

# APPEAL

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**Key question:** *Does the content speak to a broad audience?*

We need to use the word 'appeal' here loosely. Appeal really means, "Is this a topic many people want or need to know about?" A lot of tutorials are created based on demand. Others are created by companies for compliance purposes. In either case, the key here is making sure that the content is useful to a broad audience.

If you're making a tutorial based on demand, this is an important step. Study the information indicating a need for the tutorial and be sure to address the interests presented. This is a value check, as in it helps to make sure the tutorial you create, and time you invest in it is of the most value possible.

## 6. Tone

# TONE

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**Key question:** *Does the content have a neutral, friendly and inviting tone?*

Make your tutorial inviting and comfortable to watch. Narration that's overly excited or delivered in monotone will distract from the learning content and may lead some users to tune out. Tone comes through most obviously in the way the narration is read, but start setting the right tone in writing your script.

The script plays a central role in determining tone. Word choice demonstrates a lot about what the narrator wants you to feel. When you write, describe things as they are. Don't go over the top with descriptions about how something is the absolute and unquestionable greatest. Simply say it is good or great. The same is true for saying things are "simple" or "easy" instead of "incredibly simple."

State facts and don't embellish. Your audience will appreciate it.

The second half of tone comes in the narration. Read your script calmly and clearly, adding the inflections you normally would if saying it to another person. Unless the situation calls for a particular emotion, a general feeling of happiness is a good idea. Pro tip: To help ensure a happy tone, try smiling as you read.

Getting the tone right can be tough. To make it easier, have another person sit with you as you record or listen to your recording and give you feedback.

## **7. Presentation**

# PRESENTATION

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**Key question:** *Does the final piece have quality audio, video, and sufficient polish?*

Finally, we get to the part of a good tutorial that most people think of first: Presentation. I saved this for last for good reason. The presentation is, of course, very important. It is also easy to focus on and forget everything that comes before it. Like designing a beautiful book cover before writing the book.

Presentation constitutes the way the video looks, the audio sounds, and how the entire package is delivered and displayed to the audience.

If the tutorial uses screen video, it should be crisp and clear. Screencasting software like Camtasia makes it easy to record your screen and then bring the recording into the video editor. Once in the video editor, zooming and panning features allows you to get close-ups of different parts of the screen to highlight important information. Just make sure to have the best picture possible to ensure a quality video.

The audio should be easy to hear at a mid-level volume setting. If you record narration separately, audio editing software will allow you to raise or lower the volume or you can do it in Camtasia.

Use transitions, annotations, or additional effects in the video with care. Don't add effects just for fun or simply because you can. Make sure they're only used when they add to the learning experience.

Finally, the video should be placed where the audience who needs or wants it will access it. For many tutorials, this means YouTube. However, for some companies, it might be their own website, intranet, or knowledge center.

Keep in mind, too, that your video may need to reside in more than one location.

At TechSmith, we place our tutorials on our website, YouTube, and a number of social media channels so they are easy for customers to access. We also have some great ideas about video hosting to help you out.

## **Try using the 7 essentials**

I started this post asking you to consider what it meant to be "good." I argued that good is not subjective, rather it is essential. By that I mean there are core, universal traits that can help to make anything good. In this case, we focused on tutorials and the framework TechSmith uses to assess the quality of our tutorials.