Name: _____ Date: _____

Fifty Pictures for One Video

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 694 words

You are scrolling on a phone. Rows of videos slide past. Each one has a small picture on it. You stop on one. Why that one? The small picture is called a thumbnail. Its job is to make you curious. A YouTube star named MrBeast has a team that works on his thumbnails.

MrBeast is the channel name of Jimmy Donaldson. On June 12, 2026, YouTube's blog said he had 500 million subscribers. He was the first individual creator to get there. A subscriber is a person who follows a channel. In 2024, his thumbnail artist, Chucky Appleby, said the team makes about 50 ideas for each picture and title.

Then they change small things, again and again. One picture has a new shirt color. Another has a new outfit or a new background. In 2024, one report said this adds up to hundreds of pictures. You will never see most of them. The team cuts the list down until just a few are left.

Appleby has a rule: make a thumbnail easy to read at a glance. On a phone, the picture is small. A picture with too much clutter turns into a blur. MrBeast has said the top videos tend to have clear thumbnails, with little clutter. A plain picture is quick to read.

Since 2019, a picture of Jimmy's face has been in his thumbnails. Appleby said a fan of one video may click the next one with the same face. MrBeast has said his face is big, on the left side of the picture.

There is a second rule, and it is about trust. A picture makes a promise. The video has to keep it. Appleby says trust is what makes people come back and click. YouTube's staff warn that a picture made just for clicks can send people away.

So how does the team know which picture is best? They test. YouTube has a tool for this. A maker can upload up to three pictures for one video. Some people see one picture, and some see another. Then YouTube counts which one led to more watch time. A test should end in two weeks.

One test asked a small question. Should Jimmy's mouth be open or closed in the picture? Appleby said the closed mouth won in about 30 videos. It got more watch time each time. The gap was small. But it kept happening. So the team made closed mouths their usual choice.

Why count watch time and not only clicks? A click shows that someone was curious. Watch time shows whether they stayed. YouTube says it favors watch time. A picture should set the right hopes. If it promises too much, people click, feel tricked, and leave.

None of this began with a team. Jimmy put up his first video in February 2012, when he was 13. His early videos were about games, like Minecraft. One report said each got only about a thousand views. He kept making them.

In January 2017, he posted a video of himself counting to 100,000. The counting took 40 hours. He sped up some parts so the video stayed under 24 hours. Within days, tens of thousands of people had watched. It was his first big hit.

As the videos grew, he began to hire help. His first hire was an editor. He said he was picky about how a video looks. After that, he hired about one person a month. An editor cuts a video down to its best parts. He said a talking shot with no cut gets boring.

He has said people do not value the first ten seconds of a video enough. He has also said a long video needs a side story in the middle. It gives people a second reason to stay. Many people, he says, plan their first video for three months.

Did he get good right away? No. He has said his first 500 videos did not deserve a million views. His advice: make a hundred videos, and improve one thing each time. So when a picture makes you stop scrolling, look at it again. It may have started as one of fifty.

Questions

1. What is a thumbnail?

A. The small picture on a video
B. The sound at the start
C. A kind of camera

2. What did the team learn from the mouth test?

A. Open-mouth pictures got more clicks
B. Closed-mouth pictures got more watch time
C. Faces made no difference

3. Why do YouTube's tests favor watch time over clicks?

A. Clicks cost more money to count
B. Watch time is easier for computers to count
C. A click shows curiosity, and watch time shows they stayed

4. In "the video has to keep it," what does keep mean?

A. Do what was promised
B. Hide away
C. Pay for

5. How long did the counting to 100,000 take?

A. 4 hours
B. 40 hours
C. 400 hours

6. What was the first person Jimmy hired?

A. A camera operator
B. A driver
C. An editor

Words to know

thumbnail: small video picture
subscriber: channel follower
editor: video cutter
clutter: too much stuff
trust: belief in someone

Answer key: Fifty Pictures for One Video

1. A. The small picture on a video
2. B. Closed-mouth pictures got more watch time
3. C. A click shows curiosity, and watch time shows they stayed
4. A. Do what was promised
5. B. 40 hours
6. C. An editor