



PRACTICAL ADVICE THAT CAN HELP YOU WIN BACK  
YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION

# THREE EASY WAYS TO OVERCOME YOUTUBE ADDICTION

BY MARC RITTER

*"I stopped watching YouTube before bed and first thing in the morning  
after reading this book. Actionable advice for anyone"*

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# Introduction

There I was: lying on my mom's couch, watching a video of someone shaving their legs with a sharp knife at 3 in the morning. I'd reached a new low, and although the video I was watching was vaguely interesting, it had never been my intention to watch people use cutlery to groom themselves when I searched for a video on World War II history only hours before. How did this happen *again*? How did I end up watching hours of YouTube without realizing where the time had gone? It felt as if YouTube knew something about me that I didn't, and was able to manipulate me into staying on their platform much longer than I wanted to.

The YouTube algorithm, which recommends new videos based on past viewing preferences, isn't unfamiliar to the outside world. In fact, former YouTube software engineer Guillaume Chaslot, who designed the addictive algorithm, left the company after becoming disillusioned by the technology that he had created. YouTube has done little to change the technology behind the algorithm, despite heavy criticism over recent years. This has given rise to a number of people within the self-help industry trying to free people from the addictive grasp of YouTube, and to build better habits.

My goal with this book is to break down why we become addicted to social media, and how to counteract its addictive and often unconscious pull. All of the ideas presented within the following

pages have been methods and practices that have already been formulated by others. My goal is to compile what has worked best for *me* and to present this to you in a practical and efficient format. I will provide a list of references at the end of this eBook that you can use to find further material that will help.

Although the title of this book is “3 Easy Steps to Overcome Your YouTube Addiction,” it should serve as a guide that can be applied to all addictive platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, or Twitter. I chose YouTube since it’s what I’ve struggled with the most.

The three methods I will outline here are based on the framework James Clear uses in his book [‘Atomic Habits’](#) to eliminate bad habits. I will use three questions to help you understand your own behavior, and subsequently how you can counteract the impulse to reach for your phone and open up the app.

These methods aren't exhaustive. What I hope, however, is that you can use this framework to create better habits with technology and consequently avoid negative ones. On top of the references I attached at the end of this book, you can find additional articles and coaching material on my website [socialmediarehab.net](http://socialmediarehab.net)

On that note, let’s get started.

# Method #1: Where Do You Watch YouTube?

## Make it Difficult!

We all know how it feels when we're watching yet another video that simply does nothing for us. Sure, it may be entertaining for a few minutes, but the real problem arises when these few minutes become hours, and when we end up seeing that our screen time – especially on YouTube – has exceeded the hours that we know and feel is appropriate. For example, you may feel that being on YouTube is no problem if you only watch a few videos, but when you end up like me, at 3 AM still watching pointless videos that bring no real value to your life, it's time to start questioning those habits. So, start by asking yourself this question: where do you watch YouTube? We are creatures of habit. We do what feels comfortable, so to end this vicious cycle, we need to spot where the habits are, what environment they reside in, and ultimately, we must change these.

## Your Environment Is Everything

The way you act is a reflection of where you are and who you are with. If you surround yourself with people who also spend hours on the platform, you may even end up hanging out and doing this exact activity together. Of course, spending time with people doing something that you love is important, but if that thing that you love cuts away the social interactions that keep us healthy, we need to take action.

Even if your social circles are not related to your love for YouTube, there are other parts to your environment that make it easier for you to indulge in your addiction. For example, having constant access to the platform on your phone, tablet, or computer makes it easier for you to mindlessly scroll and give yourself up to the algorithm that was built to keep you addicted. Think about it: when you look down the recommended videos, how many of these are *actually* interesting? On the other hand, how many of these are just interesting enough for you to stay on the platform because it's easier to remain in this steady state – in your comfort zone – rather than to have to think about doing something else? Most of us are guilty of doing this, whether it's on YouTube or on another platform. So, it's also up to us to realize that we are letting ourselves slip and to take back control. Your accessibility to YouTube via one of the devices mentioned is crucial. If you come home and your phone is on your couch, you want to make accessing it much more difficult. If you can eliminate your access to even open up the app, you've done most of the hard work already.

### Do You Watch YouTube on Your Phone?

First question: do you watch videos on your phone? If so, what's your current screen time? This is something you probably have avoided looking at for the simple reason that you know you will be discouraged. However, it's important to know exactly where you are starting from so you can make changes and see the progress you are

making. So, take a moment to take a look at your screen time and establish whether this is something you are comfortable with. Make a goal for yourself how many hours per day you will allow yourself to watch YouTube in the beginning. A good goal could be something like 1 hour per day. Going cold-turkey is difficult, so try to taper off.

Once this is done, consider what you can do to reduce the number of hours you spend on the app. Again, if you are interested in never watching YouTube on your phone ever again, make it difficult or impossible to do so. This will take a lot of self-control and discipline, but the extent to which you are successful in implementing this change is completely up to you. You decide whether you are successful!

### **Delete the App from Your Phone!**

Let me give you an example based on my own experience. When I first realized just how much time I was spending – scratch that, *wasting* on YouTube, I deleted the app from my phone. In fact, I deleted the app from my phone a very long time ago! Initially, I reached for my phone out of habit to watch a YouTube video when I got bored, but over time, I taught my brain that there was nothing to find there. My brain adjusted to no dopamine reward being available every time the

urge or impulse to watch YouTube arose. Therefore, the environment that I had created, one where YouTube is difficult or impossible to watch, eliminated the possibility of engaging in mindless entertainment. For example, I would be sitting on the bus on my way to work, and my habit was just to take out my phone, open the app, scroll down to see whether there was something interesting to watch, and to start watching it. Even if there was nothing to watch, I'd still click on something just to keep myself entertained or busy. Even if it's impossible to watch YouTube on your phone because you've deleted the app doesn't necessarily mean that you've given it up completely. You've just made it more difficult for yourself, so you might need to wait until you get home to use the computer to watch YouTube.

Think about it this way: you need to control the impulse. This impulse is similar to Pavlovian conditioning where having a stimulus in a specific environment can make you act impulsively. If you get bored and see your phone, your impulse is to automatically open up an app that will appease that feeling of boredom. The key here is to remove the stimulus. The point is to make watching YouTube difficult. Think of it as reverse conditioning!

### **Use App Blockers!**

If you'd like a more tempered approach, you can use app blockers like [AppBlock](#) or [Stayfocused](#). There are plenty more, such as [Freedom](#), [RescueTime](#), [AppDetox](#), and [OffTime](#). If you want to cut it all out



cold-turkey, I advise you to simply get rid of the app on your phone (or disable it if you cannot uninstall it, as is the case on certain Android phones).

However, if you are not ready to completely give up just yet, you can start by limiting the amount of time you spend on the app. For example, if you know that you are particularly likely to end up on YouTube until the early hours of the morning because you do not have the self-control to put your phone away, use an app blocker to block YouTube from your phone late in the evening. While some say that you can just put your phone away for the night and place it in a different part of your room, we all know that it makes it too easy to get up, reach for the phone, and start scrolling away. Turn off your phone before going to bed. Once you eliminate the habit of going on YouTube, you want to replace it with a better habit. That means putting a book on your bed so that when you return, there is something to do, at least.

On the other hand, if you'd like a tempered approach, you can use [AppBlock](#) to set a time schedule so that you can use the site only at a specific time every day. This can help you control how much time you spend on the site. This is also helpful for those who struggle to give themselves breaks. For example, if you tend to skip lunch because you are too focused, or if you end up taking 3 hours off instead of the supposed 1 hour for your lunch break, having a time control app that limits your YouTube usage can help you prioritize your tasks. Then,

when the clock hits 1 PM, you know that you get a break and can enjoy *a bit* of YouTube with your meal. For example, I use AppBlock to allow myself access to Instagram only from 2-3pm everyday. If I miss that cutoff, then I will have to wait until the next day to use it. Therefore, I've trained myself to use sites like YouTube or Instagram only after having had lunch.

## Do You Watch YouTube on Your Computer?

### Use App Blockers on Your Laptop!

Now, what if you use YouTube on your computer? There are apps that you can use to hold yourself back from going on the site. [SelfControl](#) is a browser extension that can mitigate the access that you have to certain websites. Once you have set up a timer for the website, there is no way around it. There is also [1Focus](#), which is available on macs in the app store. Likewise, simply search for 'app or website' blockers on Google to find a variety of solutions. A plus is that it can be used for all platforms. So, if you are going through a rough exam time, have a lot of work to do and tend to procrastinate, you can use this extension to eliminate the temptation or possibility to visit a site like YouTube. This works similarly to deleting YouTube from your phone, in that you rewire the dopamine feedback mechanism in your brain so that there is no reward from visiting YouTube.

Now, onto the criticism: *but I can just change the settings of these app blockers!* Yes, and that's why it takes a lot of discipline. At the end of the day, it is your choice to stop using the app and to limit your own consumption. However, if you find yourself completely unable to control your impulses, then you can have a friend use a passcode on your computer. Have a friend use a passcode in the settings of the appblockers so that you cannot change the settings. If you really want to use YouTube, you will need to beg your friend to use the app, which is unlikely to happen. This way, you prevent yourself from disabling the app blocker and you are left to someone else's volition if you really get an urge.

Social media is made to be addictive, as the more time you spend on each platform, the more money the creators make from advertising revenue. The goal is to eliminate the impulse to use YouTube, since it is much harder to counteract its addictive pull once you start watching YouTube videos. This is why we need to place a great deal of focus on designing your environment so that you can eliminate the possibility of using it. As James Clear says, if you can make a bad habit extremely difficult, you will be less likely to engage in it overtime. This is all YouTube addiction is: rewiring your brain to look for rewards elsewhere when they can't be gained with YouTube immediately. If it makes you live a life that is freer from your YouTube addiction, then that's all that matters.

Finally, there is an extension on Chrome called [Distraction Free YouTube](#). This allows you to search for YouTube videos, but eliminates all the suggested ones. This essentially takes a lot of the 'fun' out of YouTube. Ultimately, it is ideal for someone who still needs YouTube to research things, but who doesn't want to start getting distracted by recommended videos.

There are differences between passive and active watching. Passively watching is when you just click on what's in the recommendation tab, whereas actively watching is when you watch videos with intention (go on YouTube to search for something informative). This is something that we will be exploring more in depth in the third method, which is all about finding the reason why you use YouTube.

With this in mind, let's head over to the second method.

## Method #2: When Do You Watch YouTube?

Sometimes, simply removing our phones from our environment is not possible. As such, we may feel that we *need* to have our phones next to us, and this can lead us to give in to the temptation and end yet another night by watching videos of sharks and the deep oceans (again – we’ve all been there). Do you wake up in the morning and reach for your phone immediately? Use an app blocker to block YouTube when you are most vulnerable to using it. This could be enabling the blocker so that you don't have access when you wake up in the morning or when you go to bed in the evening. Sometimes you want to come home and unwind, so you might jump back onto the app. These are some situations that may be familiar to you.

Let's examine these scenarios as they entail designing your routine and environment in a way that you stop having the impulse to open up YouTube and waste many valuable hours.

### Waking Up in the Morning

Okay, so you believe that you need to have your phone next to you because you need your alarm clock to wake you up. What if you don't hear it if you put it across your room? What if your phone dies during

the night because it's not plugged in and the charger doesn't work in that different socket (okay, this may be a bit of a stretch...)

### **Buy an Alarm Clock**

Buy an alarm clock. It's that simple. Then, before you tuck in for the night, try turning off your phone so that when you wake up, it's more difficult to use it. Again, getting past your YouTube addiction is all about making it difficult and/or impossible for you to give in to the urges. If that means buying an alarm clock, turning your phone off and being more mindful of the times when you are most susceptible to giving into the urges, then that's what you need to do!

### **Use a Habit Tracker**

Likewise, James Clear's book outlines that tracking your habits everyday and at what time you engage in them helps to be more in control of your time. Then, you are able to recognize when you're most vulnerable, and can make sure not to use YouTube. This means setting up the App blocker SPECIFICALLY so that you cannot use YouTube when you're most likely to use it; i.e. in the evening when you come home from work. This follows Clear's method of making it difficult or inaccessible.

If you can answer these questions about your own behavior patterns, you can counteract when you anticipate you are most vulnerable

(mornings or evenings). This is where you can introduce self-control apps, or where you can use tools that help you stop giving into the urges. Now, onto the final method.

## Method #3: Why Do You Watch YouTube?

The most important question to ask yourself is the following: why do I watch YouTube? It isn't easy to answer, especially if you aren't looking for something informative. We live in a world that is constantly in motion. As a result, many of us have also become acquainted with the idea that we need to have some sort of stimulation at all times. For example, this could be listening to music, to a podcast, watching TV, or, in our case, watching YouTube videos. Nowadays, it is rare that I see someone simply sitting somewhere – they are usually reading something on their phone, listening to something, or may be busy on a different app. It has become difficult to simply *be* with our thoughts, and sometimes, we want to numb out the noise with a different noise: videos. We use videos to distract ourselves from negative emotions, such as boredom or misery. We can either remove the impulse to watch videos (as mentioned in the previous two sections), or reappraise these emotions using mindfulness exercises. That means you may struggle a bit less to get past your YouTube addiction.

Most of us watch YouTube because we are bored. This is something we can work with if we change our perception of boredom. Boredom is the mind wandering without realizing it's wandering. It is an inability to tolerate the present moment because we are not fully aware of what we are feeling. However, as mentioned above, sometimes, it can be



difficult to just be bored. But – does that mean that we should try and numb out that feeling? There is something valuable in being able to hold ourselves back from giving into a temptation, and there is something beautiful in knowing that we can just be in the present moment without trying to fill an empty space in our time with something else.

## Using Mindfulness to Curb Urges

There's one principal method I recommend for boredom, and it is called mindfulness meditation. This is the equivalent of being aware of every emotion you feel and every thought that arises independently of you thinking it, and solely focusing on what you feel, see, and can sense within your body. It is an excellent way to gain control over your urges or impulses. As the [Mayo Clinic](#) outlines, it is the process by which you become “intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment”. This involves breathing a specific way, relaxing, taking note of your surroundings and allowing your mind to focus on the things it wants to focus on rather than trying to understand them or judging them. For example, this includes taking time to sit and acknowledge your feelings when you have urges, as was outlined in the previous method when we discussed journaling. With mindfulness, you become more aware of your own urges, the feelings you experience when you have such urges, and you push your mind to focus on something else so as to resist this urge. This is especially useful when you experience boredom

as you become more self-aware of the situation and can then exercise better power over the impulse.

Ultimately, if you can better understand your relationship with boredom, you can mitigate the urge or impulse to grab your phone and go on YouTube.

## Journal Your Thoughts When Urges Arise

Ask yourself: when do I feel the urge to watch a YouTube video? What type of environment makes me crave a distraction on my phone? Which type of environment makes it easy (increases accessibility) to technology? If you cannot pinpoint exactly the triggers that you have, such as boredom, feeling lonely, or simply having nothing better to do, you can always consider journaling. This involves being self-aware and paying attention to your cues. For example, whenever you pick up your phone to open up YouTube, stop and ask yourself: why am I drawn to the app right now? How do I feel? Why do I feel like this is even an option at all? By writing down the feelings that you have whenever you want to watch YouTube videos, you can start finding out the patterns that you have. You might notice that you go to YouTube when a negative emotion arises, such as when you feel lonely, sad, or feel like you do not want to be alone with your thoughts. By writing this down systematically, you give yourself a better chance of spotting this behavior, and consequently, of being

able to change it more promptly. When you know when you watch videos and what triggers this need, it becomes much easier to stop yourself when the urge arises.

### Use the 10-Second Rule

Nir Eyal, the author of the best-selling book [\*Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products\*](#) has a practical exercise that helps counteract the urge to use your phone. Next time that you feel the urge to grab your phone to watch YouTube, try the following. Sit with that feeling for 10 seconds. Observe it the same way you would observe a leaf passing on the surface of a stream in front of you. If you wait, instead of immediately unconsciously acting on it, you will see that the urge subsides. Not only this, but you will also realize that this urge is subconscious and that it is something that you can control. More importantly, you can control how you react – consciously – to the urge instead of trying to mitigate feelings of negativity.

If you still want to watch YouTube after 10 seconds, allow yourself to, but implement this exercise first. If you can counteract the impulse the moment it arises, you've already done 95% of the work towards eliminating YouTube addiction. This is why "why?" is such an important part of not only reshaping your behavior, but the habits that we engage in.

Ultimately, understanding *why* is a revealing method to understand your deeper habits. If you can understand why, you can implement systems to counteract urges and replace bad habits with better ones. This is outlined in Eyal's book, as tracking when the impulse arises helps you prepare for it. For example, once you can pinpoint when you have an impulse, you can try scheduling other activities during this time to make sure that you are either not at home and able to give into the temptation – which brings us back to the very first method, which is figuring out where you use YouTube in the first place! To this end, using both a journal and mindfulness can help you pinpoint where the urges are rooted and hence how you can avoid the urges in the first place. For example, if you know that you have the urge to be on YouTube the second you get home from work because you are tired or have nothing else to do, try changing your routine around: head to the gym, organize something with friends, or pick up a book that you like instead. Call friends and family or work on a project that is very important to you. Do anything *but* give into this temptation!

# Conclusion

On that note, this is where we will be concluding the book! I hope that the information you have read in this book will be useful to you. Try out each of the three methods and you may find that some work better than others. Ultimately, it's up to you to take the first step and to make the changes that you want to implement. You can do it!

Sometimes, however, self-control might not be enough to curb technology addiction. This is why I have created Social Media Rehab, a coaching platform to help people change their behavior and habits so that they can begin winning their attention back. For more information, feel free to email me at [livingscreenfree@gmail.com](mailto:livingscreenfree@gmail.com).