

# THE CONVERSATION

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## YouTube a valuable educational tool, not just cat videos

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While many use YouTube solely to watch videos of cats, increasing numbers use it for education and training. Phil, CC BY-SA

For many, YouTube is little more than a deluge of low-quality videos depicting the latest internet craze or conspiracy theory, perhaps some painful-looking accident, music videos and video-bloggers of dubious talent, and of course, cats. But many underestimate the potential of YouTube as an educational tool. From how-to instructional videos to TED talks, YouTube could well be the most important educational tool of our time.

### Can we take YouTube seriously as an educational tool?

The raw statistics are impressive. With over 100 hours of content being uploaded every minute on YouTube, and reaching people in 61 countries around the world, an astonishing six billion hours of video content is being watched every month. The figures climb higher by the day.

For hundreds of millions of people around the world, YouTube and dozens of other free video platforms are shaping up to be a new educational model. A growing number of not-for-profit providers like the [Khan Academy](#) offer anyone, anywhere, access to a vast catalogue of content on almost any topic you can think of. This is very good news for people in developing *and* developed countries who want an education but perhaps could not have afforded it or even gained access.

Schools and universities are integrating free video platforms like YouTube into their classrooms. Sessions are produced either by content developers or by the teacher/lecturer themselves, using a webcam and some easily learnable software, and uploaded to YouTube. The link is then embedded in the course website where the students can watch it on demand. These videos can be public or private.

Recognising the growing influence of video-on-demand in education, YouTube are aggregating their educational content into easily navigated categories and playlists to create “YouTube EDU”. In one year alone, YouTube EDU partnered with over 300 universities and other providers to offer more than 65,000 free lectures, news items and snippets of campus life.

### **A classroom in your pocket**

Beyond the delivery of lecture content, free video-on-demand platforms are being adapted for a variety of educational uses: the creation of subject-specific play-lists, the “flipped” classroom (where the students do the work outside class, then meet to discuss), student-produced reflective videos, assessment and feedback and various blended learning formats. All of these possibilities allow for very flexible delivery to smart-phones and tablet computers as well as the more traditional desktop PCs and laptops.

The ease-of-access and flexibility of YouTube is allowing amateur and professional content developers to develop instructional content to a global audience on almost any conceivable topic, from knitting, to drawing, to photography, to hair and makeup, DJing and scrapbooking.

### **Online lectures and tutorials**

[TED](#) (the Technology Education and Design Conference) has become a global force in education since the first conference was staged in Monterey, California, in 1990, just a short drive down Interstate 101 from Silicon Valley.

With 450,000 people a day watching more than 1900 free lectures from top-rated speakers on almost every conceivable topic, TED Talks [hosted on YouTube](#) are doing for educational videos what David Attenborough has been doing for nature documentaries since the 1970s, setting the standard for others to follow.

TED talks: raising the bar for online lectures. Steve Jurvetson, CC BY

Speakers who are world experts in their field present ideas worth spreading on a wide range of topics to a global audience. Lecturers and teachers everywhere are free to use this high-quality content as a free teaching resource, either showing it in class or assigning it to be viewed. The only pre-requisite is that a student has sufficient digital literacy to access the video.

## **Hacking your education**

As the 21st century unfolds, we are seeing a shift from the campus-based model of education that has endured for a thousand years to an open, anywhere anytime model. On-demand video is a disruptive technology that is providing a flexible new way of delivering education that will require some adaptive thinking from higher education providers if they are to survive this period of change.

It will be the agile institutions that survive and flourish, the ones that find ways to successfully leverage technology to deliver high-quality education to increasingly busy and mobile students. Free, video-on-demand platforms like YouTube and TED-Ed that have flexibility designed into them will be an integral part of the educational landscape of the future. Knowledge does not need to be delivered solely by teachers, nor do learning environments need to be teacher-centric.

There will always be a place for intellectually curious students to gather and be mentored by a knowledgeable teacher. Those who want this experience will still be able to get it at a traditional university and it will serve them well. But universities and colleges also need to cater for the growing number of students whose circumstances make it difficult or impossible to attend class in person, whether they want to or not. For them, on-line delivery with high-quality video-on-demand is a necessity.