DOCUMENTARY THUMBNAIL KIT

10 TEMPLATES | 20+ OVERLAYS | 6 PALETTES | PDF GUIDE

for history, geopolitics, economics and science explainers | Canva - Photoshop - Photopea



FALCON STUDIO

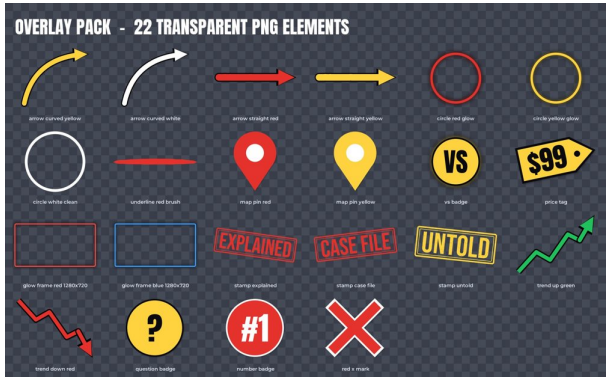
What is inside

- **01_Templates** - 10 thumbnail templates, 1280 x 720 (YouTube's size). Each folder has: **preview.png** (how it looks), **1_background.png** (bottom layer), **2_overlay.png** (arrows, frames, badges - transparent), **3_text_example.png** (sample text - transparent, to copy the style).
- **02_Overlays** - transparent PNG elements: arrows, circles, map pins, VS badge, price tag, glow frames, stamps.
- **03_Palettes** - 6 colour palettes as a swatch sheet plus a text file of hex codes.
- **fonts** - Anton, Bebas Neue and Montserrat, free under the SIL Open Font License (licence files included).

Quick start (5 minutes)

- Pick the template that matches your story (page 4).
- Stack the layers in this order, bottom to top: **1_background** - **your photo** - **2_overlay** - **your text**.
- Type your own 2-3 words in **Anton** (white or yellow, black outline). The grey 'YOUR IMAGE HERE' boxes only show where things go; they are not in the layers.
- Shrink the finished design to phone size and check it still reads (Rule 6).
- Export as JPG or PNG, 1280 x 720, under 2 MB (YouTube's limit for custom thumbnails).
- Leave the **bottom-right corner** clear: YouTube puts the video length there.

Every template is made only from shapes, gradients and free-licence fonts. No stock photos, no faces, no logos - so you can use it in monetised videos without hidden licence problems.





The 7 rules of documentary thumbnails

1 ONE BIG SUBJECT

One clear thing fills 40-60% of the frame: an object, a place, a map, a person you have the rights to. If you need to explain the picture, it is the wrong picture.

2 MAX 3 WORDS

The title does the explaining; the thumbnail does the hook. Two or three words, big, in a heavy condensed font. Never repeat the title word for word.

3 HARD CONTRAST

Light on dark or dark on light. Bright red, blue and yellow survive a busy feed. Outline or shadow your text so it never melts into the photo.

4 ONE FOCAL POINT

One arrow or one ring, pointing at one thing. Three arrows means nobody knows where to look.

5 A CURIOSITY GAP

Show the 'what', hold back the 'why'. A ring around a place, a falling line, a question - the viewer clicks to close the gap. Never promise what the video does not deliver.

6 THE MOBILE TEST

Most views come from phones. Shrink your design to about 160 px wide (or view it at arm's length). If you cannot read the words or see the subject, make them bigger and cut detail.

7 A/B TEST WITH TEST & COMPARE

YouTube Studio's Test & Compare lets eligible channels upload up to 3 thumbnails for one video. YouTube shows them to different viewers and picks a winner by **watch time share**, not clicks alone. Make your variants really different (new image or new words, not a new shade of red) and let the test finish before you judge.

Honest packaging wins long term. A thumbnail that over-promises gets the click, then loses the viewer in the first 30 seconds - and YouTube notices.

The templates - when to use each one



T01 - MONEY / ECONOMICS

Money stories: prices, debt, trade, inflation. Put a cut-out object (barrel, container, banknote, building) in the blue box; 2-3 words on yellow. Flip the red line to point up for a 'rise' story.



T02 - HISTORY / ARCHIVE

History and biographies. Use a public-domain archive photo; it fades into the sepia on the left. Put the year in the gold badge.



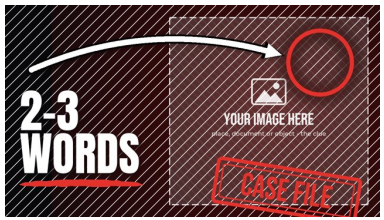
T03 - GEOPOLITICS MAP

Geopolitics and places. Drop in a map (Natural Earth is public domain), then move the pin and ring onto the place that matters.



T04 - SCIENCE / SPACE

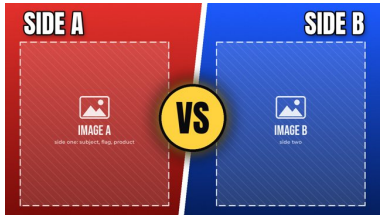
Science and space. A round crop of a planet, probe or telescope image (NASA) sits in the glowing circle.



T05 - INVESTIGATION / MYSTERY

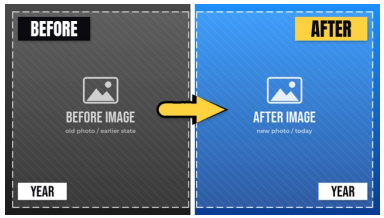
Investigations and unsolved questions. The red ring points at the clue; keep the words short and slightly mysterious.

The templates (continued)



T06 - VERSUS / COMPARISON

Two sides: countries, companies, ideas. One image per side; 1-2 words per label.



T07 - BEFORE / AFTER

Change over time: a city, a coastline, a price. Same framing in both photos makes the change pop.



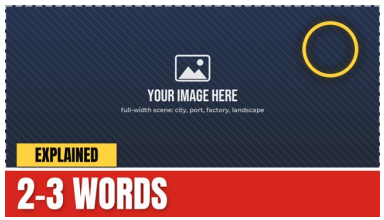
T08 - NUMBER LIST

Lists and countdowns. Change the big number; keep the words to two.



T09 - BIG QUESTION

One big question. The image is the puzzle; the words end with a question mark.



T10 - BREAKING EXPLAINER

Explainers. A wide scene on top, the topic in the red bar, and the EXPLAINED tab.

How to use the templates

CANVA (free or Pro)

1. Create design - Custom size - 1280 x 720 px.
2. Uploads - upload **1_background.png** - drag it in and right-click - *Set image as background*.
3. Upload your photo and place it over the placeholder area. Cut-outs: Canva Pro's *BG Remover*.
4. Upload **2_overlay.png**, drag it on top, stretch to the full canvas.
5. Add a text box, font **Anton** (built into Canva). Add an outline with Effects - Outline, or a Shadow.
6. Share - Download - JPG.

PHOTOSHOP

1. Install the fonts from the **fonts** folder (double-click - Install).
2. File - Open **1_background.png**.
3. File - Place Embedded: your photo, then **2_overlay.png**. Put the photo layer under the overlay.
4. Cut-outs: Select - Subject, then add a layer mask.
5. Type tool, Anton. Layer Style - Stroke (black, 6-10 px) and Drop Shadow.
6. File - Export - Export As - JPG, quality about 85, under 2 MB.

PHOTOPEA (free, in the browser - photopea.com)

1. File - Open **1_background.png**.
2. To add the fonts: File - Open the .ttf files from the **fonts** folder; Photopea loads them for this session.
3. File - Open & Place: your photo, then **2_overlay.png**. Drag layers into order in the Layers panel.
4. Cut-outs: Select - Magic Cut, or the Quick Selection tool, then a layer mask.
5. Text tool (T), Anton. Right-click the layer - Blending Options - Stroke.
6. File - Export as - JPG.

Overlays: place any PNG from 02_Overlays the same way. They are transparent, so they sit on top of anything. Resize with the corner handles (hold Shift in Photoshop/Photopea to keep the shape).

Licence-clean images: where to get them

The templates are clean. Your photo must be clean too. Always read the licence on the page you download from - terms can change, and this guide is general information, not legal advice.

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Natural Earth (naturalearthdata.com) - maps

Free vector and raster map data in the public domain. Ideal for template T03: colour one country, add the pin and ring.

NOT free, even if Google shows them

- News-agency photos (AP, Reuters, AFP, Getty) and newspaper images.
- Screenshots of other people's videos, films or TV.
- Company and channel logos, film posters, game art.
- AI images made to look like a real, named person.

WANT THEM DONE FOR YOU?

FALCON STUDIO - $45 FIRST VIDEO

2-3 thumbnail variants per video, made for YouTube Test & Compare.
Built for history, geopolitics, economics and explainer channels.

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