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Best Practices for Configuring YouTube Restricted Mode

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ABSTRACT

Love it or hate it you cannot avoid YouTube. If you are a school teacher, a school admin or a parent you will be thinking about YouTube more frequently than you like. And most often than not it will be about figuring out ways to keep inappropriate stuff away without denying your kids the many useful videos that YouTube hosts. With a variety of ways available to keep harmful videos at bay, it is easy to lose your way in the YouTube labyrinth. In this paper, we will lay out some practical tips to help you manage YouTube, particularly the hallowed YouTube Restricted Mode.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the use of technology as an educational aid has increased significantly. From using G-Suite (formerly known as Google Apps for Education – GAFE) as a medium for communication and collaboration between teachers & students, teachers & school admin, or teachers & teachers, to providing every student with a personal device for schoolwork, or experimenting with flipped classrooms, schools have come a long way in how they think about and impart education.

YouTube, with scores of educational videos, the ability to upload videos and maintain dedicated channels, is used extensively by both teachers and students to supplement learning. Today teachers can assign YouTube videos as preparatory material, just as they would assign reading lists. Students can view these assigned videos or refer to videos by educational sites such as the Khan Academy to help them learn better.

However, just as with any other thing on the internet, YouTube comes with its pitfalls – the biggest of it being the free availability of inappropriate or adult videos that students can access. Not only are pornographic videos a problem, but videos depicting violence, gun use, suicide, or bullying also need to be monitored. Videos glorifying suicide or bullying can leave lasting impressions on kids. And protecting students from these videos is what keeps teachers and parents awake at night.

PAIN POINTS

During our research for this whitepaper, we found that teachers' and school admins' struggle with YouTube is dominated by the following:

YouTube Restricted Mode



YouTube recognizes that not all content is safe for all age groups and therefore provides a Restricted Mode setting that can be configured to keep kids safe without hampering their learning experience. However, the configuration can be rather cumbersome, particularly when figuring out how to use them in conjunction with web filters, G-Suite, different browsers, and devices. The Restricted Mode is like the holy grail of using YouTube in schools and this paper, therefore, focuses on demystifying it.

Non availability of approved videos



A lot of teachers complain about how videos that have been explicitly approved for their students end up being blocked (apparently for no rhyme or reason). There could be multiple reasons for this including incorrect configurations or multiple student YouTube accounts.

Blocked channels



Teachers spend a lot of time creating customized videos for their students and creating their own YouTube channel. However, these channels become inaccessible to students in spite of having all the right(?) configurations in place. This can be a frustrating and demoralizing experience for both the teachers and their students.

Multiple student accounts



Students create multiple YouTube accounts to watch videos which result in either them being able to access harmful content or being blocked out of approved videos, both of which are detrimental to their learning and stressful for teachers. It is recommended that schools/ teachers reinforce the importance of responsible digital behavior to avoid such situations.

Bandwidth issues



While integrated learning and flipped classrooms are a great tool to have, some smaller schools are unable to benefit from it completely due to budgetary and bandwidth constraints. This is a real problem for many schools catering to underprivileged kids for whom schools are probably the only source of internet connectivity. (This is a policy issue that needs to be redressed but is beyond the scope of this paper at this time.)

DEMYSTIFYING THE YOUTUBE RESTRICTED MODE

There are four YouTube permission levels that can set up:

1. **Strict Restricted YouTube access:** This protects students from harmful/adult content and includes keyword restrictions. This means all music videos that include above PG-13 keywords, content, visuals etc. will be filtered out. This mode is recommended for middle school students or even younger ones.
2. **Moderate Restricted YouTube access:** This mode is very similar to the strict mode but without the keyword restrictions aspect. This mode can be recommended for an OU that includes high school students so that you can ensure that they are not exposed to harmful/adult content while allowing them to use YouTube for learning.
3. **Unrestricted YouTube access:** This mode will open up YouTube to everyone with all its good and bad videos. There will be no filtering when a person is signed into YouTube even if you have other network level restrictions for filtering set up. This mode is not recommended unless you are dealing with a completely mature audience.
4. **Can approve videos:** This mode is strictly to be used for teachers or administrators so that they can allow specific videos that are important to learning but would have otherwise been filtered due to other criteria. Giving students the power to approve videos can potentially lead to harmful/adult content becoming available to them.

To have these settings applied across your school you would need to configure:

1. **G-Suite App settings for YouTube:** This is the primary recommended configuration and would usually take precedence over the G-Suite User-based settings or your web filter settings. This lets you set permission at an OU level or assign teachers to approve videos. This ensures that kids have access only to appropriate videos and also lets school IT admins delegate approval authority over to individual teachers.

Ensure that the G-Suite YouTube Settings at the User Settings level are turned off by selecting the 'No policy set' option.

It is important to understand that the settings are applicable only when the user is logged in using the credentials mapped with his profile in G-Suite. To filter unauthenticated users or guests you would need to ideally have a content filter in place.

2. **G- Suite User-based settings:** This option allows you to set up restrictions for specific users. However, it is not recommended to configure User-based settings as your primary line of defense.
3. **Web filter settings for YouTube:** Most web filters would come with YouTube filtering configurations that would need to set up in addition to the G-Suite settings. If you use a web filter such as Securly, these settings would lead to a network level enforcement of the YouTube Restricted Mode. However, the G-Suite App settings would take precedence when the user is logged in to his account or his Chromebook.

The three levels of settings work with each other to filter videos for your users according to the restriction level you determine for them.

Securly Youtube Restrictions	Youtube Restricted Mode	Logged into Youtube	User's Youtube Access
Enabled	Enabled	Yes	Restricted
Enabled	Enabled	No	Restricted
Enabled	Disabled	Yes	Unrestricted
Enabled	Disabled	No	Restricted
Disabled	Enabled	Yes	Restricted
Disabled	Enabled	No	Unrestricted
Disabled	Disabled	Yes	Unrestricted
Disabled	Disabled	No	Unrestricted

G-SUITE APP SETTINGS FOR YOUTUBE

The 'Apps' menu in your G-Suite Admin Console houses the YouTube settings under 'Additional Google Services'. The 'Permissions' option includes a drop-down menu with the four settings listed earlier in this paper. Depending upon which users you are configuring the settings for, select either Strict Restricted YouTube Access or Moderate Restricted YouTube Access. You can choose to configure for your entire domain and it would be inherited by all the OUs that fall within it. Or, you can do this for individual OUs.

But this is not the end of it. You would need to 'enable' these YouTube settings by configuring the Content Settings as well. This is most crucial step without which you may encounter problems such as blocked videos being accessible. Your Content Settings would have a checkbox for 'Signed in users in your organization can only watch restricted and approved videos'. Make sure you check that box.

Video approval permissions



Teachers can be given special authority to approve specific videos or channels for their classes. To do this select the 'Can approve videos' option under the Permissions menu for the teacher OU. This will allow teachers or users in that OU to view all videos on YouTube and then approve appropriate ones for their students. With this setting, students will continue to get the Restricted Mode videos (no harmful or adult videos) with a sprinkling of the specially approved videos.

Further, Google Classroom verified teachers can also be given special approval authority by selecting the checkbox for Special Approvers under Content Settings.

For additional protection, enable **Restricted Mode** at browser level; and then lock it!

Auditing Approved Videos

The YouTube Restricted Mode security does not end at the configuration of these settings. It goes a step further and allows Admins to audit videos that are being approved by teachers and then reverse the approval if required. Not to mention, the Admin's actions take precedence over the teachers' approval authority.

Configuring YouTube Restricted Mode at browser level

In addition to the G-Suite App Settings, you can also enable Restricted Mode at the browser level. To do this login to YouTube and select 'On' for the Restricted Mode setting either in your account or at the bottom of the page. For extra protection Lock the setting for that browser. This will ensure that others using that browser do not turn off the Restricted Mode setting. You would need to do this for every browser on your machine if you choose to go this route.



BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUTUBE RESTRICTED MODE

1. If configuring for the entire school set up the Strict restricted mode to ensure that students of all grades are protected from harmful content.
2. Always go for the G-Suite App level settings for maximum protection.
3. Ensure that the G-Suite YouTube Settings at the User Settings level are turned off by selecting the 'No policy set' option.
4. Encourage students to use their school-assigned login credentials when using school-owned devices so that your G-Suite YouTube settings apply to them appropriately.
5. Regularly audit teacher-approved videos to cover any lapses in protection.
6. As the G-Suite Admin ensure that you verify your teachers so that they can approve YouTube videos.
7. The Restricted Mode works on the browser and device level and it is recommended that you turn it on for each browser so that even unauthorized users using that browser are protected.
8. When using browser level Restricted Mode settings, ensure that you have Locked it.
9. Invest in a good web filtering application that enforces YouTube Restricted Mode at the network level and lets you protect students, teachers and guests alike.

Investing in a good web filter can protect your students at the network level.

CONCLUSION

The YouTube Restricted Mode is a great tool for schools that allows them to integrate videos and technology in everyday learning without worrying about harmful exposure. It is recommended that instead of completely blocking YouTube in a bid to keep students safe, schools should attempt to strike a balance to allow both students and teachers to benefit from the vast pool of educational videos on YouTube.