Thumbnail Checklist

The three rules · the shrink test

ONE FOCAL POINT
One subject, LARGE (60%+ of frame). The half-second glance processes exactly one thing.

THREE WORDS MAX
Text optional; when used it ADDS to the title, never repeats it. Thick font.

DELIBERATE CONTRAST
Bright on dark or dark on bright + one signature accent color, every video.

The shrink test — gates every ship

Design at full size, JUDGE at thumb size: send it to your phone or zoom to an inch. Message survives = ship. Squinting = simplify and retest.

Faceless focal points

The object on a clean ground · the before|after split · the giant number ·
the lone scene with mood. Objects, text, and transformation ARE focal points.

Thumbnail Checklist

The Canva build

Build sequence

- [ ] 1280×720 canvas → subject photo in (shot ON SET — sixty seconds during production)
- [ ] Background remover → solid high-contrast ground
- [ ] Subject at 60%+ of frame
- [ ] Text only if it earns its place: ≤3 words, thick font
- [ ] AI honesty: backgrounds and cleanup only — real results stay real photos
- [ ] SHRINK TEST passed → export PNG
- [ ] Saved as TEMPLATE: colors + font locked, named "[Channel] Thumbnail v1"

MY SIGNATURE (background · accent color · font):

Consistency is recognition — subscribers spot YOUR video before reading a word. Style evolves at data reviews, not mid-pipeline moods.

Thumbnail Checklist

What to do with this document

Your next steps

- [ ] Three rules, then the shrink test — every thumbnail, every time
- [ ] Template saved; the next twenty inherit the signature
- [ ] Thumbnail shot happens on set — add it to the Pipeline SOP
- [ ] Build the thumbnail morgue: study what makes YOU click

Keep going (free)

Every lesson of the YouTube Creator Academy is free at braintrain-ai-academy.com/creator-academy — clarity, consistency, and honest expectations, module by module.

A NOTE FOR LATER

Documents like this one grow, module by module, into your Channel Playbook — the complete written plan for your channel. You can build every piece yourself with these lessons. And if you would ever like help designing it around your specific situation, BrainTrain AI Coach can guide you step-by-step. For now: run the worksheet. That is the whole assignment.