

Instagram Ranking Explained

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social media

We want to do a better job of explaining how Instagram works. There are a lot of misconceptions out there, and we recognize that we can do more to help people, especially creators, understand what we do. Today, we're updating our original post to shed more light on how ranking works across Instagram and share some new features we've built in response to feedback from creators that help improve the experiences people have across the app overall.

Ranking on Instagram

We want to share more on how ranking works across Instagram to help people maximize their experience and help creators understand how their content might be surfaced.

Instagram doesn't have a singular algorithm that oversees what people do and don't see on the app. We use a variety of algorithms, classifiers, and processes, each with its own

purpose. We want to make the most of people's time, and we believe that using technology to personalize everyone's experience is the best way to do that.

Each part of the app – Feed, Stories, Explore, Reels, Search and more – uses its own algorithm tailored to how people use it. People tend to look for their closest friends in Stories, use Explore to discover new content and creators and be entertained in Reels. We rank things differently in these different parts of the app, and have added features and controls like Close Friends, Favorites and Following so you can further customize your experience.

How we rank Feed

Feed is your personalized home base within Instagram to help you catch up with friends, family, and interests. This means your feed will have a mix of content from the accounts you've chosen to follow, recommended content from accounts we think you'll enjoy and ads. You'll also see a mixture of videos, photos and carousels. With any ranking algorithm, how it works can be broken down into steps.

We start by defining the set of things we plan to rank in the first place. With Feed we consider recent posts shared by the people you follow, as well as posts from accounts you don't already follow that we think you might be interested in. We determine what you might be interested in based on a variety of factors, including what and whom you've followed,

liked or engaged with recently. We personalize the experience for you to try to strike a balance between content from accounts you follow with content from accounts you don't follow but might be interested in.

Next we take all the information we have about what was posted, the people who made those posts, and your preferences. We've also started considering other factors like format, so if we notice you prefer photos, we'll show you more photos. We call these "signals," and there are thousands of them. They include everything from when a post was shared to whether you're using a phone or the web to how often you like videos. The most important signals across Feed, roughly in order of importance, are:

- **Your activity.** Posts you've liked, shared, saved or commented on help us understand what you might be interested in.
- **Information about the post.** These are signals both about how popular a post is – think how many people have liked it and how quickly people are liking, commenting, sharing and saving a post – and more mundane information about the content itself, like when it was posted, and what location, if any, was attached to it.
- **Information about the person who posted.** This helps us get a sense for how interesting the person might be to you, and includes signals like how many times people have interacted with that person in the past few weeks.
- **Your history of interacting with someone.** This gives us a sense of how interested you are generally in seeing posts from a particular person. An example is whether or not you comment on each other's posts.

From there we make a set of predictions. These are educated guesses at how likely you are to interact with a post in different ways. There are roughly a dozen of these. In Feed, the five interactions we look at most closely are how likely you are to spend a few seconds on a post, comment on it, like it, share it, and tap on the profile photo. The more likely you are to take an action, and the more heavily we weigh that action, the higher up in Feed you'll see the post. We add and remove signals and predictions over time, working to get better at surfacing what you're interested in.

There are a few cases where we try to take other considerations into account. One example of this is where we try to avoid showing too many posts from the same person in a row, or too many suggested posts back to back.

We always want to lean towards letting people express themselves, but when someone posts something that may jeopardize another person's safety, we step in. We have Community Guidelines that apply not only to Feed, but to all of Instagram. These rules are focused on keeping people safe. If you post something that goes against our Community Guidelines and we find it, we take it down. If this happens repeatedly, we may prevent you from using certain sharing features, such as streaming on Instagram Live, and eventually we might suspend your account. If you think we've made a mistake – and we do make mistakes – you can appeal by following these steps.

In an effort to be more transparent about ranking, we recently shared our guidelines for what types of content we move lower in Feed and Stories. This type of content includes posts our systems predict likely violate our Community Guidelines, content rated by third-party fact checkers (or accounts that repeatedly post this content), and posts we think you are likely to report. These guidelines are a part of our commitment to fostering a safer community and responding to people's direct feedback. You can learn more about the types of content we rank lower in Feed and Stories here.

How we rank Stories

Stories are a way to share everyday moments and grow closer to the people and interests you care about. The stories you see are from people you've chosen to follow, as well as ads. Similar to Feed, when we look at ranking stories we start by defining all of the potential stories – excluding advertisements – shared by accounts you follow, and remove any stories that violate our Community Guidelines. We then look at a variety of input signals such as:

- **Viewing history.** This looks at how often you view an account's stories so we can prioritize the stories from accounts we think you don't want to miss.
- **Engagement history.** This looks at how often you engage with that account's stories, such as sending a like or a DM.
- **Closeness.** This looks at your relationship with the author overall and how likely you are to be connected as friends or family.

Based on these signals, we make a series of predictions about stories you'll find more relevant and valuable – including how likely you are to tap into a story, reply to a story or move on to the next story – to determine which stories will be shown higher in your stories tray. Our Community Guidelines and guidelines for what types of content we move lower in Feed and Stories apply here as well.

How we rank Explore

Explore was designed to help you discover new things. The grid is made up of recommendations – photos and videos that we go out and find for you from accounts you don't yet follow.

Again, the first step we take is defining a set of posts to rank. To find photos and videos you might be interested in, we look at past activity such as posts you've liked, saved, shared and commented on in the past.

Once we've found a group of photos and videos you might be interested in, we then order them by how interested we think you are in each one, much like how we rank Feed and stories. The best way to guess how interested you are in something is to predict how likely you are to do something with the post. The most important actions we predict in Explore include likes, saves, and shares. The most important signals we look at, in rough order of importance, are:

- **Information about the post.** Here we are looking at how popular a post seems to be. These are signals like how many and how quickly other people are liking, commenting, sharing, and saving a post. These signals matter much more in Explore than they do in Feed or in Stories.
- **Your activity in Explore.** These are signals like posts you've liked, saved, shared or commented on and how you've interacted with posts in Explore in the past. If you interact with a specific type of post, we try to show you more content similar to the original post you interacted with.
- **Your history of interacting with the person who posted.** Most likely the post was shared by someone you've never heard of, but if you have interacted with them that gives us a sense of how interested you might be in what they shared.
- **Information about the person who posted.** These are signals like how many times people have interacted with that person in the past few weeks, to help find compelling content from a wide array of people.

Most of the content you'll see in Explore is from people you don't follow, which changes the dynamic when you come across something problematic. If a friend you follow shares something offensive and you see that in your Feed, that's between you and your friend (and you have the option to unfollow, block, mute, hide or report that person if you choose). However, we want to reduce the possibility of you seeing something offensive in Explore, since that is content we recommend to you from people you haven't yet chosen to follow.

That's why, in addition to our Community Guidelines, we have rules for what we recommend in places like Explore, Reels, Search, Suggested Posts in Feed and Suggested Accounts. We call these our Recommendations Guidelines. Posts that go against our Recommendation Guidelines are allowed on Instagram, but some people may consider them sensitive or offensive. For example, we aim to not recommend things like content depicting violence, such as people fighting, or content depicting the use of certain regulated products, such as tobacco, vaping products, or pharmaceutical drugs.

If someone's post goes against our Recommendation Guidelines, we try to avoid showing that post where we recommend content. If an account repeatedly posts content that goes against our Recommendation Guidelines or Community Guidelines, none of their posts will be eligible for recommendation for a period of time. Account Status is the best way to understand if your account and content is eligible to be recommended on Instagram – you can read more about Account Status in the sections below.

Over the years, we have added new controls so you can influence the types of content we recommend to you – like the Sensitive Content Control and ability to indicate “Not Interested” next to posts – you can read more about these controls in the sections below.

How we rank Reels

Reels are also designed to help you discover new things, with an emphasis on entertainment. Much like Explore, the majority of what you see is from accounts you don't follow. So we go through a very similar process where we first source reels we think you might like, then order them based on how interesting we think they are to you.

In order to find entertaining reels, we survey people and ask whether they find a particular reel worth their time or fun, and learn from the feedback to get better at figuring out what will entertain people. The most important predictions we make are how likely you are to reshare a reel, watch a reel all the way through, like it, and go to the audio page (a proxy for whether or not you might be inspired to make your own reel.) The most important signals, roughly in order of importance, are:

- **Your activity.** We look at things like which reels you've liked, saved, reshared, commented on, and engaged with recently. These signals help us understand what content might be relevant to you.
- **Your history of interacting with the person who posted.** As with Explore, it's likely the video was made by someone you've never heard of, but if you have interacted with them, that gives us a sense of how interested you might be in what they shared.
- **Information about the reel.** These are signals about the content within the video such as the audio track or visuals in the video, as well as popularity.
- **Information about the person who posted.** We consider popularity signals such as number of followers or level of

engagement to help find compelling content from a wide array of people and give everyone a chance to find their audience.

The same Recommendation Guidelines that apply to Explore apply to reels. We aim to make certain reels less visible for other reasons, such as low-resolution or watermarked reels, reels that are muted or contain borders, reels that are majority text, reels that focus on political issues, or reels that have already been posted on Instagram.

How you can influence what you see

How you use Instagram heavily influences the things you see and don't see. You help improve the experience simply by interacting with the profiles and content you enjoy, but there are a few more explicit things you can do to influence what you see.

Personalize your Feed and Stories

- Add accounts to your Favorites list to make sure you don't miss their content. New posts from your Favorites will appear higher in your Feed. You can also customize your feed to only show content from your Favorites or from accounts you follow (Following will show you the last 30 days of posts from those you follow in chronological order).
- If you just want a break from recommendations, you can also snooze all suggested posts in your feed for 30 days. Learn more [here](#).
- Pick your Close Friends. You can select your close friends for Stories. This was designed as a way to let you share with just the people closest to you.

- Mute people you're not interested in. You can mute an account's Feed posts, Stories, Messages, or Notes if you'd like to stop seeing what they share, but are hesitant about unfollowing them entirely. This way, people don't know you've muted them.
- To stop seeing posts from an account, you can unfollow that account at any time. People won't be notified when you unfollow them.
- Respond to surveys from Instagram. We send surveys to people asking "is this post worth your time?" and use learnings from these surveys to help improve our recommendations overall.

Improve your Recommendations

- Adjust the Sensitive Content Control if you want to see more or less of some types of sensitive content from accounts you don't follow. The "more" option is not available for people under the age of 18.
- Though we do our best to recommend content that we think you'll be interested in, we don't always get it right. To help us improve, you can indicate "Not Interested" on a recommended post so we can show you less of what you don't like. We are also testing an option for you to indicate "Interested" on a recommended post, so we can show you more of what you do like.
- Proactively hide suggested posts with captions that contain words, phrases or emojis you don't want to see.
- Report content you think violates our policies, using our reporting tool. You can report any post or profile on Instagram. This signal can help us move similar content lower across all Instagram surfaces.
- Lastly, if you're ever curious why you're seeing specific content, you can tap the three dots in the upper right corner next to the content, then tap "Why you're seeing this post/ad". We will then list some of the signals used for showing that content to you.

Addressing “Shadowbanning”

Lastly, we want to address the feedback we hear around “shadowbanning”. We’ve had a lot of direct conversations with our community to better understand what people mean by the term “shadowbanning.” Though there isn’t one shared definition, we know some people use the term to imply that a user’s account or content is limited or hidden without a clear explanation or justification. When we rank content across Instagram, that’s not our intention.

Contrary to what you might have heard, it’s in our interest as a business to ensure that creators are able to reach their audiences and get discovered so they can continue to grow and thrive on Instagram. If there is an audience that is interested in what you share, then the more effectively we help that audience see your content, the more they will use our platform. While we’ve heard some people believe you need to pay for ads to achieve better reach, we don’t suppress content to encourage people to buy ads. It’s a better business to make Instagram more engaging overall by growing reach for those who create the most engaging content, and sell ads to others.

The community’s concerns about “shadowbanning” have made it clear that there is more we can do to increase transparency so people have more information about what’s going on with their account. If anything makes your content

less visible, you should know about it and be able to appeal. That's why we've built features like Account Status to help you understand why your account's content may not be eligible to be recommended, allow you to delete any content affecting your account, and appeal the decision if you think we made a mistake.

We're continuing to invest in Account Status to bring more transparency to our community. For instance, we recently added the ability to see if your account is eligible to appear in Search or as a suggested account, and you can appeal if it's not. We plan to add even more transparency to this surface over time, so stay tuned.

We're always exploring ways we can help creators understand why certain content, like reels, aren't getting as much distribution to non-followers. We're experimenting with new notifications to help creators understand when the reach of their reel may be limited due to a watermark, and plan to expand to more people as we learn what's most effective.

As we continue to build more tools to help people understand and address issues that may be impacting their reach, we've been working on more resources to help our community understand our ranking, guidelines and best practices. Check out our new resource for improving your reach across Instagram, learn from other creators in our

Creator Lab, and learn even more details about ranking with our interactive site. In addition to staying tuned to our Blog for posts like this one, make sure you follow @creators and @mosseri for the latest and greatest tools and tips.

We want people and creators to be in control of their Instagram experience, and we're always exploring ways to add even more transparency and control to the app. Providing more context on how content is ranked and moderated on Instagram is only part of the equation and we will continue to provide ranking updates as our systems evolve.