

# Content SEO Best Practices

## Keyword Research

- Before writing, choose a main keyword phrase that best describes the theme of your article, either by...
  - initial keyword research.
  - a chosen topic, but then using SEO tools to assess the demand and competitiveness of any keywords that best describe this theme.
- Avoid duplicate content by addressing new topics versus those already on your site. If you want to improve an existing keyword ranking, update that keyword's landing page instead.
- To check for duplicate content, enter **site:website.com \*keyword phrase\*** within Google to find content that best aligns with that keyword. Is your proposed article different enough?
- Consider seasonality by entering the main keyword summarizing your blog into Google Trends. Is this the right timing for this piece?
- If the above conditions are met, enter this main keyword phrase into Google by itself, looking for related keywords...
  - Additional keywords as Google provides suggestions for the autocomplete feature in the search bar. Pay attention to each step.
  - Related searches at the bottom of search engine results page (SERPs).
  - 'People also ask' section for your keyword-based search query.
  - keywords within pages on the top-3 listings.
  - anything original and fresh based on your brainstorming process.

These related keywords should be incorporated throughout your article.

## Search Intent

- Determine if the search intent for your keyword is informational or transactional. Some keywords represent someone learning a topic instead of wanting to buy something. Google tries to capture the overall intent within their results.
- Know the result features for your keyword. Some will display news stories, another may present 3 local businesses, yet others show a video carousel. Each search query favors different media or ways of organizing content, which you must consider. Is your article going to match this intent?
- Perform competitor research on the top 3 listings. Ask yourself...
  - can I write my content in a similar format (list, guide, etc.)
  - how can I address these topics even better?

- o what original, unique value can I provide on a topic that no competitor has addressed within this article?

# Content

## URLs

- Remove [“stop” words](#) to make the URL simpler and more easily shareable.
- Strive for no more than 100 characters.
- Focus on keywords and other words that communicate the message coherently but not in a sentence format.

## Titles

- Include the main keyword at the beginning of the title tag if possible.
- Titles should be between 50-60 characters. Exceptions are to allow for necessarily-long main keyword phrases.
- Titles should include the main keyword along with something [psychologically compelling](#) (scarcity, curiosity, etc.). Choose words involving emotion. [This tool](#) can help to provide ideas.
- Consider adding the year for queries involving freshness.
- End title with | [brand name].

## Meta Descriptions

- Meta descriptions should be under 160 characters. While Google can sometimes show much longer meta descriptions, even on mobile, this is rare. These character counts also allow for date of publication and other rich snippets to appear without truncating the meta description.
- Provide a compelling summary of the content, including the main keyword at least and possibly related keywords.
- Consider a CTA using words like Buy, Discover, Learn and others that prompt the searcher to click the link, improving clickthrough rates (CTR).

## Header Tags (H1, H2...)

- H1s should be written similar to the title, viewed as an on-page title, though there are no character limits so compelling copy can be longer. Unlike the title, don't include branding.
- Use only a single H1.
- Other headers beyond H1 provide opportunities to emphasize related, longer-tail keywords you discovered throughout keyword research. If these headers answer

questions, they may trigger answer boxes and other rich results in the search engines. The content below them should be easy to skim.

## Body

- All things equal, a higher word count is better for SEO. Strive for 700+ words. At least 300 words is the minimum.
- Include the main keyword phrase within the first 100 words or the first few paragraphs.
- Summarize the article at the top through an inverted pyramid structure, leading with the essential conclusion then providing details.
- Use headers to write in an outline format, using headers to organize.
- **Bold** or *italicize* important statements containing keywords, when applicable.
- Use more paragraphs, lists, tables, etc. to segment content. Call-to-actions, block sections that change color, images, annotations, & even blockquotes can all help to separate content, making it more digestible. Strive for no more than 5 lines of text per block.

## Internal & Outbound Linking

- For anchor text, or the words used for links, use keywords that the specific page aims to rank for, when possible, instead of “click here” or similar text.
- Focus on internal linking to your most important hub pages. These should be content pillars that represent the most important keywords on your site.
- There are no real practical limits to internal linking, but keep internal links within the body to 150.
- Include 1 outbound link, ideally to a government, education, organization, or other high-quality site, and consider having it open a new tab or window. Generally limit total outbound links to no more than a few per article, unless needed to properly cite your sources.

## Images

- Reinforce the major keyword themes of the page within the image filenames and alt texts, if possible.
- Nonetheless and foremost, have the image filenames and alt text align with the picture; avoid artificially emphasizing keywords.
- Have at least one HTML-based image above-the-fold, which improves mobile search & social shareability.

## Readability

- Try to achieve a reading ease ideal of at least 65 or Plain English. This means using shorter words and sentences when possible. This score can be determined in Microsoft Word (Install Flesch Reading Ease test in Word) Preferences >

Spelling and Grammar > Show Readability Statistics)) or through the SEO Yoast plugin if you scroll down within the WordPress editor.

- You can also use [Hemingway Editor](#).
- This is not a firm rule but something to keep in mind, which will generally reduce bounce rates, increase time on page, etc.

## Other

- Set relevant categories and tags for each piece. Define a main category to ensure URL breadcrumbs work properly. (This option will be offered when setting the categories with Yoast SEO installed.)
- If this is an original article, ensure any duplicate pages have a canonical tag pointing to this original URL.
- Speed up indexing using Google URL Inspection tool within [Google Search Console](#). (This feature is currently disabled.)
- Include call-to-actions that focus on signing up for blog updates and other high-funnel marketing activities: most blog readers aren't ready to buy something yet.
- Include other possible assets that could increase dwell time like videos, PDFs, and other rich content.
- Incorporate [structured data](#) if your content form allows for it.
- Push article to all social channels and applicable partners. Ensure [Open Graph markup](#) looks ideal. (Yoast SEO populates this automatically.)

## Blog Features (General)

These are scalable ways to improve the blog that don't apply to each post manually:

- Consider time to read or other progress indicators like a scroll bar at the top that advances as the user reads. Time to read can dynamically update as well.
- Include an author box, with a portrait or a byline, with a link to an author page containing a short bio with links to credentials, if possible. This page should include other written articles. Add social links if available.
- Have a Table of Contents with jump links (fraggles) anchored to important headers like H2s.
- Include social sharing & follow buttons, possibly a like or thumbs-up voting feature as well.
- Include comments, if possible and your content encourages input.
- Include previous/next links, pagination, or an infinite blog scrolling feature.
- Include related articles.
- Consider both Date Published and Date Updated shown.