Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

A Quick Guide to Writing Web Content That's Easy to Find

There are two elements of search engine optimization: on-page and off-page SEO. The former relates to how search engines determine what the subject of your page is; the latter refers to how search engines determine the quality of your content.

On-Page SEO

The first element to consider for on-page SEO is what keywords and/or keyword phrases (keywords used consistently together in order) you should use throughout your page.

How to select your keywords
1. Identify your audience.
2. Determine what keywords your audience is using to describe the things you offer. It is vital that you optimize your content for the words your users are actually searching, not just the words your organization uses to describe itself. Brainstorm with coworkers, students and people outside your office to gauge opinions.
3. Use the Google AdWords Keyword Planner to determine which of the keywords you want to use are most competitive to purchase as advertising, which gives you a rough idea of how much competition there is for those keywords in organic search as well. (The tool was developed for search engine advertisers, but it is free to use, though you must create an account.) The planner also will show you other keywords related to the keywords you enter, to help you consider other options that your target audience might search.
4. Decide which of those chosen keywords are most valuable. The most valuable, high-impact keywords should be used predominantly on your index page (the "homepage" for your site).

Be selective with your keywords.

a. Specific keywords generate more opportunities than generic ones. For example, "graduate degree in international studies" will better help searchers find precisely what you offer over the long run than "graduate degree."
b. Ideally, you'll want to select niche terms that generate a lot of search traffic but have relatively limited competition.
c. Consider competition over time. While the competition for a keyword or keyword phrase might be low today, consider that it might rise in the next year. Select keywords that are unique to your program yet things visitors would likely type into a search engine to find your stuff.
d. Use your keywords throughout your pages' body copy—particularly toward the top of the page. This is a tough juggling act; you want to use them in as natural a way as possible to ensure your page is easy to read.
e. Do *not* use the same keywords for every page on your site. You want to lead users to the information specific to each page. If more than one page has the same keywords, choose which page you'd like searchers to land on, and only optimize that page for those keywords.

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Use this tool to enter as many keywords/keyword phrases as you like and view Google's estimates of how popular they are, how many other websites are competing for each and how frequently Web visitors search for them. (The tool is free, but registration is required.)

Where to put your keywords in your content

Your keywords (or keyword phrases) should appear on your page three to five times, in multiple locations. Having it appear more than that is unlikely to provide any SEO benefit.

Metadata
Metadata is the content *about* your page that browsers can see, but that doesn't appear on your page. Your title tag, description, and alt tags should contain your selected keywords. For more information about metadata, see our Metadata Guide (PDF).

Headline
- The most prominently displayed piece of content on the page
- Should be concise and contain a few of your targeted keywords

URL (the Web address for the page)
- This is generated by the way you name files in OU.
- Your file names should be concise and descriptive and contain a keyword if possible.
- Words should
  - be separated with hyphens (not underscores)
  - contain no special characters (e.g., "?" "!")
  - be lowercased

Off-Page SEO

Google (and other search engines) wants proof your content is valuable and worthwhile. Though its system for determining precisely how some content rises to the top of search results is proprietary, studies and surveys show that more than any other factor, the authority and trustworthiness of your website determines how easy it will be to find your pages in a given search.

The more frequently your website is mentioned on or linked to from reputable, highly ranking websites, the higher your search ranking will become, and the better your content will perform in search.

- Type your domain into the search box on this site to learn which sites are linking to your own.
- Assess these pages; disreputable websites that link to yours can hurt your site's reputation.
- Type in the domains of competitors' websites or sites you respect to see who is linking to them.
- Create a campaign to identify and contact sites you'd like to link to your own, if appropriate. Only contact them if a link to your site will genuinely enrich their content, and you are therefore providing value to them. Contacting sites and asking them to link to you purely for your benefit is bad practice and will be perceived as a type of spam.

For more information

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For a more in-depth look at basic SEO principles, see Google's [Search Optimization Starter Guide (PDF)](.).