

An In-Depth Guide to On-Page SEO & Content Optimization



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Introduction

On-page SEO refers to everything within your direct control when optimizing a page. This includes everything from the text on the page to images and even technical considerations like Schema markup.

But since on-page SEO & content optimization encompass so many different things, actually improving each aspect of on-page SEO and standardizing that process is often difficult. That's why we've broken down each consideration and explored high-impact strategies for on-page and content optimization to help you maximize your UX and performance in search.

Let's dive into the content side of on-page SEO.

On-page SEO for content

This is likely what you think of first when you think about on-page SEO, and content does indeed have the largest impact on your UX and search performance. But it's not just about the quality of the written content on your page. Even something as simple as your page's URL can affect your content performance and on-page SEO.

Create SEO-friendly URLs

Sometimes, the smallest details can carry outsized importance, and your URL is no different. The URL you choose for your page sends signals to search engines and users as to what your page content is about and what questions it will answer. That's why the most important thing you can do with your URLs is to choose ones that are relevant, short, and succinctly describe the page content.

Also, if your URLs are short, descriptive, and relevant to a given keyword or title tag, then it will be easier for you—and users—to find that content down the line. If your URLs are long, awkwardly worded, or hyper-specific, you'll be making it more difficult to find them later on.

This is especially important because URLs are tricky to change after publishing. Once a page has been crawled and indexed, that URL will start accumulating organic traffic and impressions. If you were to change the URL after the fact, that would essentially be a migration, and you would be starting from scratch organic traffic-wise.

Besides simply choosing short and descriptive URLs for your pages, the following tactics can help you create strong URLs and standardize the process to ensure your URLs are on point going forward. Specifically, we recommend:

- **Including your target keyword in the URL:** This isn't a requirement, and there is no guarantee that including a keyword will help you rank for that query. Especially if your target query is a long-tail keyword (which we'll discuss in more detail later on). That said, including your target keyword in the URL is a surefire way of communicating to users and search engines that your content is covering that topic, which is a great start.
- **Removing dates from URLs:** Dates within URLs can be important in some very specific cases, but overall, they can quickly make your content seem outdated and possibly even irrelevant to your target query. For example, if you have a piece of content based on 2024 product data and include the year in the URL, then you're creating a confusing experience for users if you update the content based on more recent data later on.
- **Don't sweat prepositions:** Prepositions and function words like "and," "but," "or," "if," etc. aren't needed in URLs. In fact, they will make your URL longer and won't offer any value to users. It's best to remove these words from URLs to help make them as short and descriptive as possible.

Take a look at these examples of a strong URL and a poor URL:

- **Strong:** <https://runrepeat.com/guides/best-basketball-shoes>
- **Poor:** <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/17-best-basketball-sneakers-time-110036292.html>

Both URLs appeared for the search query: best basketball shoes. Notice how the first example is short, direct, and descriptive. From the URL, we can see that it's a guide to the best basketball shoes. The second example, though, is much longer and includes words and numbers that add no value to the user.

Maximize your meta information

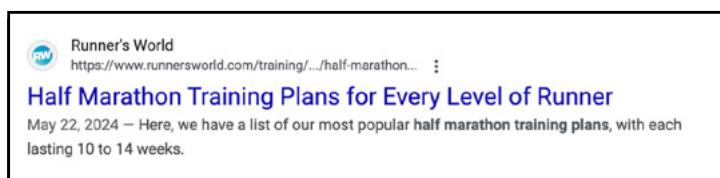
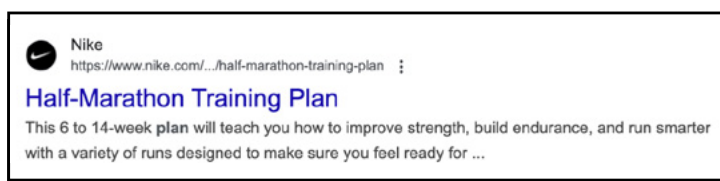
Meta information, or metadata, includes aspects of your content, like title tags and meta descriptions, that provide further context about your page content to users and search engines. This is information users will see on a search engine before clicking the link and helps them understand if your content will satisfy their needs. First up: title tags.

Create engaging title tags

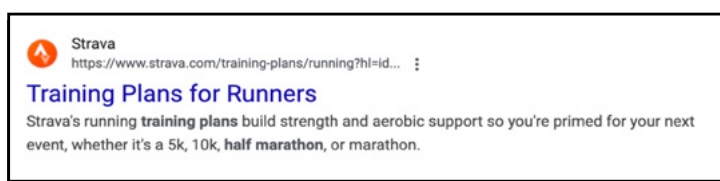
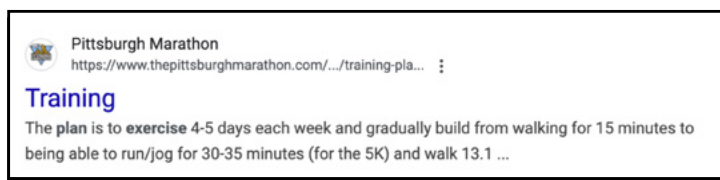
Title tags not only have a direct impact on your site's organic traffic, engagement, and conversions but are also one of the most important on-page SEO elements.

Also referred to as the meta title, a title tag should give users and, by extension, search engines an overview of what your content is about, but be sure to write title tags primarily for users, not for search engines. Think about the most important search queries that apply to a page, and then write the title.

Take the following title tags, for instance. All were for the same query: half marathon training plan.



As you can see, Nike and Runner's World's titles are explicit, telling users exactly what answers they'll find once they click.



By contrast, the title tags from Pittsburgh Marathon and Sublime Reflection aren't as strong. Pittsburgh Marathon and Strava's titles don't make it clear that the content is about half-marathon training and require the user to read the meta description and URL to understand what the content is about.

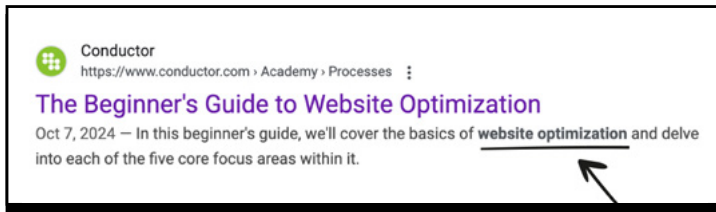
Here are some important things to prioritize in your title tag:

- **Readability:** Your title tags should make it easy to understand what your content is about. Including too much information, punctuation, or too many characters makes titles difficult to follow, so users will be unlikely to select your site over a competitor's.
- **Relevant keywords:** Your title should make it clear that users are in the right place and will find the answers they need within your content. You might have the strongest piece of content about a topic, but if your title doesn't clue users into what the content is about, then it won't drive traffic.
- **Call-to-action:** What action do you want your users to take when visiting your page? For educational content, you want them to learn. For a product page, you might want them to buy. For a career page, you'll want users to know you're hiring. This makes it clear to users upfront what they will come away with after visiting your page.
- **Good length:** Be brief but descriptive. Your users need to know what your content is about and why they should visit, and they need to know it quickly. On a SERP full of competitor content, users will select the first link they find that answers their question. So, the quicker you can make it clear what you're answering, the better.

In addition, Google won't necessarily display an entire title tag. A listing in Google's SERPs has a maximum width of 600 pixels, so anything past this will be cut off. Google has also been known to **rewrite title tags**, so following best practices can be the best way to prevent that. With this in mind, it's best to keep your title tags between 285-575 pixels or 30-60 characters to be safe.

Create unique meta descriptions

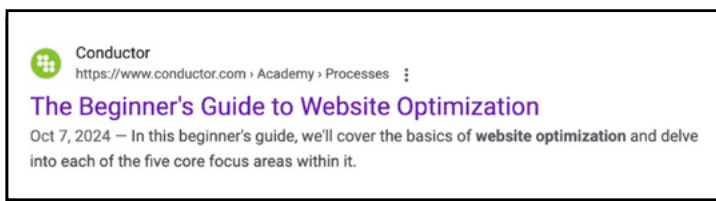
A **meta description** (also called a meta description tag) is a short description that previews your page's content before a user opens it.



Existing exclusively on SERPs, meta descriptions function as a summary of your page for users and search engines. Along with title tags, meta descriptions are your audience's first impression of your content on SERPs.

Similar to title tags, the best ways to optimize your meta descriptions are:

- **Targeted keywords:** At the end of the day, Google and other search engines want to surface content that is high-quality, helpful, and relevant to user search intent. If your meta description includes frequently searched and relevant keywords, your content is more likely to rank well on SERPs and drive strong traffic. Google will even highlight matched keywords in the search results to show their relevance, lending credibility to your page. Like in the example SERP result below for the query: website optimization.



- **Call-to-action:** Your meta description is meant to drive clicks and traffic to your website, so making it clear what users will find on your page is key. You'll want to tell them what they can accomplish on your page without sounding overly sales-y or outright tricking visitors with false advertising. The key to including a CTA in your meta description is to make it sound natural and human and to reassure users that you have the answers they need.
- **Uniqueness:** The logic here is very similar to that of title tags. You need to prioritize making meta descriptions that are unique to a given piece of content and your site. Copying competitor meta descriptions will only make your site seem less authoritative and trustworthy in your space and cost you rankings and traffic.

- **Length:** The length of your meta description impacts your content's search performance. Like with title tags, Google will cut down the length of your meta description if it's too long or rewrite it entirely. Google defines its meta description character limit as 920 pixels or 150-158 characters. But keep in mind that mobile devices and tablets will display different lengths of your meta description, so we recommend 120-158 characters.

In short, your selections for meta information have a significant impact on how users and search engines interact with your content. If your title tags and meta descriptions aren't optimized, you won't drive intent-driven traffic to your website. Getting clicks is nice, but the real value comes from driving relevant traffic within your target audience that is likely to convert.

Create strong, well-structured headings

Just like meta information and URLs, **headings** are concerned with providing users clues about what a piece of content covers. Headings help to logically break down your content to make it more readable for users and easier for search engines to crawl. Visitors use headings to quickly understand whether the article is relevant to their needs and what information is most important. Search engines use headings to understand a page's structure and what topics it covers.

In short, the headings you choose need to be well-thought-out and optimized in order to maximize your page's traffic potential.

Things to consider when optimizing your headings:

- **Hierarchy:** Within your CMS and writing software, you'll see an option to include headings within your content. There are six different kinds of headings, H1-H6s. Each of your pages should only have one H1 heading but can have as many subheadings (H2-H6s) as you need to answer user questions and maximize the readability, structure, and organization of your content.

For each large topic within your content, you'll use an H2. Any relevant but less important information related to that H2 can be included under an H3 subhead or so on. This makes it clear to users and search engines that information is related and that some of it is more important than others.

- **Relevancy:** The name of the game with all things SEO: how is this relevant to audience search intent? Headings should let users know what your content is about and what each section of your content covers. This helps them get answers quickly since they can just scroll to the information they need.

For example, if a user needs to know how to make a grilled cheese sandwich, they could scroll past irrelevant information and go directly to the related how-to subhead.

Ultimately, breaking down your content using relevant and logically structured headings provides a strong user experience. It allows users to find information and understand a topic quickly, which leads to higher rankings and organic traffic.

Optimize your page content

Page content is, obviously, a critical component to optimizing your on-page SEO and content. But creating high-quality and helpful content isn't just about creating great content that includes relevant keywords.

Remember, on-page SEO refers to everything on the page that you have control over, so things like images and links, as well as text and keywords, are important to consider.

Create quality content

Reminder: your page content needs to be helpful, engaging, and relevant to your user's search intent. That's the most important thing you can do to optimize your page content. But that's only half the battle. Your content needs to also offer a unique perspective that users can't find from a competitor. Google created the E-E-A-T acronym to help optimize your text. Standing for Experience, Expertise, Authority, and Trustworthiness, it's a useful framework to help you create the best content possible.

Creating high-quality content can be notoriously difficult, but we recommend starting every piece of content by asking yourself the question: What will set your content apart from the competition? If your article has great information that all of your competitors also have, that's not likely to outrank existing content on SERPs. That's why it's important to create a content moat. What we mean by that is creating content that is difficult for competitors to replicate.

This could involve creating a report based on internal data or insight from a thought leader within your organization. This is a great way to provide a unique perspective to users and establish expertise in your content. For example, [Conductor's 2024 Organic Benchmarks Report](#) leverages internal data to create an authoritative resource that is difficult for competitors to replicate.

Prioritize high-impact keywords and related questions to answer

When you perform [keyword research](#), you'll learn how people speak about a given topic, but more importantly, you'll understand what other questions they have about that initial query. So, more than simply giving you alternative words and phrases to throw into your content, keyword research should show you what questions your content needs to answer in order to maximize relevancy and search intent. Leverage keyword research to understand your audience and their search intent. Don't start keyword stuffing.

Improve image SEO

Images help provide further context and information about your topic and can have a huge impact on a page's traffic and engagement, especially if it appears in an image SERP. However, it's not enough to just include an image and leave it there. Elements like [image alt text](#), captions, and image size will impact your content and technical on-page SEO.

According to Google, the most important factor is alt text. Alt text is a written description of an image, chart, or graph within a piece of content. Its purpose is to describe an image that doesn't render properly or is being provided to a visually impaired user.

Alt text, captions, and even image file names help users and search engines understand the context of an image and how it relates to the larger piece of content, creating a more coherent and helpful piece of content.

For example, titling a photo pumpkin-spice-latte is better than IMAGE_001 if your goal is to rank for pumpkin spice latte. Leaving out these elements or using an image that's the wrong size or poor quality may even cause the image and, in extreme cases, the page to load improperly.

Improve link building

Internal and external [links](#) help search engines crawl and index your pages. Linking from your content to other pages on your site helps add doorways for search engine crawlers to find new pages it hasn't indexed yet.

Linking to high-quality, authoritative content outside of your site signals to Google that your site is reputable, and the information on it can be trusted because you're linking to a site Google already trusts. Links also give users opportunities to explore your site and learn more about an issue or query without having to navigate back to the homepage.

When you're creating new content, it's important to link the new content proactively to relevant articles you've already created and vice versa. This shows users and search engines that the pages are related and have information users might find helpful. We recommend performing a [site:domain.com] search to find relevant articles you've produced that it would make sense to link to from your new content. Then, link those articles to your new content to help search engine crawlers find the new content faster and understand where it fits within your site.

Target featured snippets

Featured snippets represent a huge possibility for improved rankings and traffic. If you're able to grab the featured snippet for your target keyword, you're likely to be the first result a user sees when they search for it. The good news is that the featured snippet is based largely on the quality of your content and on-page SEO.

The bad news is that there's no guaranteed way to win the featured snippet for a given keyword consistently.

Like every other part of Google's algorithm, this is shrouded in mystery. That said, there are some ways you can try to optimize your content for that spot, specifically by researching what content already owns that spot and trying to match that format. It also helps to keep your content as clear and concise as possible to win the featured snippet.

Keep E-E-A-T in mind

As we mentioned earlier, **E-E-A-T** refers to the Experience, Expertise, Authority, and Trustworthiness of a website. It's important to remember that E-E-A-T isn't a concrete score you can work to improve; it's conceptual. It's a good rule of thumb for your content. It helps you think about what your content should showcase in order to carry the most impact.

Google created E-E-A-T so content creators would provide unique and helpful content that provides value to users. This improves users' experiences, and content that satisfies users ranks well on SERPs. Strong rankings and traffic are, of course, not guaranteed, but E-E-A-T is a good framework to remember what makes content successful.

Below are some of the ways you can improve the E-E-A-T.

- **Experience:** Experience largely refers to the authenticity of the author. Is the content surface-level, or does the author provide genuine and unique insights? Speaking from your own background, memories, and feelings makes the content seem more authentic. For example, imagine you're reading an article about walking tours in New York City, and the writer includes directions to a hole-in-the-wall restaurant or hidden speakeasy. Those are details only a local would know and convey the author's first-hand experience.
- **Expertise:** Highlighting an author's background, role, and affiliation on their [author page](#) are some of the many ways to showcase expertise. For example, if you're reading an architectural blog and see that the author is a professor of architecture at Columbia University, that solidifies their expertise. In addition, the more an author writes and publishes, the more of a backlog of their content Google has once they're indexed. The more high-quality content authors produce, the more expertise and authority they show, and the more trustworthy they become to Google.
- **Authority:** One way you can improve your website's authority is to continuously update and optimize your existing content. The more helpful and high-quality content you have on your site, the more your authority on a given topic grows. [Audit your site](#) to find opportunities to improve or cut existing pieces and uncover gaps you can fill with new content. Building a strong backlog of content is key to improving your authority.
- **Trustworthiness:** External links are a great way to build trust in your content. Google examines every site for E-E-A-T, and if you link to ones that Google sees as trustworthy, your content is strengthened because you're linking to a reputable site with quality content. For example, if you link your content to an article written by Food Network, that will likely be a more trustworthy link than someone's personal food blog you found.

On-page SEO for technical health

Even though content tends to take center stage, there are still a few technical tweaks you can make in order to maximize your on-page SEO. Things like your UX, page speed, and Schema implementation go a long way toward boosting your on-page SEO through improved technical health.

Leverage Schema markup

Despite existing within a page's code, Schema still falls under on-page SEO because it's in an author or site owner's direct control to implement. Schema gives users and Google a clue as to what a page is about before they even click on the link. It also helps you secure rich result types on SERPs.

It does this by showing specific elements of a page. For instance, if your page has a review or recipe on it and includes the corresponding Schema markup, that information will appear within the SERP, making it easier for a user looking for that kind of content to find it.

Some of the most common forms of Schema include events, recipes, reviews, and breadcrumb lists, but there are many more that can move the needle. For example, at Conductor, we use ProfilePage Schema [for our CEO's profile page](#), Events Schema [for our Event detail pages](#), Organization Schema throughout our entire site, and several other kinds of Schema.

Optimize your UX

Put simply, Google and users care about UX. Google wants to provide users with the answers they need quickly, and users want fast answers from a reputable site that operates properly. It takes a proactive approach to monitor your UX and ensure that your website is running smoothly. But, maintaining strong UX across all of your pages is tricky and only gets trickier as you add more pages to your site.

But you can't improve your UX if you don't know what's impacting it. Issues that impact UX can appear at the drop of a hat and remain for weeks to months if you're not paying attention. That's why you need a platform, like Conductor Website Monitoring, that audits your pages for you and alerts you of any changes to your content or issues.

If you can get ahead of issues on your site that impact UX, you can resolve them before traffic and rankings are impacted. In addition, quickly resolving those issues helps solidify your brand as trustworthy to users. Sites that operate poorly don't gain audience trust; sites that operate well do. Keep a close eye on your website's pages to maximize your UX.

How to monitor and measure your on-page SEO

Optimizing your on-page SEO and content is only as good as your process is to keep it optimized. If you don't keep an eye on your on-page SEO, then any optimization you do will be all for naught.

As we mentioned above, Conductor Website Monitoring is great at helping you keep track of the technical aspects of your content-focused on-page SEO. However, it's not the only solution to your on-page SEO problems. Conductor Intelligence is also great at showing you how your content is performing against the competition on SERPs and offers AI guidance to help you create better content.

Safeguard your On-Page SEO with Conductor Website Monitoring

Keep an eye on your website's on-page SEO with insights into your performance and real-time monitoring for all of your pages.

[Start your trial](#)

In terms of free tools, **Conductor's Chrome Extension** offers insights from the Conductor Intelligence platform right within your browser. It offers instant insights into the content of your page, including information about your metadata, keyword use, page health, and aspects of technical SEO to help you move quickly to make improvements and get the most out of your content.



Summary

By shaping UX and influencing Google's ranking of your site, on-page SEO and content play pivotal roles in enhancing your website's performance on SERPs, driving traffic, and boosting conversions. But to create a repeatable process to optimize your content and on-page SEO, you need to understand all of the elements of on-page SEO, how they impact UX and SERP rankings, what you can do to improve, and how to continuously monitor your content.

With so many factors affecting your rankings and traffic, proactive optimization of your content and on-page SEO is crucial for staying competitive in the digital landscape.



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