



# How to Rank in Search Engines

*The Basics of SEO & Keyword Research*

Presented by Lisa Li

# A Bit About Me...

- I'm Lisa Li, a web developer and graphic designer. I've been building websites for over 20 years. For the past 6 years, I've been working primarily with WordPress websites.
- Because I help a lot of small businesses, I've studied marketing, SEO, and various advertising strategies.
- While I'm no marketing expert, I've learned a lot of things from the experts that I can share with you to help save you time and money, while also avoiding common pitfalls.



# Class Agenda

- **Lecture Part 1: SEO Terms & Intro to Keyword Research (~55 minutes)**
  - We discuss common terms used in search engine optimization (SEO) and keyword research, and explore some free and paid keyword research tools you can use.
- **10-Minute Break**
  - Grab a drink or snack, take a restroom break, or simply engage in the class live chat
- **Lecture Part 2: Optimize Your Website for SEO (~55 minutes)**
  - We talk about how to inject keywords into your website and optimize it to be picked up by search engines, how to measure our success and how to avoid SEO penalties.
- **Q&A Session (Optional) (~30 minutes)**



# What is SEO?

- SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization
- It is the practice of optimizing your website to improve its visibility on search engines
- **Main Goals:**
  - Rank higher on search engines like Google and Bing
  - Attract more organic (free) traffic to your website
  - Increase business and brand awareness
- **Key Things to Know:**
  - It is a blend of technical setup, content creation, and marketing to boost visibility
  - It is about long-term success, not overnight results



# Key SEO Terminology

- **Keywords:** The search terms and phrases people use to find information on search engines.
- **SERP:** Search Engine Results Pages – where your website appears when someone performs a search.
- **Backlinks:** Links from other websites pointing to your site.
- **On-Page SEO:** Optimizing elements on your website (content, titles, URLs).
- **Off-Page SEO:** Building authority and credibility from outside your website (backlinks).
- **Crawling and Indexing:** How search engines discover and store your website's pages.
- **Meta Tags:** Special tags that provide information about a web page.



# Keyword Research

- **Keyword Research** is where you identify phrases your target audience uses to search for information on topics, services, or products related to your business and industry.
- Importance of Keyword Research:
  - Helps you know what people are looking for.
  - Guides the content you create on your website.
- Types of Keyword Phrases:
  - Short-Tail Keywords (Broad Search Terms)
  - Long-Tail Keywords (More Specific Search Terms)



# Keyword Phrases

- There are different keyword phrase types which are used for different purposes:
  - Informational Keywords – searching for information
  - Navigational Keywords – searching for a specific site
  - Transactional Keywords – ready to buy or take action
  - Local SEO Keywords – searching for local businesses
  - Industry-Specific Keywords



# Keyword Examples

## Short-Tail Keywords:

- Shoes
- Digital marketing
- Web hosting
- SEO services
- Coffee shop
- Toyota trucks
- Windows laptop
- iPhone case

## Long-Tail Keywords:

- Best running shoes for women
- Affordable digital marketing for small businesses
- How to choose the best web hosting for a blog
- SEO services for e-commerce websites
- Best coffee shop in downtown Dallas
- Best Toyota Trucks in 2024
- Best Windows laptops for students
- Military grade water resistant iPhone case





# Finding the Right Keywords

- Brainstorm topics relevant to your business. Think about what keyword phrases your target audience might use when looking up your topics.
- Use keyword tools like Google Keyword Planner or Semrush get lists of keywords that you can target.
- Analyze competitors' websites for keyword ideas and see what keywords they rank for and get the most traffic from.
- Identify keywords that are low competition, have good regular search volume, and low ad costs.



# Keyword Research Tools

## Free Keyword Research Tools:

- **Google Keyword Planner:** Ideal for finding keywords with search volume data and trends.
- **Ubersuggest:** Offers keyword suggestions, search volume, and competitive analysis for free.
- **AnswerThePublic:** Helps find long-tail keyword ideas by showing common questions people ask around your topic.

## Paid Tools for Deep Insights:

- **Ahrefs:** Powerful tool for in-depth keyword research and competitive analysis.
- **Semrush:** Comprehensive keyword research and site audit tool, great for in-depth tracking.
- **Moz Pro:** Offers keyword suggestions, link-building opportunities, and on-page optimization recommendations.



# Pro Tip: Use Videos for SEO

- Google and YouTube are the top search engines in the world.
- Videos that are relevant to keyword phrases may appear at or near the top of search engine results, including Google.
- By posting videos on YouTube and other platforms targeting your chosen keywords, your video might appear at the top fairly quickly, and in some cases, immediately!
- YouTube videos will typically be indexed faster than other video platforms.



# On-Page Optimization

- **Title Tags:** Include your target keyword in the page title.
- **Meta Descriptions:** Write a compelling description using the keyword.
- **Headings:** Use H1 and H2 tags to structure your content.
- **URLs:** Keep them clean and include the keyword.
- **Content:** Write for humans, not search engines; naturally include keywords.
- **Images:** Optimize image alt text and filenames with keywords.



# How to Use Keywords Effectively

## Where to Use Keywords:

- **Titles & Headings:** Always include your primary keyword in your page title (H1 tag) and at least one subheading (H2, H3 tags).
- **Content:** Use your primary keyword naturally within the first 100 words and throughout the content, but avoid "keyword stuffing."
- **Meta Descriptions:** Include your keyword in meta descriptions to increase click-through rates.
- **Image Alt Text:** Use descriptive alt text for images and include relevant keywords where appropriate.
- **Product Descriptions:** Include keywords that describe the product's features, benefits, and unique selling points.

**Tip: Focus on user intent**—what the customer is searching for—and ensure keywords flow naturally in your content.



# Do Keywords Have to Be an Exact Match?

## Exact Match vs. Variants:

- **Exact Match:** While exact match keywords can be helpful, search engines have evolved to understand synonyms and contextual relevance.
- **Variations:** Use related keywords and long-tail keywords (e.g., “cheap running shoes” instead of just “running shoes”).
- **Context Matters:** Google's algorithms now focus more on the intent behind the search rather than simply matching keywords.

## Answering FAQs:

- **Does capitalization matter?** No, search engines ignore capitalization.
- **Do keywords need to appear exactly the same way every time?** No, search engines understand keyword variations and synonyms.



# Keyword Placement in Titles

- **Keep Titles Concise:** Ensure titles are under 60 characters so they don't get cut off in search results, which can reduce click-through rates.
- **Primary Keyword Placement:** Place your most important keyword as close to the beginning of the title as possible for maximum impact on SEO.
- **Compelling Titles:** Combine your keyword with a benefit or enticing offer (e.g., "Affordable SEO Tools for Small Businesses" or "Fast and Reliable Web Hosting for Entrepreneurs"). This not only improves SEO but also makes the title more clickable.
- **Avoid Keyword Stuffing:** Make sure titles read naturally and don't overuse keywords. Google penalizes unnatural-sounding titles.
- **Use Power Words:** Words like "best," "affordable," "essential," or "ultimate guide" can increase click-through rates when paired with keywords.



# Keyword Placement in Content

- **Keyword Density:** Aim for 1-2% keyword density, which means using your primary keyword naturally in the text without overstuffing. Focus on writing for the user, not just for search engines.
- **Internal Linking:** Link to other relevant content on your website using your keywords as anchor text. This helps improve SEO by distributing authority across your site and keeping users engaged for longer.
- **LSI Keywords:** LSI (Latent Semantic Indexing) keywords are related phrases or synonyms that help search engines understand the context of your content. Use tools like Google's "related searches" or keyword research tools to find relevant LSI keywords and sprinkle them throughout your content.
- **Use Headings and Subheadings:** Break content into readable sections using keywords in your H1, H2, and H3 tags. Search engines prioritize keywords in headings.
- **Write for User Intent:** Ensure the content answers questions or solves problems users may have, incorporating the primary keyword in a way that feels helpful and informative.





# SEO Tools for WordPress

WordPress has a lot of free and paid plugins that you can install on your website add titles, descriptions, thumbnail preview images, and more.

Here are some of the popular ones:

- **Yoast SEO:** One of the most popular plugins for optimizing titles, meta descriptions, and content. Offers suggestions to improve SEO score.
- **SEO Framework:** A lightweight alternative that automates SEO without unnecessary bloat. Provides smart meta tag management and easy-to-understand SEO metrics.
- **Rank Math:** Combines the power of automation and manual control, with features for keyword ranking, schema markup, and Google Analytics integration.



# SEO Tools for Most Websites

- **Moz Pro:** Comprehensive SEO tools for keyword tracking, rank analysis, and competitor insights. Ideal for all website platforms.
- **Ahrefs:** Excellent for keyword research, backlink analysis, and tracking keyword performance across platforms.
- **Semrush:** Offers SEO audit tools, keyword research, and content optimization features.
- **Ubersuggest:** A free or low-cost tool that helps with keyword research, competitive analysis, and SEO auditing for any website.

## Automation Options:

- Use plugins or built-in features on platforms like Shopify (SEO Booster, Plug in SEO) or Squarespace (built-in SEO options) to automate meta descriptions and keyword integration.



# Key SEO Tool Features

- **Automatic XML Sitemaps:** A sitemap is like a blueprint for your website, showing search engines all of your site's pages so they can crawl and index them more easily. An XML sitemap helps search engines understand your website's structure, especially for new pages, blog posts, and updates. Most SEO plugins generate and submit these automatically, making it easier for Google to discover all your content.
- **Schema Markup Integration:** Schema markup is a type of structured data that helps search engines understand the content of your pages more clearly. This can improve your chances of showing up in rich snippets (e.g., product ratings, recipes, event details) in search results. For example, if you're an online store, adding schema for product pages helps Google show price, availability, and reviews directly in the search result.
- **On-Page SEO Analysis and Suggestions:** These SEO plugins provide real-time feedback while you're writing, offering tips like keyword usage, meta descriptions, readability scores, and optimization suggestions. For example, it might suggest adding your keyword to the first 100 words of your article or improving sentence length.



# Automating SEO for Your Website

## How Automation Helps:

- Reduces manual input for meta descriptions, sitemaps, and schema markup.
- Tools like SEO Framework, Yoast SEO, and Rank Math offer automatic optimization features that help generate SEO-friendly meta descriptions, titles, and more.

## Recommended Automation Tools:

- **Zapier:** Connects different tools to automate content posting, keyword tracking, and more.
- **Surfer SEO:** Offers content optimization suggestions based on competitors' data and automates keyword density analysis.

**Pro Tip:** Regularly review automated suggestions to ensure they align with your brand's voice and the context of your content.



# Automating SEO for Your Website

- **SEO Titles and Meta Descriptions:** Some tools and plugins allow you to automatically set SEO titles and meta descriptions using a formula or template that's customizable. For example, you can set a template to use the post title and category for the meta description without needing to manually add them for each page. This saves time, especially on large sites with many pages.
- **Keyword Suggestions:** With Rank Math's AI tools, you get automated keyword suggestions as you write. The AI helps optimize your content by offering suggestions based on the keywords you're targeting, ensuring you follow SEO best practices. It can also highlight areas where optimization is needed, such as missing keywords, alt tags, or readability improvements.
- **Automatic Redirection:** Many plugins automatically manage 301 redirects when you change a URL, ensuring your visitors don't hit a 404 error and that the old link still passes SEO value to the new page.



# Off-Page Optimization

- **Backlinking:** Get other websites to link to your website.
- **Guest Blogging:** Write articles for other sites to gain backlinks.
- **Social Signals:** Engage on social media to drive traffic to your site.
- **Brand Mentions:** Monitor online mentions of your business.
- **Local Citations:** List your business on local directories like Google My Business.



# SEO Penalties (What to Avoid)

- **Keyword Stuffing:** Overloading a page with keywords.
- **Duplicate Content:** Copying content from other websites.
- **Buying Links:** Purchasing backlinks to manipulate rankings.
- **Cloaking:** Showing different content to users and search engines.
- **Slow Website Speed:** Websites that take too long to load can be penalized.



# Tracking SEO Performance

**Google Search Console:** Free tool to monitor and troubleshoot your website's presence in Google Search.

- **Key Features:** Tracks keyword performance, page indexing, mobile usability, and any penalties.
- **Action:** Set up your site and submit your sitemap to monitor SEO health.

**Google Analytics:** Analyze site traffic, user behavior, and conversions.

- **Key Features:** Track visitor demographics, real-time traffic, and goal conversions (e.g., signups, purchases).
- **Action:** Set up custom goals to track key actions (e.g., form submissions or purchases).





# Tracking SEO Performance

**Semrush:** Comprehensive SEO suite for keyword research, competitor analysis, and tracking backlinks.

- **Key Features:** Tracks keyword rankings, performs SEO audits, and analyzes competitors.
- **Action:** Use Semrush to audit your site and fix SEO issues.

**Ahrefs:** Powerful tool for tracking backlinks, keywords, and site authority.

- **Key Features:** Conduct in-depth backlink analysis, monitor keyword rankings, and discover content gaps.
- **Action:** Use Ahrefs to build your backlink strategy and improve site authority.



# Tracking SEO Performance

**Keywordsearch:** Affordable SEO tool for keyword research and competitive analysis.

- **Key Features:** Analyze search volume, keyword difficulty, and competitive keyword gaps.
- **Action:** Use Keywordsearch to find easy-to-rank keywords and optimize content.

## Best Practices:

- **Set Clear Goals:** Define your target keywords, conversion goals, and traffic objectives.
- **Track Regularly:** Monitor your progress weekly to stay on top of trends.
- **Adjust Strategies:** Continuously refine your SEO tactics based on keyword performance and traffic data.



# Key Metrics to Track

- **Keyword Ranking:** Track how well your pages are ranking for specific keywords using tools like Google Search Console, Ahrefs, or SEMrush. Monitoring this regularly helps you identify which keywords are improving and which ones may need more optimization.
- **Organic Traffic:** Use tools like Google Analytics or Matomo (a privacy-friendly alternative) to track the number of visitors coming to your site through organic search. This metric shows how effective your SEO efforts are at bringing in new visitors.
- **Click-through Rate (CTR):** Monitor your CTR in Google Search Console to see how well your SEO titles and meta descriptions are performing. A higher CTR means your titles and descriptions are enticing users to click on your link.



# Key Metrics to Track

- **Bounce Rate:** This metric shows the percentage of visitors who leave your site after viewing only one page. A high bounce rate could indicate that the page content isn't relevant to what users were searching for, or it could be due to slow load times.
- **Conversion Rate:** Measure the percentage of visitors who take a desired action, such as signing up for a newsletter, filling out a contact form, or making a purchase. This metric is critical to understanding how well your website is converting traffic into leads or customers.



# SEO Tips for Success

- Stay consistent with your content.
- Focus on creating value for your audience.
- Update older content to keep it relevant.
- Optimize for mobile—over 50% of search traffic is from mobile devices.
- Be patient—SEO takes time but pays off in the long run.
- Use SEO targeted videos on platforms like YouTube to boost your visibility.
- Use guest posting to build backlinks to your website that can improve your ranking.



# Q&A



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