

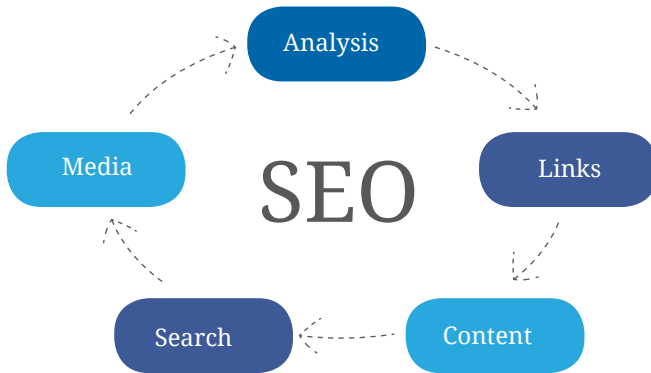
A Guide to Improving Your SEO



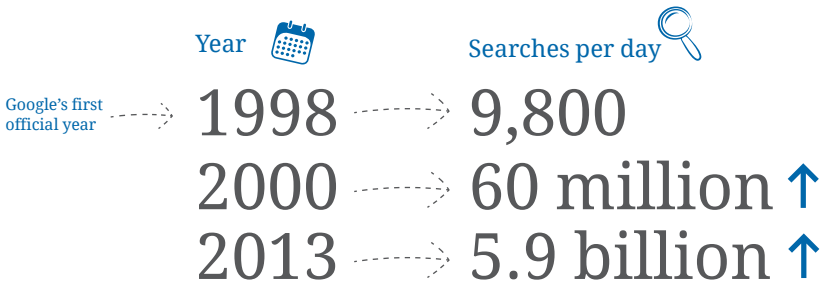


What is SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) and how can it help me to become more discoverable?

This guide details a few basic techniques to help you improve the SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) of your author website, blog and social media activity, and to generally help improve your search engine rankings.



Back in 1998, in Google’s first official year, it saw around 9,800 searches per day. By 2000, it had risen to 60 million per day, and by 2013, it had reached 5.9 billion searches per day. That’s a lot of searching from an increasingly information-hungry audience!



With an ever increasing amount of web content there is now a great deal of competition to be at the top of search result pages. It is important to consider that **SEO evolves constantly**, and that an entire SEO specialist industry hangs off every word of the somewhat secretive search engine companies like **Google, Bing, Yandex** and **Yahoo!** Improving SEO depends on a lot of technical elements so, for example, many people who specialise in this field have knowledge of coding. Furthermore, search engines also work very differently, and whilst **Google** dominates in Europe and the Americas, there are hundreds of others, including **Yandex** which rules in Russia, **Baidu** in China (where other search engines are often banned), and **Naver** in South Korea. **There is no one guide to understanding, or to optimising, them all.**

This guide, however, does cover a small number of the hundreds of basic techniques that collectively contribute to getting towards the top of search results pages. Whilst most of these tips focus on optimising results in **Google**, some will contribute to improving rankings for other search engines as well. In this guide, we'll explore the following aspects:

- 1 Posting new content on a regular basis
- 2 Thinking about how people use a search engine
- 3 Considering how to create (or enhance) a URL to boost search engine ranking
- 4 Be mobile-friendly
- 5 'Techie tips' for the more advanced
- 6 Further reading
- 7 Some final things to bear in mind when trying to boost your SEO

Remember:

There are ways to spend an incredibly large amount of money on boosting your presence in search results, but actually, **the best thing to do is to produce good, clear, specific, on-topic web content regularly, and encourage other users to share it.** Naturally, over time, and pretty much for free, your search engine rankings should improve.

1

Posting new content on a regular basis

When new content gets posted online, it doesn't appear in search results straight away.

This is because it takes time for search engines to find a website, digest its content, and then begin to show it in what they believe are matches against search queries made by their users.



If you have a blog, using tools like Blogspot, LiveJournal, or Wordpress can help you with the technical side of posting content regularly. These types of blog sites are ones that search engines tend to 'understand' the best.

If you have a website, or a listing on a university site, then you should endeavour to **keep this up-to-date with information** – giving search engines a reason to come back, re-digest it, and keep populating search results with your online content.

The more frequent you are with posting new web content, the more signals your website gives off to search engines – telling them that your website is current, maintained, and maybe worth sharing with others. Not only may this help contribute to a search engine's understanding of your website's 'authority' on a subject, but it can also mean that there are simply more chances of web users finding you.

This, combined with making sure that you **set up your blog or website as early as possible**, will help web users and search engines to find and index you and, ultimately, this will get you into search engine results pages early on.

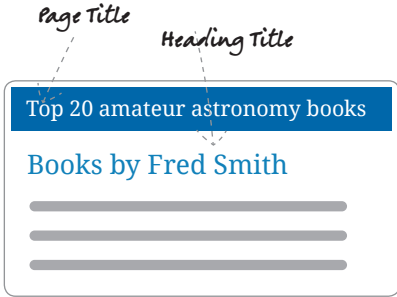
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Thinking about how people use a search engine

Search engines have reported that users are entering longer search terms to find content, and that a lot of these search terms are also questions.

Therefore, when writing content to put up online **think about the title of your blog post or web page**, and the headings within the page.

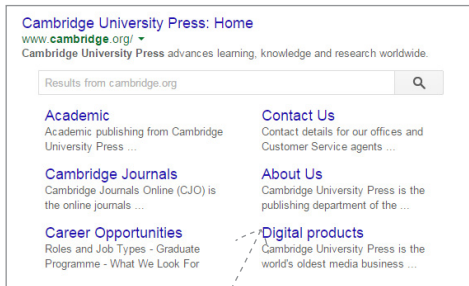
Page Titles should describe what is on your page – titles appear as large text in search results (they will normally be blue in colour), and they can also appear as the text in your browser’s tab.



Heading Titles are headings within a web page, using coding tags called ‘H1’ (or ‘Heading 1’ – which you might have seen when editing a document in Microsoft

Word, or in the editing screen of your blog). **Search engines read these H1 titles, and use it to contribute to their understanding of a page’s content.** This in turn can help them rank your web content appropriately.

For example, a page on your website or a blog post with a Heading



Title ‘My books’ would be more effective if it was reworded to appear as **‘Books by [your name]’**. This is simply because users are unlikely to search using the term ‘my books’ but are more likely to search using the term ‘books by [author’s name]’.



Top tips:

- Page and Heading Titles that are worded as questions can often match search phrases.
- Page and Heading Titles that suggest a digest of information can often match search phrases.



A Page Title that poses a question is more likely to match a search query in Google – as users frequently enter questions directly into search engines to find out answers. The question approach can also entice the user to click on your page in their search results, as it suggests that they're going to get the answer they were looking for.

Love them or hate them, **blog posts and web pages titled as if they're a question or list** (e.g. 'Top 20 amateur astronomy books') **perform well in a search because they represent something of value for the user:**

- a) They can represent an impartial recommendation or review from others
- b) They can represent a summary of information.

You should, therefore, carefully consider how you word titles and headings in your blog or web page to ensure good visibility in search engine rankings.

3

Considering how to create (or enhance) a URL to boost search engine rankings

Another contributing factor to search page ranking is your actual web address (URL).

Ideally, your website, or blog post web address, should make sense by containing keywords, like your name, or should identify the content of the page or use the actual blog post's title.

A web address of:

www.tbc.ac.uk/profile or www.tbc.ac.uk/id=1649357.php

doesn't reveal anything to individual users or search engines, whereas:

www.tbc.ac.uk/author/ann-author

or

www.tbc.ac.uk/blog/redefining-physics-in-the-classroom

gives clues to both individual users and search engines alike as to what the page is about.

4

Be mobile-friendly

In April 2015, Google introduced a change to its search engine ranking algorithms, which was soon mirrored by other search engines, serving the growing millions of mobile device users around the world.

This change, dubbed 'mobilegeddon', meant that websites that were designed and built to work on mobile devices (smartphones and tablet devices) would be treated more favourably than websites that were not mobile-friendly when it came to the order of search results.

To improve your visibility in search results, your website should be built to be mobile-friendly, or 'responsive' as it is often called.

Mobile-unfriendly websites often appear scaled down on mobile devices, with text so small that it is too difficult to read. Often only a small part of a page will be visible at any one time - making it very hard for your website visitors to view your site, or to move around it.

Often, they'll just give up and go elsewhere.

There are many technical elements to achieving a mobile-friendly website, and it can involve changing the HTML and CSS code that websites are built with.

Thankfully, this is everyday work for agencies and freelancers, so you may want to explore this option, or to talk to your website administrator about how to make your existing website or blog mobile-friendly. There are also many online tutorials and great study books available if you feel like having a go for yourself.



Google launched a mobile-friendly testing tool to help website owners see whether their website is mobile-friendly, and to offer helpful advice to those whose website failed the test. Try your site here for free, with instant results:

<https://search.google.com/search-console/mobile-friendly>

If your website or blog uses WordPress, Tumblr, BlogSpot or another kind of blogging platform, then you may find that it already passes the mobile-friendly test. If not, you can usually install a new free website design at the click of a button. This will not only make your site mobile-friendly, and help you out-pace unfriendly sites in search results, but it will also keep your visitors happy and reading your website for longer.

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‘Techie tips’ for the more advanced

Follow these quick tips to help optimise your web content for search engines – if you’re not the administrator for your website or blog then you should approach whoever has this role, and ask them to help you by following these instructions.

- 1 Set up Google Webmaster Tools, Bing Webmaster Tools, and Yandex Webmaster Tools accounts. These are free and your administrator should help you to verify them. This will allow you to see site errors as well as search terms and average rankings for your website, and it will also enable you to submit a sitemap which will help search engines digest your website more easily.
- 2 Create unique and page-specific descriptions, titles, and lists of keyphrases for each of your web pages.
- 3 Connect your social media accounts to your website – Google+ and others have small snippets of code that you can insert on your website to help search engines connect up your online channels to your website – thereby giving search engines a better and more rounded view of you and your expertise.
- 4 Explore Structured Data and Rich Snippets – an advanced way of telling search engines what kind of content is on your website, so that they can better understand it, and show it in search results. (If you’ve ever seen cinema/event time listings or product ratings in search results, this is how they are achieved.)
- 5 If you’re a WordPress blogger on your own server (not on <http://www.wordpress.com>) then ask your administrator to install the free version of Yoast (<https://yoast.com/> - there is also a premium version, and there are a few other companies that offer similar services). This will help you to boost the SEO of your content by allowing you to add in descriptions and keywords that search engines can use to match you against search queries.

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Further reading

SEO evolves constantly, and therefore, if you want to get the most out of your website or blog, you ideally need to keep abreast of it.

Here are a few authoritative sources on Search Engine Optimisation that regularly update their information and tips:

MOZ – their Beginner’s Guide to SEO

(<http://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo>)

is really useful, as is their regular Whiteboard Friday series:

(<http://moz.com/blog/category/whiteboard-friday>)

Google Search Engine Optimisation Starter Guide (PDF)

<http://goo.gl/jfVefv>

Search Engine Watch – an article website with plenty of advice:

<http://searchenginewatch.com/>

Google Webmasters YouTube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/user/GoogleWebmasterHelp>

About Rich Snippets and Structured Data

<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/99170?hl=en>

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Some final things to bear in mind when trying to boost your SEO

Using the tips outlined in this guide will help you to improve your search engine ranking by enabling you to consider how search engines operate, and how other people use them as a search function to find information online.



Our top tip to remember is that the best thing for you to do is to produce good, clear, specific, on-topic web content regularly, and encourage other users to share it.

To this end, social media can play a very important part in enabling you to produce web content (and share that content) on a regular basis.

Not only will pursuing these activities be worthwhile in itself, **but by using social media effectively** (e.g. creating and maintaining your accounts, using them to share information, and encouraging others to do the same) **you'll also go a long way to boosting your search engine ranking at the same time.**



Last, but by no means least, setting up all of these accounts and influencing your search engine ranking **takes time.** Therefore, allow yourself enough time to set up your accounts (ideally a good few months prior to publication) and then start using the advice in this guide to optimise your content in search engine rankings. Whilst it might take a little while to see the results, your efforts will certainly be worthwhile as you'll ultimately help to ensure that interested readers can find you and what you have to say.

 authorhub@cambridge.org

 [cambridge.org/authorhub](https://www.cambridge.org/authorhub)



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