CourseMints

GUIDE

SEO for Beginners

Get Found on Google the Right Way

SELF-PACED PDF COURSE

COURSEMINTS.COM

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Get Found on Google the Right Way

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How to Use This Guide

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the work of making your website easy for search engines to understand and easy for searchers to choose. When it is done honestly, it brings you visitors who are already looking for what you offer, month after month, without paying for each click. It is also slow, unglamorous and full of myths. This guide gives you the parts that matter, in the order a beginner needs them, without the jargon or the shortcuts that get sites penalized.

What you will learn

- How search engines find, store and rank pages, and what nobody outside Google can know.
- How to read search intent from the results page, so you build the kind of page people actually want.
- How to do keyword research with free tools and choose searches you can realistically win.
- How to structure your site so each important topic has one clear page.
- On-page SEO element by element: titles, descriptions, headings, URLs, images, internal links and structured data.
- How to plan and write content that answers real questions better than what already ranks.
- The technical essentials: crawling, indexing, sitemaps, speed, mobile and HTTPS, explained for non-developers.
- Local SEO for businesses that serve a town or region.
- How to earn links honestly, and why buying them is a bad bet.
- How to measure progress in Google Search Console, and a 90-day plan to put it all together.

What you need

- A website you can edit (WordPress, Shopify, Wix, Squarespace or similar is fine).
- Access to add Google Search Console, or someone who can add it for you.
- About three to five hours a week for the first three months.

A word on expectations

Nobody can guarantee a ranking, and Google itself says so. New pages on new sites often take months to gain traction, and competitive searches can take much longer. What you can control is whether your pages deserve to rank: whether they can be found, whether they answer the search well and whether other people find them worth mentioning. This guide focuses entirely on those things.

How to get the most from it

1. **Use your own site as the case study.** Every exercise asks you to apply the chapter to your pages.
2. **Read Chapters 1 to 4 before changing anything.** Research and structure come before edits.
3. **Connect Search Console early** (Chapter 10 has the steps). It takes days to collect data, so start now.
4. **Change a few things at a time and write down what and when.** Otherwise you will not know what worked.
5. **Follow the 90-day plan** in the last chapter once you have read the rest.

If you already own *Zero-Cost Marketing*, its SEO chapter is a short overview. This guide goes much further on every topic, especially keyword research, technical basics and measurement.

CHAPTER 1

How Search Engines Work

01

You do not need to understand algorithms to do SEO well, but you do need a clear picture of the basic process. Most beginner mistakes come from a wrong mental model: imagining that search engines read keywords like a checklist, or that a page ranks simply because it exists.

Three stages

1. **Crawling.** Automated programs (Google's is called Googlebot) discover pages by following links and by reading sitemaps that site owners submit. A page nobody links to and no sitemap lists may never be found.
2. **Indexing.** The search engine processes what it found: the text, images, links and structure, and decides whether to store the page in its index. Not every crawled page is indexed. Duplicates, very thin pages and pages blocked by the site owner are often left out.
3. **Ranking and serving.** When someone searches, the engine pulls pages from its index and orders them by how relevant and useful they seem for that searcher, at that moment, in that place.

What Google says it looks for

Google's public explanation of how search works describes several broad groups of factors: the meaning of the query, the relevance of pages to it, the quality of the content, the usability of the page, and the context of the searcher (such as location and language). Its guidance to site owners asks for "helpful, reliable, people-first content": pages created mainly to help people, not mainly to attract search traffic.

Google also publishes the Search Quality Rater Guidelines, used by people who evaluate search results to help Google test changes. Those guidelines describe quality using experience, expertise, authoritativeness and trustworthiness (shortened to E-E-A-T). Raters do not change the ranking of individual pages, but the guidelines are a useful picture of what Google is trying to reward.

THE SCIENCE

What nobody knows

The exact ranking system is secret, uses many signals, and changes many times a year. Anyone who claims to know the precise weight of a factor, or a secret formula, is guessing or selling. What is well established, because search engines say so and because it follows from how they work: pages must be crawlable and indexable, they must clearly match what people search for, they should be genuinely useful, and links from other relevant sites help search engines judge which pages people trust.

Myths to drop now

- **Meta keywords matter.** Google said back in 2009 that it does not use the keywords meta tag for ranking.
- **There is a perfect keyword density.** Repeating a phrase a set number of times does not help, and stuffing it in makes the page worse.
- **More pages always means more traffic.** Many thin pages can drag down how search engines view your site.
- **You must submit your site to hundreds of search engines.** A handful of engines carry most searches, and they find sites through links and sitemaps.
- **SEO is a one-time job.** Competitors publish, searches change, and pages go out of date.

How long it takes

There is no fixed timeline. In Google's own guidance on hiring an SEO, it says that changes often take months to show their full effect. As a rough planning frame, expect to see your first impressions in Search Console within weeks of publishing good pages, and meaningful traffic for low-competition searches within a few months. Competitive searches can take a year or more, or may simply be out of reach for a new site for now.

EXAMPLE

Leah's mental model

Leah assumed her bookkeeping articles were not ranking because she had not repeated "small business bookkeeping" often enough. When she checked Search Console, she found that six of her twelve articles were not indexed at all. When she installed an SEO plugin, it had marked her whole "Resources" category as noindex, which tells search engines to leave those pages out. Switching that setting off took two minutes and did more than any rewrite would have.

Common mistakes

- **Starting with tricks instead of basics.** If pages are not indexed, nothing else matters.
- **Chasing every algorithm rumor.** The fundamentals change slowly; the gossip changes daily.
- **Judging SEO after a few weeks.** Give each change time before deciding it failed.

EXERCISE

Your starting point

1. Search Google for **site:yourdomain.com** (with your real domain). Roughly how many results appear? This is only a rough indication of what is indexed.

2. List your five most important pages. Does each appear when you search for its exact title?