



WHITE PAPER

# THE ULTIMATE CHECKLIST FOR WORDPRESS ON-PAGE SEO

**TORQUE**<sup>®</sup>  
BY  WPengine<sup>®</sup>

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Search engine optimization is a wide field. There is [technical SEO](#), local SEO, [keyword research](#), link building and much more.

However, one of the most important tools for website owners to master is on-page SEO. As the name suggests, these are optimization measures that happen on a particular web page, both in terms of content and HTML code. They are a huge factor in helping search engines understand what the page is about and ranking it accordingly.

By implementing on-page SEO, you can give your content the best possible chance to rank high and attract targeted traffic. If you can do that, it will result in higher conversions and an overall more successful website.

While many factors in SEO are dependent on other people, on-page optimization is also the part that is most under your control.

To help you take advantage of it, this white paper will provide you with a detailed checklist of the most important on-page SEO factors. That way, you don't have to look at the [entire list of ranking factors](#) but can simply go down point by point to polish up your posts and pages.

## The Basis of Everything: Content

Below, you will learn how to create an optimized web page step by step. However, before that, you need to understand that the basis for all search engine success is the content on your page. It is extremely important for SEO and needs to fulfill certain requirements so that Google will consider it worth ranking.

### Be Linkable

To search engines, links are the ultimate currency. Google and Co use them to judge the popularity of content and consider them one of the most important ranking signals. Therefore, it's crucial that your content is linkable in order to appear in search results.

That means, it is not hidden behind a login form, part of an AJAX slideshow, or otherwise not parseable by search spiders. If any of that is true, Google will not add it to the SERPs and no amount of on-page SEO will change that.

### Be Useful

In their [Search Quality Rating Guidelines](#), Google explicitly uses a Needs Met rating. It looks at how well content satisfies the intent of searchers. The best pages are those that meet their needs completely.

That means, after coming to your page they have no need to visit any other resource or website. Visitors are completely satisfied with what you provide.

Of course, the definition of intent is very wide. It can be anything from entertainment over information to encouragement or help and come in video, image, text, or sound form. However, the important thing is that it is relevant to your users.

### Be High in E-A-T

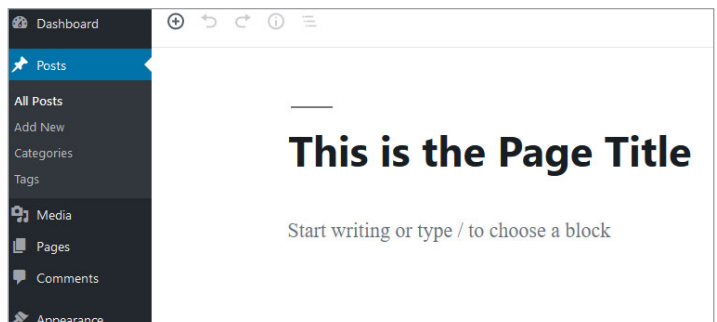
E-A-T stands for *Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness*. It's the three main factors Google uses to determine the quality of a website.

High-quality web content is one of the best ways to demonstrate E-A-T. That means [well-written](#), unique, original, up-to-date, and in-depth content. One-stop pages with evergreen information that satisfy user needs and stay relevant over time.

Google actually recently implemented an [algorithm update](#) further focusing on E-A-T markers. Therefore, it is crucial that you learn how to create content that fits the above requirements. Once you have a handle on that, you can use the steps below to optimize it for search engines.

## Page Title



The page title is usually what you input at the top of the WordPress editor.



However, you can also use an [SEO plugin](#) to change the way it appears in the search results.

[It's Possible to Set a Different Page Title With an SEO Plugin](#)  
localhost > wordpress > 2019 > 03 > 29 > this-is-the-page-title

Please provide a meta description by editing the snippet below. If you don't, Google will try to find a relevant part of your post to show in the search results.

  [Edit snippet](#)

The title of your page both tells search engines about its topic as well as [moves searchers to click through to your site](#) – or not. This makes it one of the most important on-page SEO factors to get right.

## How to Optimize

- **Include your main keyword at the beginning** – The main keyword or phrase should definitely be present in the title, preferably at the start. Words that appear earlier in titles have more weight in search engines and also for getting people to click.
- **Make it the only H1 tag on the page** – [Heading tags](#) show the structure of your post to Google. Normally, the title should be wrapped in `<h1>...</h1>` tags with all other headings taking lower orders (more on that below). [Check with your browser tools](#) if you are not sure whether that is the case for your site.
- **Keep the title under 60 characters** – Google search results only show titles to a certain width, about 50-60 characters. Make sure to keep yours within that margin. Titles of around 55 characters fit the majority of search results.
- **Add modifiers to your main keyword** – Adding words like *guide*, *best*, *2019* and similar to your title can help you rank for additional long-tail keywords. Check Google's related search (at the bottom of the search page) for inspiration.

Of course, learning to write great titles that get people to click is a whole other topic. For help in this area, check [this post](#).

## URL

Next up is the page permalink, which consists of your main URL plus the page slug.

Permalink: <http://localhost/wordpress/2019/03/29/this-is-the-page-title/> [Edit](#)

By default, WordPress uses the page title as the link ending. However, you can and should change it in order to make it more appealing to both human and electronic users.

One of the first things to check for that is to make sure you have set it to include the post name in the permalink in the first place. You can do so on your WordPress site under [Settings > Permalinks](#).

**Permalink Settings**

WordPress offers you the ability to create a custom URL structure for your permalinks and archives. Custom URL structures can improve the aesthetics, usability, and forward-compatibility of your links. [A number of tags are available](#), and here are some examples to get you started.

**Common Settings**

Plain `http://localhost/wordpress/?p=123`

Day and name `http://localhost/wordpress/2019/03/29/sample-post/`

Month and name `http://localhost/wordpress/2019/03/sample-post/`

Numeric `http://localhost/wordpress/archives/123`

Post name `http://localhost/wordpress/sample-post/`

Custom Structure `http://localhost/wordpress/ /%postname%/`

Available tags:

Here, most of the time, the best options are either *postname* or *category/postname*. The latter is good to provide extra information on the topical structure of your site. You can find out more about settings that make sense here.

## How to Optimize

- **Include your keyword here as well** – Since it is such an important signal concerning the topic of your page, definitely include your keyword in the URL. In fact, the best slugs are those only consisting of the main keyphrase of your post, such as `https://torquemag.io/2019/02/twenty-nineteen-theme-review/`. This format also makes it more likely for your content to be shared as people can directly understand the topic from the link.
- **Keep it short** – As a consequence, you should keep your permalink at 3-5 words. Avoid ugly or overly complicated URLs like `https://yourdomain.com/09/03/14/cat=wordpress/pageid=254.html`. They are not a favorite among human users and hard to remember.

## Headings

[Headings](#) and subheadings are an important part of what gives pages structure. They break content up into smaller pieces and make it scannable.

Now that you know what headings are, there is a question of what they are doing inside your content. Basically, headings fulfill two functions:

### Headings Make Text More Readable

As you have seen in this article, and as you probably know from your own experience, using headings gives structure to your content. They **break up text into subsections** and **make content more digestible**.

Why is that important? Well, I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but few people actually read your articles in their entirety. I know, hard to bear, right?

However, many of your visitors are satisfied just skimming your content and only reading those parts that actually interest them. By **dividing your content into sections** and giving each of them a title that makes sense, you enable them to do just that.

Therefore, headings should be used in a way that after reading only through the headlines of your article, readers should have a good sense of what the piece is about.

### Heading Tags Provide SEO Value

Readers aren't the only ones that benefit from headings. Search engines also scan your site for headings.

Setting heading tags in WordPress is pretty easy.

However, you also have to know how to use them correctly.

## How to Optimize

- **Use the right tags** – As already mentioned, the page title should be the only h1 on the page. Therefore, any main heading below that needs to be h2, subheadings for that h3 and so on. Note that usually there is no need to go any deeper than h3.
- **Add keywords and variations** – Headings are a great place to use your main keyword, related keywords and synonyms, so make sure to take advantage of that.
- **Make them informative** – Subheadlines are not just for technical optimization but important for readers. You should be able to only read the headings and understand roughly what you will learn on the page choose which parts are relevant to you.

## Visuals

Using images and other media (videos, infographics) is a sign of quality to search engines and visitors alike. Together with proper formatting, they **increase time on site** and reduce bounce rate, two very important metrics for user engagement that Google is known to track.

WordPress makes it easy to include visuals in your content with **auto-embeds** and the media library.

However, there is more to **making images SEO friendly**. Use the tips below to optimize the visual appeal of your site.

## How to Optimize

- **Reduce image size as much as possible** – Images contribute a lot of page weight and are, therefore, a big factor in **page loading time**. In order to minimize their impact, reduce them in size, use compression (e.g with **TinyPNG/JPG** or **WP Smush**) and only input as large an image as needed. **WordPress gives you a choice** whenever you add an image to your page.
- **Include the keyword in the image name, description, ALT tag, and caption** – Since search engines can't see images (yet), you need to tell them about their content. You can do so by filling in the above information. It also helps with **accessibility** for visually impaired users. Generally, the most important are the file name and ALT tag, the rest is optional.
- **Use additional formatting** – Aside from using visuals, break up your text in other ways. Use headings, paragraphs, lists, and other formatting options to make it pleasant to look at and read. You can also use the readability tool in **Yoast SEO** to get input on this.

## Linking

Links are an important sign for search engines. They show what others consider important and are one of the main factors Google uses to rank websites (the third most important: [Google RankBrain](#)). While it's most important that you get inbound links, the way you use links on your own site is also an important marker for on-page SEO.

### How to Optimize

- **Link internally** – Search spiders use links to understand the structure and relative importance of pages on your site. Therefore, link to your own content where it makes sense, this will also help [keep visitors on your site](#).
- **Link to authority websites** – Outbound links to other websites further clarify the topic of your pages. Which sites you choose to link to also shows the caliber of websites you associate yourself with. Therefore, make sure to pick those with a high level of authority and quality.

## Keyword Usage

Using keywords is one of the things most people associate with search engine optimization. For good reason, as it is quite important in order to show up for relevant search results.

However, using keywords is something that you can easily overdo. Keyword stuffing is an [outdated SEO technique](#) that you should stay away from under all circumstances.

By now, Google cares more about search intent, meaning satisfying the need a searcher tries to meet when typing in their query. Therefore, it's now less about exact keyword match and more about creating a good resource with high-quality content, good writing and [semantics](#).

That being said, strategic keyword placement is still important. Besides the locations already mentioned, there are a few more where your main keyword should show up.

### How to Optimize

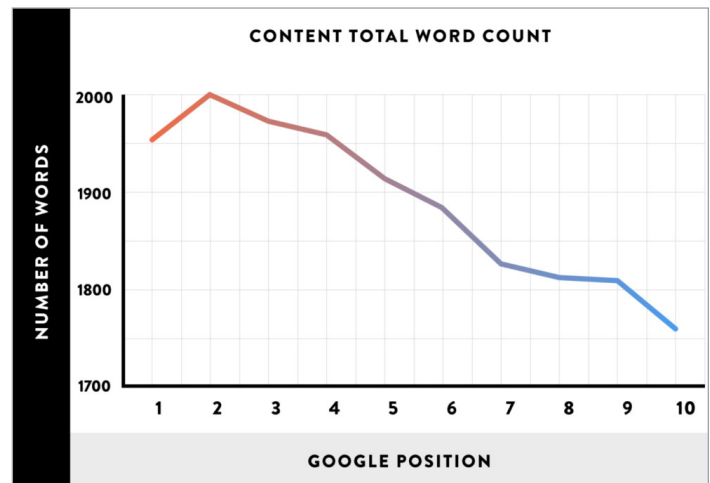
- **Include it in the first 100 words** – As already mentioned, Google often puts more emphasis on things that appear early. This includes keywords, so

make sure to place your main keyphrase in the first paragraph of your page to reinforce its topic.

- **Use synonyms and related keywords** – Search engines understand keywords that are related or that mean the same. So, be sure to include those in your content. A lot of that will happen naturally when you [write for readers](#), however, using [keyword clusters](#) can be very helpful.

## Content Length

Not only does the use of keywords inside your content important for ranking, the length of a piece also counts. Among other things, longer content increases [dwell time](#), which is another quality marker for search engines.



### How to Optimize

- **Shoot for at least 1,500 - 2,500 words** – Longer content tends to perform better in search engines than shorter posts. While there are differences among various industries, the sweet spot appears to be in this margin. Pieces that are even longer are especially good for social shares.

If you want to know how we arrived at that number, we have a [very detailed article](#) on the topic of content length that examines many studies done on the topic.

## Meta Tags

Search engines accept a number of so-called meta tags that can contain additional information about a page. The most relevant these days are the title and meta description. It's what shows up in search results as the main link and description below.

**Keyword Clustering - What It Is and Why You Need to Do It (+Tools!)**  
<https://torquemag.io/2019/03/keyword-clustering/> ▼  
 Mar 12, 2019 - Keyword clustering can help you improve your site SEO and increase traffic. Learn what it is, find useful keyword clustering tools and more.

When using a WordPress SEO plugin, you have the possibility to define them at the bottom of the WordPress editor.

**This is the Page Title - Local Test Site**  
 localhost › wordpress › 2019 › 03 › 29 › this-is-the-page-title

Anything you type in here will show up as your post's meta description in search engines.

📱 Edit snippet

SEO title ➕ Insert snippet variable

Title Page Separator Site title

---

Slug

this-is-the-page-title

Meta description ➕ Insert snippet variable

Anything you type in here will show up as your post's meta description in search engines.

If you don't, search engines will automatically use the main page title and for the description either the beginning of your content (which is why you need to add your main keyword there) or a part of your page where the user's search phrase appears. Actually, it will sometimes do the latter anyway, regardless of whether you have provided a meta description.

### How to Optimize

- **Stay within the constraints** – Just as the page title, the description also needs to stay within the margins of the Google SERPs to not be cut off. As already covered, for the title that's 50-60 characters, the description can have up to 155 characters (120 for mobile devices). A good SEO plugin will also show you this in the preview.
- **Aim the meta description at users** – While it makes sense to include the main keyword in the description

also, its main aim is to increase the click-through rate. Therefore, use it as a chance to advertise your content and move users to click. More on that [here](#).

Finally, especially if you have a lot of recipes, reviews, events or similar on your site, you might also want to look into [schema](#) markup. It enables you to add a lot more information to your content.

**Vegan Pancakes Recipe - Allrecipes.com**  
[allrecipes.com/recipe/191885/vegan-pancakes/](https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/191885/vegan-pancakes/) ▼  
 ★★★★★ Rating: 4,5 - 464 reviews - 15 mins - 264 cal  
 Sift the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt into a large bowl. Whisk the water and oil together in a small bowl. Heat a lightly oiled griddle over medium-high heat. Drop batter by large spoonfuls onto the griddle, and cook until bubbles form and the edges are dry.

**5 Minute Vegan Pancakes Recipe - Food.com**  
[www.food.com/recipe/5-minute-vegan-pancakes-132263](https://www.food.com/recipe/5-minute-vegan-pancakes-132263) ▼  
 ★★★★★ Rating: 4,5 - 335 reviews - 15 mins - 444.8 cal  
 Directions. Set out all your ingredients. Set a stove element with a pan to medium heat. Combine the 4 dry ingredients (flour, sugar, baking powder -- two Tablespoons, not two Teaspoons as some have suggested, salt) in a bowl. Add the soy milk and vegetable oil to your mixture. Mix until smooth.

## Page Loading Speed

How fast a web page loads has [long been part of search ranking](#). Therefore, speeding up your WordPress site is part of on-page SEO.

Site speed is a big topic in itself and we have several articles on that topic:

- [How to Speed Test Your Website \(Metrics, Tools, Optimization Tips\)](#)
- [Lazy Load for WordPress – What It is and How to Add It to Your Website](#)
- [14 Ways To Speed Up WordPress And Decrease Page Load Time](#)
- [9 Advanced Techniques to Make WordPress Faster](#)

Therefore, the list below only includes the cliff notes with some of the most effective measures you can take.

### How to Optimize

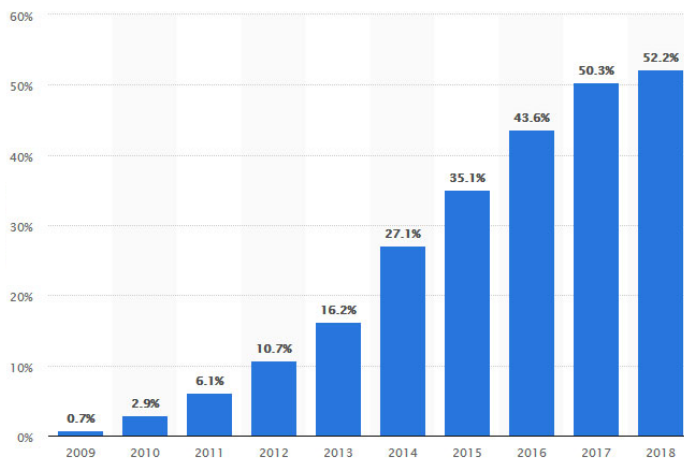
- **Upgrade your hosting** – The server on which your site is located is a big factor in how fast it loads. For that reason, be sure that your hosting provider is up to snuff. If you have problems in this area, ask to move your site to a less busy server, upgrade to a better package or change your provider altogether.
- **Do regular site maintenance** – Keep WordPress as well as its plugins and themes up to date, perform regular [maintenance tasks](#) (especially for the

database) and use the latest version of PHP to keep everything running smoothly.

- **Enable Gzip compression** – Compressing the files that make up your website makes them smaller and thus faster to download. Learn how to implement it [here](#).
- **Reduce HTTP requests** – Requests are everything the browser has to download in order to render your site. The more requests, the longer it takes. There are numerous ways to reduce them, which you can learn about in [this article](#).

Aside from that, the aforementioned image optimization techniques are also big factor in speeding up your pages.

## Mobile Friendliness



By now, [mobile users make up majority of Internet users](#).

Search engines are aware of that and have start putting the needs of searchers on phones and tablets first. You can see this in such developments as the [Google Mobile First Index](#).

If you are not yet on the mobile train, you are actively being punished in the search rankings. Therefore, it is crucial that your site is optimized for mobile devices.

### How to Optimize

- **Use responsive design** – [Responsive design](#) means that your site automatically adapts to the user's screen size. It's become the go-to solution for mobile friendliness these days (including [for Google](#)). If your site's theme is not yet responsive, learn [how to add it](#).

- **Use mobile-optimized plugins** – Aside from the design, the functionality also needs to work with mobile. For that reason, be sure to check whether the plugin you are about to install does well in that area. Test it in a [local development environment](#) if necessary.
- **Test your site thoroughly** – Use tools like [Google's mobile friendliness testing tool](#) to figure out if your site is up to snuff in this area. If there is an issue, it will tell you.

Aside from that, image optimization and page loading speed are also important factors for mobile users. For more on this topic, check our post on what makes a website mobile friendly.

## Social Sharing and Commenting

Social networks are important in today's online environment. They have become [alternative search engines](#) in their own right, enabling users to find relevant content.

Search engines also [take social signals into account for ranking](#), specifically the percentage of people who share your pages on social after reading. More importantly, however, social shares help get views for your content, which makes it more likely somebody will link to it.

Generally, having a thriving community on your site can help a lot with search rankings.

### How to Optimize

- **Include sharing options** – [A study](#) found that prominent sharing buttons can increase sharing by 700 percent. Combine that with a [click to tweet](#) button and tools like [SumoMe](#) to encourage people to post your content on social sites. However, try to limit yourself to the few social networks most likely used by your target audience.
- **Use social markup** – Social markup makes sure that networks use the correct title, description and image of your posts. While it is already quite good, you can also customize the markup just like your content's appearance in search engines with the aforementioned SEO plugins.
- **Encourage blog comments** – Ask readers to leave comments and be sure to engage in the discussion. Google has [gone on record](#) that an active commenting culture can help with search rankings.



## Conclusion

Engaging in optimization techniques makes it more likely that pages come up for relevant search queries. In addition, it's something that, luckily, is completely within your control.

Above, we have provided you with a checklist of the most important on-page SEO factors. A few of them apply sitewide and should be part of any modern website.

The rest you can use to go through your latest post or page and check whether it's up to snuff before publishing. In addition, it makes sense to go over existing content and see where there are possible improvements.

For the latter, it also makes sense that you regularly check your [Google Analytics](#) and [Search Console](#). In there, you find loads of information to further optimize your pages and entire site. With vigilance and concerted effort it's possible to improve your standing in the search results and reap all the benefits that come with it.



## About Torque.

*Torque is a news site featuring all things WordPress. We are dedicated to informing new and advanced WordPress professionals, users, and enthusiasts about the industry. Torque focuses primarily on WordPress News, Business, and Development, but also covers topics relating to open source and breakthrough technology. Torque made its debut in July 2013, at WordCamp San Francisco, and has since produced valuable content that reflects the evolution of WordPress, both as a platform and a community. Torque is a WP Engine publication, though maintains complete editorial independence. [torquemag.io](http://torquemag.io)*



## **About WP Engine.**

*WP Engine powers amazing digital experiences for websites and applications built on WordPress. The company's premium managed hosting platform provides the performance, reliability and security required by the biggest brands in the world, while remaining affordable and intuitive enough for smaller businesses and individuals. Companies of all sizes rely on WP Engine's award-winning customer service team to quickly solve technical problems and create a world-class customer experience. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas and has offices in Limerick, Ireland, San Francisco, California, San Antonio, Texas, and London, England. [wpengine.com](https://www.wpengine.com)*

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