

On-Page SEO Best Practices

On-page SEO is about a) picking the best keywords around which to base each of your pages and b) making it as clear as possible to search engines that your page is relevant to those keywords. The way search engines (and Google in-particular) rank relevance and authority has changed, and so has on-page SEO. Rather than repeating the same word over and over again, you should use a diverse set of related keywords that are specifically appropriate to the page content to help you rank for a variety of keywords. The key is to make it sound natural while covering a variety of keyword options. For example, rather than making a repetitive page title like: “Link building, Link building tips, Link building strategy” you can use a page title that includes variation in it like: “Link Building Strategy: How to Build Links”.

The following table outlines the best practices to use when writing content for your website.

	What is it?	Why is it important?	Best practices
Meta Description	The meta description is a tag that is embedded into the code that describes the content of a web page.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Meta description tags, while not important to search engine rankings, are extremely important in gaining user click-through from search results.■ It appears often as the page description in search results, though Google sometimes uses something else (depending on the phrase that's searched).■ This is the default text that is shown when someone shares a link to the web page on social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Character count: 150-160■ The meta description should employ the keywords intelligently, but also create a compelling description that a searcher will want to click.■ Direct relevance to the page and uniqueness between each page's meta description is key.
Page Title	The page title is used to describe the title of each web page on your site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Probably the top place search engines look for keywords on a web page. It heavily influences how your page is ranked in search results.■ The page title appears in search engine results.■ Creating a more enticing and informative title can lead to more page visits.■ The page title is what shows at the top of web browsers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Character count: 70 max■ Place important keywords towards the beginning of the title. First two words are most important.■ Avoid duplicate page titles.■ Match the page's main heading. For example, if your page's main heading is “Adopt a Gorilla,” then write that as your page title.■ For your home page, briefly describe your organization in the page title.■ If your org is local/regional focused, include your city/state in the page titles. For example, “Animal Shelter in Charleston”.

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Page URL	The page URL is the web address of where the page exists on your website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The words used in your page URL are thought to influence page rank. ■ Search engine referred visitors can quickly recognize they are on the appropriate page based on their search. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Add the “menu path” of where the page appears in your menu structure. For example, if the “Our Mission” page is in your “About Us” section, your URL should be <i>www.nonprofit.org/about-us/our-mission.</i> ■ Separate words with hyphens.
Header Tags	The header tag is part of the HTML code in a web page. Header tags are defined from <h1> to <h6> and identify the hierarchy of the headlines and subheads. Typically, the main headline is <h1>. A subhead would be <h2>.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <h1> tags are the most important tag on a page because search engine crawlers check the relevancy of these tags with the content on the page. ■ Search engine crawlers also check the keyword consistency between the header tag and the content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Do not stuff your header tags (or heads) with keywords but do include your keywords. ■ Have unique header tags for each page on your site.
ALT Tag	The ALT tag is the text that displays when an image is not loaded. It describes the image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adding ALT tags to your images will allow for better indexing in search engines. ■ Images alone are not indexed on search engines, having ALT tags allows content on the page to be indexed. ■ ALT tags are what screen readers use to interpret the image for visually impaired users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The ALT tag should include keywords that are relevant to the image and to the content of the page as well.
Copy/Content	Copy is the written content that is on a particular web page.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Content is the most important part of having a good SEO foundation and will keep users on your site. ■ Good copy with keyword density will increase search engine rankings and influences click-through rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Write copy for the users first and SEO second. ■ Copy should be rich with keywords that are being optimized but remain engaging to the reader

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Internal Links	An Internal link is one that points to another page on the same website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal links are most useful for establishing site architecture and increasing the ranking potential for each page. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whenever possible, consider using keywords as clickable links. For example, the link “Help Us Save the Whales”, (using the keyword string “Save the Whales”) works better than “Help Us”. Match the internal link to the page title of the page you’re linking to. For example, if you’re linking to the Our Mission page, use “Learn about our mission” as the link.
Inbound Links	Inbound links are incoming links from other sites pointing directly to your site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The more reputable links you have point to your website, the higher your rankings will be on search engines. The number of inbound links is one indication of the importance or authority of that website or page. Google was the first search engine to use links as a significant ranking factor, and viewed a link from one site to another as a ‘vote’ for the target site. The more votes you have, the more authoritative your site is considered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideally inbound links should contain keywords for which you are trying to optimize. Coordinate with third party websites to encourage the use of keywords when creating inbound links. Be sure that inbound link is not broken, and goes to the page that is intended. The most fundamental form of link building is to simply create a compelling reason for people to talk about your website, and then let them share it with others by linking to it. Openly state that others should feel free to share your content as long as they link back to your site. If possible, aim for .gov and .edu inbound links, as they’re among the most respected.
Page Load-time	Page Load-time is the speed with which your web pages load in a browser or mobile device.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Google’s new search algorithm rewards web pages that are mobile friendly. Fast loading pages are a top indicator of mobile friendliness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideally, pages should load in about 2-3 seconds. You can check page load-time using Google Webmaster Tools. Check your page using Google’s Mobile Friendly Test tool. Optimize all images for the web.

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Optimize Images	Optimizing Images is the process of reducing the number of pixels per inch of an image, while still maintaining visual integrity, to reduce the over-all size of the image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Having smaller images will speed up page load-time. ■ Faster loading pages are more mobile friendly which helps your SEO ranking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use Photoshop or other image editing tool to optimize your images for the web. ■ Image sizes should be as small as possible while still maintaining its visual integrity. ■ Keep large images well below 100k. Ideally, large photographic images should be between 30k – 70k. Smaller images can be reduced below 10k ■ Use .JPG for photos and .PNG or .GIF for flat images like icons or logos. ■ Make image's H x W size the same as the size in which they will be displayed on desktop. Avoid uploading images that are much larger. ■ If you don't have access to image editing software, you can use the free online tool Pixlr.com.

NOTE ABOUT META KEYWORDS: They're no longer important. Google, the top search engine (used 2/3 of the time), and Yahoo ignore keywords when ranking pages. Bing only uses them to identify sites abusing keywords, which could hurt your ranking.

Example of a web page optimized for the keyword phrase “adopt a gorilla”.

Inbound Link → Third party blog linking to optimized page.
Find out how you can [adopt a gorilla](#).

Internal Link → Organization's home page.
Adopt a Gorilla

Page Title → Adopt a Gorilla – Organization Name

Page URL → www.organization.com/adopt-a-gorilla

Example of ALT Text for this image:
Adopt this baby mountain gorilla from Rwanda.

<h1> Header Tag →

Adopt a Gorilla Today

Copy → The first 150-160 characters should be a very clear and compelling lead-in to the content on this page that would include your keywords. It may be the text that is displayed in search engine results. Treat this text as if it were an ad. It may be the text that will compel a user to visit your website.

Example of Meta Description for this page:
Symbolically adopt a gorilla. Proceeds support rescued orphan gorillas at GRACE center in Congo and mountain gorilla protection patrols in Rwanda.

How to set up an adoption.
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How search engine results affect your click-through rate.

Below is an example of a Google search result for the keyword phrase “adopt a gorilla”. The page title, URL, and in some cases, the meta description, can influence the user’s decision to click-through to your website. This is probably the most important part of the content on your page. Treat it as if you were writing an ad.



Several sources were referenced in developing these guidelines. Among them were:

Aaron Wall, *SEO Book* (<http://www.seobook.com/>)

Moz (<http://moz.com/>)

Google Analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics/>)