



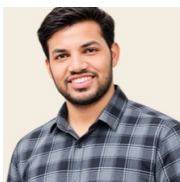
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Free Cheat sheet

How Google Search Works: 1-Page Notes

Crawl, index, rank, serve: the whole system on one page, in plain English, straight from Google's own docs.

The full video on one page: how Google finds, keeps, ranks and shows your pages, and where AI answers fit. Read it once and you'll know which part of your site to fix first.



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How to use it

1. Read the four stages once, top to bottom.
 2. Open Search Console next to it and find each stage in your own data.
 3. Do the three moves at the bottom this week.
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The 4 stages, in one table

Google's own guide splits Search into three stages: crawling, indexing and serving. I split serving into two (ranking and the results page) because that is where most confusion lives.

Stage	What Google does	What breaks it	Where you check
1. Crawling	A program called Googlebot finds URLs (mostly through links and sitemaps), downloads them and renders the JavaScript, like a browser.	robots.txt blocks, pages behind a login, server errors, pages nothing links to.	Search Console > Settings > Crawl stats; URL Inspection.
2. Indexing	Google reads the text, title, images and video, groups near-duplicate pages, and picks one 'canonical' version to keep.	A leftover noindex tag, thin or duplicate pages, low quality. Google says not every page it processes gets indexed.	Search Console > Pages (indexing report).
3. Ranking	When someone searches, Google pulls matching pages from its index and sorts them by relevance and usefulness, using location, language and device.	A page that doesn't answer the search, weak trust signals, a slow or broken mobile page.	Search Console > Performance (queries, average position).
4. The results page	Ads, a map pack, videos, AI Overviews and websites all share one screen.	Having no Business Profile, no video, no page good enough to be cited.	Search your main keyword yourself on a phone.

What Google actually rewards (its words, not mine)

☐ Meaning, not exact words.

Google lists systems like BERT, RankBrain and neural matching that connect words to concepts, so a page can rank without repeating the exact phrase.

☐ Links and mentions still count.

Google's ranking systems guide names 'link analysis systems and PageRank' as active systems that use links to understand what pages are about.

☐ Helpful, people-first content.

Google's helpful content guidance asks if a reader would 'leave feeling their goal was met'. The old helpful content system became part of core ranking in March 2024.

☐ Original work over copies.

Google runs 'original content systems' and 'deduplication systems' so the source beats the rewrite.

☐ Fresh content only where freshness matters.

Freshness systems help for news and new releases. Changing a date without changing the page is listed by Google as a warning sign.

☐ Nobody can pay for rank.

Google's docs: it 'doesn't accept payment to crawl a site more frequently, or rank it higher.' Anyone selling that is lying.

Where AI Overviews fit

AI Overviews and AI Mode pull from the same index. Google says there are 'no additional requirements' to appear in them: the page must be indexed and eligible to show with a snippet. So the AI answer is not a separate game. If stages 1 to 3 are broken, you don't get cited either. Traffic from AI Overviews and AI Mode is counted inside the normal Search Console Performance report under the 'Web' search type. There is no separate AI tab in Google's tool

as of October 2026.

Bing is different. Bing Webmaster Tools has an AI Performance report (public preview since early 2026) that shows how often Copilot and Bing AI summaries cite your pages. It is free and worth turning on.

Your first 3 moves this week

1 Check you exist

Type `site:yourdomain.com` into Google. No results means stage 1 or 2 is broken. Fix that before anything else.

2 Set up Search Console

Add your site at search.google.com/search-console. A Domain property needs a DNS TXT record and covers every version of your site (http, https, www). Then submit your sitemap.

3 Rename your homepage title

If your title tag says 'Home', change it to what you do and where. Example: 'Emergency Plumber in Pune | Sharma Plumbing'. Google's own docs call vague titles like 'Home' a mistake.

Sources

- Google Search Central: In-depth guide to how Google Search works — <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/how-search-works>
- Google Search Central: A guide to Google Search ranking systems — <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/ranking-systems-guide>
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- Search Engine Land: Bing Webmaster Tools AI Performance report — <https://searchengineland.com/bing-webmaster-tools-testing-new-ai-performance-report-468039>

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