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Free Checklist

SEO Basics Checklist

What died, what Google says it rewards now, and a 10-minute test to see if your site is ready.

The basics that still bring customers from Google and AI answers, as a tick-box list. Run the 10-minute test at the end and you'll know exactly what to fix first.



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How to use it

1. Read 'What died' so you stop doing it.
 2. Tick through the three basics on your own site.
 3. Run the 10-minute test and fix the first box you can't tick.
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What actually died (and good riddance)

These are all named in Google's spam policies. If someone sells you one of them, walk away.



Keyword stuffing

Repeating a phrase over and over. Listed by name in Google's spam policies.



Mass-produced pages made just to rank

Google calls this 'scaled content abuse', whether a human or AI writes it.



Copied or lightly rewritten content

'Scraping' is a spam policy, and Google's original content systems favor the source.



Bought or swapped links

'Link spam' is a spam policy. Penguin, the old link spam system, has been part of core ranking since 2016.



Meta keywords tag

Google's SEO Starter Guide says Google Search doesn't use it.



Word count targets

Google: 'there's no magical word count target'.

Basic 1: Google can find and read you

☐ **site:yourdomain.com shows your pages**

Google's own first check. No results means a crawling or indexing problem.

☐ **Search Console is set up and a sitemap is submitted**

It's the only place Google tells you which pages are indexed and why others aren't.

☐ **No noindex on pages you want found**

A noindex tag tells Google not to show the page. It often gets left on after development.

☐ **robots.txt doesn't block important pages**

Blocked pages can't be crawled, and Google can't see a noindex on a blocked page either.

☐ **Your main text is real text, not inside images**

Google indexes text, so words baked into images are hard for it to use.

Basic 2: Each page clearly answers one need

☐ **Every page has its own descriptive title**

Google's title docs warn against vague titles like 'Home' and boilerplate repeated across pages.

☐ **One clear H1 that matches the title**

Google recommends making the main title visually clear, for example in the first visible H1.

☐ **The answer is near the top**

Google's people-first test asks whether a reader leaves feeling their goal was met.

☐ **It's clear who wrote it and why you know**

Google's 'Who, How, Why' guidance; of E-E-A-T, Google says trust is most important.

☐ **Pages link to each other with descriptive anchor text**

Google says most new pages it finds are discovered through links.

Basic 3: Other people trust you

☐ **Google Business Profile claimed (if you meet customers face to face)**

It's free and puts you on Maps and the local pack.

☐ **Same name, address and phone everywhere**

Consistent details help Google and AI tools match mentions of you to one business.

☐ **At least a few real sites mention or link to you**

Google lists link analysis and PageRank among its active ranking systems.

☐ **Real reviews you reply to**

Reviews show customers, and Google, that a real business is behind the site.

Why AI answers still need these basics

Google says there are no extra requirements to appear in AI Overviews or AI Mode. The page has to be indexed and eligible for a normal snippet. So the same three basics decide whether you get cited. Bing Webmaster Tools now has a free AI Performance report (preview) to see Copilot citations.

How to spot an SEO tactic that won't last

☐ **It promises a guaranteed #1 ranking**

Google doesn't guarantee crawling, indexing or ranking, so nobody else can.

☐ **It helps Google but not the reader**

That's Google's own definition of search-engine-first content.

☐ **It needs you to hide something**

Hidden text, cloaking and sneaky redirects are all spam policies.

☐ **It works only at huge volume**

Hundreds of near-identical pages fall under scaled content abuse or doorway abuse.

The 10-minute 'is my site ready' test

1 Minute 1

Search site:yourdomain.com. Are your main pages there?

2 Minute 2

Open yourdomain.com/robots.txt. No 'Disallow: /'?

3 Minute 3 to 4

View source on your homepage (Ctrl+U). Search 'noindex' and read the <title>. Does it say what you do?

4**Minute 5 to 7**

Run your homepage through PageSpeed Insights on mobile. Are LCP under 2.5s, INP under 200ms and CLS under 0.1?

5**Minute 8 to 9**

Search your business name. Do your Business Profile and correct phone number show?

6**Minute 10**

Search your main service + city. Write down who ranks. That's your real competition.

Sources

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