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What's the Best URL Structure for SEO?

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SEO 101: What's the Best URL Structure for SEO?

Many of your visitors will come to your website by clicking on a link, so you may wonder if it really matters what's in the actual URL of a specific page.

It may surprise you to know that when it comes to on-site SEO, **what your URLs look like is actually really important.**

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What is URL Structure?

Your website URL works as your address on the web. It's the most direct way for someone to visit a page on your website. If you're not familiar with the term, the URL is the thing that starts with either www or http.

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In the early stages of starting a website, you want to sit down and figure out a standard structure for your website URLs. *(If your website is already established and growing, it's not too late to do this now, it just might require more work.)*

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Your URLs **always** start with the root domain for your website (e.g. *www.yourwebsitename.com*), so what you want to define is what follows for individual pages.

Your URL structure will directly relate to your larger site architecture. You want your URLs to both reference what's on the specific page, as well as help situate the website visitor to where this page belongs on the larger website. For example, the URL for a post on your blog should look something like this: *www.yourwebsitename.com/blog/nameofyourblogpost*

At a glance to the URL, any visitor who reached the post through an outside link would quickly be able to see that they're on a blog, as well some basic information about the specific blog post on the page.

Why Does URL Structure Matter?

Your URL structure matters for a few key reasons.

1   First, for Google to consistently deliver relevant results to searchers, it has to know **what each page in its index is about.** The URL is one of the most important parts of the page Google looks at to determine what a page is about.

2   Next, an intuitive URL structure makes your site **easier to navigate for users**. If someone browsing a retail website for clothes finds themselves on the page *www.clothesretailer.com/womens/dresses/nameofspecificdress*, they know the page belongs in the two categories that precede the final part of the html: women's clothes and dresses. Savvy web users also know they can delete the last couple of parts of the URL (dresses/nameofspecificdress) to get back to the larger selection of women's clothes.

3   And lastly, the same thing that makes a good URL structure intuitive for users is good for search engines too. The search engine crawler can more **easily make the relevant connections between different pages on your website** – it can see that a particular item belongs in the same category as other dresses (even if "dress" isn't in the product name), which belong in the larger category of women's clothes on the site – information that helps the crawler better understand what different sections of the website are about and how they relate to each other.

As an added benefit, having those extra categories precede the specific keyword or product name in your URL adds in some extra relevant keywords without creating a URL that's spammy. That gives Google just a little bit more information to make sure it understands what's on the page and knows what keywords the page should show up in search for.

7 Tips for Creating a Good URL Structure

The URL is a pretty basic part of on-site optimization, but one that it's important to get right. Here are a few good ways to make sure you use your URLs wisely.

1. Always edit a page's URL to be relevant.

A surprising number of websites will still use automatically generated URLs that look like a string of gibberish. That's skipping a big SEO opportunity, while also creating a more confusing experience for your visitors.

The first and most important thing you need to do for your website's URLs is to simply commit to **customizing each one based on what's on the web page**.

2. Follow a standard URL structure.

As discussed above, this will relate to your website's overall organization and is an important rule to follow. **Determine what categories and subcategories you'll be using** and how you'll portray them in the URLs of web pages that belong in each category.

Be careful not to let things get too complicated here – too many categories will bog down your URLs and make them confusing rather than helpful: *www.clothesretailer.com/womens/dresses/nameofspecificdress* is an intuitive URL structure, while *www.clothesretailer.com/womens/dresses/short-sleeves/purple/floral/knee-length/nameofspecificdress* is taking things too far.

Stick to the main categories that are important for making your website more intuitive in its organization, and be as consistent as possible in the URL structure you use across the site.

3. Keep it short and simple.

Good URLs are short and to the point. Make sure you aren't filling yours with any unnecessary words or characters, and **avoid keyword stuffing**. Having the same keyword in your URL more than once won't do you any good.

While most of your visitors will use links or bookmarks to access specific pages of your website rather than going to the URL directly, you want it to at least be plausible that someone could remember a specific URL if they wanted to.

4. Use your primary keyword.

For every page on your website, you should have a primary target keyword in mind that you want it to rank for in the search engines. Obviously this should be something that specifically describes what's on the web page, while also being a common term used by people looking for what's on the page.

Make sure your primary keyword is part of the page's URL. It may work to simply use the keyword as the part of the URL specific to your page (e.g. *www.yourwebsitename.com/relevant-category/primary-keyword*).

If the web page is for an article or blog post, the main words in the article's headline can usually be pulled out to make a strong headline that includes the primary keyword and clearly describes what's on the page. For example, a post called *10 Tips to Find the Perfect Summer Dress* that has the target keyword "summer dress", could become the URL *www.clothesretailer.com/blog/find-perfect-summer-dress*

5. Use hyphens to separate words.

You can't include spaces in a URL, so SEO best practice is to use hyphens to separate words. This will signal to Google where the breaks between words are, and make it easier for your visitors to understand URLs than if the words all ran together.

6. Remove stop words.

You want URLs to be short and simple, which means you never need things like pronouns and articles. So when translating a page title into a URL structure, drop any common stop words in the title, such as: *a, the, and, or, but, an, of, etc.*

7. Use canonical tags where needed.

This part's a little more technical, but still important. You don't want Google registering different versions of the same page on your website as distinct pages. So if you have the same web page that's tied to more than one URL for any reason, you're diluting its SEO value.

The most common version of this is when you have web pages for both *http://yourwebsite.com* and *www.yourwebsite.com*, or if you have a secure version of a page at *https://yourwebsite.com* along with the two versions mentioned above. Whatever the reason, you want each URL for the same page to be consolidated in the eyes of Google so that a link back to one of them counts for all versions.

You can communicate that to Google by using the canonical tag on every variation of the page that clarifies which URL should be considered the main URL to represent all versions.

Setting Your URL Structure

Getting a standard URL structure into place can take some time and planning, but once you have your main structure defined, picking the right URL for each web page on your site can be one of the easiest parts of on-site SEO. Make sure you customize your URLs for best results every time. It's an easy way to improve your SEO and create a better visitor experience in a small way.

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