

How search works

Understand the basics of search engine optimization (SEO)

Keyword research and website structure

Video

Keyword research and recommendations

3 min

Video

Daniel - Steps and tips a beginner digital marketer should take to optimize a website for SEO

4 min

Video

Organize your website's pages: Website structure and navigation

6 min

Ungraded Plugin Practice

Structure an e-commerce website

10 min

Reading

Site hierarchy best practices

20 min

Practice Quiz

Test your knowledge: Keyword research and website structure

4 questions

Review: Understand search engine optimization (SEO)

Site hierarchy best practices

Organizing a site hierarchy makes it easier for Google search engines to crawl and index the pages on your site. **Crawling** is the process of finding new or updated pages. An organized site hierarchy also ensures that URLs are simple and readable, enhances SEO, and makes it easier for customers to find what they want on your site. This reading will help you understand best practices for organizing a site hierarchy.

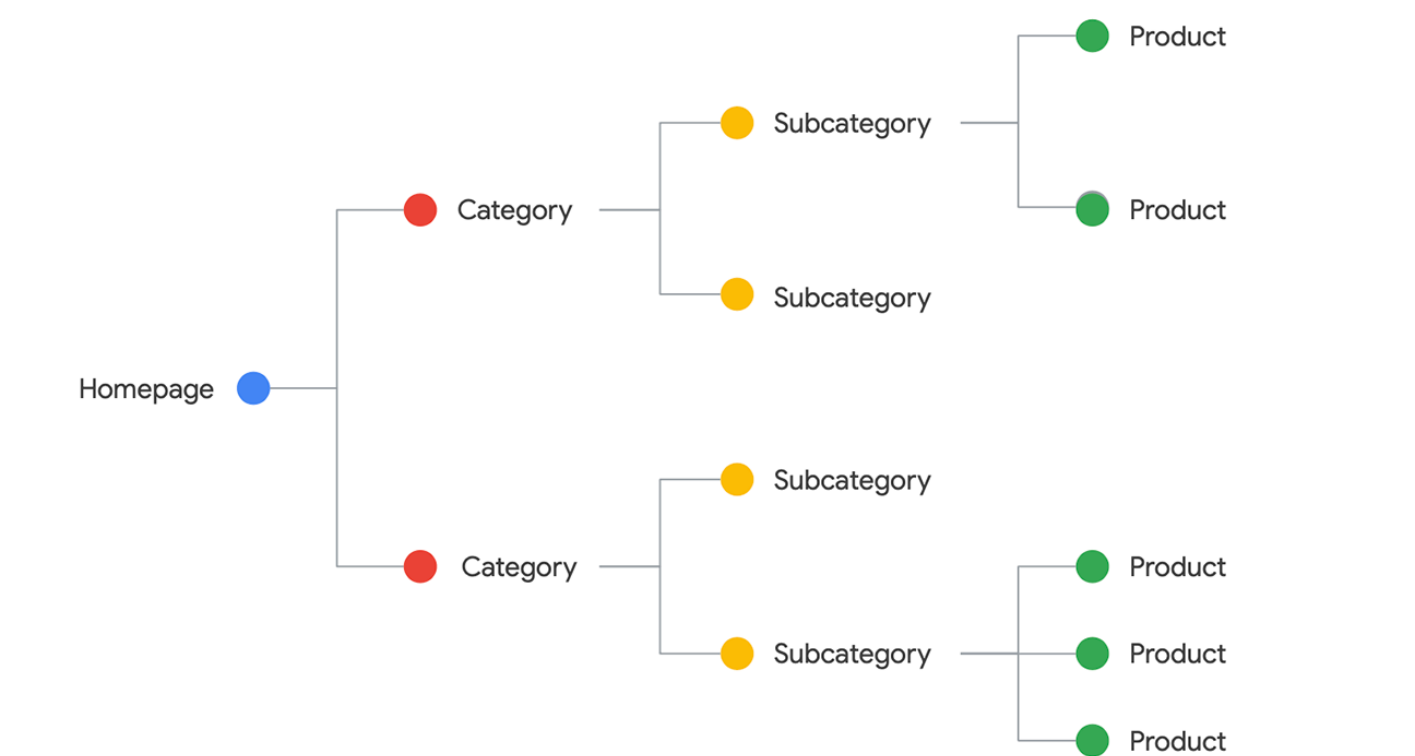
Planning your site hierarchy

Every website has a homepage—also known as the root page. This is the starting point for creating your site hierarchy. It's also the page that many of your customers will land on when they first visit your site.

The homepage, which is at the top level of your site hierarchy, should contain general information about your business or products. The **subpages**, or lower-level pages that appear below the homepage, should contain more specific information, such as product details.

You may have three or four levels of subpages within your site hierarchy. Each level includes more specific information than the previous level. Some sites include more than four levels, but it's usually best to make every page no more than three or four clicks away from the homepage.

Here is an example of how the site hierarchy might be organized for an e-commerce website, starting with the homepage and then leading to three levels of subpages: category pages, subcategory pages, and product pages.



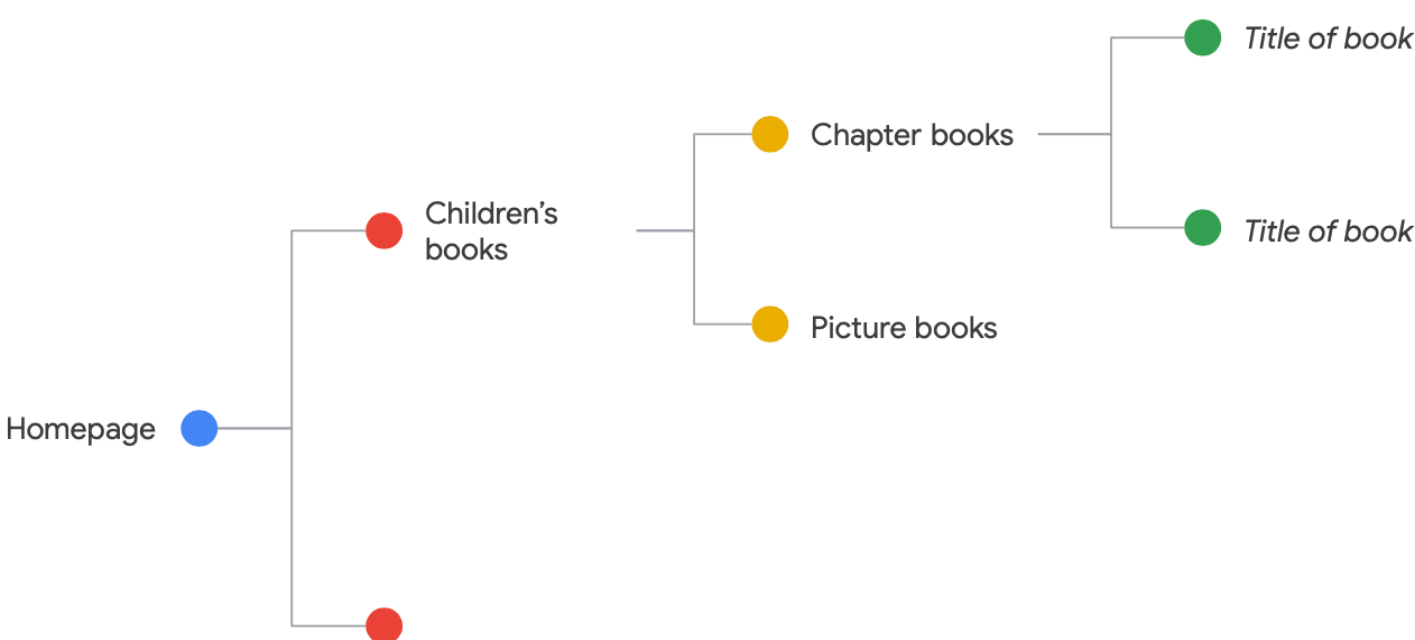
Imagine you work for an online bookstore. The homepage for the online bookstore would feature content that interests the majority of their customers, such as current deals, new releases, and bestsellers.

The first level of site hierarchy below the homepage would include category pages, which group similar content or products together. For example, the categories for an online bookstore might include fiction, nonfiction, and children's books.

The second level of site hierarchy would include subcategory pages, which are pages that relate to the category pages. For example, underneath the category page for children's books, the website might include subcategories for chapter books, picture books, graphic novels, boxed sets, and other related subjects.

The third level of site hierarchy would include more specific information, such as a product detail page for a specific children's book title.

The site hierarchy below demonstrates how a portion of the online bookstore's website might be organized.



Using breadcrumbs

Let's say a visitor finds their way to the product detail page for a specific children's book, but then they want to browse other books. How do they return to a broader selection of books? One option would be to use **breadcrumbs**, which is a row of internal links at the top or bottom of the page that allows visitors to quickly navigate back to a previous section or the homepage.

Breadcrumbs typically begin with the homepage and include links for each level in the site hierarchy leading up to the page the visitor is currently on.

For example, the online bookstore's breadcrumbs would start with the homepage, then include a link to the category page, and end with a link to the subcategory page. The breadcrumbs below demonstrate how this would be laid out:

[Home](#) > [Category](#) > [Subcategory](#)

A visitor who lands on the product detail page for a specific book title would encounter a breadcrumb trail similar to this:

[Home](#) > [Children's Books](#) > [Chapter Books](#)

By clicking on one of these breadcrumb links, the visitor will be able to return to a broader selection of books.

Using simple, descriptive URLs

Another best practice for site hierarchy is to create URLs that are simple and descriptive. The text in the URLs should describe the content on the page. This makes it easy for visitors to understand what they'll find when they visit that page. This also enhances SEO by making it easier for search engines to understand what the page is about.

Best practices for URLs

Keep URLs as short as possible.

- URLs that are too long can overwhelm or confuse your visitors.
- Shorter URLs make it easier for visitors to share a link to your page.

Make URLs easy to understand.

- Visitors should be able to tell where a link will take them when they click on the URL.
 - For example, if you're creating a URL for a subcategory page for mystery books, you might use a URL like this: <https://www.booksgalore.com/fiction/mystery>. The visitor will know they are visiting a website about books. They'll also know that the link will take them to mystery books within the fiction category. *Note:* the Books Galore is fictional and the link does not work.
- URLs should include words instead of cryptic numbers that don't mean anything to the visitor. You'll also want to avoid using generic words like "page1" or excessive keywords like "books-fiction-books-fictionbooks" in your URL.
- Keep in mind that URLs are visible in search engine results, which is why it's important to make sure your URLs are user-friendly.

Keep URLs updated.

- A broken link may occur if a webpage is deleted, or if the content is moved to a different location. **Broken links** are links that lead to webpages that no longer exist.

Create useful 404 pages.

- Occasionally visitors may land on a **404 page**, which is a page that informs the user that the webpage they were trying to visit does not exist.
- 404 pages with a vague message or no guidance on what to do next will lead the visitor to a dead end.
- Custom 404 pages help guide the visitor back to a working page on your site.

Key takeaways

Following best practices for organizing a site hierarchy is important because it makes it easier for visitors to find what they need. It also makes it easier for search engines to crawl and index your site. Following these best practices will help users navigate your site, improve SEO, and make it easier for search engines to understand how the pages on your site relate to each other.

Resources for more information

To learn more about site hierarchy best practices, read this article:

- [Google Search Central](#) [🔗](#): Learn more about organizing your site hierarchy

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