SEO Fundamentals Review Guide

- **Title tags**. The contents of a page's title tag are what appear in the browser's tab as the "name" of the current page. Title tags are important for SEO, and fortunately, easy to optimize.

  - In general, keep titles to 65 - 75 characters long. Most search engines don't display more than this in search results.

    - If you're targeting particularly long keywords, or include branding text in your title tags, it's okay to go longer.

  - Make sure your page's keyword(s) appear as early in the title as possible.

    - E.g., **JavaScript Error Handling in a Nutshell** might be a good choice for an article on…Well, JavaScript Error Handling.

  - **Write titles like headlines**. Titles appear as the "heading" in search results. Emotionally compelling titles don't directly improve search rankings, but they do improve click-through rates. And, the more popular search engines perceive your site to be, the better it will rank.

    - CopyBlogger has great resources for writing headlines.

- **Meta tags**. There are several different meta tags, but one stands out for our purposes.

  - **Description**.

    - The description tag looks like: `<meta name="description" content="...">`, where your textual description of the page is the value of the tag's `content` attribute.

    - Search engines often use the `content` of a meta description to provide an excerpt of a page's contents. The description tag doesn't directly affect rankings anymore, but, as with well-written titles, compelling descriptions do garner click-throughs.

      - Note that they don't *always* use the meta description this way. Sometimes, they'll ignore it in favor of what they deem the most relevant text on the page.

  - Keep your descriptions under 160 characters. Search engines rarely display

anything longer.

- Search engines will create their own snippets if you don't provide a description. These snippets will always contain the keywords a user searched for. That means that, if your page targets multiple keywords, or features content about several different topics, it's okay not to write a description tag. In these cases, the search engines do a good job of writing targeted descriptions on their own.

- **Unique and relevant title tags**. Each page on a site should have a **unique** title tag. The title should accurately and succinctly describe its page. Titles are also shown in search results, so it's important that they're relevant to users' needs.

- **Optimize URLs**. Your site's URL structure has a major impact on its search engine rankings.

  - When possible, include keywords in your URL. You might serve an article about Bananas Foster at `http://peleke.me/blog/bananas-foster-recipe`, for instance.

  - Make sure URLs and page titles are as similar as possible. For instance, a page with the title '10 NPM Packages You'll Love' might be served at `.../blog/10-npm-packages-youll-love`.

  - Prefer simple URLs. `https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/skullduggery` is preferable to `https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=query%20strings%20in%20url`.

    - This is more important for users and social shares than for search engines, strictly speaking, but it's considered a best practice..

- **Optimize navigation structure**. Search engines can't crawl a site that doesn't have well-designed navigation. This means that a site's navigation structure is one of the most important factors in determining its search engine rankings.

  - Make sure your site contains at least one link to every page. This ensures search engines can in fact crawl and index your entire site.

  - Create a natural, hierarchical navigation structure.

    - REST is a good model. Good navigation is hierarchically organized in a similar manner, and might look like: `http://site.com/authors/gladwell`

    - Take a moment to read about information architecture.

- Make sure your navigation is mostly textual. In other words, use anchor *text*, rather than images, etc., to implement navigation.

- **Include breadcrumbs on larger sites**.

- **Include sitemaps**. A sitemap is effectively a set of links to all the major destinations on your website.

  - Sitemaps "help search engines find and classify content on your site that they may not have found on their own" (SEO Moz), including video, images, etc., which are traditionally very difficult for machine to understand and index.

  - Tools like XML-Sitemaps can generate sitemaps for you.

  - There are also packages, such as NPM's sitemap, that you can use to programatically generate sitemaps for dynamic sites.

- Bookmark this Technical SEO Checklist. Keep it handy often, and in time, you'll know it like the back of your hand.