

A technical guide to SEO best practices

What are the critical HTML tags for SEO?

1. Title
2. Meta description
3. Heading
4. Image alt text
5. Canonical
6. Meta robots

#1 Title tag

The title tag serves as the headline in search engine results pages (SERP).

Your title tag should be:

1. Unique
2. Specific
3. Under 60 characters

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#1 Title tag (cont.)

Include the title tag by adding it inside the <head> tag of your HTML document.

For publishing on ibm.com, title tags are required to include the vertical symbol followed by “IBM”.

<title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>
  </head>
  <body>
  </body>
</html>
```

#2 Meta description tag

The meta description tag usually serves as the description or caption in search engine results pages (SERP). Sometimes SERP will use other copy from your webpage.

Your meta description tag should be:

- Focused on intent
- Be concise
- Under 160 characters

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#2 Meta description tag (cont.)

Include the meta description tag by adding it inside the <head> tag of your HTML document.

<meta name="description" content="How AI and machine learning can automate processes to boost your productivity">

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>
    <meta name="description" content="How AI and machine
      learning can automate processes to boost your
      productivity.">
  </head>

  <body>
  </body>
</html>
```


#3 Heading (H1-H6) tags

Heading tags structure your webpage for readers and search bots alike:

- Don't use more than one H1
- Keep a shallow structure - H1 for the title, H2 for section headings, and H3 for subsections
- Treat each heading as an additional opportunity to rank in search

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>
    <meta name="description" content="How AI and machine
      learning can automate processes to boost your
      productivity.">
  </head>
  <body>
    <h1>10 ways to automate your business</h1>
    <section>
      <h2>Keep track of business expenses</h2>
      <h3>AI gives you the ability to capture and
        collect receipts in real-time.</h3>
    </section>
  </body>
</html>
```

#4 Image alt text

Image alt text isn't just for accessibility; it help search bots index your images:

- Be descriptive
- Be concise
- Ambient images, such as textures or backgrounds, should not have alt text

```

```

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>
    <meta name="description" content="How AI and machine learning can automate processes to boost your productivity.">
  </head>
  <body>
    <h1>10 ways to automate your business</h1>
    <section>
      <h2>Keep track of business expenses</h2>
      <h3>AI gives you the ability to capture and collect receipts in real-time.</h3>
      
    </section>
  </body>
</html>
```


#5 Canonical tag

Using the canonical tag prevents problems caused by identical or "duplicate" content appearing on multiple URLs and helps establish "domain authority".

Add the canonical tag in the <head> tag of your HTML document. It must reflect the exact location (URL) of your webpage.

```
<link rel="canonical" href="https://ibm.com/automation/automatation-for-business-2020/">
```

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>
    <meta name="description" content="How AI and machine learning can automate processes to boost your productivity.">
    <link rel="canonical" href="https://ibm.com/automation/automatation-for-business-2020/">
  </head>
  <body>
    <h1>10 ways to automate your business</h1>
    <section>
      <h2>Keep track of business expenses</h2>
      <h3>AI gives you the ability to capture and collect receipts in real-time.</h3>
      
    </section>
  </body>
</html>
```

#6 Meta robots tag

The meta robots tag specifies how your webpage should be crawled by search bots:

- **noindex** — page should not be indexed
- **index** — page should be indexed
- **nofollow** — links on the page should not be followed
- **follow** — links on the page should be followed, even if the page is not to be indexed
- **noimageindex** — images on the page should not be indexed
- **noarchive** — search results should not show a cached version of the page
- **unavailable_after** — page should not be indexed beyond a certain date.

#6 Meta robots tag (cont.)

Add the meta robots tag in the <head> tag of your HTML document. You can use any number of parameters in a single meta robots tag, separated by a comma.

```
<meta name="robots"
content="index, follow">
```

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>
    <meta name="description" content="How AI and machine
learning can automate processes to boost your productivity.
">
    <link rel="canonical" href="https://ibm.com/automation/
automatation-for-business-2020/">
    <meta name="robots" content="index, follow">
  </head>

  <body>
    <h1>10 ways to automate your business</h1>

    <section>
      <h2>Keep track of business expenses</h2>
      <h3>AI gives you the ability to capture and
collect receipts in real-time.</h3>
      
    </section>
  </body>
</html>
```

Semantics matter

Using semantic HTML tags helps search bots better understand your web page's structure, which in turn helps your page rank higher in search results.

Yes to semantic tags

For better indexing, use semantic tags in your markup. Consider tags like:

- header
- nav
- menu
- figure
- figcaption
- section
- aside
- footer

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>
    <meta name="description" content="How AI and machine learning can automate
    processes to boost your productivity.">
    <link rel="canonical" href="https://ibm.com/automation/
    automataion-for-business-2020/">
    <meta name="robots" content="index,follow">
  </head>
  <body>
    <header></header>

    <h1>10 ways to automate your business</h1>

    <section>
      <h2>Keep track of business expenses</h2>

      <h3>AI gives you the ability to capture and collect receipts in
      real-time.</h3>

      <figure>
        
        <figcaption>Photo: Getty Images</figcaption>
      </figure>
    </section>

    <footer></footer>
  </body>
</html>
```


No to non-semantic tags

Non-semantic tags provide zero sense of webpage structure to search bots.

Reserve tags like <div> for inner containers required for correct styling with CSS.

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>10 ways to automate your business | IBM</title>
    <meta name="description" content="How AI and machine learning can automate
    processes to boost your productivity.">
    <link rel="canonical" href="https://ibm.com/automation/
    automata-tion-for-business-2020/">
    <meta name="robots" content="index,follow">
  </head>

  <body>
    <div></div>

    <div>10 ways to automate your business</div>

    <div>
      <div>Keep track of business expenses</div>

      <div>AI gives you the ability to capture and collect receipts in
      real-time.</div>

      <div>
        
        <div>Photo: Getty Images</div>
      </div>
    </div>

    <div></div>
  </body>
</html>
```


Other considerations

- Mobile-first indexing
- Speed
- Meaningful URLs

Mobile-first indexing

Search engines now use the mobile version of your webpage for ranking and indexing.

There's no additional action so long as you're following the practices previously outlined along with responsive web design.

Speed

How fast your webpage loads is now a factor for Google search rankings.

Carefully consider the UX/UI of your webpage.

Features like animations and transitions can add significant weight to your webpage.

Meaningful URLs

URLs should provide context to your webpage.

ibm.com/resources/automate-your-business

is more meaningful than

ibm.com/resources/page-104