

Best Practices for Search Engine Optimization

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DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

The path to getting on Google and other search engines begins at home. This document contains a few tips that you should keep in mind when building your website. Please keep in mind that the changes you make to your site won't immediately (it might take up to a week for them to pick up on your changes) be reflected on Google, et all.

There are two key methods to help ensure that your site ranks in Google searches: proper use of meta data and HTML code and having meaningful content.

NOTE: This document is designed to help you do this effectively and efficiently. As information changes, this document will be updated. In that sense, it should be considered a work in progress.

META INFORMATION AND HTML CODE

The first thing that you should do when building your website from the template files provided by the Department of Communications and Public Affairs is to edit the meta information.

To do this, locate the `<head>` tag within the code view of the template files provided (they end with the `.dwt` extension). Inside these tags, you'll find three main meta tags that we're concerned with:

```
<meta name="author" content="Communications and Public Affairs" />
<meta name="Description" content="department home page" />
<meta name="Keywords" content="Western Communications public affairs
news media relations graphic standards web photos guidelines" />
```

Author

You should change the author of the site to be your department. Do not use any one person's name.

Description

The importance of the description arises when you do a Google search for a website. The description that comes up below the title is whatever you set. You should change the `<meta name="Description">` to be a description about your site. You should limit it to one professional-sounding sentence of no more than 20 words (at most):

Acceptable: The Faculty of Health Sciences at The University of Western Ontario

Unacceptable: FHS at UWO. Welcome to our website!

Keywords

Keywords should reflect the main content users will find on your website. Keep your keywords as “solid” as possible. Think about what users would use to find your website. While keywords used to be much more important in search engine relevance than they are today, they shouldn’t be ignored.

Keywords should be separated with commas. Terms without commas are treated as “keyphrases” and are considered one term (i.e.: “earth studies” versus “earth, studies”).

Acceptable keywords: heath sciences, western, undergraduate, graduate, nursing, kinesiology

The W3C recommends commas in HTML 4.01 specification:

*Some indexing engines look for META elements that define a **comma-separated list of keywords/phrases**, or that give a short description. Search engines may present these keywords as the result of a search. The value of the name attribute sought by a search engine is not defined by this specification. Consider*

```
<META name="keywords" content="vacation,Greece,sunshine">
```

HTML - Title

Edit your code and give your page a good title (you’ll find the text you’ll need to change between the `<title>` and `</title>` tags). Make sure you create a meaningful page title that reflects your faculty and some keywords about your content. For example:

Acceptable: Western News – Stories, *or* The University of Western Ontario

Unacceptable: Welcome!, *or* Homepage

HTML – H1, etc.

One of the most important things you can do is use HTML tags in the way they were intended. Google seems to like content and titles within heading tags (`<h1>`, `<h2>`, etc.).

Your in-page titles should be within H1 tags and be as on-topic as possible. Titles like, “Welcome to our website!” do nothing (think about how many other sites are on the Internet saying the same thing).

Titles like “The Biology Graduate Advantage at Western” might be more on topic and relevant to an actual search a user might carry out.

MEANINGFUL CONTENT

One of the most important parts of ensuring that you place well in a search engine like Google is writing good, relevant copy.

On Topic Content related to keywords

The general rule when writing copy is to write in as many keyword-friendly terms as you can without spamming (repeating the same keywords many times with no real information being provided). While being keyword-rich, it’s also important to be concise and on-topic. A viable paragraph might look like this:

Western's Department of Earth Sciences has a proud tradition of outstanding scholarship and research that continues to grow with innovative research. Our willingness to explore new approaches to problems has resulted in the department being awarded a Canada Research Chair and an NSERC Industrial Research Chair. Take the opportunity to engage your intellectual curiosity and creativity by participating in Western's cutting edge research.

In the end, regardless of your code and content, the most important thing you can do is have relevant, informative, and useful content and tools.

Good practices for content

Write easy to follow text where needed. As in everything, your content should follow these guidelines:

1. Be error free and grammatically correct. No one wants to read sloppy text.
2. Don’t put text inside images just to preserve the headline font. Not only can search engines not read it, but users can’t resize or copy and paste it if they want/need to.
3. Stay organized: keep your content on-topic. Keeping your content current will make it more likely that people will revisit you frequently to tap into your expertise.
4. Use relevant language that users might search for to find your content. For example, people might search for popular acronyms or specific pieces of content. To make sure you’re on topic with relevant searches, you can use Google’s keyword tool (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>). Just enter a keyword you’re thinking of using and see what similar terms people are using to find content similar to yours.

5. Don't let your content get stagnant. Update your content as often as possible to keep users coming back for more. A good schedule is to have something update on your landing page at least 5x/week (that works out to once a day if possible).