Actionable **WordPress** SEO Guide

Written Specifically for Beginners

Are you looking for a free WordPress SEO tutorial which will help you improve traffic? This beginner-friendly WordPress SEO guide will give you a step by step actionable process to improve your site performance in the search. I will share with you the best WordPress SEO practices and tips, which I personally use on clients websites.

WordPress is quite SEO friendly platform compared to other closed source content management systems, such as Wix and Shopify. If you want to get search traffic, WordPress is a great option. So, technically you can perform any SEO technique that you want on a WordPress site. There's no end to optimization.

Note: This SEO guide is for self-hosted WordPress websites only.

Let's start from scratch. I want to make this WordPress SEO tutorial as comprehensive as possible. So, beginners to both SEO or WordPress can benefit from this guide. I will cover all the SEO topics which should be understood by a small business to maximize clicks through search.

What is SEO and Why is it Important?

Introduction to SEO

SEO or Search Engine Optimization is a process of optimizing websites for search engines. Most top search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo use identical algorithms to [crawl and index](#)websites.

Anyone can easily optimize a website if he has some knowledge of basic HTML tags. However, if you want to master the art of SEO, you should consider improving HTML and CSS skills. It will help you adjust things on your website for better user experience.

There are many SEO techniques which SEO professionals and webmasters use to attract traffic from the search. SEO practitioners have divided SEO into 2 different categories:

1. White hat SEO

In simple terms, white hat SEO is a method of search optimization which follows [Google Webmaster Guidelines](#). Anyone who follows these methods has a better chance of getting a steady amount of traffic for the long term. Most businesses prefer to opt for this method because it is a reliable and sustainable way to increase traffic steadily for a long period.

2. Black hat SEO

When webmasters use SEO techniques which are not recommended by Google webmaster guidelines, this method is called black hat SEO. It includes a variety of techniques such as cloaking, link farms, cookie stuffing, etc…

This method is employed by often businesses who are looking for quick results. It is a quite unreliable and unpredictive way of performing SEO on any business website. So, I would not recommend you to use black hat SEO practices at any cost.

It is not a long term solution, Google de-list a website which uses black hat SEO practices. Any decent business never considers using this SEO method. Read more about [white hat and black hat SEO](#).

In this WordPress SEO guide, I will only share white hat SEO practices combined with my secret techniques which I used countless times to boost clients traffic 10x more.

WordPress Website Structure for SEO

A logically structured website has a higher chance of ranking in the [search results](#). Why? Because a well-structured website will be easier to index by search engines compared to the website which has no proper structure. One of the most important things, when you are creating your WordPress website, is to create a hierarchical website structure.

For example, let's have a look at this Wikipedia page:

As you can see that there are a lot of links on this page which are connecting multiple pages of this website altogether. When you land on 1 page, the chances are higher that you will click on any of countless links and read multiple articles. So, what's the benefit?

- It will increase page views per user and reduce bounce rate.
- A user on the website will be more engaged and easier to convert.
- Logical website structure is easier to crawl for search engines.
- Google considers this as a ranking factor, so logically structured website rank higher in the search.

Every page should be accessible to the user by links. So, they can easily navigate all the pages on a website. Please read this post on how to improve your website structure for SEO.

Create a Solid Content Strategy

HubSpot	TOPIC/TITLE	CONTENT/DETAILS	KEYWORD(S)	TARGET PERSONA(S)
MONDAY				
	12 Revealing Charts to Help You Benchmark Your Business Blogging Performance [NEW DATA]	Explain importance of blogging and how to benchmark your efforts to garuntee success	business blogging, blogging benchmarks	Owner Ollie, Mary Marketer
TUESDAY				
	Top SEO Tips Straight From the Industry Experts [INFOGRAPHIC]	Highlight SEO tips through expert advice while promoting complete guide	search engine optimization, SEO	Owner Ollie, Mary Marketer
WEDNESDAY				
	How to Craft the Right Questions for Your Next Marketing Survey	Use an exceprt from the Marketing Surveys ebook to provide readers beneficial survey best practices	marketing surveys, survey marketing	Owner Ollie, Mary Marketer
THURSDAY				

When it comes to SEO, content is quite important. Having a solid content strategy helps increase user engagement with a brand and assists a user take certain actions. Content strategy includes the words on the page, images, multimedia content on any of the platforms that your business use. Such as social media content strategy could be a little different than a website content strategy. However, the goal of any good content strategy is to attract a certain audience and help them solve a specific problem.

So, make sure that your business content strategy is relevant across every platform such as social media sites, blog, website, and offline content material. For example, if your whole website content is about 'Travel' and you out of thin air start to write content on beauty products, it won't be very good for your website.

Pick up a few topics/products and write about them. Also, avoid copying content from other websites, as search engines can identify copied content. In this post, I have talked about how to find and fix duplicate content issues.

I would highly recommend you to create a complete content strategy before starting a website. It will help you improve your site structure, SEO, and topical relevance. Read this post on developing a content strategy for the small business website.

Research Your Competitors

You can collect a lot of useful competitors information, such as their link building techniques, keyword strategy, content strategy, and more. This will be helpful to understand your market and audience as well.

Things to look for when performing competitors research

1- What are your competitor's high performing keywords. It is the easiest way to find great keywords which you can also use in your content strategy.

2- Competitors backlink strategy – which websites are linking to your competitors? You can also use those websites to create backlinks or acquire backlinks from.

3- Website structure – how they are linking content throughout the website including navigation links, footer links, category links.

You can use these [competitors research tools](#) to gather the information that I mentioned above.

Find Out Keywords
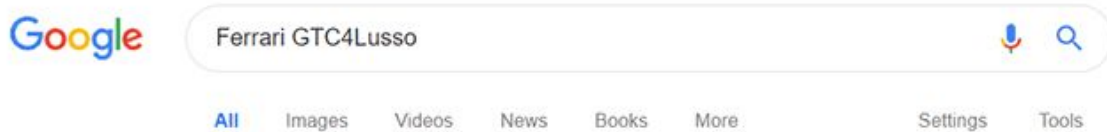
Keywords are the backbone of SEO. If you don't use good keywords, you will be having a tough time to attract search traffic.

What is a keyword?

Any query people typed in the search engines to look for things to buy, read articles and news, or finding multimedia content. So, as a business owner, you use these queries and words on your website. When people search for those exact words they could find your website in the search.

How to find great keywords to use on your site?

There are a lot of paid and free tools which could help you in finding out great keywords.

I personally use these 2 tools "Semrush" and Google Keyword Planner.

ORGANIC SEARCH POSITIONS 1 - 100 (29,161,747)

Keyword	Pos.	Volume	KD	CPC (USD)	URL	Traffic %	Costs %	Com.	Results	Trend	SERP	Last Update
ebay	1 (1)	45,500,000	92.37	1.71	www.ebay.com/	32.59	55.38	0.04	1,920,000,000			6 days ago
ebay com	1 (1)	7,480,000	82.79	0.41	www.ebay.com/	5.35	2.18	0.08	-			6 days ago
ebay motors	1 (1)	2,240,000	94.23	0.05	www.ebay.com/motors	1.60	0.07	0.09	27,000,000			6 days ago
ebay.com	1 (1)	1,220,000	80.96	0.94	www.ebay.com/	0.87	0.81	0.14	1,920,000,000			6 days ago
www.ebay.com	1 (1)	673,000	81.44	0.90	www.ebay.com/	0.48	0.43	0.05	54,900,000			5 days ago
ebay usa	1 (1)	450,000	74.72	1.63	www.ebay.com/	0.32	0.52	0.07	92,200,000			5 days ago

In Semrush, I usually enter my competitor's website and find out their top performing keywords. It saves me a lot of time. Semrush is a little expensive tool but the data it fetches is quite good.

The second method is totally free using Google Keyword Planner. It's a free tool for Google Ads advertisers to find keywords but this data can also be used in SEO too.

Log in to your Google Ads account and find Keyword Planner from the menu.

Add a keyword that you think might be searched by your audience. Keyword planner will send you similar keyword ideas based on your given keyword.

What you need to do is to look for keywords with higher monthly searches. collect all those keywords and put them in a spreadsheet.

Now, search them one by one on Google and find out which pages are currently ranked on the 1st page. If you think you can outrank them with better content and linking strategy then you should highlight those keywords on your spreadsheet.

You can also try these free keyword research tools to find out good keywords.

Install Google Analytics on WordPress

By using Google Analytics on your WordPress based website you can track users activity. It will help you understand a lot of things about your website users. I would highly recommend that you install Google Analytics. It is completely free to use and easier to install. Here's how you can install Google Analytics:

Step 1: Sign-up on the Google Analytics website [here](). Create a new website property.

Step 2: Enter your website/company name. Now add your website domain address. Choose the protocol for your website: 'http or https'. Choose an 'Industry Category' that best matches your website.

Now click on Get Tracking ID button.

Step 3: Install & Activate Google Analytics for Dashboard Plugin from the WordPress plugins directory or follow this link. After activating this plugin, Open the plugin configuration page, which is located under the Google

Analytics menu. Authorize the plugin to connect to Google Analytics using the Authorize Plugin button.

Verify Google Search Console Property

Verifying your WordPress website on Google Search Console will help you collect useful information about your website, how it appears in search, how Google sees your website, how many pages are indexed, etc...

Note: *You need a Google account in order to use Google Search Console.*
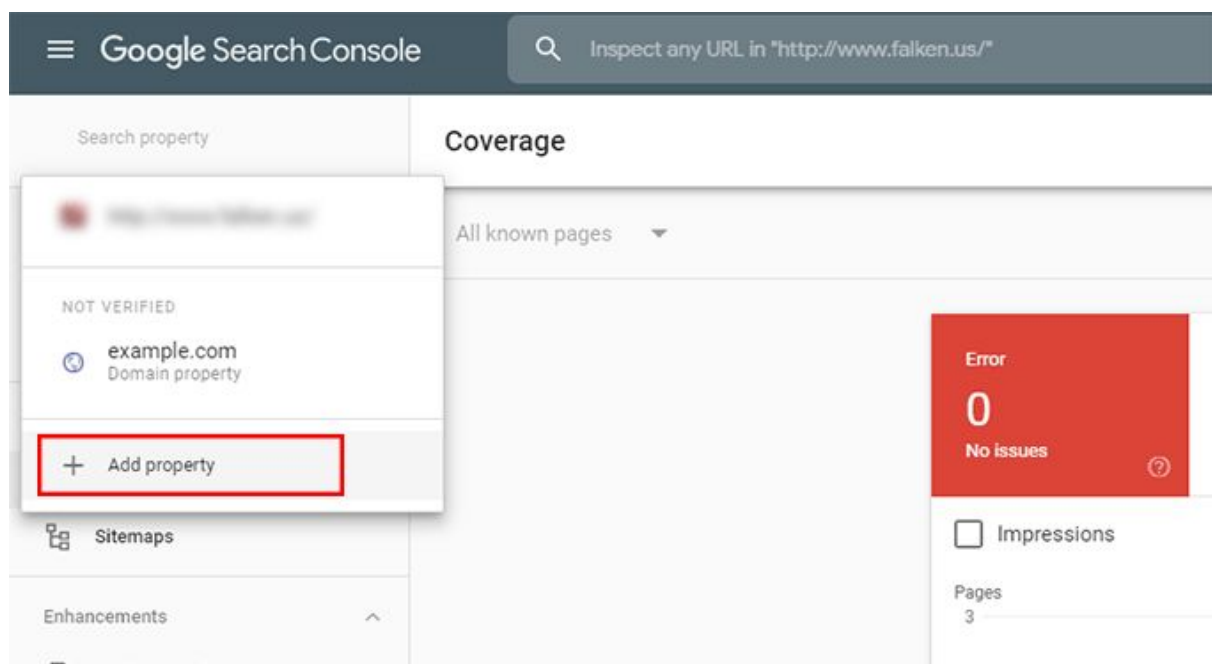
Step 1: In the Search Console home page, click on the button **Add a property**.

Step 2: Use the URL prefix method to add your website URL. Type the complete URL of your website exactly as it appears in the browser address bar, including the final / mark. Click on the **Continue** button to open the Site verification page.
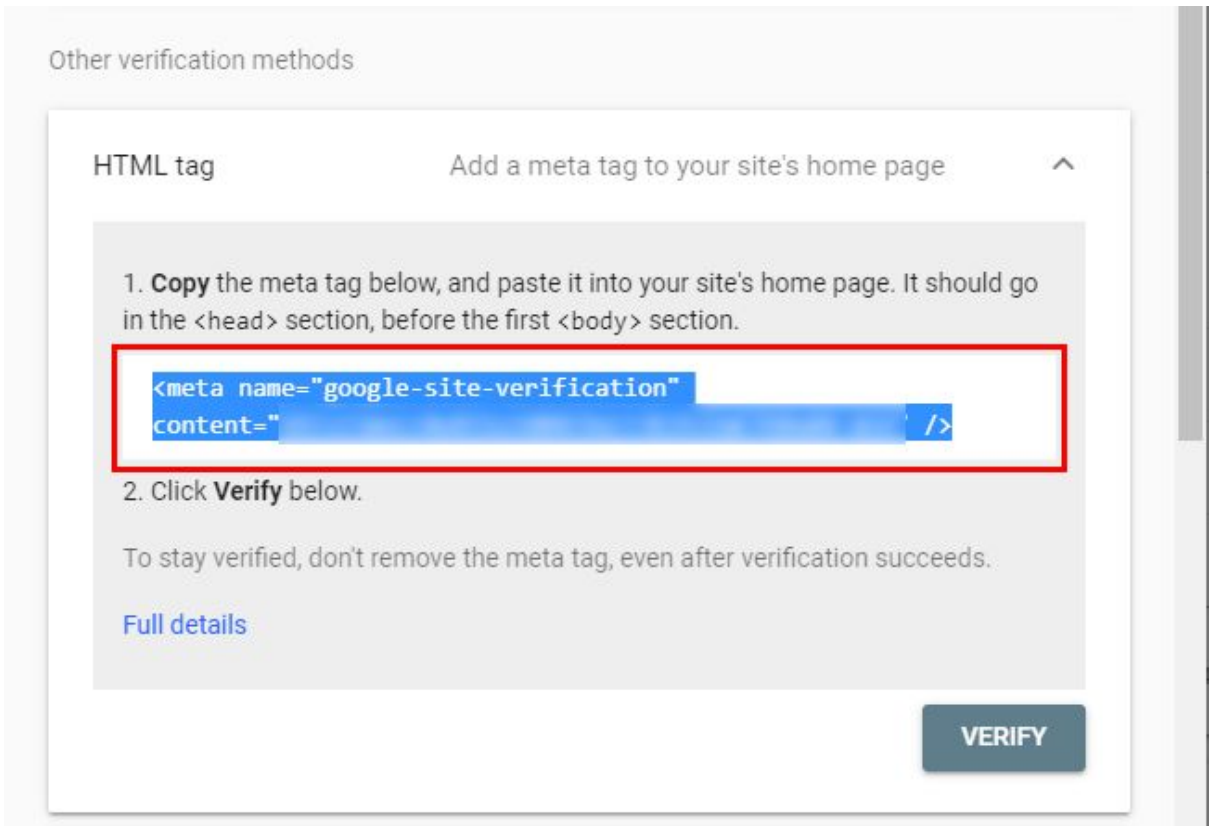
Step 3: Select HTML Tag as a verification method and copy the meta tag. Now login to your WordPress website and download and activate this plugin: Header and Footer Scripts
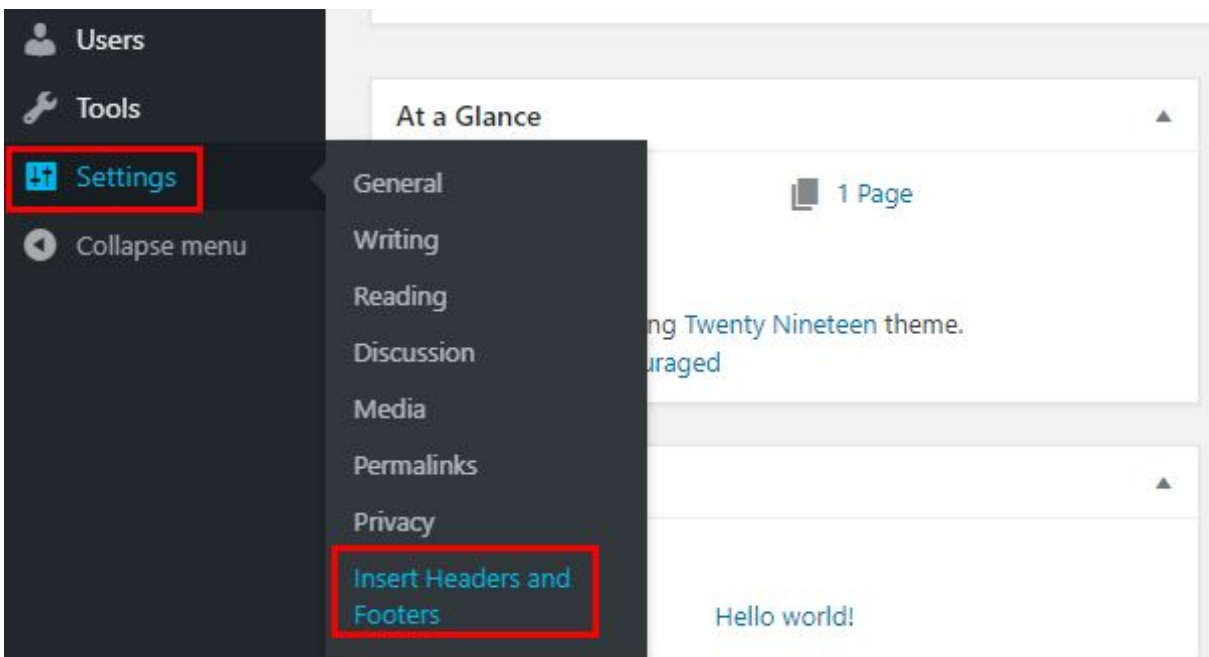
Step 4: Hover your mouse to the settings button and click on the "Insert Header and Footer" link. It will open up a new window.

Step 5: Paste the verification meta tag inside the head script section. Click on the Save button.

Step 6: Now, go back to Google Search Console and click on the Verify button.

After verification, it will take some time to get the data in your Google Search Console property. Also, if you are using multiple protocols (HTTP or HTTPs) or WWW/non-WWW prefix then you should verify them too using the same method.

Create and Submit XML Sitemap

Now that you have created a website and collected all that data, you should start notifying search engines about the existence of your website.

The best way to do it submits a sitemap. I personally submit the sitemap to top 3 search engines Google, Bing, and Yahoo. I use Yoast SEO plugin to create a sitemap but you can use a variety of WordPress XML sitemap creation plugins.

Once you are done, [submit the sitemap to Google, Bing, and Yahoo](#).

Now let's move our effort on the technical side of SEO. How to actually implement SEO techniques to improve your WordPress website's SEO.

Install and Set up Yoast SEO Plugin

Yoast SEO is one of the [best WordPress SEO plugins](#). I personally use it to optimize all my clients' websites. Here's how you can set up Yoast SEO Plugin.

Log into your WordPress website. From the sidebar, click on the Plugins > Add New. Search for "Yoast SEO". Press the install button, wait for a few seconds to let it install then click on the activate button.

Click on the SEO > General then "Configuration Wizard". It is a self-explanatory basic set up. Fill it out as best as possible and finish this wizard.

Now Go to General and click on the Features tab. It will bring should keep your settings like this:
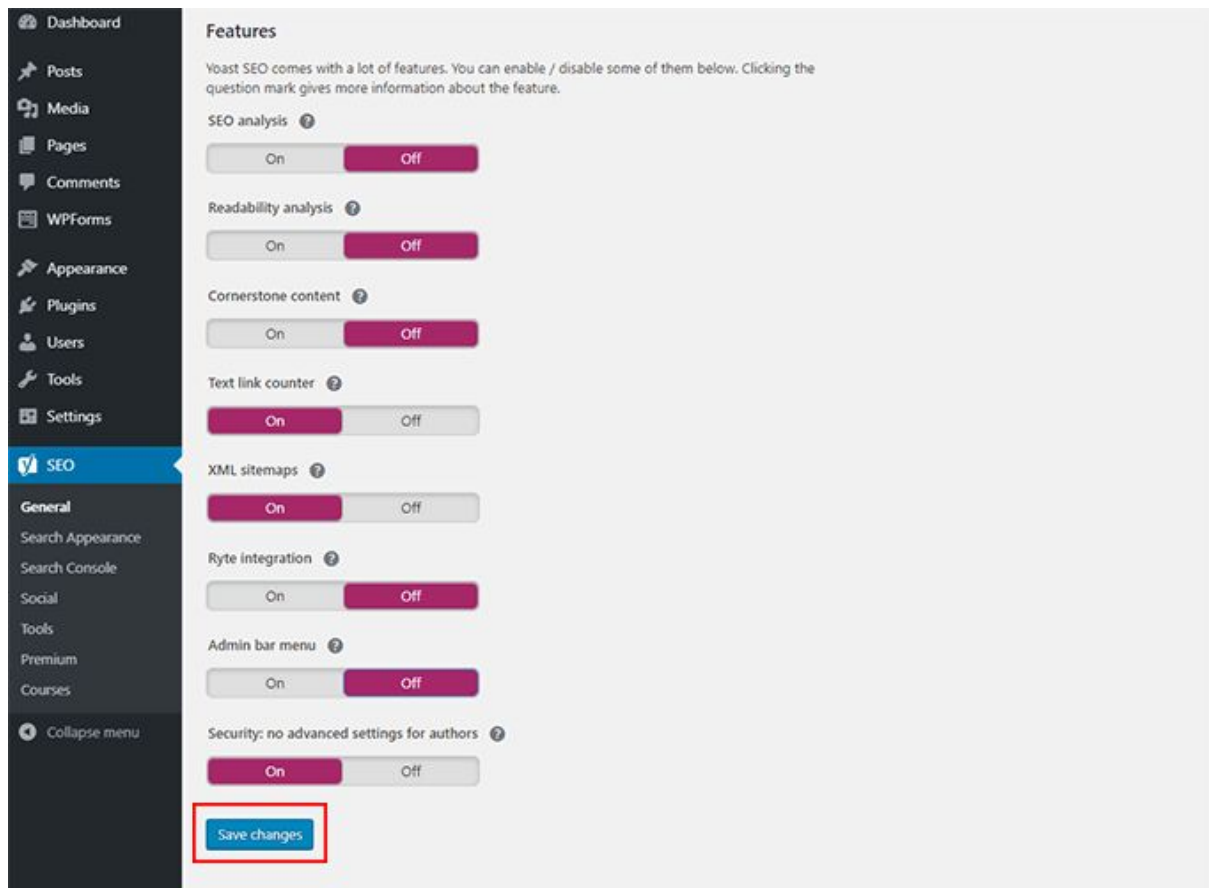
Hover Your mouse to the Yoast SEO icon then click on Search Appearance. In the General tab, you don't need to make any changes.

In the "Content Types" tab, it is already optimized by default. However, if you don't want to index either pages or blog posts on your website then you should make a change here. Otherwise, move on to the next step.

Now let's move on to the Taxonomies tab. Here you need to specify which taxonomies you want to be indexed by search engines. If you are using categories and tags then you can keep them enabled. See the screenshot below:

Search Appearance - Yoast SEO

Please enter and activate your license key for WPForms to enable automatic updates.

General   Content Types   Media   **Taxonomies**   Archives   Breadcrumbs   RSS

❓ NEED HELP? ⌄

Categories (category) ⌃

Show **Categories** in search results? ❓

[**Yes** | No]

SEO title
⊕ Insert snippet variable

[Term title] Archives [Page] [Separator] [Site title]

Meta description
⊕ Insert snippet variable

Modify your meta description by editing it right here

Yoast SEO Meta Box

[**Show** | Hide]

Tags (post_tag) ⌃

Show **Tags** in search results? ❓

[**Yes** | No]

SEO title
⊕ Insert snippet variable

[Term title] Archives [Page] [Separator] [Site title]

Meta description
⊕ Insert snippet variable

Modify your meta description by editing it right here

Yoast SEO Meta Box

[**Show** | Hide]

Formats (post_format) ⌃

Format-based archives

[**Enabled** | Disabled]

Show **Formats** in search results? ❓

[Yes | **No**]

SEO title
⊕ Insert snippet variable

[term_title] Archives [Page] [Separator] [Site title]

Meta description
⊕ Insert snippet variable

Modify your meta description by editing it right here

Category URLs

Remove the categories prefix ❓

[**Keep** | Remove]

[Save changes]

In the Archives tab, I disable author archives to be indexed by search engines because I run 1 author blog. However, if you have multiple authors then you can keep the different settings. Please see the screenshot below:
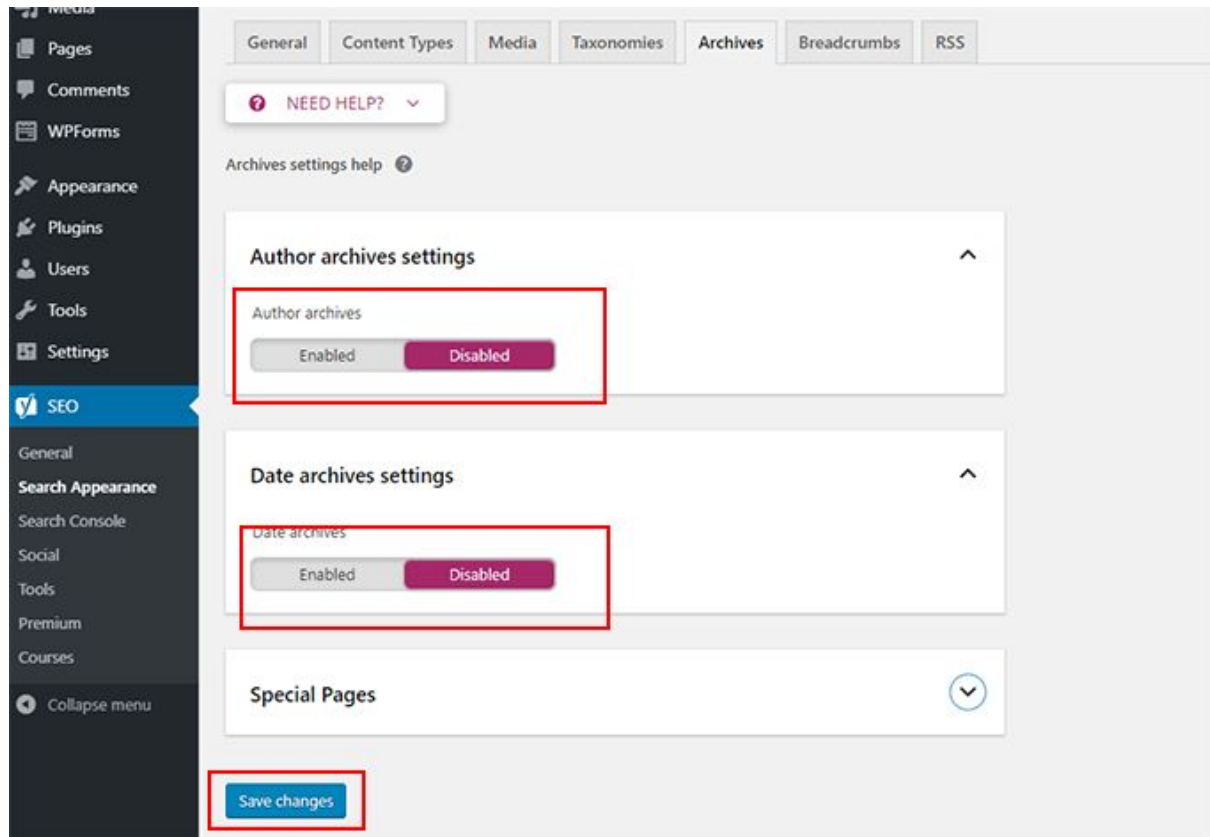
In Breadcrumbs tab, I usually use theme built-in Breadcrumbs or another plugin by the name "NavXT". You can look it up in the WordPress plugins directory. So, I also keep Yoast SEO breadcrumbs feature disabled.

How to Create XML Sitemap and Submit to Google Search Console Using Yoast SEO WordPress Plugin

Now, here comes the important part. Yoast SEO also offers an XML sitemap feature. We have already enabled this feature in the 1st step.

Now we need to go back to the Yoast SEO settings > General > Features. Click on the "?" icon right next to the XML Sitemaps heading. Click on the link "See the XML Sitemap".

It will open up a new page, which should be your WordPress website XML sitemap. Copy the link from the browser address bar.

Now, go to your Google Search Console Property and inside the sitemap settings, enter the ending part of this URL and click on the "Submit" button.

Optimize WordPress Post and Pages for SEO

Let's look at what are the best WordPress SEO practices to optimize post and pages on your website. I have covered the topic of keyword research at the beginning of this guide. We will be using those keywords to optimize our pages.

- Include your keywords in Page/post title.
- Include keywords in URL. Not all of them but 1 or 2 keywords
- Write down effective copy using keywords
- Add keywords at the beginning of your article or page.
- Use keywords in the alt text of your pages.
- Add meta title & description using the Yoast SEO plugin. Add your keywords in both of them.
- Use internal links to other relevant blog posts/pages.
- Add descriptive alt tags.
- Use proper headings on each page or post. Use keyword rich headings.
- Write short paragraphs & sentences so users can easily read the content.

Internal Links

One of the very important topics, which most SEO guides don't talk about. You can rank any website if you have a good content strategy, site structure, and internal links.

Internal links are the backbone of on-page SEO. However, you should keep these points in mind when linking to other pages and posts on your WordPress website.

- Use descriptive anchor text when creating links.
- Don't place links on every second word of a website. Keep them in balance. A good practice is don't use any more than 1 or 2 links in each paragraph.
- Linking pages should be relevant to each other or at least talk about the closely similar topic.
- Make sure that all the links on your website are working. You can read this post on how to find and fix broken links on a WordPress website.

- Also, use a nofollow attribute when linking to external websites. You can read more on [how to add nofollow link in WordPress](#).

WordPress Site Navigation

When you create header and footer menu links, make sure to include all the top pages/categories in the menus. However, keep it short and sweet.

Don't add unnecessary pages in the menus. Footer menu is used for giving legal information, partner links, sitemaps, privacy, terms & conditions.

By keeping your website navigation short and to the point, Google has a higher chance of understanding which pages are important for your website visitors to see. Also, it can help you get site links on your domain quite easily.

WordPress Category, Tag & Archive

If you have a blog or shop where you need to categorize content, make sure to use these best practices in order to get the most benefit with SEO.

- Use categories to divide your content into different sections. For example, if you have a food blog, you can categorize your content into continental food, Asian food, Italian food, etc...
- Think of tags as keywords, which differ with each topic. Continuing the above example, we can use tags such as healthy food, pasta, burgers, sandwiches, etc...
- Archive pages, category pages should be optimized for search engines as well. You should add descriptive meta title & description on each category and tag page
- Keep your tags & categories to minimal. So users can easily navigate them. You can also add your top tags and category pages in the header navigation menu, sidebar, and footer menu.

URL Structure for SEO

You should aim for URL structure that help your users find content in a logical way. Let's suppose if you sell sunglasses, you would use URLs similar to these:

example.com/sunglasses/brand1/product-name/

example.com/sunglasses/brand2/product-name/

Or if you have a blog you will simply use the post name in URL. Aim to make your URLs easier to read and short. If your visitors will look at it can easily understand what the page is about without even looking at your website content.

WordPress Website Visibility Check

Many WordPress beginner users make this terrible mistake. There's an option in WordPress settings to hide a website from search engine. When you install WordPress on a website, it comes with the option 'Search Engine Visibility' checked by default. This means that your website will be invisible to search engine crawlers.

When you are ready to launch your website, please make sure to uncheck this option. Login to your WordPress website, go to settings > Reading > Search Engine Visibility > Uncheck.

Optimize WordPress Site for Mobile
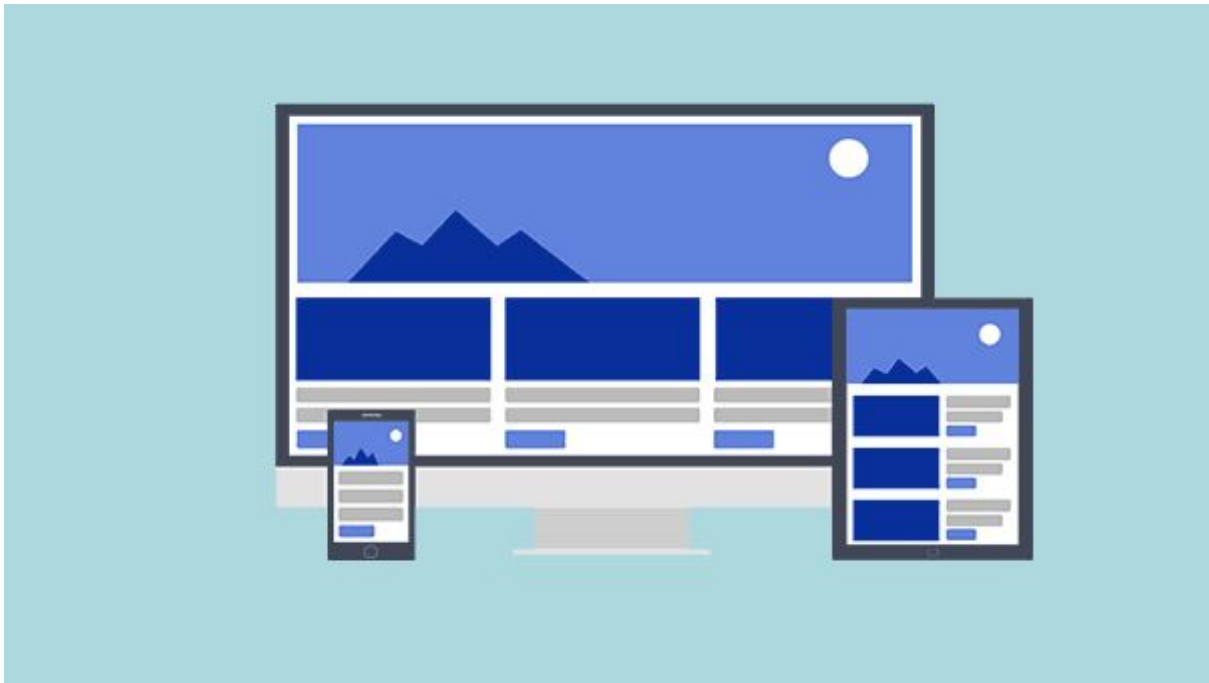
Recently Google introduced a new search algorithm, [Mobile-first Indexing](#). The purpose of this update is to first crawl and index a mobile version of a new page rather than a desktop version. In the past, Googlebot used a desktop website version when it crawled and indexed websites. to the mobile website.

More people are using Google search from their mobile phones each day. Hence, it is quite important that your WordPress website should be optimized for mobile users. You should keep these points in mind to making sure your website is mobile optimized:

Use a Responsive WordPress Theme

By responsive theme, it means a website layout which fits and adjust to the actual size of the screen. A well built responsive theme will help them improve ranking. It can be done by using HTML and CSS (if you want to do it manually). However, the easier way is to use responsive themes from the WordPress themes directory. Also, there are tons of paid WordPress responsive themes you can use according to your website needs.

Optimize Content for Voice Searches

Since more people are using mobile these days than a desktop computer. It is important to stylize your content for voice searches. People are using different voice assistants such as Apple's Siri and Google Assistant to conduct searches. You can read more on how to optimize your website content for voice searches.

Optimize WordPress Website Speed

Website Speed can help you reduce bounce rate as well as it will assure your content is being delivered to your audience on the right time. That's why your WordPress website needs to be optimized in terms of speed for both mobile and desktop users. Here's what you can do to optimize it.

Compress Images on WordPress

Some of my clients' sites have ridiculously large images both in terms of size and resolution of the images. Unoptimized images can have a negative impact on your SEO. If you have already uploaded images on your WordPress website, then you can use some plugins such as EWWW Image Optimizer and WP Smush, both are great plugins which will reduce the image file size.

If you are looking to add high-quality images to your website then check out some of these stock photo and video websites to enrich your blog posts.

Make sure to always optimize images before uploading them to your WordPress site. It is a better way than to rely on plugins. I personally use software such as PhotoShop and Gimp to compress images. You can read my comprehensive tutorial on how to compress images without losing quality.

Use Cache Plugins

Only optimizing images won't do you any good if your website code is all over the place. To improve your website speed, consider using cache plugins. There are plenty of such plugins exist in the WordPress plugins directory both free and paid.

I personally use WP Fastest Cache on this website and a few others I manage. However, you can use any caching plugin of your choice. I did a side-by-side comparison between the 2 amazing cache plugins here: [WP Total Cache VS WP Fastest Cache](#).

I hope you find this post useful. Please consider sharing it so more businesses can optimize their WordPress websites without relying on outside help. If you don't feel like doing it yourself you can get a quote for my [white-hat SEO services](#).