INSITE ADVICE

FREE CHECKLIST · 180 STEPS

SEO Checklist: 180 Steps to Rank Higher on Google

180 steps in nine parts.

By Alex Wolk, founder of Insite Advice · Last reviewed: November 19, 2026
Interactive version: https://insiteadvice.com/seo-checklist/

Check each box as you finish a step. Work through the parts in order, or start with the gaps that matter most for your business.

Part 1 — Setup and foundations (steps 1–16)

Get the free tools, files and baselines in place before you change anything, so you can see problems and prove progress. Source: Google SEO Starter Guide ↗

Search engine tools

- [ ] 1 **Verify a Domain property in Google Search Console.** A Domain property (verified by DNS record) covers http, https, www and every subdomain in one view. URL-prefix properties miss traffic that lands on other versions of your site. Source: Google Search Console Help ↗
- [ ] 2 **Verify the site in Bing Webmaster Tools.** You can import your verified sites from Search Console in a couple of clicks. Bing's index feeds Bing, Microsoft Copilot and other search products, and its reports often catch issues Google's don't.
- [ ] 3 **Turn on IndexNow.** IndexNow pings participating search engines, including Bing, when you publish or update a URL. Many SEO plugins and CDNs like Cloudflare can send these pings automatically.
- [ ] 4 **Install Google Analytics 4 and link it to Search Console.** Linking the two lets you see search queries next to on-site behavior. Check that the tag fires on every template, including thank-you pages.
- [ ] 5 **Set up key events in GA4.** Mark the actions that matter, like form submissions, calls, bookings and purchases, as key events so you can tie SEO work to leads and revenue.

Site files and settings

- [ ] 6 **Install and configure one SEO plugin.** On WordPress, pick one of Yoast, Rank Math or All in One SEO and configure titles, sitemaps and schema defaults. Running two SEO plugins at once creates duplicate tags.
- [ ] 7 **Check your robots.txt file.** Visit yourdomain.com/robots.txt and make sure it isn't blocking pages, CSS or JavaScript you want crawled. Google ignores content beyond its 500 KiB robots.txt size limit, so keep the file short.
- [ ] 8 **Create and submit an XML sitemap.** List only canonical, indexable URLs that return a 200 status, then submit the sitemap in Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools and reference it in robots.txt.
- [ ] 9 **Pick one preferred version of your domain.** Choose https with or without www and 301-redirect every other version to it. Test all four combinations in a browser.

- [ ] 10 **Make sure search engines can index the site.** Check for a sitewide noindex left over from development (in WordPress, Settings → Reading → "Discourage search engines"). It is one of the most common reasons a new site never shows up.
- [ ] 11 **Check for manual actions and security issues.** Open both reports in Search Console. A manual action or hacked-content warning outranks every other item on this list.

Baselines and goals

- [ ] 12 **Choose your SEO KPIs.** Pick a small set, such as organic leads, organic revenue, clicks from non-branded queries and rankings for your 20 money keywords. Traffic alone can rise while leads fall.
- [ ] 13 **Record a baseline.** Export 16 months of Search Console data and 12 months of GA4 organic data before you start, so every later change has a "before" to compare against.
- [ ] 14 **Set up rank tracking.** Track your target keywords in Semrush, Ahrefs, SE Ranking or AccuRanker on desktop and mobile, at the city level if you serve a local market.
- [ ] 15 **Crawl your site once to see where you stand.** Run Screaming Frog, Sitebulb or a site audit tool and save the report. It becomes your first technical to-do list.
- [ ] 16 **Document access and ownership.** Keep a list of who owns the domain registrar, hosting, DNS, CMS, Search Console and GA4 logins. SEO work stalls when nobody can reach DNS.

Part 2 — Keyword research and search intent (steps 17–34)

Find the words your customers use, understand what they expect to see, and map each topic to one page.

Find keyword ideas

- [ ] 17 **Start with what you already rank for.** In Search Console, sort queries by impressions and look for terms in positions 5–20. Those pages are already relevant and are usually the fastest to improve.
- [ ] 18 **List your seed topics from the business, not a tool.** Write down your services, products, problems you solve and questions customers ask on sales calls. Tools expand a list; they shouldn't create it.
- [ ] 19 **Expand the list with a keyword tool.** Use Semrush, Ahrefs, Google Keyword Planner or a free tool like Google Trends to find variations, volumes and related terms for each seed.
- [ ] 20 **Mine Google's suggestions.** Autocomplete, People Also Ask and "People also search for" show how real searchers phrase things, including long-tail versions tools often miss.
- [ ] 21 **Look where your customers talk.** Reddit, Quora, industry forums, Facebook groups and YouTube comments reveal the exact language and worries of your audience.
- [ ] 22 **Find question keywords.** Who, what, how much, how long, is it worth it, vs. Question keywords become FAQ answers, blog posts and sections of service pages.
- [ ] 23 **Run a competitor keyword gap.** Compare your domain with two or three competitors in a gap tool and list valuable terms they rank for and you don't.

- [ ] 24 **Note the prompts people use in AI tools.** Write down the longer, conversational questions customers ask ChatGPT or Gemini about your category. They often reveal comparisons and objections that short keywords hide.

Judge intent and difficulty

- [ ] 25 **Check search intent by looking at the results.** Search each target keyword and note what ranks: guides, product pages, local map results, videos or comparison lists. Build the page type Google is already rewarding.
- [ ] 26 **Label each keyword by intent.** Informational, commercial, transactional or navigational. A "how to" query rarely converts on a sales page, and a "near me" query rarely ranks a blog post.
- [ ] 27 **Note the SERP features.** Map packs, AI Overviews, video carousels, shopping results and People Also Ask boxes change how many clicks a ranking is worth.
- [ ] 28 **Estimate how hard each keyword is.** Look at the ranking pages, not just a difficulty score. If small sites with thin pages rank, you can compete; if every result is a national brand, aim for a narrower term first.
- [ ] 29 **Prioritize by business value.** Score each keyword by how likely a searcher is to become a customer. Ten searches a month for a high-value service can beat 1,000 for a vague topic.
- [ ] 30 **Group keywords into topics.** Cluster terms that share the same intent and would be answered by the same page. One page can rank for dozens of close variations.

Map and plan

- [ ] 31 **Build a keyword map.** A spreadsheet with one row per URL: primary keyword, secondary keywords, intent and status. It prevents duplicate pages and shows the gaps.
- [ ] 32 **Assign one primary topic per page.** Two pages chasing the same keyword usually split signals. Merge, re-target or differentiate them.
- [ ] 33 **Plan topic clusters.** Pair a broad pillar page with supporting pages on subtopics, linked together. It shows search engines the depth of your coverage.
- [ ] 34 **Keep a list of content gaps.** Topics your competitors cover and you don't, ranked by value. That list becomes your content calendar.

Part 3 — On-page SEO (steps 35–54)

Make each page clearly about its topic, easy to scan and tempting to click.

Titles, descriptions and URLs

- [ ] 35 **Write a unique title tag for every page.** Put the main keyword near the front and keep titles roughly 50–60 characters so they're less likely to be cut off. Google may rewrite titles that don't match the page.
- [ ] 36 **Add a reason to click in the title.** Modifiers like a year, a price range, "free," "checklist" or your city help the title stand out next to competitors.

- [ ] 37 **Write a unique meta description for each important page.** Summarize the page and give a reason to click in about 150–160 characters. Google often uses it to build the snippet, so a good one can improve clicks.
- [ ] 38 **Use short, readable URLs.** /seo-checklist/ beats /blog/2026/11/19/the-ultimate-seo-checklist-for-everything/. Google recommends hyphens, not underscores, to separate words.
- [ ] 39 **Don't change ranking URLs without a redirect.** If you must change a URL, 301-redirect the old one to the new one and update internal links.

Headings and body content

- [ ] 40 **Use one clear H1 that matches the page topic.** The H1 should tell a reader instantly what the page covers. Most themes output the page title as the H1, so check for duplicates.
- [ ] 41 **Structure the page with descriptive H2s and H3s.** Use headings that say what each section answers. Many readers scan headings before deciding to read.
- [ ] 42 **Answer the main question early.** Put a direct answer or summary in the first 100–150 words, then add detail. Readers and AI features both reward pages that get to the point.
- [ ] 43 **Use your keyword and close variations naturally.** Include the main term in the title, H1, opening paragraph and a heading or two. Then write for the reader; repetition beyond that rarely helps.
- [ ] 44 **Cover the related subtopics.** Look at what top-ranking pages cover and what People Also Ask shows. A page that answers the follow-up questions has a better chance of satisfying the search.
- [ ] 45 **Make content easy to scan.** Short paragraphs, bullet lists, tables for comparisons and bold key phrases. Break up walls of text.
- [ ] 46 **Add a clear call to action.** Every commercial page needs one obvious next step, such as calling, booking or requesting a quote, placed where readers are ready for it.

Images and media

- [ ] 47 **Compress and resize images.** Serve images at the size they're displayed and in WebP or AVIF where you can. Oversized images are a common cause of slow pages.
- [ ] 48 **Write descriptive file names and alt text.** "red-brick-tuckpointing-before-after.jpg" with alt text describing the image helps accessibility and image search.
- [ ] 49 **Specify image width and height.** Setting dimensions, or using CSS aspect-ratio, stops the layout jumping as images load and protects your CLS score.
- [ ] 50 **Use original images where you can.** Your own photos, diagrams and screenshots add something stock photos can't and can earn links and image traffic.
- [ ] 51 **Embed video where it helps.** A short explainer or demo can answer questions faster than text. Host it on YouTube or a video platform and add a transcript or summary on the page.

Links on the page

- [ ] 52 **Link to helpful external sources.** Cite primary sources, official documentation and original studies when you make a claim. It helps readers verify what you say.

- [ ] 53 **Add contextual internal links.** Link to related pages with anchor text that describes the destination. Two to five relevant internal links per article is a reasonable starting point.
- [ ] 54 **Check that links open the right pages.** Broken or redirected links waste crawl paths and frustrate readers. Fix them at the source.

Part 4 — Content quality and E-E-A-T (steps 55–72)

Publish content that shows real experience, adds something new and makes it obvious who stands behind it.

Helpful, people-first content

- [ ] 55 **Read Google's helpful content guidance.** Google's "Creating helpful, reliable, people-first content" page lists self-assessment questions. Run your top pages through them honestly. Source: Google Search Central ↗
- [ ] 56 **Add information gain.** Include something the top results don't have: original data, a tested process, real examples, pricing, photos or a clear opinion. Pages that repeat page one rarely beat it.
- [ ] 57 **Show first-hand experience.** Say what you did, tested or saw: "We replaced this part on 40 furnaces last winter." Specific detail is hard to fake and easy to trust.
- [ ] 58 **Match the format to the intent.** Use checklists for processes, comparison tables for "vs" queries, calculators or tools for estimates, and guides for learning topics.
- [ ] 59 **Write for your audience's level.** Define jargon, explain steps and avoid padding. Content should be as long as the topic needs and no longer.
- [ ] 60 **Use AI tools carefully.** Google's guidance focuses on whether content is helpful, not how it was made. Mass-producing pages with little value can fall under its scaled content abuse spam policy, so edit, fact-check and add your own expertise.

Show who is behind the content

- [ ] 61 **Add a real author byline.** Name the person who wrote or reviewed the page and link to an author page.
- [ ] 62 **Build author pages with credentials.** Include experience, qualifications, a photo and links to profiles like LinkedIn or professional directories.
- [ ] 63 **Add expert review on high-stakes topics.** For health, legal or financial content, have a qualified professional review the page and say so.
- [ ] 64 **Make your About and Contact pages complete.** Who you are, where you are, how long you've been in business and how to reach you. These pages help visitors and quality raters judge trust.
- [ ] 65 **Cite sources for claims and statistics.** Link to the original study or official document, not a blog that quoted it. If you can't find a source, rephrase or remove the claim.
- [ ] 66 **Show a published and updated date.** Display the date of the last meaningful update and keep it consistent with your schema.

Content upkeep

- [ ] 67 **Audit existing content every year.** List every indexable page with its traffic, links and conversions, then decide to keep, update, merge, redirect or remove it.
- [ ] 68 **Update content that's slipping.** Refresh facts, examples, screenshots and dates on pages losing clicks. A real update often recovers rankings faster than a new page.
- [ ] 69 **Merge thin or overlapping pages.** Combine several weak pages on the same topic into one strong page and 301-redirect the rest.
- [ ] 70 **Remove or noindex pages with no value.** Old tag archives, thin location pages and outdated announcements can dilute a site. Remove them or keep them out of the index.
- [ ] 71 **Fix keyword cannibalization.** Use Search Console to find queries where several of your URLs swap positions. Pick one page, consolidate, and re-point internal links.
- [ ] 72 **Keep a content calendar.** Plan new pages and refreshes monthly from your keyword gap list so content work doesn't stop when things get busy.

Part 5 — Technical SEO (steps 73–109)

Make sure search engines can crawl, render and index your pages, and that real visitors get a fast, stable experience.

Crawling

- [ ] 73 **Find and fix crawl errors.** Check Search Console's Page indexing and Crawl stats reports for server errors (5xx), 404s and fetch failures, and fix the causes rather than the symptoms.
- [ ] 74 **Use crawlable links.** Google can generally only follow links that are elements with an href attribute. Menus or buttons that rely only on JavaScript click handlers may hide pages from crawlers.

75
Don't block important resources. Make sure robots.txt allows the CSS and JavaScript files needed to render your pages, and test with the URL Inspection tool's rendered view.

76
Keep important pages within a few clicks of the homepage. Pages buried five or more clicks deep can get crawled less often. Use a crawler to check click depth.

77
Find orphan pages. Compare your crawl with your sitemap and analytics to find pages with no internal links, then link to them or remove them.

78
Watch server response times. Slow or erroring servers can make Google crawl less. Check Crawl stats for average response time and spikes in errors.

Indexing

79
Inspect key URLs in Search Console. The URL Inspection tool shows whether a page is indexed, which canonical Google chose and how the page rendered.

80

Review "Crawled – currently not indexed" pages. Large numbers here often point to thin, duplicate or low-value pages. Improve them, merge them or remove them.

81

Use noindex correctly. Add a noindex robots meta tag to pages you want kept out of results. Don't also block those pages in robots.txt, or Google can't see the noindex.

82

Handle soft 404s. Pages that say "not found" or are nearly empty but return a 200 status confuse crawlers. Return a real 404 or 410, or add useful content.

83

Check index coverage of your sitemap. Filter the Page indexing report by sitemap to see how many of the URLs you submitted are actually indexed.

Duplicates and canonicals

84

Add a self-referencing canonical tag. Every indexable page should point to its own preferred URL. Remember canonicals are a hint, so keep your internal links and sitemap consistent with them.

85

Consolidate duplicate URLs. Trailing slashes, uppercase letters, tracking parameters and print versions can create duplicates. Redirect or canonicalize them to one version.

86

Check for duplicate versions in Google's index. Search site:yourdomain.com and look for http, staging, old subdomains or parameter URLs that shouldn't be there.

87

Keep staging sites out of search. Password-protect development and staging sites. A noindex alone can be removed by accident during launch.

Redirects and status codes

88

Use 301 redirects for permanent moves. Reserve 302 and 307 redirects for genuinely temporary changes. Permanent redirects are a stronger signal of which URL should be shown.

89

Fix redirect chains and loops. Point every redirect straight to the final URL. Chains slow pages down and loops make pages unreachable.

90

Fix broken internal and external links. Crawl monthly and fix or remove links that return 404s.

91

Reclaim links to dead pages. Find pages with backlinks that now return 404 (Ahrefs or Semrush "best by links" reports) and redirect them to the closest relevant page.

92

Use HTTPS everywhere. Install a valid certificate, redirect http to https and fix mixed content, meaning images, scripts or forms still loading over http.

Speed and Core Web Vitals

93

Pass all three Core Web Vitals. Aim for Largest Contentful Paint within 2.5 seconds, Interaction to Next Paint of 200 milliseconds or less and Cumulative Layout Shift of 0.1 or less, at the 75th percentile of page loads.

94

Use field data, not just lab scores. Search Console's Core Web Vitals report and PageSpeed Insights show real-user data from the Chrome UX Report. Lighthouse can't measure INP; it uses Total Blocking Time as a stand-in.

95

Speed up the largest element. Don't lazy-load the hero image, add fetchpriority="high" to it, preload key fonts and serve images from a CDN.

96

Improve INP by cutting JavaScript. Remove unused scripts, delay non-essential third-party tags, and break up long tasks so the page responds quickly to taps and clicks.

97

Prevent layout shifts. Reserve space for images, ads, embeds and cookie banners, and avoid inserting content above what the visitor is reading.

98

Improve server response time. Use good hosting, page caching and a CDN. Time to First Byte affects every other loading metric.

Mobile and rendering

99

Design mobile-first. Google primarily indexes the mobile version of most sites. Make sure mobile pages have the same content, links and structured data as desktop.

100

Test on a real phone. Check tap targets, font sizes, menus and pop-ups on an average Android phone over cellular, not just a desktop browser resized.

101

Avoid intrusive interstitials. Full-screen pop-ups that cover content as soon as someone arrives from search hurt the experience. Use smaller banners or delay them.

102

Check JavaScript-rendered content. Google renders JavaScript, but many other crawlers, including several AI crawlers, may not. Server-render or pre-render important text and links where you can.

103

Compare raw HTML with the rendered page. View source versus the URL Inspection rendered HTML. If key content or links only appear after scripts run, that is a risk.

Large and international sites

104
Control faceted navigation. Filters for size, color and price can create thousands of near-duplicate URLs. Keep valuable filter pages indexable and block or noindex the rest.

105
Handle pagination cleanly. Give each paginated page a self-referencing canonical and crawlable links to the next page. Google no longer uses rel="next" and rel="prev" as an indexing signal.

106
Implement hreflang for language or country versions. Each version must list all alternates, including itself, with return links, plus an x-default for a fallback page.

107
Analyze server log files. Logs show what Googlebot actually crawls, how often and where it wastes time. Verify real Googlebot hits with a reverse DNS lookup, because the user agent is often spoofed.

108
Manage crawl budget on very large sites. Google's crawl budget guidance is aimed at very large or fast-changing sites. Cut duplicate and low-value URLs so crawlers spend their time on pages that matter.

109
Keep pages lean. Googlebot crawls the first 2 MB of an HTML file, and each CSS or JavaScript file is fetched separately under the same limit. Very heavy pages can lose content past the cutoff.

Part 6 — Site architecture and internal linking (steps 110–123)

Organize the site so people and crawlers can find every important page and understand how topics relate.

Structure

110
Plan a simple, logical hierarchy. Homepage → main categories or services → individual pages. Most sites need two or three levels, not six.

111
Group related content in folders. /services/roof-repair/ and /services/gutter-cleaning/ tell users and search engines how pages relate.

112
Make the main navigation reflect your priorities. Link your most important services, categories and resources from the menu, using clear labels people search for.

113
Use breadcrumbs. Breadcrumb links show where a page sits and add internal links up the hierarchy. Mark them up with BreadcrumbList schema.

114
Add an HTML sitemap on large sites. A page that links to every key section helps both visitors and crawlers on sites with hundreds of pages.

115
Keep footer links useful. Link to key pages like contact, about, top services and policies. A footer stuffed with keyword links looks spammy.

Internal linking

116
Link from strong pages to pages you want to rank. Use Search Console's Links report or Ahrefs to find your most-linked pages, then add links from them to priority pages.

117
Use descriptive anchor text. "St. Louis roof repair" tells search engines more than "click here." Vary anchors naturally.

118
Link new content from existing pages. When you publish, add links to the new page from two or three related older pages so it's found quickly.

119
Connect pillar and cluster pages. Supporting articles should link to the pillar page and the pillar should link back to each of them.

120
Add related-content links. "Related articles" or "related services" sections keep readers moving and spread internal links.

121
Fix internal links that redirect. Update internal links to point directly at final URLs instead of through redirects.

122
Avoid nofollow on internal links. Nofollowing your own pages blocks crawlers from following paths you want them to take.

123
Review internal links every quarter. Run a crawl, sort pages by inlinks, and give more links to priority pages that have too few.

Part 7 — Structured data and search features (steps 124–138)

Help search engines understand who you are and what each page contains, and make your results more useful.

Core markup

124
Add Organization markup to the homepage. Include your name, logo, URL, contact details and sameAs links to your official profiles.

125
Add LocalBusiness markup if you serve a local area. Use the most specific type, such as Plumber, Dentist or Attorney, with address, phone, hours and geo-coordinates.

126

Mark up articles. Use Article or BlogPosting with headline, author, datePublished, dateModified and image on editorial content.

127

Mark up products and offers. E-commerce pages should use Product with offers, price, availability, shipping and return details where eligible.

128

Mark up breadcrumbs. BreadcrumbList helps search engines understand site structure. Since January 2025, Google shows breadcrumbs in desktop results only, not mobile.

129

Add video markup for important videos. VideoObject with name, description, thumbnail, upload date and duration helps videos appear in video results.

Use markup correctly

130

Mark up only what visitors can see. Structured data must match the visible content. Marking up hidden or invented information can lead to a manual action.

131

Know which rich results are gone. Google retired HowTo rich results in 2023 and FAQ rich results in May 2026. FAQPage markup no longer produces a special result in Google Search.

132

Follow the review snippet rules. Don't mark up reviews a business writes about itself, and never mark up fake or undisclosed incentivized reviews.

133

Validate every template. Test pages with Google's Rich Results Test and the Schema Markup Validator, and watch the Enhancements reports in Search Console for errors.

134

Use JSON-LD. Google recommends JSON-LD because it is easiest to add and maintain separately from the visible HTML.

Search appearance

135

Set a favicon. Use a square image in a supported format so your logo shows next to your results.

136

Specify a preferred image. Use og:image or primaryImageOfPage so Google and social platforms pick the right image for your page.

137

Control snippets deliberately. Use nosnippet, max-snippet or data-nosnippet only where you have a real reason, because they also limit how your content can appear in Google's AI features.

138

Write for featured snippets and "read more" links. Answer a question in a short paragraph, list or table directly under a matching heading. Clear sections make it easier for Google to link to a specific part of the page.

Part 8 — Links, digital PR and local SEO (steps 139–157)

Earn mentions and links from relevant sites, and make sure local customers can find you.

Link building

139

Analyze your current backlink profile. Use Ahrefs, Semrush or Moz to see which domains link to you, which pages earn links and what anchors they use.

140

Study your competitors' backlinks. Find the sites that link to two or more competitors but not to you. They're your most realistic prospects.

141

Create linkable assets. Original research, free tools, calculators, templates and in-depth guides attract links in a way sales pages rarely do.

142

Turn unlinked mentions into links. Set up brand alerts in Google Alerts, Ahrefs or Mention, and ask sites that name you without linking to add a link.

143

Reclaim lost links. When a linking page removes your link or your page moves, reach out or redirect to win it back.

144

Pursue partner and supplier links. Manufacturers, distributors, associations and clients often have "partners," "dealers" or "members" pages.

145

Write guest content only where it's genuinely relevant. Contribute expert articles to respected industry publications for their audience, not just for a link.

146

Follow Google's link spam policies. Don't buy links that pass ranking credit, join link schemes or use private blog networks. Mark paid or sponsored links with rel="sponsored".

147

Use the disavow tool only when needed. Google says most sites don't need it. Consider it if you have a manual action for unnatural links or a history of paid links you can't remove.

Digital PR and brand

148

Answer journalist requests. Platforms like Qwoted, Featured and Source of Sources connect experts with reporters looking for quotes.

149
Pitch data-driven stories. A short survey, an analysis of your own anonymized data or a local trend report gives journalists something new to cover.

150
Become a podcast or event guest. Show notes and event pages usually link to guests, and the appearances build your name in your industry.

151
Build your brand across platforms. Consistent profiles on LinkedIn, YouTube, industry directories and social platforms reinforce who you are and drive branded searches.

152
Track brand mentions and sentiment. Monitor what people and publications say about you, including reviews and forum threads, and respond where it helps.

Local SEO basics

153
Claim and complete your Google Business Profile. Choose the most specific primary category, add services, hours, photos and a description, and post regularly.

154
Keep your name, address and phone consistent. Use the exact same details on your website, Business Profile and major listings like Apple Business Connect, Bing Places, Yelp and Facebook.

155
Build pages for the services and areas you serve. Each page needs unique, local content: projects, photos, reviews and details for that place.

156
Ask every customer for a review. A steady flow of honest reviews, with replies from you, helps both rankings and conversions. Never pay for reviews.

157 **Work through the full local checklist.** For every local step, from Business Profile setup to geo-grid tracking, use our Local SEO Checklist.

Part 9 — AI search, measurement and maintenance (steps 158–180)

Show up in AI answers, measure what SEO earns, and keep the site healthy month after month.

AI search

- [ ] 158 **Read Google's guide to generative AI features.** Google's guidance says standard SEO best practices still apply to AI Overviews and AI Mode, and that unique, non-commodity content matters. Source: Google Search Central ↗

- [ ] 159 **Benchmark your AI visibility.** Each month, ask ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Copilot and Google AI Mode the questions your customers ask, and record whether you're named and which sources are cited.

- [ ] 160 **Get onto the sources AI tools cite.** The review sites, lists, directories and articles that keep showing up in answers are your PR and outreach targets.
- [ ] 161 **Structure pages so they're easy to quote.** Put direct answers under question-style headings, keep sections self-contained and use lists and tables for comparisons.
- [ ] 162 **Let AI search crawlers in.** Check that robots.txt doesn't block Googlebot, Bingbot, OAI-SearchBot (ChatGPT search), PerplexityBot or Claude-SearchBot if you want to appear in their answers.
- [ ] 163 **Treat llms.txt as optional.** Google says llms.txt files aren't needed for Google Search and won't help or hurt rankings. Add one only if another service you care about uses it.
- [ ] 164 **Go further with our AI search checklist.** For the full 92-step process, use our AI Search Checklist.

Measurement

- [ ] 165 **Review Search Console monthly.** Compare clicks, impressions, CTR and position month over month and year over year. AI Overviews and AI Mode traffic is included in the Performance report under the "Web" search type.
- [ ] 166 **Separate branded and non-branded queries.** Use a regex filter to exclude your brand name. Non-branded growth shows whether SEO is reaching new customers.
- [ ] 167 **Find pages with high impressions and low CTR.** These pages rank but don't get clicked. Rewrite the title and description and see if CTR improves.
- [ ] 168 **Get more than 1,000 rows of data.** The Search Console interface shows up to 1,000 rows per report. Use the API, Looker Studio or BigQuery export for complete data.
- [ ] 169 **Track organic key events in GA4.** Report leads, calls and sales from organic search, not just sessions, and build a landing-page report for organic traffic.
- [ ] 170 **Segment AI referral traffic.** Create a GA4 segment for visits from chatgpt.com, perplexity.ai, gemini.google.com, copilot.microsoft.com and claude.ai.
- [ ] 171 **Annotate changes.** Log site changes, content launches and Google updates with dates so you can explain movements later.
- [ ] 172 **Report on what matters to the business.** A monthly one-page report with leads, revenue, top movers and next steps beats a 40-page ranking export.

Maintenance and audits

- [ ] 173 **Crawl the site every month.** Catch new broken links, redirect chains, missing titles and noindex mistakes before they cost traffic.
- [ ] 174 **Run a full SEO audit every year.** Review technical health, content, links, competitors and goals, and reset the plan for the next 12 months.
- [ ] 175 **Follow Google's update announcements.** Check the Google Search Status Dashboard and Search Central blog when rankings move, before making big changes.
- [ ] 176 **Monitor uptime and security.** Use an uptime monitor, keep the CMS, theme and plugins updated, and keep daily off-site backups.

- [ ] 177 **Plan site migrations carefully.** Map every old URL to its new URL, keep content and metadata, use the Change of Address tool for domain moves, and monitor Search Console daily for weeks after launch.
- [ ] 178 **Check new pages before they go live.** Use a pre-launch checklist: title, description, H1, canonical, indexability, internal links, schema and mobile layout.
- [ ] 179 **Watch for spam and hacked content.** Search site:yourdomain.com for odd pages, check the Security issues report and lock down user-generated content like comments and forms.
- [ ] 180 **Revisit this checklist every quarter.** SEO changes and sites drift. Reset your progress and work through it again with fresh eyes.

Want help with the steps you haven't checked yet?
INSITE ADVICE · St. Louis digital marketing · insiteadvice.com
Interactive checklist with saved progress: https://insiteadvice.com/seo-checklist/