

WUNDERLANDMEDIA

The Complete On-Page SEO Checklist

Not 12 bullet points. Every element on every page,
explained with real data from 100+ audits.

By Kemal | wunderlandmedia.com

100+

Sites Audited

50+

Checklist Items

6

Years of Data

1 Title Tags & Heading Structure

5+

Position jumps I've seen from rewriting title tags alone. This is the single highest-leverage on-page element. Get it right before touching anything else.

TITLE TAG

- ☐ **Primary keyword placed within the first 3-4 words**
Keywords closer to the front still correlate with better rankings. Front-load, don't bury.
- ☐ **Total length under 60 characters**
Google truncates at ~60 chars on desktop, ~55 on mobile. Check in Google's SERP preview tools.
- ☐ **Compelling enough to click (not just keyword-stuffed)**
Your title competes with 9 other results. Numbers, "how to", and specificity win clicks.
- ☐ **Unique across the entire site**
Duplicate title tags cause keyword cannibalization. Every page needs a distinct title.
- ☐ **Brand name at the end (if included)**
Format: "Primary Keyword Phrase | Brand". Brand goes last so keywords get priority.

GOOD

On-Page SEO Checklist: 50+ Elements From 100 Real Audits

BAD

SEO Tips, SEO Checklist, SEO Guide, On-Page SEO Best Practices 2026

H1 TAG

- ☐ **Exactly one H1 per page**
Multiple H1s dilute topical focus. I still find sites with zero H1s or three on a single page.
- ☐ **Matches title tag intent (not necessarily identical)**
The H1 can be longer or more descriptive. It confirms to Google (and readers) they're in the right place.
- ☐ **Contains primary keyword naturally**
Not a second chance to stuff keywords. It should read like a headline a human would write.

HEADING HIERARCHY

- ☐ **Logical structure: H2 > H3 > H4 (no skipping levels)**
Don't jump from H2 to H4. Screen readers and search engines rely on hierarchy for structure.
- ☐ **H2s cover distinct subtopics of the main keyword**
Each H2 should be a mini-answer to a sub-question. Think "People Also Ask" structure.
- ☐ **Keywords in H2s where natural (not forced)**
Google uses H2s to understand content structure. Include related terms, not just the exact match.
- ☐ **H2s are scannable and self-explanatory**
A reader should understand the page structure from headings alone. "The Thing About SEO" tells nobody anything.

Why This Matters

AI Overviews and featured snippets extract content by heading. A clear H2/H3 structure is no longer just good practice. It's how you get cited in AI-generated answers.

2 URLs, Meta Descriptions & Open Graph

URL STRUCTURE

- ☐ **Short and descriptive (3-5 words max)**
Shorter URLs consistently outperform long, parameter-heavy ones in click-through and rankings.
- ☐ **Contains primary keyword**
The URL is a ranking signal. /on-page-seo-checklist tells Google exactly what this page is about.
- ☐ **Lowercase, hyphens only (no underscores or spaces)**
Google treats hyphens as word separators. Underscores are joined: on_page = "on_page" (one word).
- ☐ **No dates, IDs, or parameters in the path**
/blog/2026/05/article-4829 looks disposable. /on-page-seo-checklist looks evergreen.
- ☐ **Flat structure where possible**
/seo-checklist is better than /blog/seo/guides/checklists/seo-checklist. Depth implies low importance.

GOOD

/on-page-seo-checklist
/wordpress-plugin-alternatives

BAD

/blog/2026/05/article-id-4829
/p?id=141&cat=seo&ref=home

META DESCRIPTION

63%

of meta descriptions get rewritten by Google. But when yours shows, it drives ~5.8% higher CTR. On 10,000 monthly impressions, that's 580 extra clicks. Worth 60 seconds of your time.

- ☐ **Under 155 characters**
Google truncates beyond this. Aim for 140-155. Too short and you're wasting real estate.
- ☐ **Primary keyword included once**
Google bolds matching search terms in the description. This visual cue increases clicks.
- ☐ **Contains a call-to-action**
"Learn how," "Check your site," "See the full checklist," "Get started." Give them a reason to click.
- ☐ **Specific and differentiated**
"Complete on-page SEO checklist from 100+ real audits" beats "Learn about SEO best practices."
- ☐ **Unique per page (no duplicates across site)**
Duplicate meta descriptions are a wasted opportunity. Each page gets one shot at the SERP pitch.

OPEN GRAPH & SOCIAL TAGS

- ☐ **og:title set (can differ from title tag)**
Social shares use this. Make it engaging for social audiences, which differ from search audiences.
- ☐ **og:description set**
The snippet shown when shared on LinkedIn, Facebook, Slack, etc.
- ☐ **og:image set (1200x630px recommended)**
Posts with images get dramatically more engagement. Use a custom graphic, not a stretched logo.
- ☐ **og:type set to "article" for blog posts**
Tells platforms how to render the preview card.
- ☐ **Twitter card tags set (twitter:card, twitter:title, twitter:image)**
Falls back to OG tags if missing, but explicit is better. Use "summary_large_image" for articles.
- ☐ **Canonical tag points to the correct URL**
Prevents duplicate content issues. Essential on e-commerce, paginated content, or sites with URL parameters.

3 Content Quality & E-E-A-T Signals

What Changed

Google's systems have gotten genuinely good at detecting whether content comes from someone with real experience or from someone who just summarized the top 10 results. E-E-A-T is no longer a buzzword. It's a ranking factor you can feel.

KEYWORD STRATEGY

- ☐ **Focus keyword in first 100 words**
Google pays attention to what appears early. Place it naturally within the opening paragraph.
- ☐ **Keyword density: 3-5 mentions across entire post**
If it reads naturally, you're fine. The moment it feels forced, you've gone too far.
- ☐ **Semantic/related keywords used throughout**
Writing about "on-page SEO"? Also mention: meta tags, internal links, heading structure, crawlability, Core Web Vitals.
- ☐ **No keyword stuffing in any element**
Title, headings, alt text, content. If it reads like it was written for a robot, Google treats it that way.
- ☐ **"People Also Ask" questions addressed in content**
Search your focus keyword and check PAA. Answering these directly increases featured snippet chances.

CONTENT DEPTH & READABILITY

- ☐ **Topic covered thoroughly (no thin content)**
Every section earns its place. Cover comprehensively, but don't pad with filler.
- ☐ **Readable by a smart 16-year-old**
Short paragraphs. Clear sentences. No jargon without explanation. Complex ideas, simple language.
- ☐ **Self-contained H2 sections**
Each section should make sense on its own. Google extracts individual sections for featured snippets and AI Overviews.
- ☐ **Paragraphs under 4 sentences**
Walls of text kill engagement. Break it up. White space is your friend, especially on mobile.
- ☐ **Mix of formats: text, lists, tables, examples**
Variety keeps readers engaged and gives Google multiple ways to feature your content.

E-E-A-T (EXPERIENCE, EXPERTISE, AUTHORITY, TRUST)

- ☐ **Author byline with real name and credentials**
Anonymous content ranks worse. Show who wrote it and why they're qualified.
- ☐ **First-hand experience visible in the content**
Client stories, specific numbers from real projects, screenshots of actual results. Not theory.
- ☐ **Author page linked with bio and credentials**
Google's systems look for author entities. An author page helps establish expertise signals.
- ☐ **Claims backed by data or sources**
"Rankings improve" is vague. "Pages jumped 5+ positions" is credible. Specificity builds trust.
- ☐ **Publish date and last-updated date visible**
Freshness matters. Show both when it was written and when it was last reviewed.
- ☐ **Content reviewed/updated every 6 months**
Set a reminder. Outdated content decays in rankings. Your top posts deserve regular maintenance.

HIGH E-E-A-T

"I audited 100+ sites over 6 years. Title tag rewrites moved pages 5+ positions in 3 of those projects."

LOW E-E-A-T

"Title tags are important for SEO. Experts agree that optimizing title tags is a best practice."

4 Internal Linking Strategy

"If I could only fix one thing on a client's site, it would be internal linking. It's the most neglected tactic I see."

From 100+ site audits

LINK PLACEMENT

- ☐ **3-5 relevant internal links per page minimum**
Internal links tell Google which pages are important and how they relate. A page with 20 incoming internal links carries more weight than one with 2.
- ☐ **Links placed within body content (not just nav/footer)**
Contextual links within paragraphs carry more weight than site-wide navigation links.
- ☐ **Links appear naturally in the flow of reading**
Don't dump 10 links in the conclusion. Distribute throughout the content where relevant.
- ☐ **Link from high-authority pages to important pages**
Homepage, top-traffic posts, service pages. Links from these pass more value than links from deep archive pages.
- ☐ **New posts link to older related content**
Every new post is an opportunity to strengthen older pages with fresh internal links.
- ☐ **Older posts updated to link to new content**
This is the step everyone skips. Go back and add links from your existing high-traffic posts to new content.

ANCHOR TEXT

- ☐ **Descriptive anchor text with target page's keyword**
"Learn more about keyword research" beats "click here." The anchor text tells Google what the target page is about.
- ☐ **Varied anchor text (not identical every time)**
If 20 pages all link with "SEO checklist," it looks manipulative. Use natural variations.
- ☐ **No generic anchors: "click here," "read more," "this post"**
These waste the anchor text signal. Every link is a chance to describe the destination.

SITE ARCHITECTURE

- ☐ **Hub-and-spoke model for topic clusters**
Pillar page covers the broad topic. Supporting posts cover subtopics and link back to the pillar (and to each other).
- ☐ **No orphan pages (every page has at least one internal link pointing to it)**
A page with no internal links is invisible to Google's crawler unless it's in your sitemap.
- ☐ **Important pages reachable within 3 clicks from homepage**
Click depth is a ranking signal. The deeper a page is buried, the less important Google thinks it is.
- ☐ **Regular internal link audit (quarterly)**
Check for broken internal links, orphan pages, and redistribution opportunities. Tools: Screaming Frog, Ahrefs.

Real Result

I had a client whose legal services page went from zero to #1 in 4 days. Strategic internal linking was a major factor. Not the only factor, but the easiest to implement and the one that tipped it over.

EXTERNAL LINKS

- ☐ **1-2 outbound links to authoritative sources per post**
Linking out to trusted sources signals confidence and provides context. Don't overdo it.
- ☐ **External links open in new tab**
Don't send visitors away from your site. `target="_blank"` with `rel="noopener"` is the standard.
- ☐ **No links to low-quality or spammy sites**
You're judged by the company you keep. Link to primary sources, research, and authoritative publications.

5 Images & Media Optimization

IMAGE FORMAT & PERFORMANCE

- ☐ **All images in WebP format**
25-35% smaller than JPEG at equal quality. If you're still serving JPEGs in 2026, you're leaving speed on the table.
- ☐ **Images compressed (target: under 100KB for content images)**
Use tools like Squoosh, ShortPixel, or ImageOptim. Quality 80-85 is usually visually identical to 100.
- ☐ **Lazy loading on below-the-fold images**
Add loading="lazy" to every image except the first one. Free performance. Native browser support.
- ☐ **Above-the-fold hero image preloaded**
<link rel="preload" as="image" href="..."> in the head. Directly improves LCP.
- ☐ **Served at display dimensions (not scaled by browser)**
A 4000px image in an 800px container wastes bandwidth. Use srcset for responsive images.
- ☐ **Explicit width and height attributes set**
Prevents layout shift (CLS). The browser reserves space before the image loads.

ALT TEXT & FILE NAMES

- ☐ **Descriptive alt text on all meaningful images**
Accessibility first, SEO second. Describe what the image shows, not what you want to rank for.
- ☐ **Empty alt="" on decorative images**
Backgrounds, spacers, and decorative elements don't need alt text. Empty alt tells screen readers to skip.
- ☐ **Keyword in alt text only when genuinely descriptive**
"SEO checklist priority pyramid" is fine. "SEO checklist SEO best practices on-page SEO" is spam.
- ☐ **Descriptive file names (not IMG_4829.jpg)**
on-page-seo-checklist-priority-pyramid.webp tells Google more than any alt text could.

GOOD ALT TEXT

"Bar chart showing title tags as the highest-impact on-page SEO element"

BAD ALT TEXT

"SEO on-page SEO checklist SEO guide best SEO practices image"

VIDEO & EMBEDS

- ☐ **Videos lazy-loaded or facade pattern (click-to-load)**
YouTube embeds add 500KB+. Use a thumbnail facade that loads the player on click.
- ☐ **Explicit dimensions on all embeds (iframes, videos)**
Same as images: prevents CLS. Set width and height or use aspect-ratio CSS.
- ☐ **Video schema markup if video is the primary content**
VideoObject schema can earn video rich results in search.

Quick Size Reference

Hero images: 1200px wide, WebP, ~80-120KB **Content images:** 800px wide, WebP, ~40-80KB **Thumbnails:** 400px wide, WebP, ~15-30KB **OG images:** 1200x630px

6 Schema Markup (JSON-LD)

+20%

CTR increase from FAQ schema rich results on pages where Google shows them. Schema doesn't directly boost rankings, but the visibility it earns drives clicks.

REQUIRED FOR EVERY PAGE

- ☐ **JSON-LD format only (not Microdata or RDFa)**
JSON-LD is Google's recommended format in 2026. If you're using inline Microdata, it's time to switch.
- ☐ **Schema validates in Google Rich Results Test**
Test every page: search.google.com/test/rich-results. Fix errors before publishing.

SCHEMA BY PAGE TYPE

Page Type	Schema	Key Properties
Blog post	Article	headline, author, datePublished, dateModified, image
FAQ page	FAQPage	mainEntity[] with Question + acceptedAnswer
How-to guide	HowTo	name, step[] with name + text, totalTime
Service page	LocalBusiness	name, address, telephone, areaServed, priceRange
Product page	Product	name, offers (price, currency, availability), review
Review	Review	itemReviewed, reviewRating, author

ARTICLE SCHEMA TEMPLATE

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "Article",
  "headline": "Your Title Here",
  "author": {
    "@type": "Person",
    "name": "Author Name"
  },
  "datePublished": "2026-01-15",
  "dateModified": "2026-05-10",
  "image": "https://example.com/image.webp"
}
```

SCHEMA CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Article schema on all blog posts**
Include author, datePublished, dateModified, headline, and image at minimum.
- ☐ **FAQ schema on pages with Q&A content**
If your page answers specific questions, wrap them in FAQ schema for dropdown rich results.
- ☐ **HowTo schema on step-by-step guides**
Google can show individual steps directly in search results.
- ☐ **LocalBusiness schema on service/contact pages**
If you serve specific areas, this helps with local search visibility.
- ☐ **Breadcrumb schema for site navigation**
Earns breadcrumb display in search results. Helps Google understand site hierarchy.
- ☐ **No schema errors or warnings in testing tools**
Test with Google Rich Results Test and Schema.org validator before publishing.

7 Core Web Vitals & Page Performance

Metric	What It Measures	Good	Needs Work	Poor
LCP	Largest Contentful Paint: how fast main content loads	≤ 2.5s	2.5s - 4.0s	> 4.0s
INP	Interaction to Next Paint: responsiveness to user input	≤ 200ms	200 - 500ms	> 500ms
CLS	Cumulative Layout Shift: visual stability while loading	≤ 0.1	0.1 - 0.25	> 0.25

LCP OPTIMIZATION

- ☐ **Preload the largest above-the-fold image**
<link rel="preload" as="image"> tells the browser to fetch it before it discovers it in the HTML.
- ☐ **Serve critical CSS inline**
Extract above-the-fold CSS and inline it in <head>. Eliminates render-blocking CSS for initial view.
- ☐ **Use a CDN for static assets**
Serve images, CSS, and JS from edge locations closer to the user. Cloudflare, AWS CloudFront, Fastly.
- ☐ **Server response time under 200ms (TTFB)**
Everything downstream depends on this. Upgrade hosting before optimizing anything else if TTFB is slow.
- ☐ **Compress images to WebP (target <100KB for hero images)**
The LCP element is usually an image. Make it as small as possible without visible quality loss.

INP OPTIMIZATION

- ☐ **Defer non-critical JavaScript**
Add defer or async to scripts that aren't needed for initial render. Move analytics/tracking to defer.
- ☐ **Break up long JavaScript tasks (>50ms)**
Long tasks block the main thread. Use requestIdleCallback or setTimeout(0) to yield back to the browser.
- ☐ **Minimize third-party scripts**
Every chat widget, analytics tool, and social embed adds main thread work. Audit and remove what you don't need.
- ☐ **Avoid layout thrashing in event handlers**
Read DOM properties first, then write. Interleaving reads and writes forces the browser to recalculate repeatedly.

CLS OPTIMIZATION

- ☐ **Explicit width and height on all images and embeds**
This is the #1 CLS fix. The browser reserves space before loading. Use CSS aspect-ratio as an alternative.
- ☐ **No content injected above existing content**
Cookie banners, sticky headers, and late-loading ads that push content down. Reserve space upfront.
- ☐ **Web fonts preloaded or using font-display: swap**
Invisible text that suddenly appears causes layout shift. Preload critical fonts.
- ☐ **No dynamically injected ads without reserved space**
If you use ads, set min-height on the container so the page doesn't jump when the ad loads.

Measurement Tools

Lab data: Lighthouse (Chrome DevTools), PageSpeed Insights, WebPageTest **Field data:** Chrome UX Report (CrUX), Google Search Console Core Web Vitals report **Real-time:** web-vitals.js library for RUM monitoring

8 AI Overviews & Mobile Optimization

35%

CTR drop for the #1 organic result when an AI Overview appears above it. But **76.1%** of URLs cited in AI Overviews also rank in the top 10 organically. Traditional SEO still drives AI citations.

The Takeaway

Traditional on-page SEO still matters. The pages getting cited in AI Overviews are the same pages doing well in regular search. But specific formatting choices increase your chances of being cited.

WRITING FOR AI EXTRACTION

- ☐ **Self-contained paragraphs that answer specific questions**
Each paragraph should deliver a complete answer. AI systems extract clean, standalone passages.
- ☐ **Clear H2/H3 structure mapping to user questions**
AI Overviews pull from well-organized content. Your heading should be the question, your content the answer.
- ☐ **"People Also Ask" questions addressed directly in content**
Search your keyword and look at the PAA box. Answer those questions explicitly within your post.
- ☐ **Specific data: numbers, percentages, concrete examples**
"63% of meta descriptions get rewritten" gets cited. "Most meta descriptions get rewritten" does not.
- ☐ **Concise, factual sentences**
Shorter statements are easier for AI to extract and attribute. One fact per sentence when possible.
- ☐ **Definition-style openings for key sections**
Start sections with "X is..." or "X refers to..." when defining concepts. AI loves extractable definitions.
- ☐ **Lists and tables for structured data**
AI Overviews frequently pull bullet points and table data. Structure information as lists where natural.

MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

- ☐ **Fully responsive layout (test at 375px width)**
Google uses mobile-first indexing. If it doesn't work on mobile, it barely exists.
- ☐ **Font size minimum 16px for body text**
Anything smaller forces pinch-to-zoom on mobile. Google flags this in mobile usability reports.
- ☐ **Tap targets at least 48x48px with 8px spacing**
Buttons and links need to be large enough to tap without accidentally hitting neighbors.
- ☐ **No horizontal scrolling**
Tables, images, and code blocks are common offenders. Use overflow-x: auto on containers.
- ☐ **No intrusive interstitials**
Full-screen popups on mobile are a ranking penalty. Small banners are fine. Full-page overlays are not.
- ☐ **Viewport meta tag set correctly**
<meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1"> in every page's head.

ACCESSIBILITY (SEO-RELEVANT)

- ☐ **Color contrast ratio at least 4.5:1 for body text**
Light gray on white fails accessibility and gets flagged by Lighthouse. Readability affects engagement metrics.
- ☐ **Skip navigation link for keyboard users**
Helps screen readers and improves the accessibility score that feeds into overall page quality signals.
- ☐ **ARIA labels on interactive elements where needed**
Buttons, forms, and navigation that lack visible labels need aria-label for screen readers.

Priority Matrix: Where to Spend Your Time

Section	Items	Time to Implement	Impact
1. Title Tags & Headings	12	30 min per page	Highest
2. URLs & Meta	11	15 min per page	High
3. Content & E-E-A-T	16	1-3 hours per post	High
4. Internal Linking	13	45 min per page	High (most underrated)
5. Images & Media	13	20 min per page	Medium
6. Schema Markup	8	15 min per template	Medium (high CTR lift)
7. Core Web Vitals	13	2-8 hours (site-wide)	Medium
8. AI Overviews & Mobile	16	Ongoing (per post)	Growing

"Not all on-page elements carry the same weight. Fixing your title tag matters maybe 10x more than adding alt text to a decorative background image. But most checklists present them side by side, as if they're equally important. That's a problem. Because when everything is a priority, nothing is."

Kemal, Wunderlandmedia

If You Only Have 2 Hours

Focus on Sections 1 and 4: Title tags, H1s, heading structure, and internal links. These are where the real leverage is. I've seen more ranking improvements from title tag rewrites and internal link restructuring than from all other on-page elements combined. Everything else is optimization on top of a solid foundation.

Your Audit Schedule

Frequency	What to Check
Every new page	Title tag, H1, URL, meta description, internal links, schema, images
Monthly	Core Web Vitals scores, broken internal links, new internal link opportunities
Quarterly	Full internal link audit, orphan page check, content freshness review
Every 6 months	Update top-performing posts, refresh dates, re-check SERP landscape, review schema

Read the Full Post
wunderlandmedia.com/on-page-seo-checklist
Need someone to run this checklist on your site? That's exactly what I do. wunderlandmedia.com