

How to write for Google

<http://seocopywriting.com/seo-copywriting-checklist/>

Are you writing your SEO copy based on the latest information?

Are you sure?

I originally wrote this SEO copywriting checklist in 2012. My, how things have changed. Today, there's a new Google algorithm in town (Hummingbird,) and new rules around content optimization. I've updated the list to reflect these changes and provide additional information. I've also included two additional tips. As a side note, I would argue that there's no such thing anymore as "writing for Google." Yes, there are certain things you should do to make the Google gods happy. However, your most important goal should be writing clear, compelling, standout copy that tells a story. I'm keeping the old headline in the hopes that I can convert some of the "write for Google" people to do things the right way. Whether you're an in-house SEO content writer, a DIY business owner or a freelance SEO copywriter, this 27-point checklist will help you write engaging, Google-happy content. Every time.

Items to review before you start writing:

- Do you have enough information about your target reader?

Your copy will be much more powerful if you can picture your target reader. Ask your client or supervisor for a customer/reader persona document outlining your target readers' specific characteristics. If the client doesn't have a customer persona document, be prepared to spend at least 30 minutes – 1 hour asking some detailed questions. Here's more information on [customer personas](#).

- Writing a sales page? Did you interview the client?

It's important to interview new clients and learn more about their company, their USP and their competition. Not sure what questions to ask to get the copywriting ball rolling? Here's a list of [31 questions](#) you can start with today.

- Does the topic resonates with your readers?

When you're blogging, it's tempting to write about whatever strikes your fancy. The challenge is, what interests you may not interest your readers. If you want to make sure you're writing must-read content, sites like Quora, LinkedIn, Google Trends and [BuzzSumo](#) can help spark some ideas.

- Did you conduct keyphrase research?

Some people mistakenly believe that keyphrase research is no longer necessary. Keyphrase research (and content optimization) is still incredibly important. If you don't give Google some keyphrase "cues," your page probably [won't position the way you want](#).

- What is your per-page keyphrase focus?

Most writers focus on 2-3 keyphrases per page. New to keyword mapping? Check out how easy it is to develop your own [per-page keyphrase strategy](#).

- Did you expand your keyphrase research to include synonyms and close variants?

No longer are writers stuck with using exact match keyphrases in their copy. In today's world, including synonyms and related words is a *good* thing. Here's some more information on [close variants](#) (plus some advanced SEO tips.)

Items to review when the page is complete:

- Did you edit your content?

Resist the urge to upload your content as soon as you write it. Put it away and come back to it after a few hours (or even the next day.) Discover why [editing your Web writing](#) is so very important.

- Did you edit it again?

Once is never enough. Review your content at least one more time. It's amazing what you can find to edit the second (or third) time around!

- Does your content answer your readers' questions?

Consider what questions your readers may have about your topic and make sure you answer them in your copy. Remember, people aren't typing in [keyword], [keyword], [keyword]. They're typically asking Google a question (especially if they're using voice search.) Writing content that answers your readers' questions will help it position for question-oriented queries. Here's more information about ["conversational search."](#)

- Is the "voice" of the page appropriate?

Yes, it's OK if your copy has a little personality! Here's more information about working with your page's [tone and feel](#) and how to avoid the ["yawn response."](#)

- Are your sentences too long?

Vary your sentence structure so you have a combination of longer and shorter sentences. If you find your sentences creeping over 30 or so words, it may be time to edit them down.

- Are your paragraphs too long?

Long paragraphs without much white space are hard to read off a computer monitor – and even harder to read on a smartphone. Split up your long paragraphs into shorter ones. Please.

- Are you forcing your reader into a "dead end" page?

"Dead end" pages (pages that don't link out to related pages) can stop your readers dead in their tracks. Want to avoid this? Read more about ["dead end" Web pages.](#)

- Does the content provide the reader valuable information?

Google's Panda update spanked sites with "thin," low-quality content that was poorly written. Before you upload your page, ask yourself if the content answers your reader's questions and is informative. If you find that you're focusing more on the keyphrase usage than the actual content, rewrite the page.

- Did you use bullet points where appropriate?

If you find yourself writing a list-like sentence, use bullet points instead. Your readers will thank you and the items will be much easier to read.

- Did you use "too many" keyphrases?

Remember, there is no such thing as keyword density. If your content sounds "keyphrase-heavy" and stilted, reduce the keyphrase usage and focus more on your readers' experience. Learn more about the [myth of keyword density](#). Also, here's a great article by Ian Lurie that discusses [TD-IDF](#) and why keyword stuffing doesn't work.

- Does your headline include a keyphrase?

Searchers are following the “search scent” from the search engine results page. When they reach the landing page, they are quick-scanning for their search term (or a variation)—so including a keyphrase in your headline is important. Adding your keyphrase to your H1 headline is also an excellent way to reinforce keyphrase relevancy.

- Writing a blog post? Does your headline work for SEO, social and your readers?

Yes, you want your headline to be compelling, but you also want it to be keyphrase rich. Always include your main page keyphrase in your Title and work in other keyphrases if they “fit.” Here’s some great information on [how to write headlines that get noticed](#) (and are good for Google.).

- Did you include keyphrase-rich subheadlines?

Subheadlines are an excellent way to visually break up your text, making it easy for readers to quick-scan your benefits and information. Additionally, just like with the H1 headline, adding a keyphrase to your subheadlines can help reinforce keyphrase relevancy. You may not be able to add a keyphrase every time, but make sure you give it a try.

- Is your Title “clickable” and compelling?

Remember that the search engine results page is your first opportunity for conversion. Consider how you can create an enticing Title that “gets the click” over the other search result listings. Remember, you have about 59 characters (with spaces) to work with, so it’s important to write tight. Here are some additional [Title-writing tips](#).

- Does the meta description fit the intent of the page?

Yes, meta descriptions are still important (here’s a [great article](#) by Neil Patel that explains why.) And yes, every page should have its own meta description.

- Is the main CTA (call to action) clear—and is it easy to take action?

What action do you want your readers to take? Do you want them to contact you? Is your main goal to entice your reader into making a purchase? Make sure you tell reader what you want them to do and make it easy for them to take action.

- Do you have a secondary CTA (such as a newsletter signup or downloading a white paper?).

Do you want readers to sign up for your newsletter or learn about related products? Consider ways to make the secondary call to action stand out.

- Does the page include too many choices?

It’s important to keep your reader focused on your primary and secondary CTA’s. If your page lists too many choices (for example a large, scrolling page of products) consider eliminating all “unnecessary” choices that don’t support your main calls to action. Too many choices may force your readers into not taking any action at all.

- Writing a sales page? Did you include benefit statements?

People make purchase decisions based on what’s in it for them. What does this mean to you? You need to put the benefits front and center. Make sure that you tell your reader how your product/service will make their lives better and satisfy a need. And for heaven’s sake—[don’t bury your benefit statements!](#)

- Do you have vertical-specific testimonials?

Testimonials are fantastic—they offer third-party proof that your product or service is superior. Whenever possible, include vertical-specific testimonials (for instance, a real estate agent testimonial on a real estate landing page.) This will help increase your conversion rates. Learn more about [writing sales copy with testimonials](#).

And finally...the most important question...

- Does your content stand out and truly deserve a top position?

SEO writing is more than shoving keyphrases into content. If you want to be rewarded by Google (and your readers) your content [must stand out](#). That means knowing what your competitors are writing and coming up with a new angle, writing something in-depth and truly educating your readers. Making your site a must-read resource will take time. But the positions (and conversions) are well worth it.

What additional tips would you add to the checklist?

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