



# Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide



# Welcome to Google's Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide

This document first began as an effort to help teams within Google, but we thought it'd be just as useful to webmasters that are new to the topic of search engine optimization and wish to improve their sites' interaction with both users and search engines. Although this guide won't tell you any secrets that'll automatically rank your site first for queries in Google (sorry!), following the best practices outlined below will make it easier for search engines to crawl, index and understand your content.

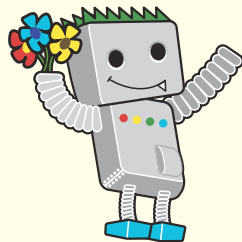
Search engine optimization is often about making small modifications to parts of your website. When viewed individually, these changes might seem like incremental improvements, but when combined with other optimizations, they could have a noticeable impact on your site's user experience and performance in organic search results. You're likely already familiar with many of the topics in this guide, because they're essential ingredients for any web page, but you may not be making the most out of them.

Even though this guide's title contains the words "search engine", we'd like to say that you should base your optimization decisions first and foremost on what's best for the visitors of your site. They're the main consumers of your content and are using search engines to find your work. Focusing too hard on specific tweaks to gain ranking in the organic results of search engines may not deliver the desired results. Search engine optimization is about putting your site's best foot forward when it comes to visibility in search engines, but your ultimate consumers are your users, not search engines.

Your site may be smaller or larger than our example site and offer vastly different content, but the optimization topics we discuss below should apply to sites of all sizes and types. We hope our guide gives you some fresh ideas on how to improve your website, and we'd love to hear your questions, feedback, and success stories in the Google Webmaster Help Forum.

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From here on, I'll be explaining various points on search engine optimization (SEO)!



**Googlebot**  
Crawling content on the Internet for Google's index every day, every night, non stop.

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An example may help our explanations, so we've created a fictitious website to follow throughout the guide. For each topic, we've fleshed out enough information about the site to illustrate the point being covered. Here's some background information about the site we'll use:

**Website/business name:** "Brandon's Baseball Cards"  
**Domain name:** brandonsbaseballcards.com  
**Focus:** Online-only baseball card sales, price guides, articles, and news content  
**Size:** Small, ~250 pages

Search engine optimization affects only organic search results, not paid or "sponsored" results such as Google AdWords.



# Create unique, accurate page titles

## Indicate page titles by using title tags

A title tag tells both users and search engines what the topic of a particular page is. The <title> tag should be placed within the <head> tag of the HTML document (1). Ideally, you should create a unique title for each page on your site.

## Page title contents are displayed in search results

If your document appears in a search results page, the contents of the title tag will usually appear in the first line of the results (if you're unfamiliar with the different parts of a Google search result, you might want to check out [the anatomy of a search result](#) video by Google engineer Matt Cutts, and this helpful [diagram of a Google search results page](#)). Words in the title are bolded if they appear in the user's search query. This can help users recognize if the page is likely to be relevant to their search (2).

The title for your homepage can list the name of your website/business and could include other bits of important information like the physical location of the business or maybe a few of its main focuses or offerings (3).

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Brandon's Baseball Cards - Buy Cards, Baseball News, Card Prices</title>
<meta name="description" content="Brandon's Baseball Cards provides a large selection of vintage and modern baseball cards for sale. We also offer daily baseball news and events in">
</head>
<body>
```

(1) The title of the homepage for our baseball card site, which lists the business name and three main focus areas.



(2) A user performs the query [baseball cards]. Our homepage shows up as a result, with the title listed on the first line (notice that the query terms the user searched for appear in bold).



If the user clicks the result and visits the page, the page's title will appear at the top of the browser.



(3) A user performs the query [rarest baseball cards]. A relevant, deeper page (its title is unique to the content of the page) on our site appears as a result.

### Glossary

**Search engine**

Computer function that searches data available on the Internet using keywords or other specified terms, or a program containing this function.

**<head> tag**

An element that indicates the header in an HTML document. The content of this element will not be displayed in a browser.

**HTML**

Abbreviation for HyperText Markup Language, a language used when describing web page documents. It denotes the basic elements of web pages, including the document text and any hyperlinks and images embedded within.

**Search query**

Single or multiple terms which are input by the user when performing a search on search engines.

## Best Practices

### Accurately describe the page's content

Choose a title that effectively communicates the topic of the page's content.

**Avoid:**

- choosing a title that has no relation to the content on the page
- using default or vague titles like "Untitled" or "New Page 1"

### Create unique title tags for each page

Each of your pages should ideally have a unique title tag, which helps Google know how the page is distinct from the others on your site.

**Avoid:**

- using a single title tag across all of your site's pages or a large group of pages

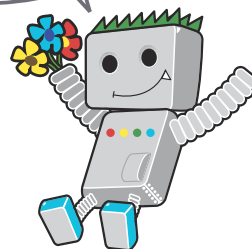
### Use brief, but descriptive titles

Titles can be both short and informative. If the title is too long, Google will show only a portion of it in the search result.

**Avoid:**

- using extremely lengthy titles that are unhelpful to users
- stuffing unneeded keywords in your title tags

Page titles are an important aspect of search engine optimization.



#### Links

- **The anatomy of a search result**  
<http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2007/11/anatomy-of-search-result.html>
- **Diagram of a Google search results page**  
<http://www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/answer.py?answer=35891>

# Make use of the "description" meta tag

## Summaries can be defined for each page

A page's description meta tag gives Google and other search engines a summary of what the page is about (1). Whereas a page's title may be a few words or a phrase, a page's description meta tag might be a sentence or two or a short paragraph. Google Webmaster Tools provides a handy [content analysis section](#) that'll tell you about any description meta tags that are either too short, long, or duplicated too many times (the same information is also shown for <title> tags). Like the <title> tag, the description meta tag is placed within the <head> tag of your HTML document.

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Brandon's Baseball Cards - Buy Cards, Baseball News, Card Prices</title>
<meta name="description" content="Brandon's Baseball Cards provides a large selection of vintage and modern baseball cards for sale. We also offer daily baseball news and events in">
</head>
<body>
```

(1) The beginning of the description meta tag for our homepage, which gives a brief overview of the site's offerings.

## What are the merits of description meta tags?

Description meta tags are important because **Google might use them as snippets for your pages**. Note that we say "might" because Google may choose to use a relevant section of your page's visible text if it does a good job of matching up with a user's query. Alternatively, Google might use your site's description in the **Open Directory Project** if your site is listed there (learn how to [prevent search engines from displaying ODP data](#)). Adding description meta tags to each of your pages is always a good practice in case Google cannot find a good selection of text to use in the snippet. The Webmaster Central Blog has an informative post on [improving snippets with better description meta tags](#).

Words in the snippet are bolded when they appear in the user's query (2). This gives the user clues about whether the content on the page matches with what he or she is looking for. (3) is another example, this time showing a snippet from a description meta tag on a deeper page (which ideally has its own unique description meta tag) containing an article.



(2) A user performs the query [baseball cards]. Our homepage appears as a result, with part of its description meta tag used as the snippet.



(3) A user performs the query [rarest baseball cards]. One of our deeper pages, with its unique description meta tag used as the snippet, appears as a result.

### Glossary

**Snippet**

Text displayed beneath the title of a corresponding web page on the search results pages of a search engine. A web page summary and/or parts of the page that match the search keywords will be displayed.

**Open Directory Project (ODP)**

The world's largest volunteer-run web directory (a list of Internet links collected on a large scale and then organized by category).

**Domain**

An address on the Internet that indicates the location of a computer or network. These are administrated to avoid duplication.

**This is a sample, click download link to get the full Tutorial**

**CLICK BELOW**

