

Annex 3 - Google is transparent about its approach to ranking

I. Introduction and Summary

1. This Annex supplements Google's response to the Competition and Markets Authority (**CMA**) consultation of 28 January 2026 (**Consultation**) on the proposed conduct requirement (**CR**) in relation to fair ranking. It responds specifically to the Consultation's objective to "*ensure that Google provides transparency over how it ranks search results*"¹
2. Google already provides to publishers abundant information about the ranking criteria of Google Search; the Consultation acknowledges this.² Google provides this information for free, drafted in plain and intelligible language, and keeps it up-to-date.

II. Google communicates extensive information on the ranking criteria of Google Search

3. The key sources that Google provides on the ranking criteria of Google Search are the Google Search Essentials webpages (formerly the Webmaster Guidelines), the How Search Works website, and the Google Search Quality Rating Guidelines. Beyond these key sources, Google provides a wealth of additional information to websites to help them understand Google's ranking criteria and take action as needed to optimise their ranking, no matter what stage of development the site is at.

(1) The Google Search Essentials webpages, the How Search Works website, and Google Search Quality Rating Guidelines

4. First, a core way that Google communicates the ranking criteria of Google Search is via the **Google Search Essentials** webpages (formerly the Webmaster Guidelines).³ On these webpages, Google provides guidance specifically for websites designed to help them understand Google Search's ranking criteria and optimise their ranking. In particular, the Google Search Essentials site sets out (a) best practices to help improve how a website appears in Google Search results, (b) technical requirements (i.e., what Google needs from a webpage to show it in Google Search), and (c) spam policies (i.e., behaviours and tactics that can lead to lower ranking or being completely omitted from Google Search results).

¹ Fair Ranking Consultation, para. 4.10.

² Fair Ranking Consultation, para. 4.12.

³ [Google Search Essentials](#).

Home > Search Central > Documentation
Was this helpful?
Send feedback

On this page
Technical requirements
Spam policies
Key best practices

Google Search Essentials

The Google Search Essentials make up the core parts of what makes your web-based content (web pages, images, videos, or other publicly-available material that Google finds on the web) eligible to appear and perform well on Google Search:

- **Technical requirements:** What Google needs from a web page to show it in Google Search.
- **Spam policies:** The behaviors and tactics that can lead to lower ranking or being completely omitted from Google Search results.
- **Key best practices:** The main things that can help improve how your site appears in Google Search results.

It doesn't cost any money to appear in Google Search results, no matter what anyone tries to tell you. It's important to note that just because a page meets all of these requirements and best practices, doesn't mean that Google will crawl, index, or serve its content. Learn more about [How Search Works](#).

5. Second, the **How Search Works** website is designed to provide a more high-level and easily-understandable layman's explanation on the ranking criteria and functioning of Google Search.⁴ This site contains information on browsing and indexing, Google's algorithms, Google's efforts to provide users with useful answers, Google Search's rigorous testing, and spam detection.

Google Search
Overview
Our approach
How Search works
Features
Our history

Organising information
Ranking results
Rigorous testing
Detecting spam

How Google Search organises information

When you search, Google looks through hundreds of billions of web pages and other digital content organised in our Search index to find helpful information – more information than all of the libraries of the world.



6. In particular, the How Search Works site provides information on the operation of Google Search's algorithms: "Google's ranking systems are designed to sort through hundreds of billions of web pages and other digital content to present the most relevant, useful results on the first page in a fraction of a second."⁵ This *Ranking Results* section of the site is organised in several subsections to enable users to easily find the most useful piece of information on ranking criteria (e.g., meaning of your query, relevance of content, quality of content, usability of webpages, and context and settings).



7. Third, the **Google Search Quality Rating Guidelines** are an important source of information on the criteria that Google uses to evaluate results.⁶ The Rating Guidelines are provided to external raters (who measure the quality of Search results on an ongoing basis) as guidance to evaluate Google's search results.⁷ The Rating Guidelines define the relevance standard against which raters test changes in Google's results, and establish users as the central reference point for search result evaluation. In particular, the Rating Guidelines explain the concepts of quality and relevance (e.g., topicality and how sites meet user needs). Google designs its algorithms to return results that are high quality and relevant in the way described in the Rating Guidelines.
8. Google releases the Rating Guidelines publicly and for free, releasing a new version at least every year: they were last updated in September 2025. The Rating Guidelines consist of a comprehensive 180+ page guide that sets out the criteria that Google uses to evaluate the quality of webpages. The Rating Guidelines contain detailed and granular information that websites can therefore use to design their sites in a way that is likely to optimise their ranking in Google's results.
9. As explained in the Rating Guidelines, a core concept that is used to determine site **quality** is whether the site is trustworthy (i.e., is the page accurate, honest, safe, and reliable?). Trust is assessed by looking at experience (i.e., does the author have

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ [Google Search Quality Rating Guidelines](#) (last updated 11 September 2025).

⁷ See Google Search, [Improving Search with rigorous testing](#).

experience on the topic?), expertise (i.e., is the author an expert on the topic?), and authoritativeness (i.e., is the webpage authoritative about the topic?).

3.4 Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trust (E-E-A-T)

Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trust (E-E-A-T) are all important considerations in PQ rating. The most important member at the center of the E-E-A-T family is Trust.



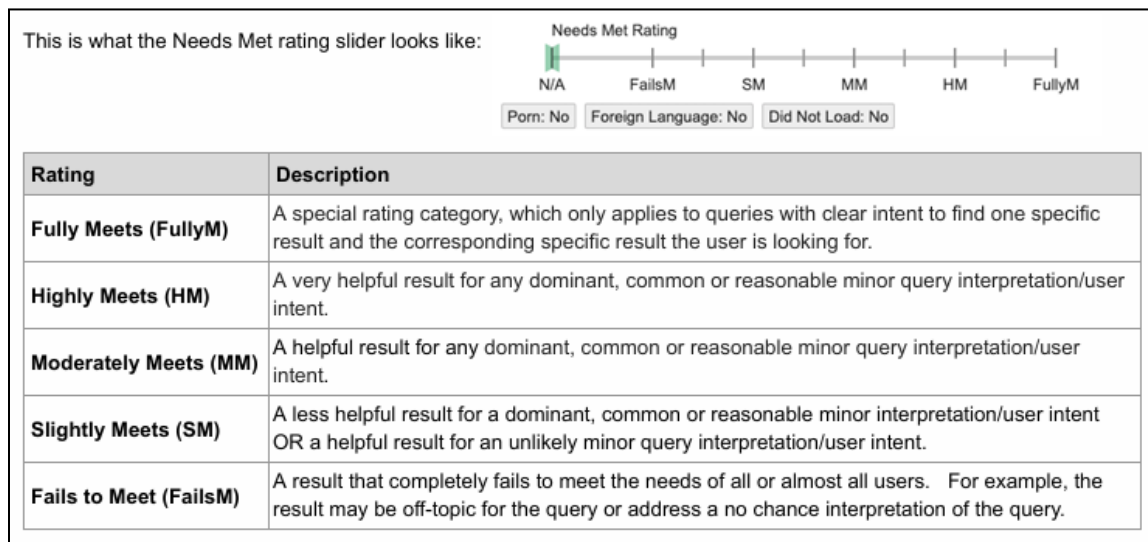
Experience, Expertise and Authoritativeness are important concepts that can support your assessment of Trust:

	Experience: Consider the extent to which the content creator has the necessary first-hand or life experience for the topic. Many types of pages are trustworthy and achieve their purpose well when created by people with a wealth of personal experience. For example, which would you trust: a product review from someone who has personally used the product or a "review" by someone who has not?
	Expertise: Consider the extent to which the content creator has the necessary knowledge or skill for the topic. Different topics require different levels and types of expertise to be trustworthy. For example, which would you trust: home electrical wiring advice from a skilled electrician or from an antique homes enthusiast who has no knowledge of electrical wiring?
	Authoritativeness: Consider the extent to which the content creator or the website is known as a go-to source for the topic. While most topics do not have one official, Authoritative website or content creator, when they do, that website or content creator is often among the most reliable and trustworthy sources. For example, a local business profile page on social media may be the authoritative and trusted source for what is on sale now. The official government page for getting a passport is the unique, official, and authoritative source for passport renewal.

10. The Rating Guidelines go on to identify other core criteria that raters should consider in assessing quality and that therefore are the criteria that websites should take into account if they want to optimise their ranking. The Guidelines:
- List the factors a rater should consider in ranking the overall quality of a webpage, e.g., the purpose of the webpage and the type of website,
 - List the factors a rater should consider in ranking the main content of a webpage, e.g., effort (the extent to which a human being actively worked to create satisfying content) and accuracy (the extent to which the content is factually accurate), and

c. Explain how to assess the reputation of a website.

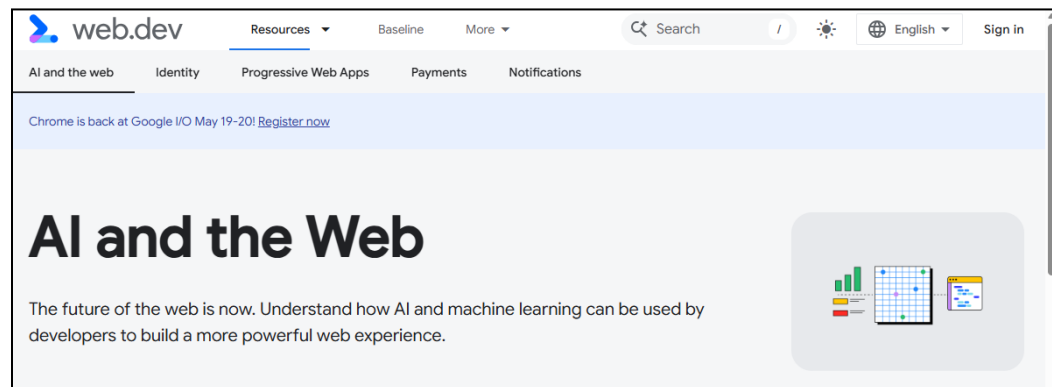
11. The Rating Guidelines also set out guidance on how to evaluate the **relevance** of a website. In particular, the Rating Guidelines discuss how to assess whether a result meets a user's needs (specifically, what we believe the user needs based on the query they entered). Websites that want to optimise their ranking on Google Search can refer to the Guidelines' "Needs Met rating slider" to understand how their websites are rated based on meeting a user's needs, and what it takes for a website to "fully meet" a user's needs. The slider is accompanied by detailed guidance and examples on the types of results that fall into each category on the rating slider.



(b) Google provides a wealth of additional information for websites to help them understand the ranking criteria of Google Search

12. In addition to the key resources described above, Google provides help to websites to (i) get started with Google Search, (ii) monitor and improve ranking on Google Search, (iii) get updates on changes to Google Search, and (iv) get help on Google Search. Google also provides additional resources, e.g., academic articles and conferences, for websites looking for even more in-depth information about how Google Search works. These resources are summarised at a high-level below.

13. **Getting started.** Google provides various resources for websites that are just getting started and want to optimise their ranking on Google Search. All these resources are public and free.
- a. Google provides a dedicated site called Web Dev, which sets out detailed advice on how to build a site valued by users that is likely to rank well.⁸ The Web Dev site provides detailed information, resources, videos, code labs, and samples to help websites create a web experience that is (a) fast, (b) integrated, (c) reliable, and (d) engaging, including by using AI.⁹ These factors allow a website to optimise its ranking in Google's results.



- b. Google publishes a detailed Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Starter Guide.¹⁰ The SEO Starter Guide is updated regularly and sets out the best practices to follow to optimise ranking on Google. For example, it provides tips on how to improve URLs, how to provide content that users find compelling and useful, and instructional videos.

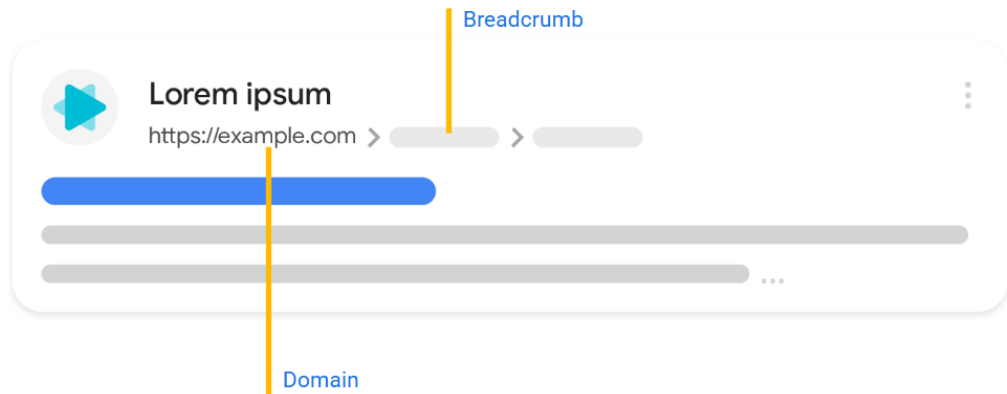
⁸ web.dev

⁹ See web.dev, [AI and the Web](#).

¹⁰ [Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide](#).

Use descriptive URLs ↗

Parts of the URL can be displayed in search results as breadcrumbs, so users can also use the URLs to understand whether a result will be useful for them.



Google learns breadcrumbs automatically based on the words in the URL, but you can also influence them with [structured data](#) if you like a technical challenge. Try to include words in the URL that may be useful for users; for example:

`https://www.example.com/pets/cats.html`

A URL that only contains random identifiers is less helpful for users; for example:

`https://www.example.com/2/6772756D707920636174`

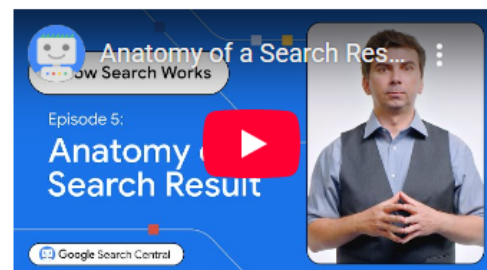
Make your site interesting and useful

Creating content that people find compelling and useful will likely influence your website's presence in search results more than any of the other suggestions in this guide. While "compelling and useful content" can mean different things to different people, content like this generally shares some common attributes, such as:

- **The text is easy-to-read and well organized:** Write content naturally and make sure the content is well written, easy to follow, and free of spelling and grammatical mistakes. Break up long content into paragraphs and sections, and provide headings to help users navigate your pages.
- **The content is unique:** When you're writing new content, don't copy others' content in part or in its entirety: create the content yourself based on what you know about the topic. Don't just rehash what others already published.
- **The content is up-to-date:** Check in on previously published content and update it as needed, or even delete it if it's not relevant anymore.
- **The content is helpful, reliable, and people-first:** Be sure that you're writing content that your readers will find helpful and reliable. For example, providing expert or experienced sources can help people understand your articles' expertise.

Influence how your site looks in Google Search ↗

A typical Google Search results page consists of a [few different visual elements](#) that you can influence to help users decide whether they should visit your site through those search results. In this section, we're focusing on the *title link* and the *snippet* because these are the more visually significant elements.



14. **Monitoring and improving.** Google gives websites the ability to perform tests for how well their site is designed on criteria that are important for Google's ranking through Search Console.¹¹ Search Console gives websites free tools and reports to help manage their performance in Google's results, as well as with step-by-step tips and short instructional videos.
15. Search Console allows websites to keep track of their search traffic and performance and enables them to check indexing status and optimize the visibility of their websites.

The screenshot shows the 'Welcome to Google Search Console' interface. At the top, it says 'Welcome to Google Search Console' and 'To start, select property type'. Below this are two main options: 'Domain' and 'URL prefix', separated by an 'or'.

Domain

- All URLs across all subdomains (m., www. ...)
- All URLs across https or http
- Requires DNS verification

example.com
Enter domain or subdomain

CONTINUE

URL prefix

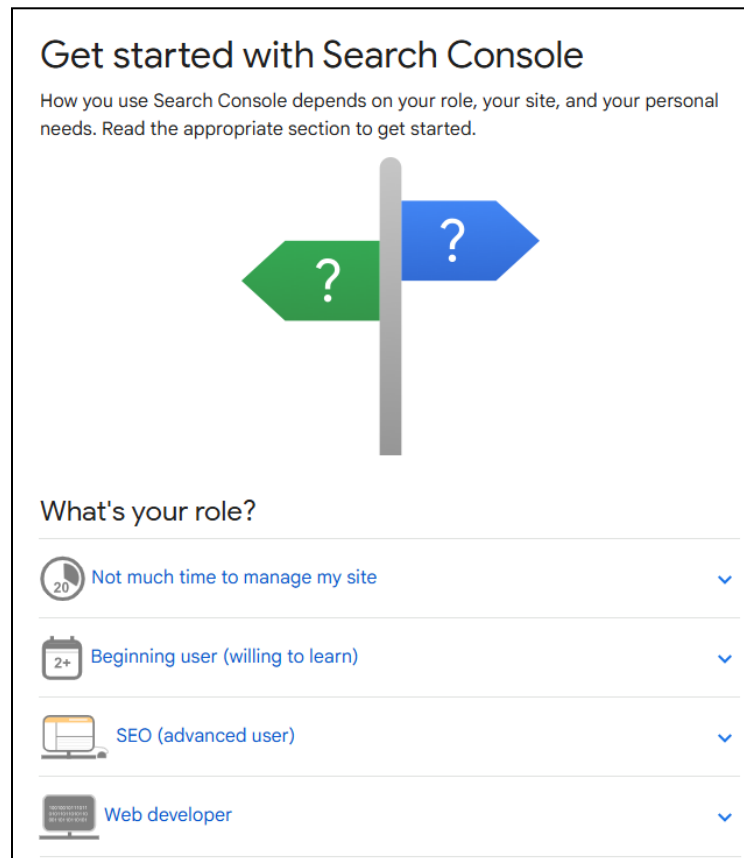
- Only URLs under entered address
- Only URLs under specified protocol
- Allows multiple verification methods

https://www.example.com
Enter URL

CONTINUE

¹¹ [Search Console Help.](#)

16. The *Get Started With Search Console* introductory page¹² provides easy-to-understand information organised in different sections, depending on the website owner's role (e.g., "Not much time to manage my site", "Beginning user (willing to learn)", "SEO (advanced user)", and "web developer"). For example, the section for website owners without *"much time to manage [their] site"* provides them with links to specific pages describing the operation and functioning of Google Search, tips for search results optimization, and the possibility to measure their website's performance.



17. Google Search Central also provides helpful pages with step-by-step guides and instructional videos to get started with Search Console.

Get started with Search Console

[Search Console](#) is a tool from Google that can help anyone with a website to understand how they are performing on Google Search, and what they can do to improve their appearance on search to bring more relevant traffic to their websites.

Search Console provides information on [how Google crawls, indexes, and serves websites](#). This can help website owners to monitor and optimize Search performance.

There is no need to sign in to the tool every day. If new issues are found by Google on your site, you'll receive an email from Search Console alerting you. But you might want to check your account around once every month, or when you make changes to the site's content, to make sure the data is stable. Learn more about [managing your site with Search Console](#).

A video thumbnail for 'Intro to Google Search Console'. It features a man in a red shirt holding a blue object, with a large red play button in the center. The text 'Intro to Google Search Console' is overlaid on the image, and a banner at the bottom reads 'Search Console Training'.

18. With Search Console, websites can receive notifications of spam issues on their site. For example, websites will receive a notification if Google has to take manual action against the site to remove a page from its web index because of a serious violation. Google has invested substantial resources in communication and outreach.
19. Google also allows websites to perform tests for how well their website is designed on criteria that are important for Google's ranking through Search Console. Such criteria includes mobile-friendliness, page speed, and structured data. Websites can receive recommendations on how to improve their websites based on the test results. This may improve their ranking in Google's results. For example, the URL Inspection tool allows websites to test whether a URL might be indexable.¹³ Google also introduced tools so that websites can take advantage of new Google Search features. For example, the Rich Results Testing Tool provides websites the ability to test whether a webpage supports rich results.¹⁴
20. Resources to monitor and improve ranking on Google Search are not limited to Search Console. Google Search Central provides specific guidance on how to improve the SEO of a website, including in relation to AI-generated content.¹⁵ The guidance is tailored depending on whether a business owner, developer, or SEO professional is looking to improve the ranking of a website.

¹³ Search Console Help, [URL Inspection Tool](#).

¹⁴ Google [Rich Results Test](#).

¹⁵ Search Central Blog, [Google Search's guidance about AI-generated content](#).

Google Search's guidance about AI-generated content

[Send feedback](#)

On this page

[Rewarding high-quality content, however it is produced](#)

[How automation can create helpful content](#)

[Our advice for creators considering AI-generation](#)

FAQ

[Is AI content against Google Search's guidelines?](#)

[Why doesn't Google Search ban AI content?](#)

[How will Google Search prevent poor quality AI content from taking over search results?](#)

[How will Google address AI content that potentially propagates misinformation or contradicts consensus on important topics?](#)

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Wednesday, February 8, 2023

At Google, we've long believed in the power of AI to transform the ability to deliver helpful information. In this post, we'll share more about how AI-generated content fits into our long-standing approach to show helpful content to people on Search.

Specific things you can do to improve the SEO of your website

Select your profile and get some recommendations of how you can improve the SEO of your website below.



Business owner or marketer

I'm interested in SEO from a business standpoint, and I might hire consultants to do tasks for my site. I want to learn the basics of optimizing site for search engines, and know what features are available in Google Search.



Developer

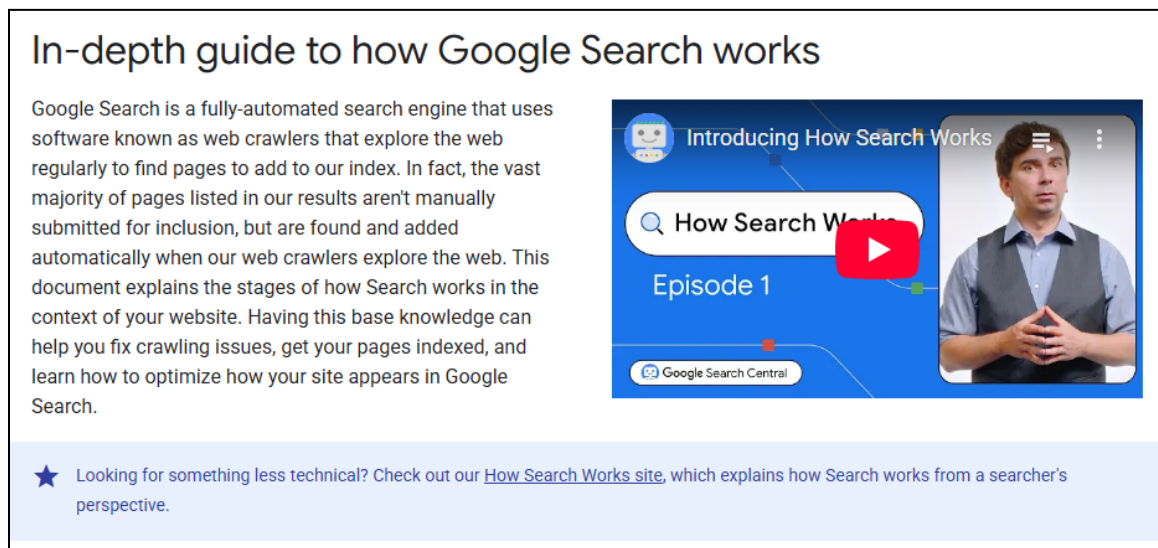
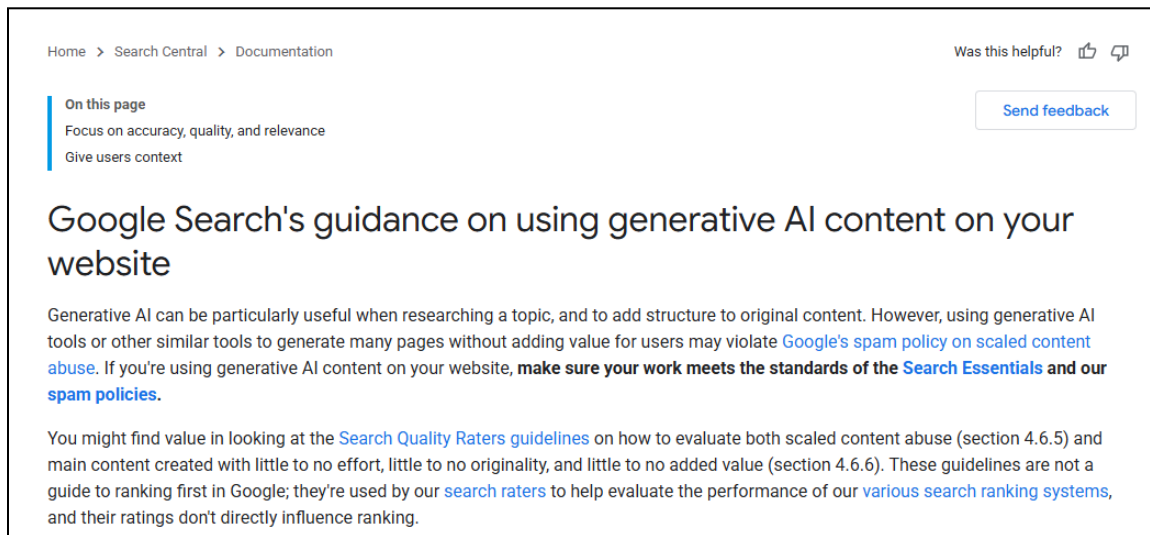
I create the markup and code for my site. I'm interested in monitoring and resolving common issues with how my site shows up on Google Search.



SEO professional

I already know the basics of how Google Search works. I'm focused on monitoring website traffic, optimizing ranking, and making informed decisions about the appearance of my site in Search results.

21. Google Search Central also provides a wealth of documentation on SEO fundamentals, crawling and indexing, ranking and search appearance, monitoring and debugging, and it provides site-specific guides.¹⁶ For example, it provides in-depth guidance on how Google Search works, including in relation to generative AI content, supplemented with instructional videos.¹⁷ The guidance links out to other resources, like the How Search Works site (one of the key resources mentioned above), in case websites are looking for less technical guidance.

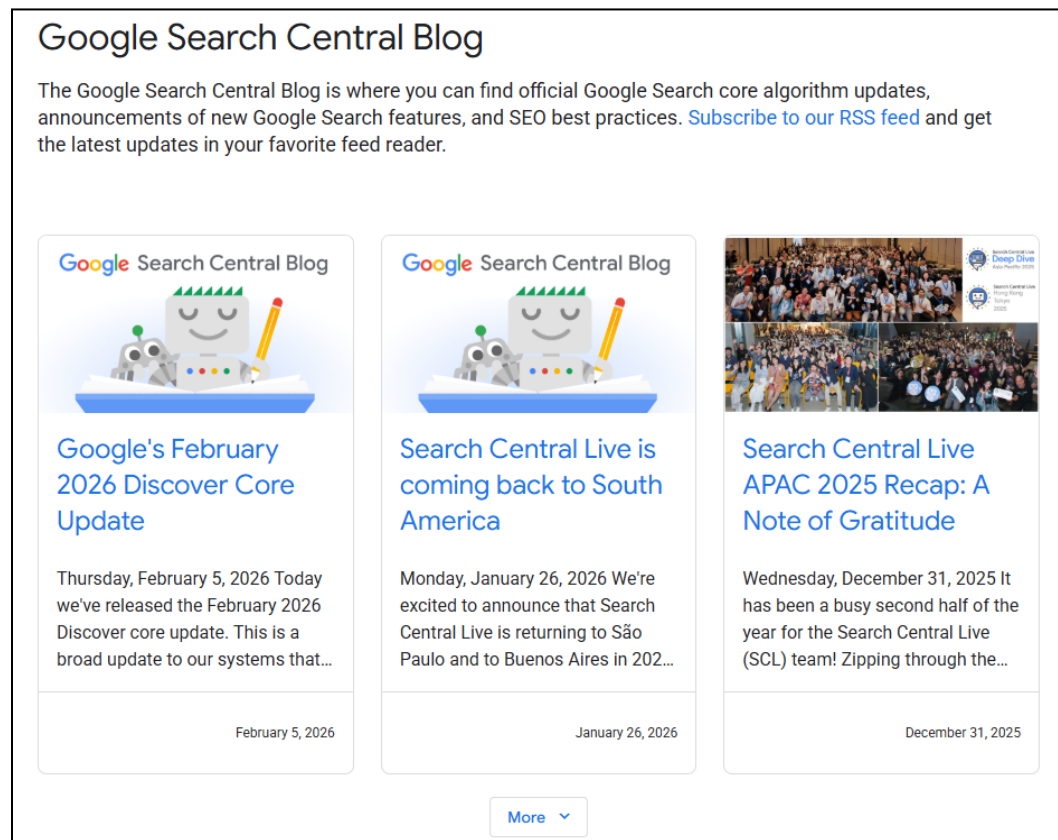


¹⁶ [Explore Google Search documentation to improve your site's SEO.](#)

¹⁷ Google Search Central, [Google Search's guidance on using generative AI content on your website](#). See too Google Search Central, [Creating helpful, reliable, people-first content](#).

22. **Updates on Google ranking.** Google announces major ranking changes, including core updates, and keeps users and websites up-to-date through blogs, X, and YouTube channels:

- a. Google announces important changes that affect ranking of websites on its Google Search Central Blog.¹⁸ The Google Search Central Blog contains posts on the operation of Google's algorithms, including information for websites on upcoming algorithm changes. The blogs are divided into categories covering (i) more recent updates, (ii) Google Search core updates, ranking changes, and algorithm updates, and (iii) structured data updates.



- b. Google provides another free blog, called the Search Blog, where users and websites can find the latest news on Google's search ranking, screenshots of Google's newest features, and other multimedia resources.¹⁹

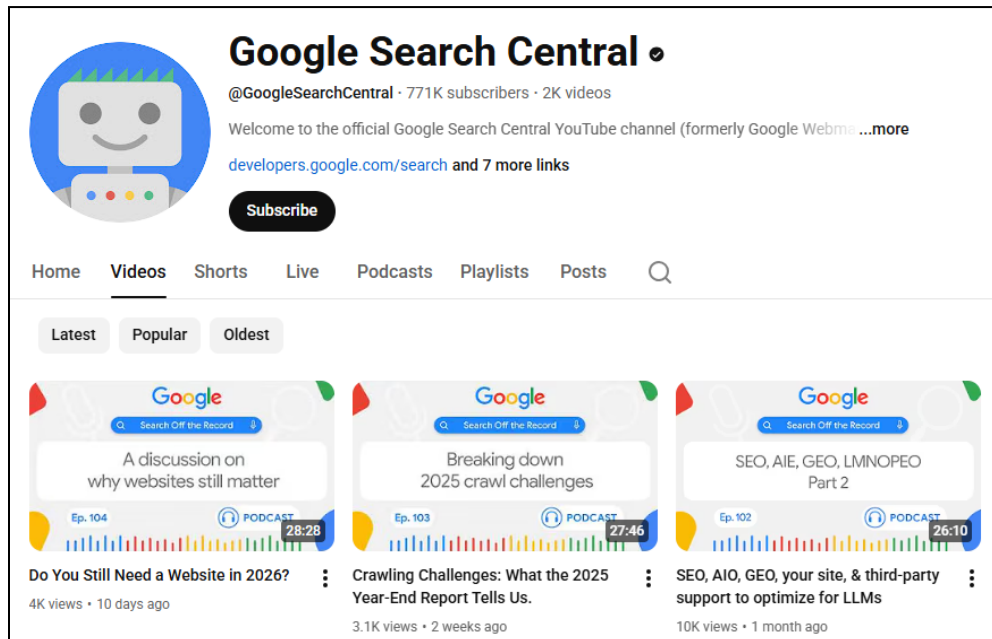
¹⁸ [Google Search Central Blog](#).

¹⁹ Google, The Keyword, [News about Google Search](#).

- c. The Google Search Central X account (@googlesearchc) provides free information about new launches and features, including algorithm updates. The Google Search Central X account posts updates informing followers of changes to Google's ranking systems (core update) and spam policies. Google Search Liaison account on X (@searchliaison), is another account Google uses for core updates to Google Search and other algorithm announcements.



- d. The Google Search Central YouTube channel regularly broadcasts information covering, among other things, Google's algorithm updates, to c.770,000 subscribers.²⁰ The channel provides popular YouTube videos on its search ranking, including (i) *How does Google Search work?*,²¹ (ii) *SEO for startups in under 10 minutes*,²² (iii) *Webspam Content Violations*²³ and (iv) *Anatomy of a Search Result*.²⁴



23. Troubleshooting. Google provides various resources for websites that run into difficulties or ranking issues on Google Search.
- a. The Google Search Central Help Community is a dedicated community forum where websites can describe issues they face with their ranking and see posts and explanations providing answers.²⁵ Websites can search over tens of thousands of pre-existing posts and answers to find input on their questions. In addition, websites can post new questions that will be answered by contributors to the community, including Google employees and other expert contributors.

²⁰ YouTube, [Google Search Central](#).

²¹ YouTube, [How does Google Search Work?](#)

²² YouTube, [SEO for startups in under 10 minutes](#).

²³ YouTube, [Webspam Content Violations](#).

²⁴ YouTube, [Anatomy of a Search Result](#).

²⁵ Search Console Help, [Google Search Central Help Community](#).

The respondents are graded with coloured badges (for example, if they are Google employees or Google community specialists) to help websites find information they seek more easily.

- b. Google provides websites specific help with troubleshooting problems.²⁶ The troubleshooting results website helps answer questions such as:
 - i. *Why did my site traffic drop?* The troubleshooting site provides the top reasons for traffic drops and helps websites diagnose the problem and find a fix.
 - ii. *Why is my page missing from Google Search?* The troubleshooting site helps websites troubleshoot and fix the most common problems when their webpage is missing from Google Search results.
 - iii. *Why is my site labelled as dangerous in Google Search?* The troubleshooting site helps websites understand why their site may have been blocked from Google Search (e.g., because it shows dangerous or spammy material) and to fix that problem.
- c. Google employees from the Search Quality team answer questions about Google Search on SEO Office Hours.²⁷ Google picks questions submitted by websites and publishes answers on Google's YouTube channel.

Submit a question idea for Google SEO Office Hours



Google SEO Office Hours is where Googlers from the Search Quality team answer questions around Google Search, websites, and the things between. We pick questions submitted by you, aiming to publish on our [YouTube channel](#) on a monthly basis.

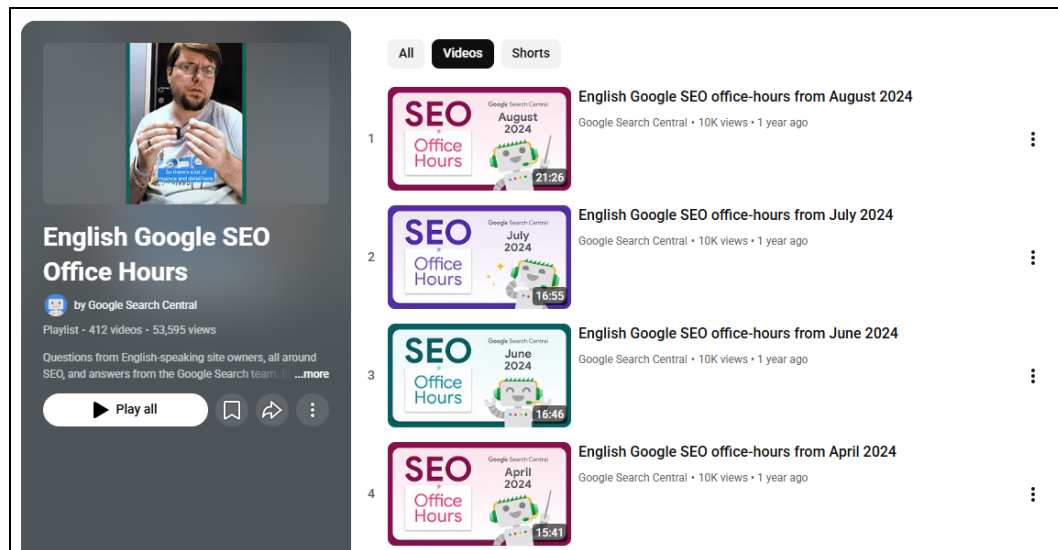
Do you have a question that might be a good fit? Use our submission form to let us know:

Submit a question



²⁶ Search Console Help, [Troubleshooting results](#).

²⁷ YouTube, [English Google SEO Office Hours](#).



- d. When Google makes more complex updates compared to the usual core updates, it may make available a ranking feedback form to understand how the update is working. For example, Google made such a form available following its March 2024 algorithm update for any websites that had input on the ranking changes made.²⁸

24. **Deep dives into ranking.** Google also publishes resources to assist websites looking for an even deeper, more technical understanding of the ranking criteria of Google Search. Google organises free conferences, talks, and workshops as another means to communicate the information on Google's search ranking set out in published resources (described above).²⁹ These events also give website owners the chance to discuss with Google employees and industry experts on Google's search ranking. Presentations at these conferences cover content also published online, e.g., how to make content easily accessible to the growing number of internet users, as well as SEO, security, and quality.

III. **The information that Google provides on how Google Search ranks results is easily accessible, publicly available, plain and intelligible, and free**

25. Google's disclosure of its ranking criteria is easily and publicly available and drafted in plain and intelligible language.

²⁸ Google Search Central Blog, [What web creators should know about our March 2024 core update and new spam policies](#) (5 March 2024).

²⁹ Google Search Central, [Upcoming Search Central Live events](#).

26. First, all the resources mentioned above are free and publicly available online. All the resources are easily accessible through links and are featured on popular websites like YouTube, Google, and X; they are not hidden behind paywalls.
27. Second, Google uses plain and intelligible language to describe how Google Search ranks. For example, the Rating Guidelines are provided to external raters as guidance to evaluate Google's search results and must therefore be sufficiently structured, simple, and clear to be educational. The Rating Guidelines are accompanied by examples, tables, and illustrations to help raters and webmasters understand the ranking concepts.
28. Other resources are similarly written in simple and clear language. The Google Search Central blog, for example, provides nicely structured easy-to-read articles on various topics.³⁰ The information on Google Search is also provided in different formats from articles, to videos, step-by-step guides, and Q&As to cater to a wide audience.
29. Third, Google provides enough information to make websites aware of relevant changes, including to Google's ranking algorithms, without overwhelming them with detail. For example, Google provides updates on changes to Google Search's ranking algorithms where sufficiently relevant and significant (e.g., the core updates, and other updates that could impact a website's ranking). Google Search is continuously tweaking its algorithms to fix bugs and improve its search service, but not every tweak merits a blog post or video.

IV. Conclusion

30. Google uses varied and established channels to communicate clearly and transparently to publishers (and other third parties) about its approach to ranking Search results and any upcoming changes. Indeed, the Consultation recognises Google's extensive disclosure. Against this background, the Consultation fails to demonstrate the necessity or proportionality of the broad and onerous disclosure obligations proposed by the draft CR.

³⁰ For example, Google Search Central Blog, [Top Ways to ensure your content performs well on Google's AI experiences on Search](#) (21 May 2025).