

“Best Content on the Internet” Checklist

Part 1: Research

Choose Topic

Your target topic should be one of three things:

- Something that sells your product
- Based on a keyword with high search volume (especially when just starting out)
- A high-competition target that you should still cover to prove yourself an expert in the field

If you don't have a keyword research tool, try Googling various ideas and see what comes up in the search bar as you're typing, or look at the other suggested searches that Google gives you. Those are generated by people actually typing those topics into Google, which means at least someone is looking for information on that topic.

Analyze the Competition

Look through the top 10 sites that rank for a specific keyword. Are any of them ordinary websites written by someone like you or me? Or are they part of a larger organization/agency. Additionally, do the results include Reddit or Quora posts instead of articles? If so, this may indicate low competition.

Develop the Title

This should include your top keyword near the beginning. Include other keywords if needed. Keep the title around 50-60 characters. Do not go over 60.

Determine the Target Article Length

While not a hard and fast rule, I like to take the average of the top 5 ranking articles on Google for your topic, then add roughly 10% for my target word count.

Read the Top 4 Articles on Google

Reading the top 4 articles (or more) is useful to make sure you are well versed in the subject matter before you write, or before you assign to a writer.

Step 2: Outline

Gather All Major Talking Points

I like to go through all the other articles in the top search results and mark down every topic and subtopic that they cover. I might even copy and paste certain sections into my notes so that I have the facts available when it's time to write.

Add Personal Insight/Original Research

The best way to rank for a topic on Google is to provide original research or personal insight. Don't just parrot what everyone else is saying, go a step further. Bring your own knowledge into things, create your own experiments, or conduct a social media/newsletter poll to offer original data.

Look Through Google's List of Questions

Google often has a list of frequently asked questions that they display in their search results. These can be a gold mine for topics to cover within your article.

Write Down Your Headings

Now that you've gathered all your information, write down what your main subheadings (H2s) are going to be, as well as any sub-subheadings (H3s). This is the backbone of your article.

If A Lot of Images are Necessary, Collect Them

If you're creating an article that requires a lot of visuals (a tutorial for example), make sure to gather those ahead of time.

(Optional) Contract Designer If Necessary

Not all, but some projects require additional graphic design elements. If this is the case, hire this person ahead of time so you have their work to reference as you write.

Step 3: Write/Edit the Article

Write!

The time has come to write your article! If you've done the research, built your

outline and assembled your images, this is actually a straightforward process and shouldn't be that difficult.

Check for Scrollability

You want to make sure that your article scrolls well so that it appeals to both skimmers (those who just read the headings) and scuba-divers (those who want to read the entire article). We do this by following a few “rules” of skimmability:

- Make sure each paragraph is no longer than 3 sentences long
- Ensure there are no long passages between subheadings. If necessary, divide up subheadings even further
- Use lists when appropriate
- Use bold and italicized text to call attention to key points
- Break up long sections of text with images, pullquotes, callout boxes, etc.

Check on “Cookie Cutter” Effect

For certain types of articles (especially list articles), you want to make sure that each section is uniform with all the others. For example, in a list of the “Best Horror Books”, the spotlight for each book on the list should follow the same structure.

Read Through and Confirm it's the Best Thing on the Internet

This is the #1 rule: **make it the best thing on the Internet**. If you can honestly say that the top ranking posts are not as good as your article, you're good to go.

(Optional) Analyze with Software

If you have access to a tool like Clearscope, Surfer SEO, MarketMuse, etc, these can be really handy to analyze your text as compared to the top search results. It will help you know if you are missing any major topics that others cover.

Step 4: Format the Article

Verify the URL “Slug” Is Short and Contains the Keyword

The “Slug” is the part of the URL unique to your article (i.e. yourwebsite.com/your-article). Make sure it's short, usually containing just the keyword you are targeting. It should not include the entire name of the article, or the date, unless you are a news site.

Add a Meta Title and Description

The Meta Title and Description are pulled by Google to display in the search results. You can use your article title, or pick something more likely to get people to click.

One Last Check for Grammar and Spelling

Now's the time to give your article a once-over to check for any last spelling or grammar mistakes.

Format Headings, Subheadings, Lists, etc.

Make sure your article has all of the right headings, subheadings, lists, and other key components that you included in your writing.

Add Featured Image

Every article should have a featured image. This is the image that will be displayed if the article is shared on social media, and is usually the main image seen at the top of the page.

Run All Images through Kraken.io to Reduce Size

A tool like Kraken.io will help reduce the size of your image files without a huge drop in quality. This will increase your page speed and chance of ranking.

Upload and Format All Images

Once you've reduced the size of your images, upload all of them and make sure they look good in the flow of your article.

Make Sure All Images Have ALT Tags

ALT Tags were created to help people with vision impairment to know what the image was about. Make sure that all images have these, and that they accurately describe the content.

Make Sure the Article Has the Right Category

If using Wordpress, make sure your article is assigned a category.

Look For At Least 2-4 Internal Links

Make sure you have opportunities to link to other articles on your website. This builds authority and establishes yourself as an expert in related subjects.

Look For at Least 1-2 External Links

Additionally, you want to verify your content by linking out to other content that supports your arguments. Do not link to other articles on the exact same topic/keyword.

Add Table of Contents if Necessary

For longer articles, it helps to have a Table of Contents at the top so people can jump to a specific section.

Write a Good Excerpt

Wordpress has an “Excerpt” section. I usually copy/paste what I wrote in the Meta Description.

(Optional) Format Tables

If you have tables, you will need to take extra time to make sure these look good. All tables should have a heading, should be easy to understand, use alternating colors if necessary, etc. I recommend the plugin NinjaTables for most use cases.

(Optional) Add In-content Add to Join Newsletter

If you are trying to promote a newsletter (you should), then make sure that every article mentions it. You can make this a huge banner ad-type-thing, or something you bring it up within the content.

(Optional) Add Affiliate Links

If there are any affiliate products that are important to the subject of your article, be sure to sign up for those affiliate programs (if you haven’t already), then include links within your article.

Step 5: Final Check

Now that you’ve gone through the entire checklist, it’s time to do one last once-over before you hit publish.

- Is it the Best Thing on the Internet?
- Does it Scroll Well?
- Does it Have Internal and External Links?
- Are the Visuals the Best to Explain Things When Necessary?
- Have you Checked and Double Checked Your Grammar?
- Does it Have All Possible Email Signup Opportunities?

If everything looks good, hit that Publish button!