

# WordPress and SEO

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### Learning objectives

In this lesson, you'll learn:

- what SEO is and why it is of great importance for your WordPress site;
  - what WordPress does for your site's SEO out of the box.
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## 1. What is SEO, and why is it important?

The previous modules were all about creating an excellent site with WordPress. But what is an excellent website without visitors? You can have the best site the world has ever seen, but unfortunately, that is not enough to make people visit it. And that's where the real challenge begins. Of course, you can ask your family and friends to check out your site. But we're assuming your goal is to have traffic coming in from other sources as well. But how? Creating a WordPress site is only the first step on your way to stardom — for the other steps, you need to work on your SEO.

So, before we start, let's first examine what SEO is and why you should work on it. **SEO** stands for '**search engine optimization**.' It's the process of improving websites and content to get more traffic from search engines. SEO has two parts:

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1. an **on-page** part, which has to do with optimizing everything on your site to make it better. For example, make sure you have great content, a good site structure, and more technical stuff, like the quality of your code.
2. an **off-page** part, which encompasses everything you do outside of your site to get people to visit it. This could be social media or organizing events.

Basically, working on your SEO means increasing the chances that the site will get visited. If you want to dive deeper into SEO, you should check out the [Yoast SEO academy Premium subscription!](#)

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## Advanced: Holistic SEO

At Yoast, we practice '**holistic SEO**'. We advocate that your primary goal should be to build and maintain the best possible website. Ranking in Google will come automatically if your website is of extremely high quality.

Google wants to serve its customers. Its mission is to index all the world's information and make it universally accessible. In addition to this, Google, of course, wants to make money. To achieve this, people have to keep using Google. This means that it has to show people the results they are looking for. So if your website is the best in your market, Google wants to rank it high in the results.

Permanently ranking well in Google demands an **extensive, holistic SEO strategy** that is focused on every aspect of your website. The technical side, the user experience (UX), the content on your website: everything needs to be top-notch. To keep ranking well in Google, you should develop – what we call – a holistic SEO approach.



Image 1: Holistic SEO

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## 2. What does WordPress do for your SEO?

WordPress is quite an SEO-friendly content management system. By installing WordPress, you get a pretty good experience out of the box. A lot of basics are handled well by WordPress. However, it would be a mistake to think that you're ready to rank immediately after installing it. There are still a lot of things you need to take care of yourself. In this lesson, we'll first explore what WordPress does for your SEO. In the next lessons, we'll show you how Yoast SEO can help, and what you have to do yourself.

So, let's go through the things that WordPress does for your site's SEO out of the box.

### 1. A strong foundation

First of all, WordPress helps you get going quickly, and it's a pretty solid platform to work on. A basic setup can provide a strong foundation – even without extensive customization, theme optimization, and plugins.

### 2. Pretty permalinks

It supports so-called pretty permalinks so you can use SEO-friendly URLs. We've shown you how to do this earlier in the course.



## Example: Pretty permalinks

Wait, what do we mean by pretty permalinks again? An example of a pretty permalink is:

*everydayimtravelling.com/top-10-travel-destinations*

Whereas the following URL is not very pretty, and therefore not user- and SEO-friendly:

*everydayimtravelling.com/?p=124562*

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### 3. Title tag

WordPress also supports the title tag. This makes sure that the title you entered is also rendered in the code, so the search engines know exactly where to find the all-important title of your post.

### 4. Duplicate content

Also, WordPress automatically deals with duplicate content on some pages. By that, we mean that you sometimes show the same content on different URLs.

Say you sell products in different colors and sizes. You have a different URL for each product variation, but the product description stays the same. This may seem harmless, but as a matter of fact, it can really hurt your rankings, because duplicate content confuses Google. WordPress solves this for some pages by adding a so-called canonical link, showing that one version of the page is the one you want to show in the search engines. It doesn't do this for every page, however, but we'll get back to that in the next lesson.

### 5. Redirects

Out of the box, WordPress also redirects posts whenever you change their titles, which is very convenient. Imagine if you decide you don't like the way you've framed your post. So you rewrite it and then still have the old URL, which doesn't fit your post's contents anymore! It would be very confusing for visitors and search engines alike.

### 6. Health Check

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Lastly, a recent addition is the Health Check dashboard that shows you how your site is doing in a technical sense. We've discussed the WordPress Health Check in the lesson about updates and backups in the previous module.

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## New: WordPress 5.5 update - XML sitemaps

As of version 5.5, WordPress comes with its own XML sitemaps. At its core, an XML sitemap is simply a list of URLs in a text file. The XML sitemap helps search engine crawlers uncover your content. It helps them find and update content on your site, which helps them get your content in the indexes for ranking purposes. The current version of the XML sitemap in WordPress is very basic and supports only a small set of content types. Yoast SEO also generates an XML sitemap, which is more powerful and lets you have more control. If you are using Yoast SEO, make sure to read about the [differences between the Yoast SEO and the WordPress core XML sitemaps](#).

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## WordPress needs help

But even with the things WordPress does automatically when it comes to SEO, it still needs help. Now, it *is* possible to optimize your site all by yourself, but we wouldn't recommend it. It would take ages, and you'd really have to know your (technical!) stuff. Luckily, there are tons of WordPress SEO plugins out there that can help you take care of the most important improvements. One of those is Yoast SEO. And of course, you need to do some things yourself. In the next two lessons, we'll explore exactly that.

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## Key takeaways

- **SEO** stands for **search engine optimization**, and it's the process of improving websites and content to get more traffic from search engines. It has an on-page and off-page part.
  - WordPress does a couple of things for your site's SEO out of the box:
    - it offers a strong **foundation**;
    - it supports pretty **permalinks**;
    - it supports the **title tag**;
    - it automatically deals with **duplicate content** on some pages;
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- it **redirects** posts whenever you change their titles;
  - it has a **Health Check dashboard**, which shows what your site is doing in a technical sense.
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