Best Practices for On-Page SEO

Create & Organize Content to Improve Organic Search Rankings

This document will guide you through on-page content strategies that can improve organic search performance. It will focus on page-level optimizations, but there may be larger structural changes necessary to implement each piece, starting with …

URL Structure

Your URLs should reflect the hierarchy of content on your site and include your page title, which is usually keyword driven. Note that the following URL structure also creates the need for a page for Bachelor's Degrees, and a page for Programs.

> *A Bachelor of Arts in English page may follow a structure like …*
> https://www.collegeofamerica.edu/programs/bachelors-degrees/bachelor-of-arts-in-english

Metadata for SEO

Title Tag: Page Name | School Name
Name of the page, which is often the top keyword for the page.

> *A Bachelor of Arts in English at College of America might use …*
> Bachelor's in English | Arts and Sciences | College of America

Meta Description:
Brief page description that shows on search engine results pages. Aim for 50-200 characters.

> *A Bachelor of Arts in English at College of America might use …*
> The BA in English strengthens literary analysis, critical thinking, and written and oral communication skills through a rigorous curriculum of literature, composition, and communication studies.

On-Page Content

The most important ranking factor for SEO is the **quality of your content** – does it answer a question or solve a problem? Is it helpful, engaging, and unique? After evaluating the quality of your content, be sure to consider structural elements:

<H1> Page Title

This should be your top search keyword. It should be unique and specific to the content on the page.

> *A Bachelor of Arts in English would use:* **<h1>** Bachelor of Arts in English

<H2> Main Headings

Use headings to group similar content and guide your reader down the page. These don't need to be as tactical as the H1, but should include relevant keywords.

> *And may narrow down to:* **<h2>** An English Degree That Prepares You for the Future

<H3> Subheadings

For groups of information that further clarify or explain the main topic in the H2.

> *Which has a sub-section about:* **<h3>** Internships for English Majors

On-Page Content, Continued …

Including keywords in your body copy is important, but it's less important than writing engaging, relevant content. You should include the most important keywords toward the top of the page.

> *The intro copy for a Bachelor of Arts in English page at College of America might say …*
> Students with big book collections (and bigger ideas) thrive at **College of America**. Earning a **bachelor's degree in English** gives students opportunities to read and analyze literature, effectively communicate through writing and speaking, and apply new knowledge to real-world situations. This prepares graduates for fulfilling **careers in marketing,** media, journalism, teaching, and more.

Note that including keywords is a delicate balance. You want to include different phrases students may search for throughout the page – so in the above example, you may want to include "undergraduate English degrees" or "BA in English" further down the page.

However, you must **avoid keyword stuffing**: using the same keywords over and over in quick succession. Search engines are now smart enough to understand close variations on keywords (such as bachelor's in English vs. bachelor in English).

Importance of Links
Links are how search crawlers find your pages and add them to their index. It's important throughout your pages to include links to other areas of your site. This can take the form of hyperlinks within body copy, CTA buttons, breadcrumbs and sidebar navigation.

Internal Links: When choosing what to link on a page, consider the action you ultimately want the user to take. Link to information that will help them make a decision or take an action. Hyperlink helpful information but consider using CTA buttons for actions you really want the user to take. Be careful not to over-link or send users away from the page too early.

External Links: A page has more authority when high-quality external sites link to it. Consider opportunities to have external sources link to your pages and be sure to write share-worthy content such as blog posts to further encourage linking.

Images, Accessibility, and SEO
Poorly optimized images are the biggest culprit for slow-loading pages – which can lead to increased bounce rates and lower SEO rankings. Consider compressing images to improve page load times.

It is also important to consider **filenames** and **alt text**. This helps site crawlers better understand content on your page, but more important, it keeps your page accessible for those who use screen readers, such as the visually impaired.

Filenames: Briefly include what's in the image and, if relevant, a top page keyword

Alt Text: Describe content of image in a bit more detail; can include a keyword but not as important.

This image, if used for a Bachelor of Arts in English page, might use …

Filename: English-major-reading.jpg

Alt Text: Girl reading textbook with laptop open beside her