Introduction to Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

What is Search Engine Optimization?

Have you ever gone to an online search engine to find a website, entered just a word or two, and found exactly the site you were looking for at the very top of the results page?

Search engine optimization is a strategy for writing Web pages that tries to ensure that people searching the Web for information or services that you provide will find *your* website at the top of their search results.

The strategy is informed by knowledge of the rules that search engines follow to rank Web pages as well as an awareness of the search terms, or *keywords*, your would-be audience is likely to use.

Use the **SEO Starter Guide checklist** as a self-assessment tool as you prepare each of your UBCMS pages.

Why Do I Need to Optimize My Website?

SEO will improve user experience by making your website easier to find. Another perk: more visitors.

Best Practices for Optimization

You won't need to rewrite your site from scratch to optimize your Web content for search engines. Just tweak your existing pages, and create future pages, with the following best practices in mind:

- Create **page titles** that are accurate, short and unique
- Use **page headings** that are descriptive, short and well-placed
- Include **keywords** on your page that reflect what your visitors are looking for
- Create **page links (or "link phrases")** within paragraphs that describe their destination (avoid using "click here" or "more")

Resources and Further Reading

Diagram of a Google search results page
A quick guide to all the elements and tools that you'll find on a Google search results page.
Google's Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide
A compact but detailed guide with tips from Google's own technical staff.
Beginner's Guide To Search Engine Optimization
Comprehensive information to start you on the road to professional quality SEO.

Best Practice: Page Title

Page titles are the descriptive captions that label each Web page so that readers know what the page is about. Page titles are displayed at the top of your browser, but most importantly, they label your page in the results of an online search.

Below are three best practices for creating a page title.

1. Accurately describe and communicates the page topic

Your page title should be descriptive enough so that it is easy to read very quickly in search engine results. Use words relevant to the page topic and familiar to your target audience to help them find what they are looking for. Resist the urge to suggest the page contains information that cannot be found there.

2. Create a unique title for each Web page

Be sure your audience can identify which page they want in a search -- if multiple pages are all labeled the same, no one will know which is which.
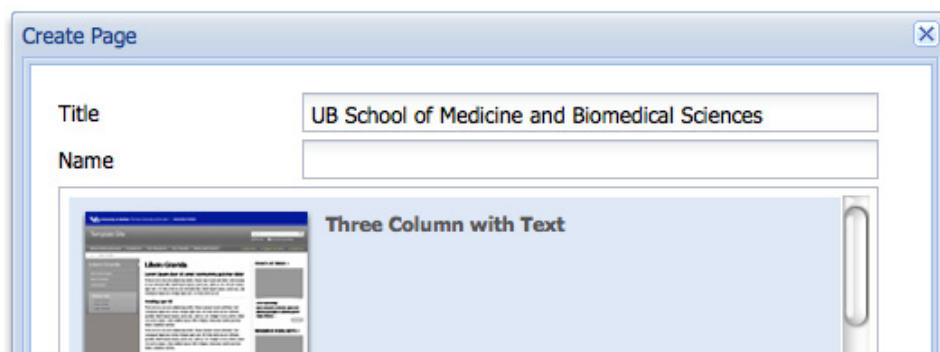
3. Do not exceed 66 characters

Google's search engine returns the first 66 characters of a page title on the search results page. Keep your titles below the 66 character range so the entire title shows up in a search return. If your title must be longer, be sure the initial 66 characters contain the unique and descriptive title described in #1 and #2.

For example:
A Web search for "*university at buffalo school of medicine*" returns the page title, **UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences**, a clickable headline in the search results. This title is 39 characters in length, which is easily displayed in its entirety on Google's search results page. This title is a brief but clear description of the School's homepage, and is the only page on the School's website with that specific title.

Page Title in the UBCMS

The title tag should be placed within the Title field when creating a new page. A title tag resides in a head tag of the HTML document. They are created by using a unique page title inside the page properties window.

These examples will help guide you in understanding and creating descriptive page titles using unique page content. Always include the unique and descriptive words first before the name of the university and school or department.

Best Practice Page Title Examples
- For an administrative office: **UB Office of the President**
- A first level navigation section of the site: **Our University's Vision - UB Office of the President**
- A linked page in the first level navigation of a section: **Key Ambitions for UB - UB Office of the President**

Best Practice: Page Heading

Page headings are visual cues that emphasize important text and also introduce sections of content on your Web page. Multiple page headings are critical to presenting your content in an easy to navigate and scannable format.

Below are four best practices for creating page headings in the UBCMS.

1. Introduce new topics

Use headings when you introduce a new idea, topic, or subject in your content. These headings help the Search Engine to quickly index your page and help your readers easily scan the page to find the topic that interests them.

2. Write brief, descriptive headings using keywords

Your page headings should include the keywords your readers use. Good keywords in headings influence a higher-ranking position of your page in Search Engine result pages. Readers will quickly scan your page for the keywords they input into a search engine to find your Web page. Keywords provide a visual 'hook' to your content.

3. Write five to seven word headings

Headings should be short to help your reader scan the page with ease. Headlines that wrap to two or more lines are more difficult to read. When possible, use one-line headings that do not exceed **five** to **seven** words.

4. One heading viewable at all times

At least one heading should be viewable to the reader at all times. As the reader scroll down the page, another heading might introduce a new topic. In this case, two or more headings could be viewable to the reader at the same time. Since headings introduce a new topic, the reader will always be aware of the overall content of the page.

Page Headings in UBCMS

Page headings in the UBCMS are built using the title component.

- **Heading 1** - Auto-generated when a new page is created, repeating the page title, usually used once per page before the main body content. You can edit page heading 1 following the recommended best practice for page heading above.

Three additional heading styles are available:

- **Heading 2** - Used to break up large content areas of the page.
- **Heading 3** - Used to break up text within Heading 2 areas.
- **Heading 4** - A stylized heading used to group information.

On the SMBS IGPBS > About the Program page:

- **About the Program** text uses Heading 1 (**About the Program** is also the page title)
- **Why Choose Our Program** text uses Heading 2

Best Practice: Page Keywords

Keywords are a familiar search word or phrase typed into a search engine. Familiar words spring to mind when Web users input their search queries in a search box, such as Google. If your writing favors made-up terms or jargon, Web users won't find your site.

Below are four best practices for writing keywords in the UBCMS.

1. Write relevant and familiar words
Write words your readers will use to search for your Web page. Familiar words spring to mind when users create their search queries. Make sure these words are relevant to the page topic and familiar to your target audience.

2. Test your keyword value
Search for your chosen keywords in a search engine to test their value. Use keyword tools such as Google's Keyword Estimator to get keyword ideas related to your website topic. More keyword tools are available below in the **Keyword Tool Resources** section.

3. Use synonyms
Synonyms are different words with almost identical or similar meanings. Use synonyms in your paragraphs to get all of the most-searched keywords on to your page.

4. Do not use made up terms and be careful with jargon
Your target audience is unlikely to understand these words or search for them online. Unfamiliar words tend to confuse your readers, and by using them you risk discouraging your readers from exploring further.

Keywords in the UBCMS
When writing content for your Web page, include relevant keywords in the Page Title, Heading 1, and the body content using the relevant components found in the Sidekick.

Keyword Tool Resources
Google Adwords' Keyword Estimator Use the Keyword Estimator to get keyword ideas related to your website topic.
Google Insights for Search Use Google Insights to find out when people search for a keyword most often
Google Trends Keyword Demand Prediction Use Google Trends to search for trends in keyword search terms

Further Reading
Use Old Words When Writing for Findability from Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox

Best Practice: Page Links

Links (also called *hyperlinks*) guide a user in navigating to another Web page or site. Links can be an image or a short phrase of **five** to **seven** words. Don't include too many links or your reader will have trouble scanning the page.

Below are four best practices for creating page links in the UBCMS.

1. Use descriptive words about the link destination
Links on your page lead to content on other pages on your site. The more descriptive your link text is, the easier it is for your site's visitors to understand why they should click on each link. Descriptive links also help search engines to better index your entire website by providing clear relationships between each linked page.

2. Link phrases should ideally contain between five to seven words
Five to **seven** word phrase links are easy for your reader to scan when embedded in paragraph text.

3. Include one or two links per paragraph
Including too many links in a paragraph makes it harder for visitors to read, since they encouraged to focus on teh links rather than the text itself. If you find yourself including more than two links in a paragraph, consider limiting the choice to one or two key links, or provide a bulleted list of links instead.

4. Avoid using <u>click here</u> or <u>more</u> as next steps
A link that reads '<u>click here</u>' or '<u>more</u>' does not give your readers any idea of what the linked page is about. A reader of your site would not enter the search terms '<u>click here</u>' and '<u>more</u>' into a search engine to find your website, so don't use them.

For example:

Poor Practice: A light rail Metro Rail line connects UB's South Campus with downtown Buffalo and the neighborhoods between them. <u>Click here</u> for more information.
Best Practice: A <u>light rail Metro Rail line</u> connects UB's South Campus with downtown Buffalo and the neighborhoods between them.

Links in the UBCMS
Links are created by editing the body copy of a paragraph. Highlight between five and seven words in the paragraph you would like to use as an internal link. Your link text should give your website visitor some information about the content of the links' destination.

Remember: Make sure all of your links use descriptive words about the link destination.

This example shows how external links are utilized in the text paragraphs.