

Lori Ballen
SEO Cheat Sheet

*This article contains links to the tools I mention. In addition, I benefit from purchases made through my links due to affiliate relationships with the software I use.

Tools:

- SEMrush: <https://bit.ly/2Cg33km>
- Link Whisper: <https://bit.ly/2Zzizl9>
- Frase: <https://bit.ly/3likT3Y> (add the SEO upgrade)
- Jarvis: <https://bit.ly/3yp4m9G> + Surfer: <https://bit.ly/31DdSdy>
- Grammarly: <https://bit.ly/2WUjmeY>

Keyword Research: Begin by finding low competition keywords with a domain rating, with the same or lower score than your domain. Choose one tool to identify the domain rating score. While I use SEMrush, you can use any tool that measures domain authority.

A great way to find keywords is to perform a competitive analysis using a keyword tool like SEMrush. Enter the competitor's domain name, and view all of the articles they have created and the keywords they rank for.

Sort these keywords by competition and search volume. Start with the lowest competition keywords and create content in topic clusters (more on clusters below).

Don't copy their content. Just get the idea of what to create.

Here are a few articles on Keyword Research:

- [How hard will it be to rank for a particular keyword?](#)
- [The art of using long-tail keywords](#)
- [10 Mistakes to Avoid when doing keyword research](#)

Domain Authority: Your domain authority, domain score, or authority score will rise over time. Gaining quality backlinks from other websites can move the needle faster. All domains start at zero and can earn a score as high as 100. You can generally rank for low competition keywords with a low score. That's the wise starting point.

[Here are ten steps to increase the domain authority on your website.](#)

Pillar Posts: Create at least one long content piece as a comprehensive guide. You will refer to this guide throughout your website whenever and as often as it makes sense. This post should have stats, visuals, and information that other websites refer to. This kind of article can earn backlinks. You can use this pillar post to reach out to other websites for backlink requests.

These types of posts are generally 3000-5000 words long. They are often referred to as skyscraper posts.

You can also turn this blog post into a PDF and use it as a lead magnet to build your email list. Over time, you'll want to create a pillar post for each main topic you will cover on your website.

[Here's more on skyscraper-style link-building posts.](#)

Topic Clusters: It's best to create your content in topic clusters. When performing keyword research, start with a broad term/seed keyword. Then, look at the suggested keywords, phrases, and questions related to the topic. You'll often find subtopics that could be blog posts.

The more you write about a specific topic; the more likely Google is to view your website as an authority on that topic. In addition, you'll want to focus on the low competition keywords, phrases, and questions while your domain authority is low.

[You can learn more about creating topic clusters here.](#)

Internal Links: Next, create the pillar post as mentioned above for that topic cluster. Each subtopic blog should link back to that pillar post. When appropriate, the blog posts within the topic cluster can link to one another. The link equity will flow to the pillar post and the cluster pages, and Google will better determine the relationship between each.

If you don't know which pages to link to, I subscribe to [Link Whisper](#) software. Each time you publish a blog, and then click edit, Link Whisper will make suggestions to other pages on your website that might be related to a phrase you mentioned in the blog.

You can check off the suggestions you want to keep, and Link Whisper will make the links on that post for you. It has an auto-linking feature as well.

[You can learn more about how to do internal linking in this guide.](#)

Answer User Intent: Before creating any content, search on Google for that keyword phrase. Then, look at the top 10 results. In most cases, you will see similarities between the top-ranking results. A blog will likely not compete in that space if you see videos primarily. You would need a video, as well.

If most of the results are listicles, you need to create a list-style blog. Google has already determined what the user wants. The top-ranking pages satisfy the user intent, so you already have the formula.

Create content that is in the same format.

Here's an article to help you learn more about [buyer intent keywords](#).

Create Helpful Content: Google ranks content that it believes is helpful to the user. Before and after writing content, ask yourself if the content is beneficial to the reader.

If you satisfy the user intent and create helpful content focused on a keyword you can compete for (domain authority score), you are likely to rank.

[Here are ten ways to determine if your content is useful.](#)

Make it Readable: Use simple words rather than complex vocabulary. Make your content readable by using transition phrases and avoiding passive voice. I use Grammarly to help me with this.

Keep your sentences short. Add white space between 3 or more sentences. View your articles on mobile to ensure that you are not creating a wall of text.

[Here are 9 Simple Ways to make your content more readable.](#)

Create Longform Content: Not all content needs to have a lot of words to rank. The best way to determine how much content you will need to create on a subtopic is to look at the other top-ranking pages. I use SEMrush's content template or FRASE's SEO tool to have these figured for me.

It will give you a ballpark number of words that you need to write. Google isn't counting the words on the page and giving more weight to one that has more. Instead, it's about how in-depth the coverage is on the topic.

Most bloggers have an average article word count of around 1200 words, while many top-ranking articles, especially the more competitive ones, can have 3000 or more. But, of course, it always depends on that specific keyword/topic, so do the research.

[Here's an article where you can learn more about how long your content should be.](#)

Apply On-Page SEO: While keyword stuffing is no longer required, and can get you penalized for spam, appropriate placement of your target keyword is still recommended.

Use your keyword in the following places:

1. Your Title Tag
2. Your intro
3. In an H2 paragraph heading
4. In an image description (if natural to do so)
5. In your URL
6. In the closing paragraph

[Here are seven reasons your content might not be ranking on Google.](#)

Include External Links: Google expects to see outbound links that help the reader learn more about a specific topic or product. One good way to do this is to quote a case study or report and link to that website.

Therefore, it's best to include 2-3 outbound links per long-form article. You can mark these links as no-follow to not pass link equity from your page to theirs.

If you don't see the ability to add no-follow to a link, you can add a Plugin to WordPress to give you this option.

[Here are 10 ways you can optimize your blog post for SEO.](#)

Submit a Sitemap: Set up your free Google Search Console account. Submitting a sitemap will help Google crawl your website and see the relationship between posts and categories, pages, child pages, etc.

Using an SEO plugin like YOAST, you can locate your sitemap there. [Here's the help file](#) on using Yoast to submit a sitemap.

[Here's a list of 17 SEO content writing services.](#)

Pass Core Vitals: Google has created a scoring system that measures the user experience. Your website has to load fast and be accessible. Various tools will measure core vitals, including SEMrush. You can also use Google's page insights tool to [measure an external link](#).

Your Google Search Console account will also measure your core vitals. It's essential to have a great hosting plan that provides systems that help with page loading times.

If you are struggling with core vitals, need a better host, a new website, or SEO content, talk to my brother Jeff and Paul at [Ballen Brands](#). 702-917-0755.