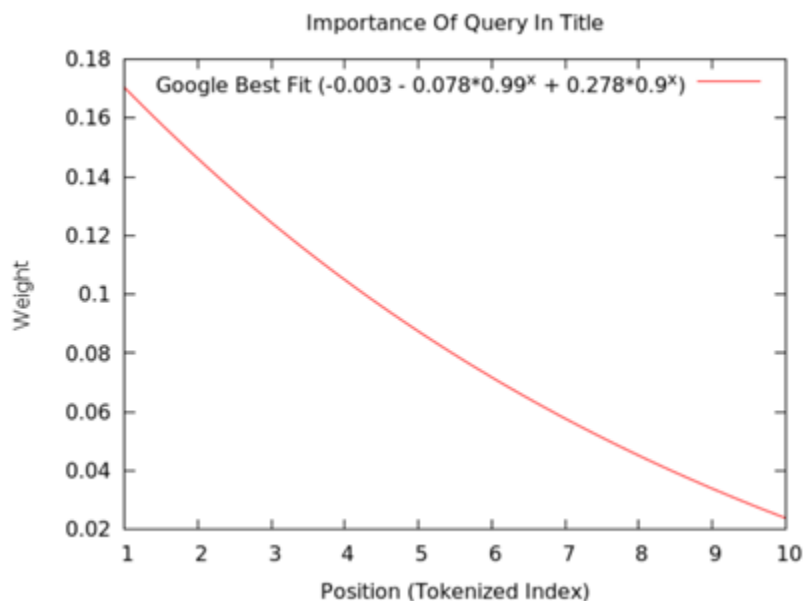


HTML Head Tags

- **Title** - the most important of on-page keyword elements, the page title should preferably employ the keyword term/phrase as the first word(s). In our correlation data studies, the following graph emerged:



Clearly, using the keyword term/phrase as the very first words in the page title has the highest correlation with high rankings, and subsequent positions correlate nearly flawlessly to lower rankings.

- **Meta Description** - although not used for "rankings" by any of the major engines, the meta description is an important place to use the target term/phrase due to the "bolding" that occurs in the visual snippet of the search results. Usage has also been shown to help boost click-through rate, thus increasing the traffic derived from any ranking position.
- **Meta Keywords** - Yahoo! is unique among the search engines in recording and utilizing the meta keyword tag for discovery, though not technically for rankings. However, with Microsoft's Bing set to take over Yahoo! Search, the last remaining reason to employ the tag is now gone. That, combined with the danger of using keywords there for competitive research means that at SEOmoz, we never recommend employing the tag.
- **Meta Robots** - although not necessary, this tag should be sure NOT to contain any directives that could potentially disallow access by the engines.
- **Rel="Canonical"** - the larger and more complex a site (and the larger/more complex the organization working on it), the more we advise employing the [canonical URL tag](#) to prevent any potential duplicates or unintentional, appended URL strings from creating a problem for the engines and splitting up potential link juice.
- **Other Meta Tags** - meta tags like those offered by the [DCMI](#) or [FGDC](#) seem compelling, but currently provide no benefit for SEO with the major engines and thus, add unnecessary complexity and download time.

URL

- **Length** - Shorter URLs appear to perform better in the search results and are more likely to be copied/pasted by other sites, shared and linked-to.
- **Keyword Location** - The closer the targeted keyword(s) are to the domain name, the better. Thus, `site.com/keyword` outperforms `site.com/folder/subfolder/keyword` and is the most recommended method of optimization (though this is certainly not a massive rankings benefit)

- **Subdomains vs. Pages** - As we've [talked about previously on the blog](#), despite the slight URL benefit that subdomains keyword usage has over subfolders or pages, the engines' link popularity assignment algorithms tilt the balance in favor of subfolders/pages rather than subdomains.
- **Word Separators** - Hyphens are still the king of keyword separators in URLs, and despite promises that underscores will be given equal credit, the inconsistency with other methods make the hyphen a clear choice. NOTE: This should not apply to root domain names, where separating words with hyphens is almost never recommended (e.g. pinkgrapefruit.com is a far better choice than pink-grapefruit.com).

Body Tags

- **Number of Keyword Repetitions** - It's impossible to pinpoint the exact, optimal number of times to employ a keyword term/phrase on the page, but this simple rule has served us well for a long time - "2-3X on short pages, 4-6X on longer ones and never more than makes sense in the context of the copy." The added benefit of another instance of a term is so miniscule that it seems unwise to ever be aggressive with this metric.
- **Keyword Density** - A complete myth as an algorithmic component, [keyword density](#) nonetheless pervades even very sharp SEO minds. While it's true that more usage of a keyword term/phrase can potentially improve targeting/ranking, there's no doubt that keyword density has never been the formula by which this relevance was measured.
- **Keyword Usage Variations** - Long suspected to influence search engine rankings (though never studied in a depth of detail that's convincing to me), the theory that varied keyword usage throughout a page can help with content optimization and optimization nevertheless is worth a small amount of effort. We recommend employing at least one or two variations of a term and potentially splitting up keyword phrases and using them in body copy as well or instead.
- **H1 Headline** - The H1 tag has long been thought to have great importance in on-page optimization. Recent correlation data from our studies, however, has shown that it has a very low correlation with high rankings (close to zero, in fact). While this is compelling evidence, correlation is not causation and for semantic and SEO reasons, we still advise proper use of the H1 tag as the headline of the page and, preferably, employment of the targeted keyword term/phrase.
- **H2/H3/H4/Hx** - Even lower in importance than the H1, our recommendation is to apply only if required. These tags appears to carry little to no SEO value.
- **Alt Attribute** - Surprisingly, the alt attribute, long thought to carry little SEO weight, was shown to have quite a robust correlation with high rankings in our studies. Thus, we strongly advise the use of a graphic image/photo/illustration on important keyword-targeted pages with the term/phrase employed in the alt attribute of the *img* tag.
- **Image Filename** - Since image traffic can be a substantive source of visits and image filenames appear to be valuable for this as well as natural web search, we suggest using the keyword term/phrase as the name of the image file employed on the page.
- **Bold/Strong** - Using a keyword in bold/strong appears to carry a very, very tiny amount of SEO weight, and thus it's suggested as a best practice to use the targeted term/phrase at least once in bold, though a very minor one.
- **Italic/Emphasized** - Surprisingly, italic/emphasized text appears to have a similar to slightly higher correlation with high rankings than bold/strong and thus, we suggest its use on the targeted keyword term/phrase in the text.
- **Internal Link Anchors** - No testing has yet found that internal anchors are picked up/counted by the engines.
- **HTML Comments** - As above, it appears the engines ignore text in comments.

Internal Links & Location in Site Architecture

- **Click-Depth** - Our general recommendation is that the more competitive and challenging a keyword term/phrase is to rank for, the higher it should be in a site's internal architecture (and thus, the fewer clicks from the home page it should take to reach that URL).
- **Number/Percentage of Internal Links** - More linked-to pages tend to higher rankings and thus, for competitive terms, it may help to link to these pages from a greater number/percentage of pages on a site.
- **Links in Content vs. Permanent Navigation** - It appears that Google and the other engines are doing more to recognize location on the page as an element of link consideration. Thus, employing links to pages in the Wikipedia-style (in the

body content of a piece) rather than in permanent navigation may potentially provide some benefit. Don't forget, however, that Google [only counts the first link to a page](#) that they see in the HTML.

- **Link Location in Sidebars & Footers** - Recent patent applications, search papers and experience from inside SEOmoz and many practitioners externally suggests that Google may be strongly discounting links placed in the footer, and, to a lesser degree, in the sidebar(s) of pages. Thus, if you're employing a link in permanent navigation, it may pay to use the top navigation (above the content) for SEO purposes.

Page Architecture

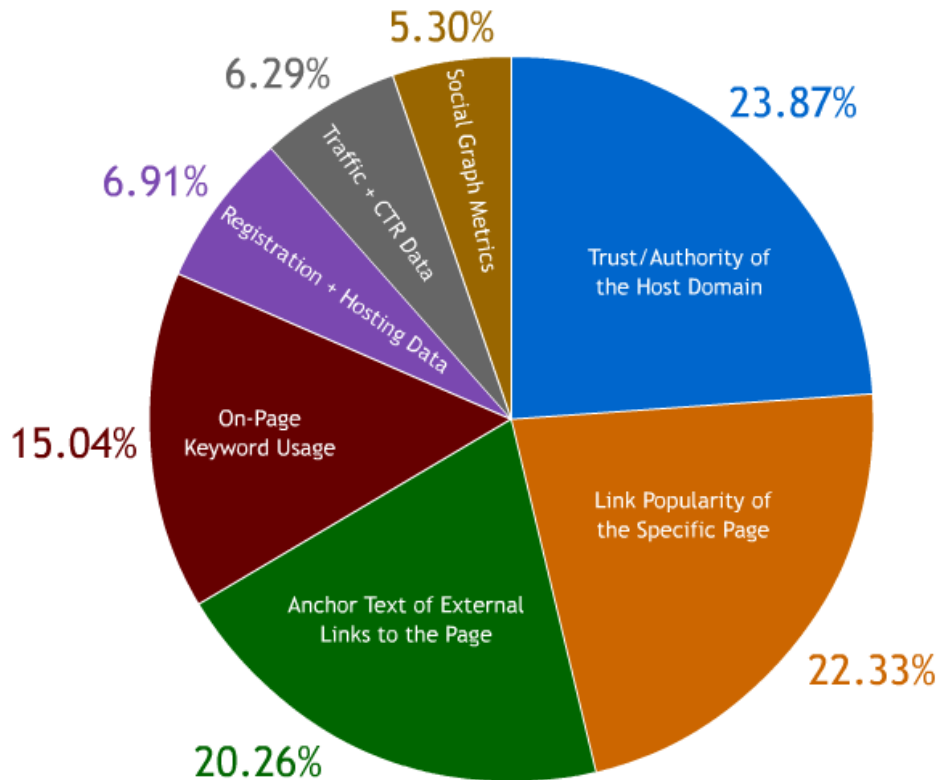
- **Keyword Location** - We advise that important keywords should, preferably, be featured in the first few words (50-100, but hopefully even sooner) of a page's text content. The engines do appear to have some preference for pages that employ keywords sooner, rather than later, in the text.
- **Content Structure** - Some practitioners swear by the use of particular content formats (introduction, body, examples, conclusion OR the journalistic style of narrative, data, conclusion, parable) for SEO, but we haven't seen any formal data suggesting these are valuable for higher rankings and thus feel that whatever works best for the content and the visitors is likely ideal.

Why Don't We Always Obey These Rules?

That answer is relatively easy. The truth is that in the process of producing great web content, we sometimes forget, sometimes ignore and sometimes intentionally disobey the best practices laid out above. On-page optimization, while certainly important, is only one piece of a larger rankings puzzle:

Components of Google's Ranking Algorithm

(According to 72 SEOs Surveyed for SEOmoz's Biennial Search Ranking Factors)



(FYI - The new [ranking factors survey data](#) is set to release very, very soon)

It most certainly pays to get the on-page, keyword-targeting pieces right, but on-page SEO, in my opinion, follows the 80/20 rule very closely. If you get the top 20% of the most important pieces (titles, URLs, internal links) from the list above right, you'll get 80% (maybe more) of the value possible in the on-page equation.

Best Practices for Ranking #1

Curiously, though perhaps not entirely surprisingly to experienced SEOs, the truth is that on-page optimization doesn't necessarily rank first in the quest for top rankings. In fact, a list that walks through the process of actually getting that first position would look something more like:

1. **Accessibility** - content engines can't see or access cannot even be indexed; thus crawl-ability is foremost on this list.
2. **Content** - you need to have compelling, high quality material that not only attracts interest, but compels visitors to share the information. Virality of content is possibly the most important/valuable factor in the ranking equation because it will produce the highest link conversion rate (the ratio of those who visit to those who link after viewing).
3. **Basic On-Page Elements** - getting the keyword targeting right in the most important elements (titles, URLs, internal links) provides a big boost in the potential ability of a page to perform well.
4. **User Experience** - the usability, user interface and overall experience provided by a website strongly influences the links and citations it earns as well as the conversion rate and browse rate of the traffic that visits.
5. **Marketing** - I like to say that "great content is no substitute for great marketing." A terrific marketing machine or powerful campaign has the power to attract far more links than content may "deserve," and though this might seem unfair, it's a principle on which all of capitalism has functioned for the last few hundred years. Spreading the word is often just as important (or more so) than being right, being honest or being valuable (just look at the political spectrum).
6. **Advanced/Thorough On-Page Optimization** - applying all of the above with careful attention to detail certainly isn't useless, but it is, for better or worse, at the bottom of this list for a reason; in our experience, it doesn't add as much value as the other techniques described.

As always, I'm looking forward to hearing your thoughts and experiences about the specific recommendations above and the general concept of the "perfectly" optimized page.