

Navigating Search Engine Optimization in the Era of AI

A Guide For Government Web Teams

We continue to bring stronger AI capabilities to Search guided by our unwavering mission; to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. Crucially, we are investing heavily to ensure essential public information remains easily accessible in the era of AI search.

How is Search evolving with the help of AI?

For 25 years, Google Search has continually evolved to match how people seek information, adapting from simple keywords to complex, natural language queries. The introduction of AI Overviews and AI Mode is the latest step, allowing users to ask conversational, multimodal questions and receive helpful context with links to explore more. Using generative AI, AI Overviews provide a snapshot of helpful key information about a topic or question with links to easily learn more on the web. AI Mode, our most powerful AI search yet, enables users to ask complex questions via text, voice, images or videos and provides detailed, conversational answers with the ability to explore further with follow-up questions and helpful web links.



Quality and safety protections

AI Overviews and AI Mode are deeply integrated with Google's core web ranking systems. They are designed to carry out traditional "search tasks" with safeguards to ensure reliability, especially for sensitive topics. These safeguards include (though are not limited to):

Corroboration

Providing links to and showing information backed by high-quality, top-ranking web results, which generally mitigates against "hallucinations" associated with large language models (LLMs).

Higher standards

For critical "Your Money or Your Life" (YMYL) queries—a category that covers most sensitive topics like health, finance, and safety—we have an even higher bar for quality and reliability, and will often advise users to seek expert advice or verify the information.

Systemic protections

Core spam protections and safety guardrails, including technologies like SafeSearch and SpamBrain, are built-in to prevent harmful or low-quality content from appearing.

Data void awareness

Our systems understand when there is not enough high-quality information available on the web for a specific query, preventing the generation of low-confidence overviews.

AI Overviews and AI Mode help people discover a wider breadth of the web:

For many years, search engine optimization (SEO) has been heavily focused on keywords. While still relevant, generative AI shifts the focus toward complete, complex questions. People are moving away from clipped "Search speak" and are now asking more nuanced questions in their natural language. For example, where a constituent once searched "*small business grant*," they might now ask, "*what grants are available for a new veteran-owned business in rural California and what are the reporting requirements?*"

Google's AI Overviews and AI Mode use the Gemini model's multi-step reasoning and a technique called "query fan-out" to respond to these multi-part queries in a single search, simultaneously and across subtopics and multiple data sources. This technique then brings together a wider breadth and depth of information than a single, traditional search ever could. In doing so, it can increase the discovery of more websites and authoritative sources, connecting constituents with pages and resources they might not have found otherwise.

Our Honest Results policy — there's no "special treatment"



No single entity—including government or advocacy organizations—receives special technical treatment or ranking boosts based on its relationship with Google. All organizations must follow the same public guidelines and rely on the same free-of-charge tools to optimize their content, promoting trustworthiness by ranking only the most authoritative and useful information. [Learn more about our Honest Results policy.](https://www.google.com/search/policies/honest-results/)

Fundamentals of getting SEO right

While AI is bringing more powerful experiences to Search, the fundamentals of content discoverability remain the same. There are no additional requirements to appear in AI Overviews or AI Mode, there are no special files needed, nor other special optimizations necessary. This means that the best practices for SEO remain relevant for these features in Google Search. That said, it's always good to review the fundamental SEO best practices, rooted in good web hygiene, to ensure your site is positioned for success:

Learn more:

Read our [SEO starter Guide](#) and [website best practices](#)



Ensure that search engines are able to crawl and index your site:

- Use [Search Console](#) to monitor, maintain, and troubleshoot your site's presence. Get started with this training video [series](#) and stay on top of the [latest](#) best practices.
- Make sure [Googlebot](#) is not blocked, allowing it to crawl your site to ensure that your page can show up in Google's Search results.
- Build and submit a [sitemap](#) to provide information about the pages, videos, and other files on your site, so that Google can better understand the relationships between them.



Add structured data to your site to help search engines understand it:

- [Structured data](#), like page [title](#), [description](#) and [FAQ](#) schema, is a standardized format for providing information about a page and classifying the page content to help search engines understand it.



Ensure structured data is recognized by search engines:

- Use the [Rich Results test](#) to make sure rich results can be generated by the structured data your site contains. This test shows you if search engines can properly read and understand the markup you've added.



Use snippets meta tags and robots.txt as desired:

- The [robots.txt](#) file is used to indicate which content you allow to be crawled. If there are parts of your website that you don't wish to have crawled automatically—perhaps resource-intensive calculations—use [robots.txt](#) appropriately. [Snippet meta tags](#) can limit the visibility of content in search results, including in AI Overviews and AI Mode.



Ensure that your content is optimized:

- Clear and structured context helps users and search engines quickly find and understand key information:
 - Use heading tags to emphasize important text and create a logical document structure.
 - Provide site navigation with internal links and clear information hierarchy.
 - Avoid putting informational text inside images or videos as search engines often cannot read it.
 - Keep question and answer pairs on the same page for clarity and context.
- Keeping your site secure and trustworthy protects the user and information integrity:
 - Always include a date in newsroom press releases to signal timeliness and trustworthiness.
 - Follow security best practices and keep website systems updated to prevent hacking and avoid demotion in search results.

Finally, consider managing your digital presence beyond Search and consider these additional platforms:

- **YouTube:** Consider creating a [YouTube channel](#) to provide engaging content about the information and services your agency provides. Don't forget to post regularly.
- **Google Maps:** Use the [geo data upload tool](#) to share your most up-to-date geographic information with Google Maps.
- **Google Business Profiles:** Use [Google Business Profile](#) to manage information such as hours of operation, addresses, and phone numbers of physical office locations.
- **Plus Codes:** Consider using [plus codes](#) for address information—short codes for locations or places that don't have their own street address, such as rural areas that may not have any road, or for buildings with separate entrances.

