

The Complete Guide To Using The WordPress SEO Plugin By Yoast



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This guide is current as of v 1.4.4 of the plugin, March 2013.

*While some general aspects of SEO will be touched on in this guide in the course of explaining the plugin, beginners may find that they need a more fundamental understanding of how SEO works in general, in order to get the best use out of this plugin. I have written an ebook that addresses that need – **The Beginner's Guide To SEO For Business:***

<http://www.webtrainingwheels.com/beginners-guide-to-seo-ebook/>

The WordPress SEO plugin by Yoast is on most lists of 'must-have' WordPress plugins. As much as is written about, the extensive set of options it provides can seem intimidating, especially to newer users.

Yoast has a fair amount of commenting and explanatory text throughout the plugin screens so I won't duplicate anything he's saying there, but just try and clarify the less obvious parts.

SEO > Dashboard

Security

If you are an advanced user, leave this unchecked, but otherwise it's ok to check it, particularly if you have multiple users on your site that might wreak havoc with this.

Webmaster Tools

Yoast provides a very handy way to verify your site with Google Webmaster Tools, Bing webmaster tools and Alexa. Each of those services will give you a meta tag to paste into your code as a method of proving your ownership of your website. However by pasting the meta tag here you can save yourself the need to touch any code. Google Webmaster Tools is a must-have account since it will give you useful information about the health of your website, and will provide enhanced info inside your Google Analytics account. Bing webmaster tools also provides some helpful info, including a good keyword research tool. As for Alexa, well it won't do any harm to verify your site there but in all honesty I personally don't put a lot of stock in Alexa and I rarely use this. Below you can see the meta tag that Webmaster Tools provides you. The underlined part is what you will paste into this field of the SEO plugin.

Recommended method

Alternate methods

HTML tag

Add a meta tag to your site's home page.

1. **Copy** the meta tag below, and paste it into your site's home page. It should go in the <head> section, before the first <body> section.

```
<meta name="google-site-verification" content="UMGkA7euVeXJCxhtiBkvcovxkP5a_2vWkQiCfsGwYXA" />
```

▶ [Show me an example](#)

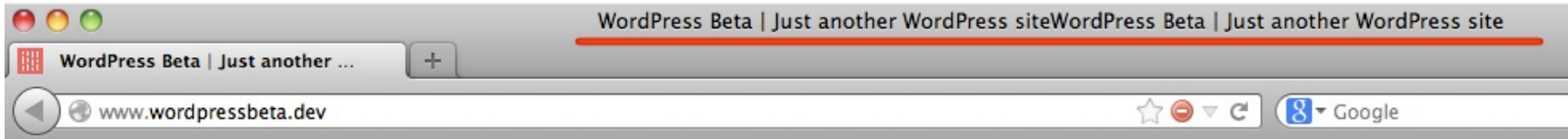
2. Click **Verify** below.

To stay verified, don't remove the meta tag, even after verification succeeds.

SEO > Titles & Metas > General

Title Settings

Force rewrite titles - This box relates to how the meta titles for each page are produced by the code. It may be necessary to check this box depending on your theme. Sometimes there's a conflict between the WordPress SEO plugin and your theme which may also be outputting some SEO info. The typical indication of this is duplication of the meta title. You can check for this either in the source code of one of your pages, or at the very top of your browser window:



So if you have strange output like this you will need to check the "Force rewrite titles" box to resolve the problem.

Sitewide Meta Settings

noindex subpages of archives

It's recommended to check this box to avoid people performing a Google search and ending up on, for example, page 2 of your archives which may not be the best place for them. Archive pages change over time as you add new posts - so something that is on page 2 of the archives today, could be on page 3 tomorrow. It's not ideal to have people land on these pages because they may not be able to easily find what they are looking for. You want people to always land on the most relevant page/post for their search and typically that's NOT an archive page.

use meta keywords - This is not needed because no search engine uses these for ranking any more.

add noodp tag and add noydir

Generally speaking you'd want these boxes checked, although it may not make any real difference to your site unless it's listed in the Yahoo or DMOZ directories. This makes sure that search engines don't use Dmoz and Yahoo meta descriptions for your site, instead of the meta descriptions you will provide.

These directories used to be authoritative guides to the web but now they are significantly less so, so there's no value in using info from those listings.

Clean Up The Head

By default, WordPress outputs a lot of extraneous information in the <head> section of your site. This is a section of code not visible on your webpage itself, but if you use View Source in your browser you'll see it. The less irrelevant code Google has to crawl through the better, so Yoast allows you to clean up some of this unnecessary stuff.

Hide RSD Links - These are used to connect with 3rd party services that use xml-rpc to publish remotely to your blog. For example, I use Diigo for bookmarking websites. It has a feature that lets me post directly to my blog from Diigo. For this remote publishing feature to work, the RSD links have to be visible to Diigo. When I used this option to hide the link, I could no longer connect Diigo to my blog for this type of remote posting. If you don't use any 3rd party publishing like this, you can check the box. It can always be un-checked at a later time if necessary.

Hide WLW Manifest Links - You can check this box unless you use Windows Live Writer. If you don't use, or even know what WLW is, you can safely check it ;)

Hide Shortlink for posts - WordPress provides what it calls "shortlinks" for your posts (which are really just the default permalink with the number at the end, not a real shortlink like bit.ly). Again, if you don't use, or even know what the shortlinks are, you can hide it. It's not a huge deal either way, but hiding them will make your <head> code more compact.

Hide RSS Links - If you have a blog on your site, do not check this box.

SEO > Titles & Metas > Home

This is the section where people tend to get confused. A couple things to understand.

First, one must understand that one of the major points of this plugin is that it allows you to control the meta information for each piece of content on your site, in all the ways that WordPress displays it (homepage, single post, tag archive, category archive etc)

Secondly, "titles & metas" refers to the meta title and the meta description which determines how your site's pages/posts appear in Google search results pages.

[WordPress Plugins by Yoast](#)

[yoast.com/wordpress/](#)

Yoast offers several WordPress plugins built by Joost de Valk to optimize your **WordPress SEO**, track its performance and tweak the minor usability issues power ...

Meta Title

[WordPress SEO Tutorial • The Definitive Guide • Yoast](#)

[yoast.com/yoast-essentials](#)



by Joost de Valk - in 17,336 Google+ circles - More by Joost de Valk
Oct 27, 2012 – This is the **ONLY** tutorial you'll need to hugely increase your search engine traffic by improving your **WordPress SEO**. Plugin, theme & site ...

[Why can I only use one focus keyword in WordPress SEO? • Yoast](#)

[yoast.com](#) › [SEO](#)

by Joost de Valk - in 17,336 Google+ circles - More by Joost de Valk

Feb 21, 2013 – You can only chose one focus keyword for a post in our **WordPress SEO** plugin. This post explains why you really don't need more than one.

[WordPress SEO • Archives - Yoast](#)

[yoast.com/tag/wordpress-seo/](#)

Dec 12, 2012 – Today is the first result of what might become a somewhat longer tradition: **WordPress SEO** is now a Sucuri Safe Plugin. What this means? It...

Meta Description

[WordPress SEO, more secure than ever before. • Yoast](#)

[yoast.com](#) › [WordPress](#)

by Joost de Valk - in 17,336 Google+ circles - More by Joost de Valk

Dec 7, 2012 – What this means? It means I've asked Sucuri to do a full security review of my **WordPress SEO** plugin. They found a couple of small issues, ...

What is a meta description or meta title template?

Ideally you would hand-craft the title and description for every single page or post. But if you're only starting this process when you already have a lot of content not yet optimized, or perhaps you have authors who you think won't fill it in, the templates you can create in this section allow something to be output in the event you don't handcraft it, or if you just want to "set it and forget it". So at least you will be providing some information to Google rather than nothing at all.

The template is created by replacing the variables you see with the content from that post. So for example, %%title%% will be replaced with the title of the post or page in question. %%sitename%% will be replaced with whatever you have designated as your site title in your Settings > General > Site Title



Yoast WordPress SEO: Titles & Metas

General

Home

Post Types

Taxonomies

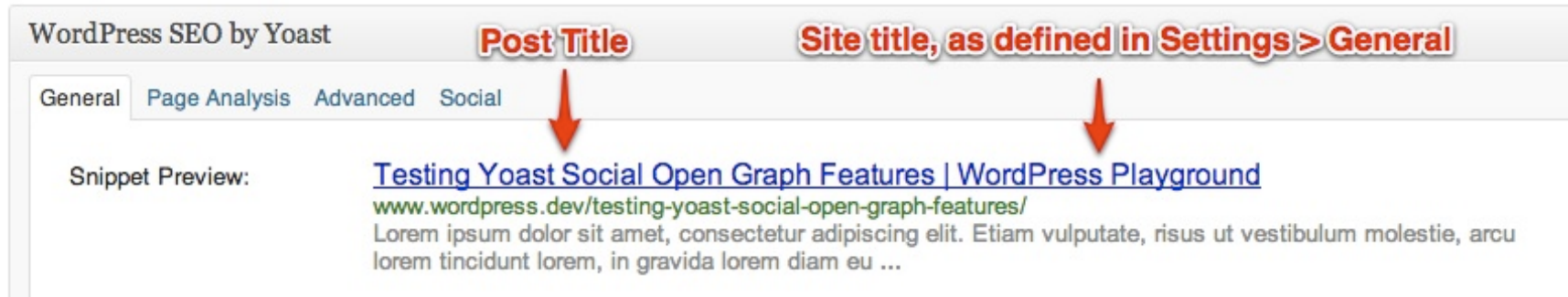
C

Posts

Title template:

%%title%% | %%sitename%%

This template would translate to this for an individual post:



All the possible variables are found in the Help tab. The defaults that the plugin sets up are pretty good to use for templates, but as I mentioned before, hopefully you'll be customizing on a per post basis (see below).

Even if you set up templates, you can still customize individual pages/post by filling in the info in the WordPress SEO box on that individual piece of content as described later. The template just makes sure that your title and description aren't totally empty.

Homepage

In WordPress, if you have set your blog posts to display on your homepage, you'll need to use this section to control the Title and Description specifically for your homepage. If you are using a static homepage, you can control the info on that individual page.

The default is the site name then description as you've set in your WordPress Settings - but you can override that here with more specific info.

Author Metadata

This is for Google Authorship. If yours is a multi-author blog you may not want to specify one author for the homepage. But you will want to specify your Google business PAGE as the publisher. This adds the necessary `rel=publisher` to the `<head>` of your site for Google to detect. You also need to go into your Google Page and add a link from there to your website to complete the loop.

SEO > Titles & Metas > Post Types

This allows you to set up templates for the output of the meta title and description for every regular and custom post type on your site.

Meta Robots: I don't recommend checking this box unless you know what you are doing since it will prevent an entire set of content being indexed by Google. There are definitely use cases for this, but if you're a beginner, best to leave alone.

Date in Snippet Preview: There's varying schools of thought on this. Generally speaking you would want to show the date in the snippet preview if you run a news-style site that has time-sensitive content. For other sites you'll probably want to leave it un-checked.

WordPress SEO Meta Box - this is the box that appears on the editing screen for every individual piece of content on your site - allowing you to customize the meta information for it. 99% of the time you need to leave this un-checked.

If you have custom post types (such as a portfolio, or products for example) they will automatically show up here and you can customize them just like regular posts and pages. If your custom post types have archive pages, they will show at the bottom of this screen.

SEO > Titles & Metas > Taxonomies

Allows you to control meta information for all the taxonomies on your site such as tags and categories, in addition to any custom taxonomies generated by themes or plugins.

SEO > Titles & Metas > Other

Here you can set up meta information templates for other archive pages such as date-based archives, author archives, as well as your 404 pages and search pages. You'll notice that for the Date Archives the default is that the "noindex, follow" box is checked - this is to avoid duplicate content issues on your site so it's good to keep it checked. On single author blogs, you may want to do the same for the Author Archives since it's just showing the same content that's already available on your blog homepage and category and tag archives.

SEO > Titles & Metas > Help

This tab contains all the variables that are used in the meta info templates - use it as a reference or if you're creating your own template, you'll find what you need here.

SEO > Social

This is a very cool feature of Yoast's plugin, but you should make sure you don't have other plugins duplicating what's being done here.

Facebook OpenGraph

As long as you don't have another plugin also outputting Open Graph info, you'll want to check this box.

When you (or someone else) posts a link from your site to Facebook, it typically displays with a title, description and thumbnail. If your links are not showing up with the correct or desired info, it's probably because you have not specified your OpenGraph info. This is a set of tags in your site's code that Facebook looks for in order to gather info about the page and use that info when shared on Facebook. If you don't provide it, Facebook is left to its own devices and sometimes that results in random thumbnails showing up etc.

So the WordPress SEO plugin can output that info for you, but other plugins also do it, so only turn it on if you don't already have it in place. Or turn off the other plugin instead.

To see if your site is outputting open graph info you can view the source code of your site and look for the following og tags:

```
<meta property="og:image" content="http://webtrainingwheels.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/droid-search-fb.jpg" />
<meta property="og:title" content="Swifttype &#8211; WordPress Plugin For Enhanced Search"/>
<meta property="og:type" content="article"/>
<meta property="og:url" content="http://webtrainingwheels.com/swifttype-wordpress-plugin-enhanced-search/" />
<meta property="og:site_name" content="Web Training Wheels"/>
<meta property="og:description" content="Swifttype is a new WordPress plugin to spruce up the search feature on your site. It's promising but won't be
satisfactory for everyone just yet. " />
```

[Open Graph information](#)

Facebook Insights and Admins

By clicking "Add Facebook Admin" while logged into your Facebook account, it will allow the plugin to detect your FB user ID and set it as the Admin for your website so that you will get insights (stats) about your website inside Facebook.

Frontpage settings

Since you may have several different images on your homepage, particularly if your front page is a blog, you'll want to specify which one should be used when someone shares a link to your homepage.

Default settings

This is the fallback image to be used if a post doesn't have any images.

How Social Works With Images:

The plugin will find any images in the post and assign them each an og: image tag. This means that when someone shares the link on Facebook, they will have a choice of thumbnails to assign to the post.

Note that Google Plus also uses the OpenGraph Protocol to determine how shared links show up.

Google Authorship: WordPress SEO will create the necessary markup in the code for Google Authorship - that's where your photo shows up next to your content in the search results pages. In order to make this work, you need to go into Users > Your Profile and fill in the link to your G+ profile there. You also need to add a link to your website in the About section of your Google Profile.

Twitter: WordPress SEO can add the Twitter meta data that would be needed to have a more detailed summary of your post show up inside Twitter when shared, but that feature doesn't happen automatically on Twitter. This is not due to the plugin, but due to Twitter itself. You have to submit and be approved here for participation in Twitter Cards:

<https://dev.twitter.com/form/participate-twitter-cards>

SEO > XML Sitemaps

Having an XML sitemap helps Google find all of the content on your site quickly and efficiently. The XML sitemap automatically updates as you add new content. This type of sitemap is designed for bots not humans.

You should submit this URL to your Google Webmaster Tools account. Inside Webmaster tools, from the nav menu on the left, click on Optimization, then Sitemaps. You will see the Add/Test Sitemap button at the top right. Click that and then Submit Sitemap. Add your sitemap url and you're done.

Note that an XML sitemap is designed for search bots, not for humans:

<http://webtrainingwheels.com/xml-html-sitemaps-wordpress-basics/>

If there are certain post types that you never want to include in your sitemap (because you don't want Google to know about them and index them) you can exclude them all here, but you can also control it individually per post type.

SEO > Permalink Settings

This is fairly advanced stuff - most typical users will not have need for it. Yoast's comments are pretty well detailed here.

SEO > Internal Links

Breadcrumbs Settings

Breadcrumbs are navigational aids that help humans orient themselves within a site - understanding what section or sub-section they are in. They also provide help to bots in discovering all the content on your site. For most personal blogs breadcrumbs wouldn't really be necessary. But if your site has a more complex structure that goes several sub-sections deep, or provides many ways to get to the same content, as many ecommerce sites do, for example, you may find them useful. This is what breadcrumbs look like:

A screenshot of a breadcrumb trail displayed in a light yellow box. The text reads: « Back | Home > Shoes > Sneakers & Athletic Shoes > Emerica > Laced by Leo. The words "Home", "Shoes", "Sneakers & Athletic Shoes", "Emerica", and "Laced by Leo" are blue and underlined, indicating they are clickable links. The "Back" link is preceded by a double left-pointing arrow.

All of the options in this section let you customize how you want your breadcrumbs to look and where on the site you want them to show up. However, unless you happen to be using one of a handful of themes that natively support Yoast's breadcrumbs (Thematic and Hybrid are examples), you will have to add the code that Yoast provides into your theme. If you are a beginner uncomfortable with code, this would not be recommended. You would be best not bothering with this section. You can check if your theme has its own method of breadcrumbs built-in - many do.

SEO > RSS

This is a genius feature Yoast has provided to foil scrapers (dodgy sites that automatically republish content from other sites without permission). They work by scraping the content of your RSS feed, so Yoast provides a way for you add a footer or header to your feed which contains links back to your site. This way, even if someone does scrape the content, at least you will be credited. If you're not sure what to do here, just leave the default settings.

SEO > Import & Export

So let's say you've been using some other SEO plugin on your site for a long time and now everyone is telling you to use Yoast's plugin. Will you have to start from scratch or lose all that meta data you already input in your other plugin? NO! Yoast provides an import featured here which allows you to move your exiting meta information from another plugin into WordPress SEO so that you don't have to re-do everything. Likewise you can also export all of your Yoast data here as well.

SEO > Edit Files

Beginner users will generally want to keep out of this section. It provides easy editing access to your site's robots.txt file (which you may not necessarily have) and your .htaccess file. For advanced users you can use .htaccess to do redirects, security tweaks and various other things but you should only be in this section if you know what you are doing!

So those are all the main settings for the plugin, but you will also find various WordPress SEO by Yoast boxes throughout the backend of your site, on almost every piece of content. So if you look at the editing

screens for individual posts, pages, categories, tags etc, you will see a WordPress SEO box that lets you customize meta information for that section. The thoroughness of this plugin is one of the reasons that it is so highly recommended. It gives you tons of control.

Posts, Pages and Custom Post Types

You will see the following box at the bottom of each piece of content you are editing:

Path: p
Word count: 3
Last edited by lucyb on March 21, 2013 at 3:09 pm

WordPress SEO by Yoast

General Page Analysis Advanced Social

Snippet Preview: [Testing Yoast's WordPress SEO Plugin - WordPress Playground](http://www.wordpress.dev/testing-yoasts-wordpress-seo-plugin/)
www.wordpress.dev/testing-yoasts-wordpress-seo-plugin/
content goes here ...

Focus Keyword:

SEO Title:
Title display in search engines is limited to 70 chars, 11 chars left.

Meta Description:
The meta description will be limited to 156 chars, 156 chars left.

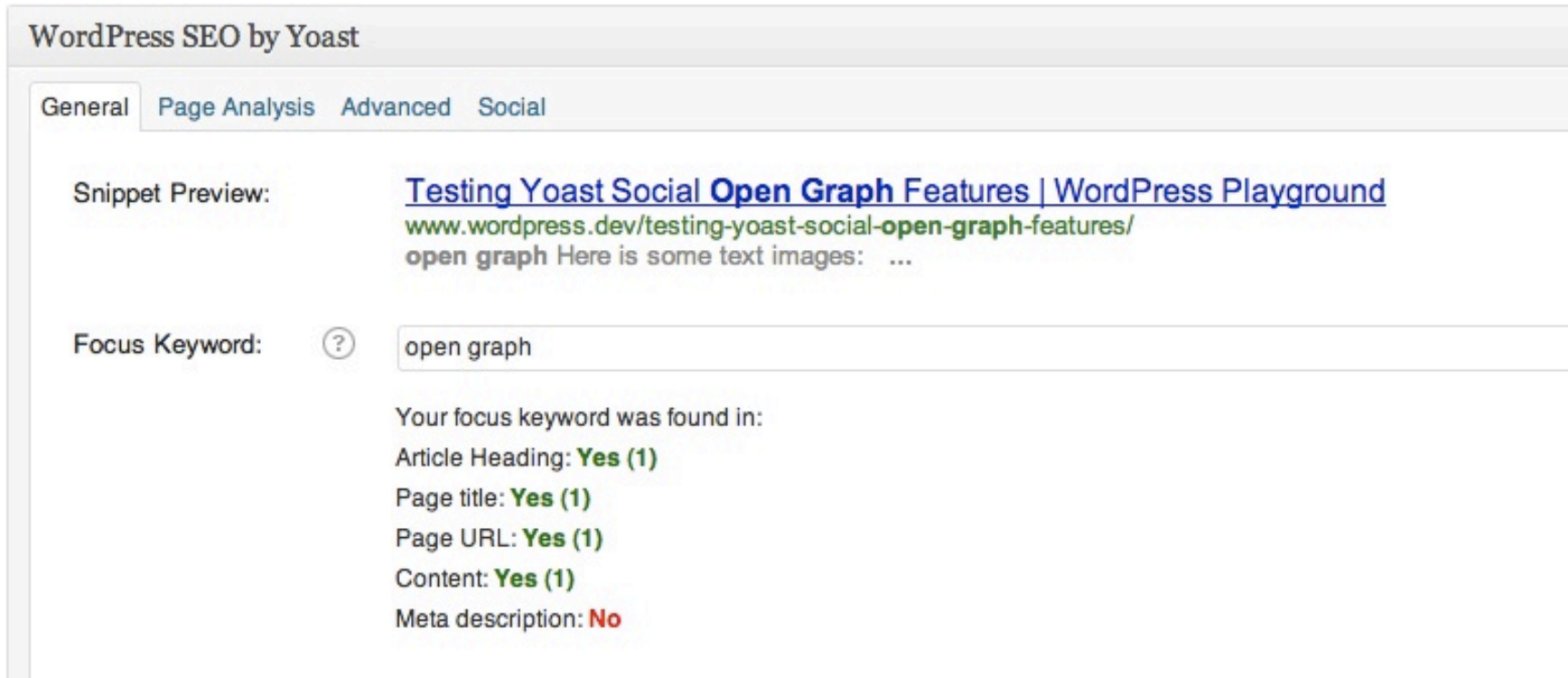
General

Earlier in this article I talked about how the plugin allows you to create a template for your meta title and description, but that you may want to customize it on a per-post basis. This is where you would do that.

Snippet Preview - If you set up a meta information template in the SEO > Titles & Metas section you'll already see some information populated in the Snippet Preview area. This gives you a preview of how your post will look in the Google results pages, based on your current settings. You will notice that if you start typing something into the SEO Title or Meta Description fields, the snippet preview will change in real time to reflect the new information you are providing.

Focus Keyword - Many people on first glance get hung up on or confused by this field. Here's what you have to understand - this is a TOOL only, and does NOT affect the output of the plugin. Using the Focus keyword field is optional, you only need to use this if you want to do the page analysis and use the check button in the Publish box. What this tool will do is the following:

You enter your focus keyword (that's ONE keyword or ONE phrase) for your post, then after updating your post you will see a quick checklist of where your keyphrase was found.

A screenshot of the WordPress SEO by Yoast plugin interface. The title bar reads "WordPress SEO by Yoast". Below it are four tabs: "General", "Page Analysis", "Advanced", and "Social". The "Page Analysis" tab is selected. Under "Snippet Preview", there is a blue link "Testing Yoast Social Open Graph Features | WordPress Playground" followed by the URL "www.wordpress.dev/testing-yoast-social-open-graph-features/" and the text "open graph Here is some text images: ...". Under "Focus Keyword", there is a question mark icon and a text input field containing "open graph". Below the input field, it says "Your focus keyword was found in:" followed by a list of checks: "Article Heading: Yes (1)", "Page title: Yes (1)", "Page URL: Yes (1)", "Content: Yes (1)", and "Meta description: No".

WordPress SEO by Yoast

General Page Analysis Advanced Social

Snippet Preview: [Testing Yoast Social Open Graph Features | WordPress Playground](#)
www.wordpress.dev/testing-yoast-social-open-graph-features/
open graph Here is some text images: ...

Focus Keyword: ⓘ open graph

Your focus keyword was found in:

- Article Heading: **Yes (1)**
- Page title: **Yes (1)**
- Page URL: **Yes (1)**
- Content: **Yes (1)**
- Meta description: **No**

Note that as you type in the focus keyword field, you'll see a dropdown of suggestions - those keywords and phrases are based on Google searches, so this function helps you refine your focus keyword based on real-world searches. Click on the Page Analysis tab to get even more detail.

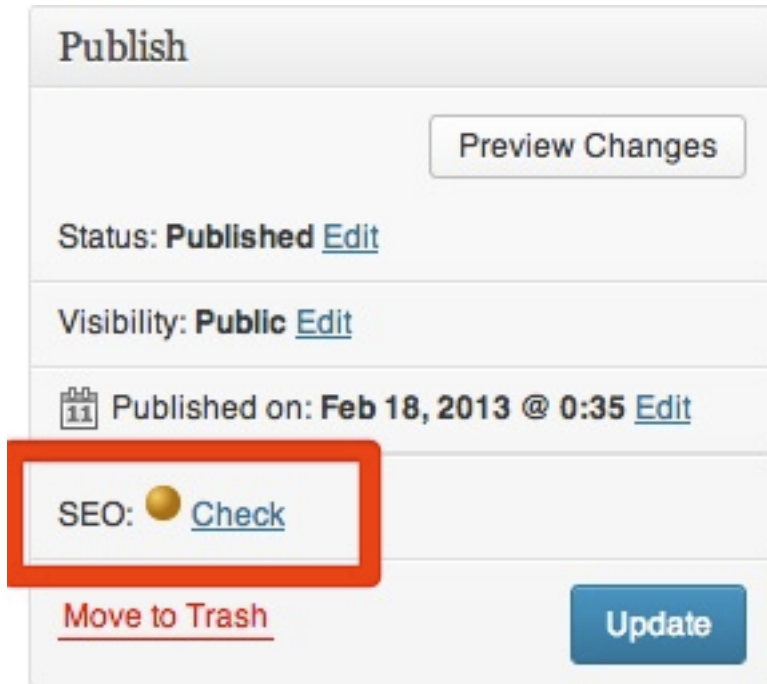
WordPress SEO by Yoast

General Page Analysis Advanced Social

To update this page analysis, save as draft or update and check this tab again.

- There are 50 words contained in the body copy. This is far too low and should be increased.
- No meta description has been specified, search engines will display copy from the page instead.
- The keyword doesn't appear in the first paragraph of the copy, make sure the topic is clear immediately.
- The page title contains keyword / phrase, but it does not appear at the beginning; try and move it to the beginning.
- No outbound links appear in this page, consider adding some as appropriate.
- No subheading tags (like an H2) appear in the copy.
- The images on this page contain alt tags with the target keyword / phrase.
- The keyword / phrase appears in the URL for this page.
- The page title is more than 40 characters and less than the recommended 70 character limit.

This tool is designed to help you improve your on-page optimization skills. If you are already well-versed you will not need this tool, but it may be helpful for beginners. The color indicator up in the Publish box shows how well you're doing.



Don't obsess about making it turn green however - you never want to sacrifice well-written content for the sake of search engine optimization. Additionally it occasionally provides inaccurate information such as saying your keyword is not in the title when it clearly is. Each post or page should be tightly focused around one concept- that's why you only enter one word or phrase in this tool. If you don't know what to put it means you may not have a clear direction with this piece of content.

SEO Title, Meta Description

If your post titles are strong, meaning keyword-rich and descriptive you may not need to customize your SEO Title. However in some cases you may have crafted a clever or funny post title for your readers, but that may not be the most search-engine friendly way of describing your content. So the SEO title lets you give Google a more straightforward and descriptive title.

Everything should be written in human-friendly English (no lists of keywords or other tricks). The title should have your keywords for that post/page in it. The description is like ad copy - a compelling description of the content that will encourage people to click on your result in the SERPS.

Advanced

This gives you control over the robots meta tag for the page/post, allowing you to specify if the page should be noindex-ed and/or nofollow-ed. Most regular users won't need to do anything here. A common use case would be if you are creating a landing page that you don't want to show up in search results. You can also control the canonical url for the page, or set up a 301 redirect. The latter is useful if this piece of content is perhaps out of date. You generally don't want to ever delete pages on your site since they can result in broken links, 404 errors and poor user and googlebot experience. You can instead point a page to a better version using a 301 redirect so that users and googlebots find the new content instead. If you don't know what any of these settings relate to, you would be advised to stay out of this tab!

Social

The Social tab provides some very handy functionality. By default, whatever you have created for your Meta Description will be used as the snippet when your link is shared on Facebook and Google+. However you may want to craft a unique snippet for Facebook that is different than the meta description on the search engine results. The Social tab lets you specify those different descriptions. Although there is a box for a Google+ description, it doesn't actually seem to do anything. I don't see anything different output in the code of the page, and when you share a link to Google+ it will use your Facebook description if there is one, otherwise the meta description.

Thanks for reading! If you found this guide useful, drop a comment on the blog, Tweet it to your friends or drop me an email: lucy@webtrainingwheels.com !

If you need to learn more about the fundamentals of search engine optimization, check out my ebook:

The Beginner's Guide To SEO For Business:

<http://webtrainingwheels.com/beginners-guide-to-seo-ebook/>