

Focus keyphrases

This lesson covers focus keyphrases. Let's explore what they are, why they are important, and how you can optimize them with the Yoast SEO plugin.

Focus keyphrases

What is a focus keyphrase?

The focus keyphrase is the search term that you most want your page to rank for, so when people search for that keyword or phrase, they should find you. A focus keyphrase can be a word, like [shoes], but also a phrase, like [ballet shoes for kids].

Why is a focus keyphrase important?

When you optimize your blog post for a specific keyphrase, it's important that people actually search for that keyphrase. If they're not, you will be doing a lot of hard work for nothing. But how do you choose the right focus keyphrase?

There are two things to consider when choosing your focus keyphrase:

1. Your **audience**: what are they searching for and which words are they using? You should get inside the heads of your audience and try to figure this out. You can use tools like [Google Trends](#) to help you with this (Image 1).

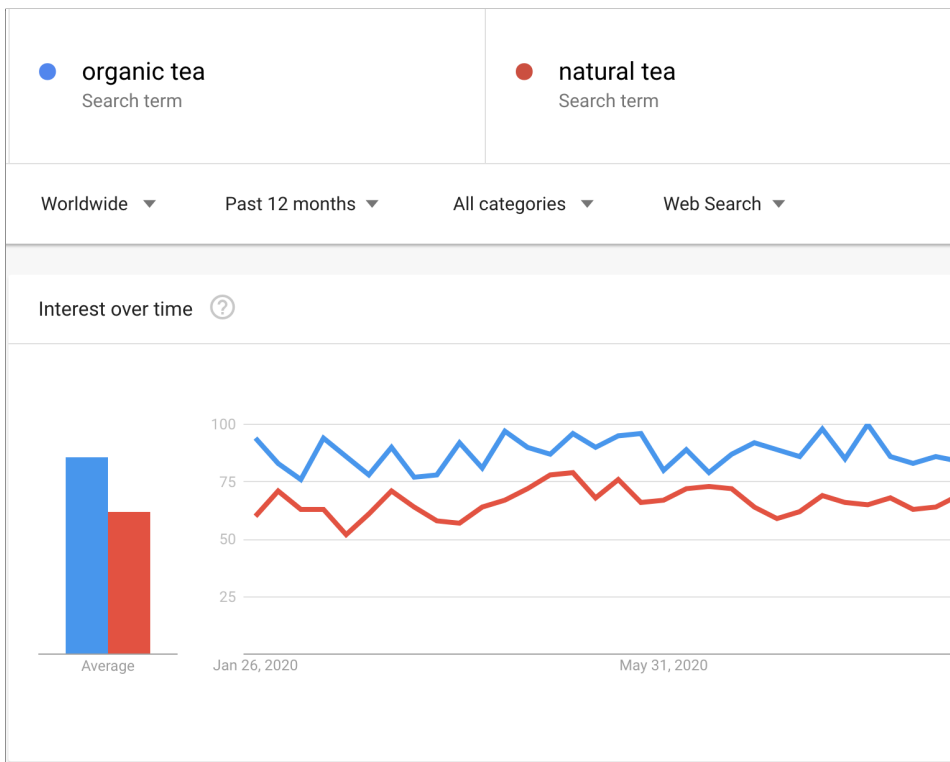


Image 1: Google Trends

2. Your **competition**: you have to focus on keyphrases that are not too competitive, otherwise you'll have a hard time ranking. To check this, you can search for your proposed focus keyphrase in Google and see whether or not the post you want to write would stand out from the other results (Image 2). Does your site have enough authority?

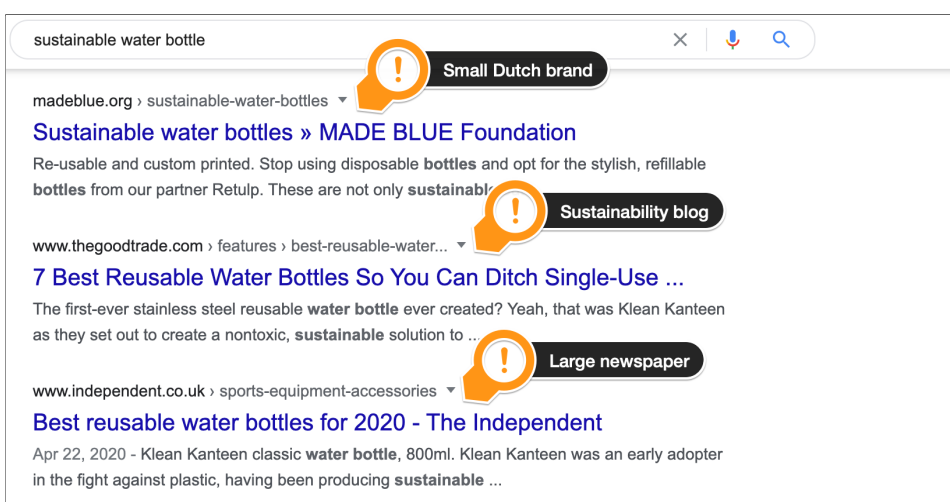


Image 2: Google your focus keyphrase to analyze your competition

Use your focus keyphrase only once

You do not want to compete with your own content for a position in Google, so you should use your focus keyphrase only once. If you optimize two different articles for the same focus keyphrase, you would like to have both posts to turn up in Google. You'll be telling Google: these two are both suitable for people searching for my keyphrase. You may be able to get away with this if you're a large company dominating the search results. Generally, however, you should try to write the optimal post for a focus keyphrase and try to rank for that article. You can have multiple posts about one topic, but try to optimize them for different keyphrase by addressing different aspects of that topic.

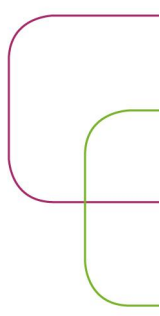
How do you use keyphrases in your pages and posts?

There was a time where you could add a lot of keyphrases to your pages and posts, so-called keyword or keyphrase stuffing, and you'd rank in the search engines. However, this is not a great SEO strategy anymore. If you do this, you'll be hit by [Google Panda](#) (or another update) in no time. Google prefers nice, readable texts. Texts with a high keyphrase density do not read nicely. They are in fact, terrible to read. Instead of using your focus keyphrase over and over, you should use synonyms if possible. Google actually recognizes synonyms to keyphrases now. With this ability, optimizing for a single focus keyphrase becomes more and more silly.

Of course, you should use your focus keyphrase in your text, but you shouldn't overdo it. Usually, a keyphrase density of 1 to 2% is perfect. In addition, you should make sure your use of keyphrases is balanced throughout the text. Make sure you use your focus keyphrase in your page title, first paragraph, one or several subheadings, and in your meta description.

Head, mid-tail, and long-tail keyphrases

There are several kinds of keyphrases. Some of them are rather generic, others are more specific. We distinguish three kinds of keyphrases: head keyphrases, mid tail keyphrases and long tail keyphrases. Let's take a closer look.



Head keyphrases

Most blogs have just a few main topics – these are called the **head keyphrases**. Mom blogs are usually about children and family life; food blogs are about eating, restaurants, and recipes. Our blog at yoast.com is all about SEO. So, all of our blog posts are about SEO, or about SEO-related-topics. We most certainly want to rank for the term [SEO]. In addition, terms like [SEO plugin], [SEO courses], [SEO blog], etc. are also head keyphrases for us. As an authority in our field, we have the luxury of being able to rank for these phrases.

The main topic or theme of your blog is the number one keyword or keyphrase you want people to use to find you, in our case [SEO]. Imagine yourself having a food blog about homemade Italian food. You would then like to be found on a search term like [homemade Italian food]. That would pretty much be the number one.

Mid-tail keyphrases

You cannot, however, optimize all blog posts for the same term [homemade Italian food], even if all your blog posts will be about homemade Italian food. Instead, you should write a whole number of blog posts about all kinds of long-tail variants of your number one search term. In the example of the food blog, you could write about all kinds of delicious things: homemade Italian pasta, homemade Italian salads, homemade Italian pie. These could be your main categories. We call them mid-tail keyphrases. **Mid-tail keyphrases** are more specific keyphrases, derived from the head keyphrase they tie into.

Long-tail keyphrases

Your blog posts could be even more long-tail. You could write about: homemade Italian spaghetti bolognese, homemade Italian lasagna, homemade Italian penne carbonara, and so on. These keyphrases are called long-tail keyphrases. **Long-tail keyphrases** are even more specific and less common keyphrases, which often focus on a niche. The longer (and more specific) search phrases are, the easier it will be to rank for

them. For smaller sites, long-tail keyphrases can comprise up to six or seven separate terms.

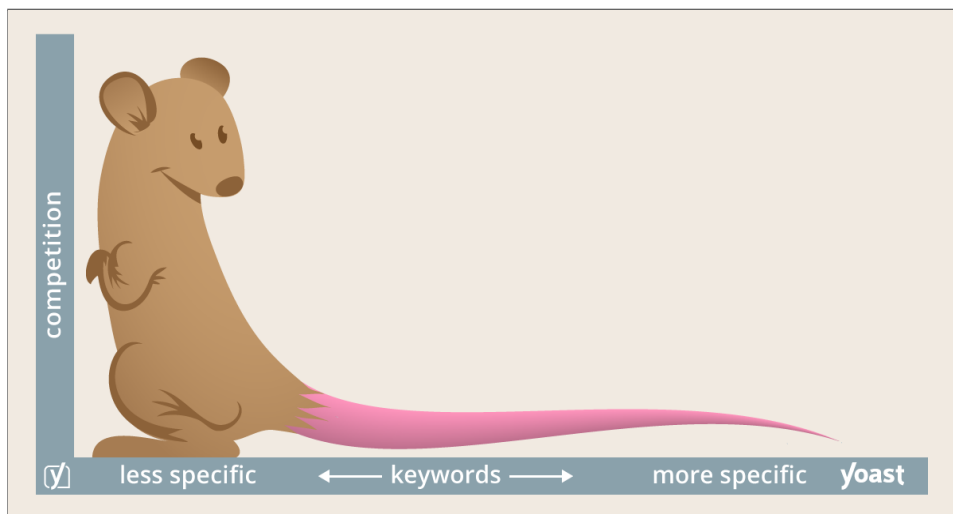


Image 3: Focus keyphrases

Adding a focus keyphrase in Yoast SEO

Yoast SEO has its own input field for focus keyphrases. The plugin evaluates the page's content and provides feedback on how to improve the content for that focus keyphrase. As shown in Image 4, the plugin gives you feedback on a lot of different aspects, including whether you use the focus keyphrase often enough (but not too often) throughout your text, and whether you use it in enough of your subheadings. In addition, it tells you whether or not you have used this keyphrase before.

The feedback is provided in a structured way. It is divided into problems (red bullets), improvements (orange bullets) and good things (green bullets). Please note that you don't need a green bullet for everything to get an overall green bullet. To get a green bullet for everything will be nearly impossible, and you have to keep in mind that green bullets don't equal a great text. Moreover, if you base your text too much on the bullets feedback, your text may actually even be worse than it may have been otherwise.

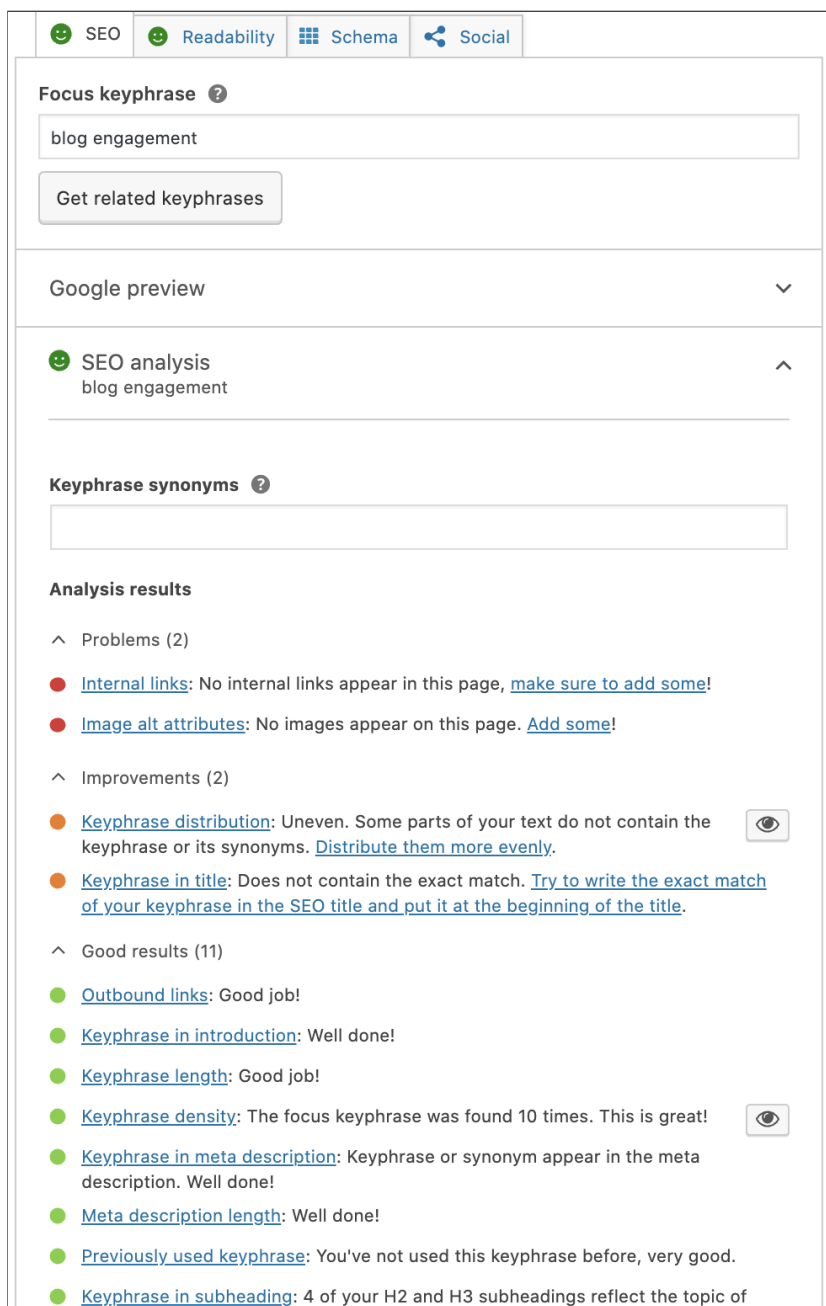


Image 4: The focus keyphrase in Yoast SEO

Related keyphrases with Semrush

Under the Focus keyphrase input field, you will find the Get related keyphrase button. The first time you click on it, you will see a screen asking you to connect your Semrush account or make a new one. Then, you will need to authorize Yoast SEO to connect the accounts. After completing those steps, you can find related keyphrases right within the

post editor. You even get insights on search volume and trends! Plus, you can select the country and the language you want to see results for.

This feature is available for free, but Premium users get the added benefit of using it in the related keyphrase feature and optimize the content for multiple keyphrases and synonyms (Image 5). You can add the relevant keyphrases you find with a simple click of the button. After that, you can simply optimize your text for these keyphrases in the post editor sidebar.

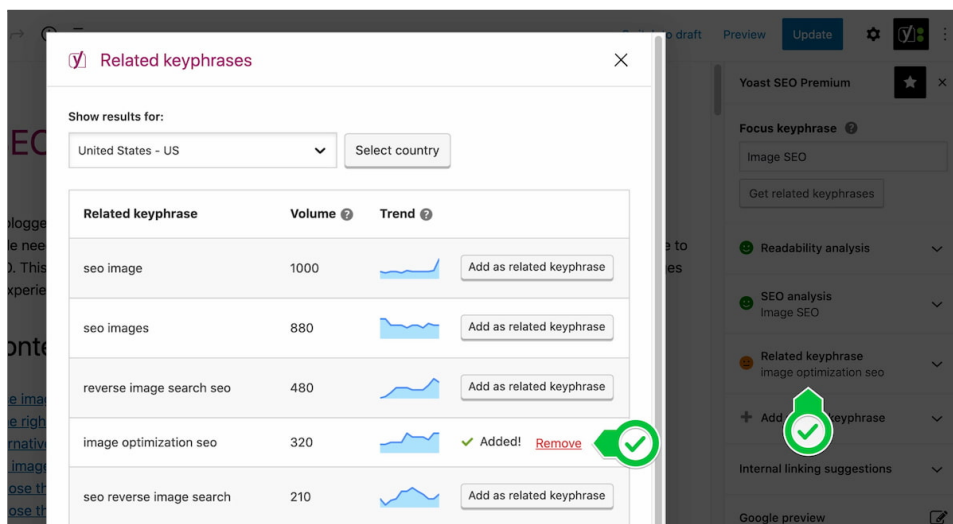


Image 5: Semrush related keyphrases data in Yoast SEO

Synonyms (Premium only)

Search engines are becoming smarter. They increasingly use the context surrounding terms to build a complete picture of what that term means. That's why we help you optimize your text with synonyms as well – if you have Yoast SEO Premium. Synonyms of a word are words or phrases that have the same meaning. A synonym for 'dog', for example, is 'canine', 'hound' or 'man's best friend'. Using synonyms in your copy can help people understand it better, and it improves the readability of your text. If you repeat the same word very often in your copy, it looks like you've written it for search engines, not humans.

In Yoast SEO Premium, you can indicate which synonyms you have used in addition to your main keyphrase. If you click the SEO analysis tab, you will see an input field where you can add them (Image 4). Then, the plugin will take these synonyms into account in the keyphrase checks.

Word forms and word order (Premium only)

Search engines also recognize word forms such as plurals, singulars, comparatives, or past-tense variants of the same words. That's why we also added this functionality to the Yoast SEO Premium plugin. The plugin will now recognize all word forms of your focus keyphrase.

Does this sound a little too abstract? Let's take a look at an example. Say, you have a dog training school with an online site. And let's say one of your focus keyphrases is [teach dog to sit]. With this functionality, the plugin will not only recognize the exact keyphrase but also alternative matches with different word forms, like [teaching dog to sit] or [teaching dogs to sit].

In addition, word order doesn't influence keyphrase recognition anymore, both for search engines and in Yoast SEO. So, it doesn't matter if you write [a trained dog] or [a dog that is trained]. In both sentences, the Yoast SEO analysis will find the keyphrase you're optimizing your post for. This will enable you to write in a more natural and free way and still get green bullets from Yoast.

Related keyphrases (Premium only)

We've talked about related keyphrases before. You can use the Semrush integration to find them. Search engines will recognize related terms in your copy, just like they recognize synonyms and different word forms of your focus keyphrase. This means that in a text about puppy training, search engines will also recognize words like 'rewards', 'commands' or 'behavior'. In Yoast SEO Premium, you can add related keyphrases to your SEO analysis. You can use the Semrush integration to do this, but you can also add them manually (Image 6). Your focus keyphrase is the most important, of course. That's why we're less strict in our analysis of your related keyphrases.

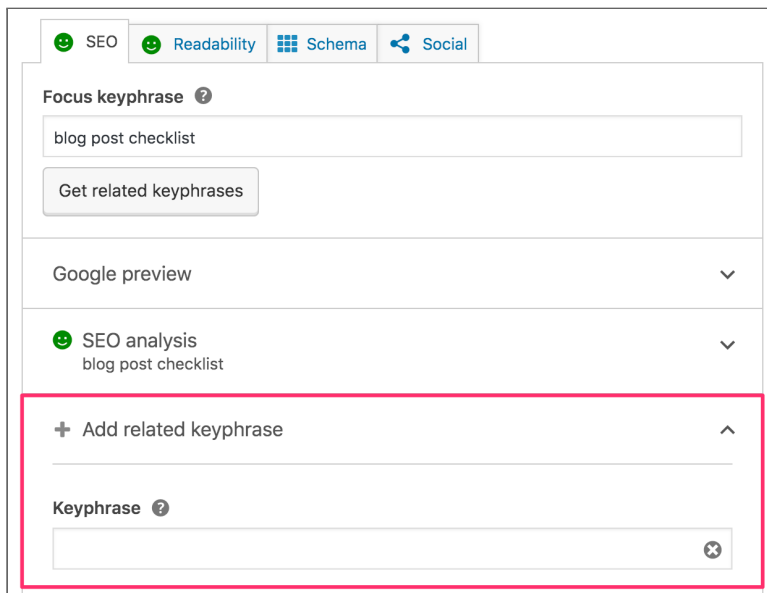


Image 6: Adding related keyphrases to the Yoast SEO analysis

Conclusion

In this lesson, we've discussed focus keyphrases. We've seen that it's very important to choose the right focus keyphrase. Otherwise, you'll be doing a lot of hard work for nothing. In addition, we've explained that you can fill out your focus keyphrase in the Yoast SEO plugin, and then it evaluates your page's content and provides feedback on how to improve the text for that focus keyphrase. If you have Yoast SEO Premium, the plugin also checks for synonyms, related keyphrases, and different word forms.