Yoast SEO for WordPress

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Learning objectives

After this lesson, you will be able to:

- understand the functionalities of the free version of Yoast SEO;
- point out the additional features available in Yoast SEO Premium;
- describe what Yoast SEO can't do, and therefore, you should do yourself;
- identify possible reasons for why your site may not rank, even though you have optimized it with Yoast SEO.

1. What does Yoast SEO free do?

Suppose you know nothing about SEO, but you have heard about this plugin called Yoast SEO. People have told you that it is a very convenient tool to optimize your site and its pages for Google, Bing, and Yandex. It's effortless. You want to use it. You install the Yoast SEO plugin and simply follow the advice given in that plugin. Within a week, your website will be topping the charts in Google. Or not? No, to be honest. It's not that simple. Our plugin helps you to optimize your website for search engines. And it does that well, but it needs your input.

Key features of the free Yoast SEO plugin

Yoast SEO makes working on your SEO easy. We aim to help you with it, step by step. Let's discuss the most important features of the free Yoast SEO plugin.

SEO analysis

Let's start with the SEO analysis. After you type in your focus keyphrase – the term you want your post or page to be found for – the plugin runs a bunch of checks on your content. These checks focus a lot on your keyphrase: did you include it in your title, introduction, and headings? Did you use it enough, or maybe a little too much?

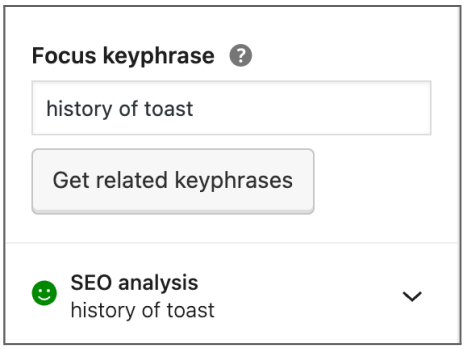


Image 1: Focus keyphrase and SEO analysis in the Yoast SEO sidebar

We give you feedback on all these things using traffic lights that come in green, orange, and red. Green means you're doing great, orange means you could use some improvement, and red means you've got some work to do. The feedback we provide with these traffic lights tells you exactly how to improve your text.

But that's not all! The SEO analysis also checks your links, images, and snippet elements, and gives you feedback on how to improve your content from an SEO perspective. In other words: we tell you exactly what you need to do to optimize your content for search engines.

Readability analysis

The second analysis in Yoast SEO is the readability analysis. This analysis gives feedback from a different perspective: it helps you improve the readability of your text. But why is this important? Well, making sure your content is easy to read is essential for your visitors because reading from a screen is tough, and people get distracted easily. But most importantly, you want people to understand what you're writing. If your text is incomprehensible, dull, or crammed with keywords, no one will want to read it. And if your content isn't readable, your visitors won't find what they need, *which is bad for your SEO*.

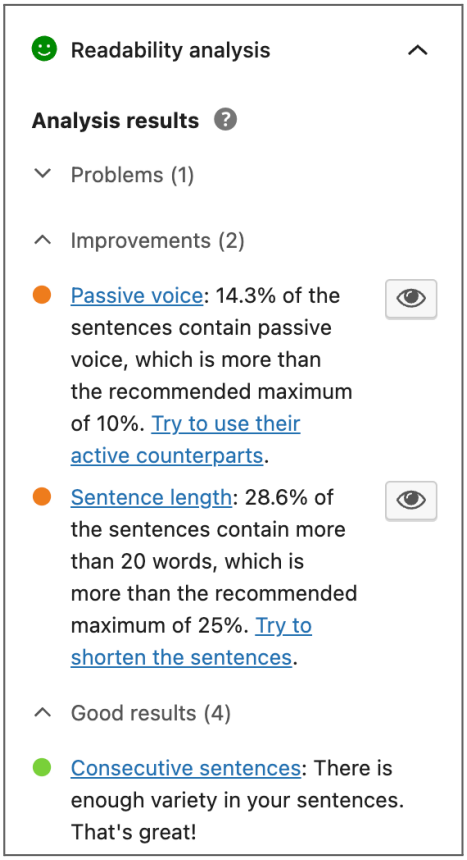


Image 2: The readability analysis in Yoast SEO

So, that's why we help you write clear and easy-to-read texts that both your audience and search engines will appreciate. Our readability analysis checks a lot of things based on extensive research. For instance, we'll warn you if

your text has too many long sentences or paragraphs, or advise you to use more headings or transition words.

Inclusive language analysis

Let's talk about the third analysis in the free version of Yoast SEO: the inclusive language analysis. We offer this analysis because it's surprisingly easy to exclude people by using the wrong words, without even realizing it. That's why our analysis detects words that could be harmful to people and suggests alternatives for you to consider. The inclusive language analysis is opt-in, so you can decide for yourself whether or not to use it.

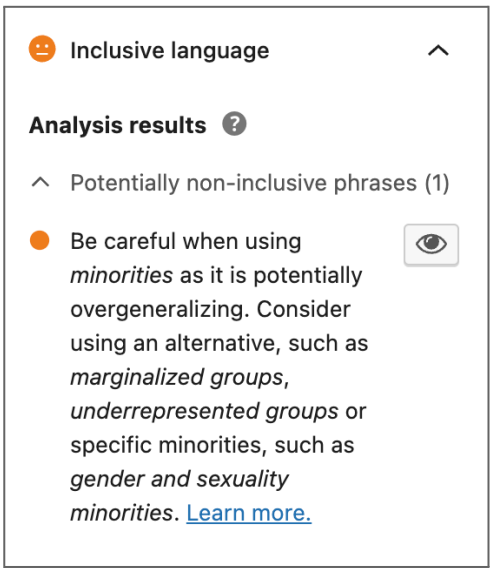


Image 3: The inclusive language analysis in Yoast SEO

Google preview

In addition to these analyses, Yoast SEO comes with other great tools. The first one we will discuss is the Google preview. This feature allows you to see what your post might look like in Google's search results. This helps you make sure your post stands out and looks appealing to people who are searching for topics related to your post.

With the Google preview, you can toggle between desktop and mobile views to see how your post might look on different devices. You can also *edit* key elements of your post's snippet, including the SEO title, slug, and meta description. If you're not sure how to optimize these elements, take a look at the feedback in the SEO analysis.

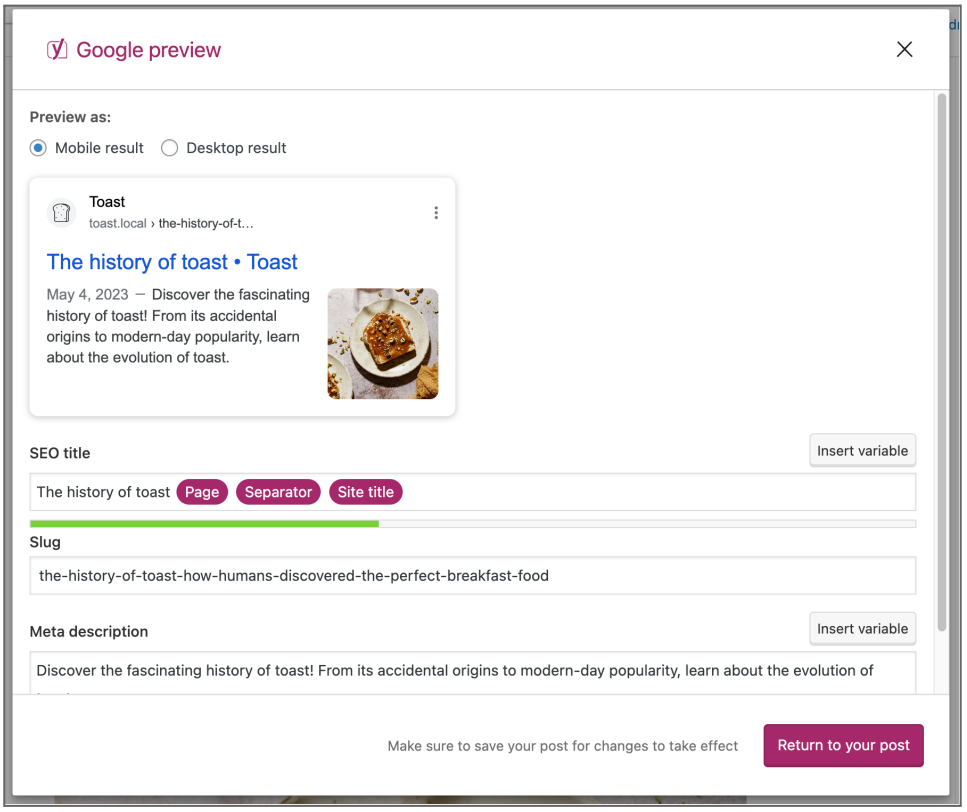


Image 4: The Google preview in Yoast SEO

Social media

With the Facebook and Twitter previews, you can choose the image, title, and description that people will see when sharing your post on social media. This saves you time and makes your social media optimization more efficient. If you're a Yoast SEO Premium user, you can even preview the post and set default social templates for every page, custom post type, taxonomy, and archive. This gives you more control and saves you time.



Image 5: The Facebook and Twitter preview in Yoast SEO

Schema

Now, let’s dive into the more technical stuff. One of the most significant innovations at Yoast that we are super proud of is our Schema implementation. When you use Yoast SEO, we automatically add structured data code to your pages. Structured data helps search engines understand your content better and can lead to more visually appealing and informative

search results, known as rich snippets. These rich snippets can provide users with more information about your website, such as reviews or ratings, which can help attract more traffic to your site.

XML sitemaps

Another technical thing Yoast SEO helps you with is XML sitemaps. An XML sitemap is like a roadmap for search engines to help them find all the pages on your site. With Yoast SEO, you don't have to worry about creating your own sitemap, because we automatically generate one for you.

Since the release of WordPress 5.5, all WordPress installations automatically get an XML sitemap as well. But this default WordPress XML sitemap is very basic. We have been working on the Yoast XML sitemap for years, and over time, it has become more and more sophisticated. So, we advise you to use our XML sitemap over the basic WordPress XML sitemap.

If you want to read more, you can check out this FAQ about XML sitemaps in WordPress 5.5 and Yoast SEO.

Breadcrumbs

The Yoast SEO plugin also gives you full control over your breadcrumbs. Breadcrumbs are the links, usually above the title post, that look like this: *Home / SEO blog / Content SEO* (Image 6). They allow users to easily navigate your site and make it easier for search engines to determine your site's structure.

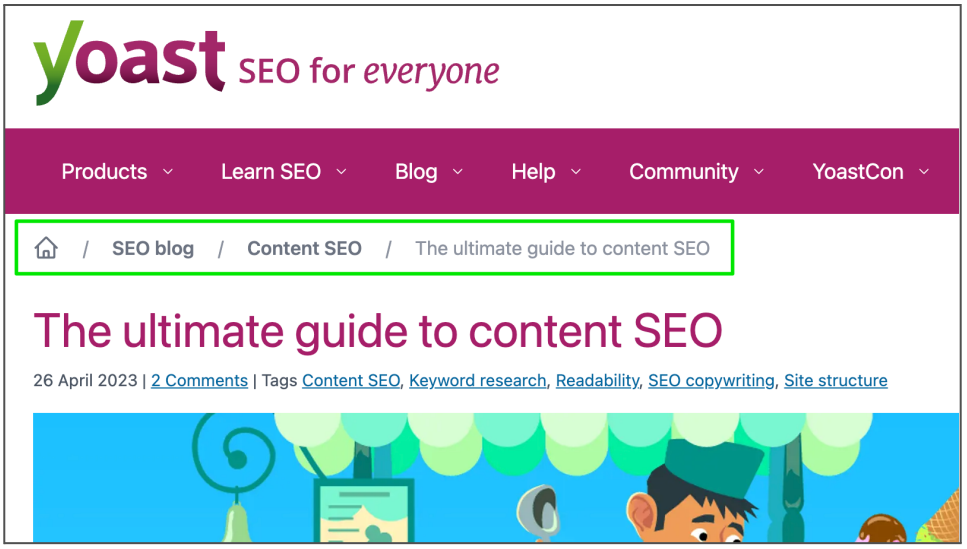


Image 6: Example of the Yoast SEO breadcrumbs (marked with green)

Canonical URLs

Another cool feature in Yoast SEO enables you to set canonical URLs. The same content on your site may be available on various URLs. To avoid confusing Google (and the user), you can tell search engines which URL you want Google to index.

Robots meta tags

The plugin also allows you to control where search engines go on your website and what they're allowed to index, using robots meta tags. This feature can be used to exclude low-value pages, such as admin, login, and thank you pages, from search results. You can add robots meta tags with the plugin to tell search engines which URLs they should exclude from search results and prevent search engines from valuing links on a page.

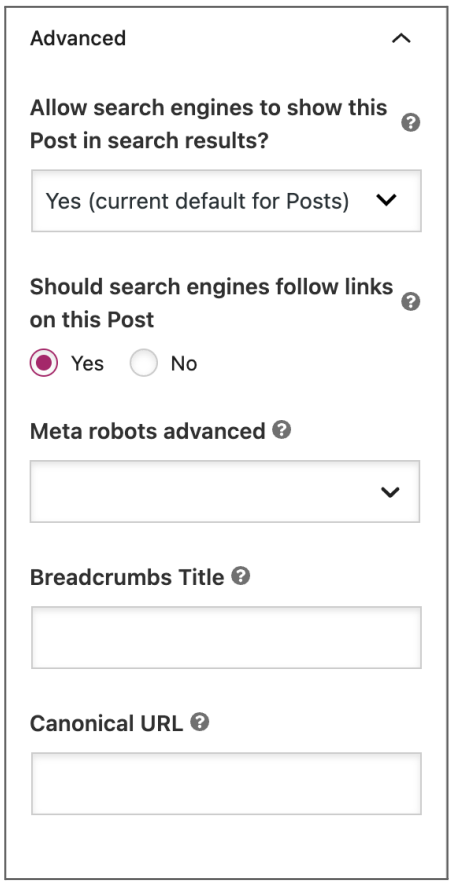


Image 7: The Advanced settings in Yoast SEO, showing the meta robots and canonical URL settings

Crawl optimization settings

Crawlability is essential for SEO. If you want search engines to find your site and show it in the search results, your site must be crawlable. However, it's not enough to simply make your site crawlable. You also need to make sure that search engines crawl the pages that you want to rank with.

In addition to this, there's another aspect to consider - the environmental impact of crawling. Crawling requires a lot of energy and resources, both on the part of search engines and website owners. By optimizing crawling, you not only improve your site's SEO but also reduce its carbon footprint.

With Yoast SEO's crawl optimization settings, you can easily remove URLs that don't have any SEO value, making crawling more efficient and environmentally friendly.

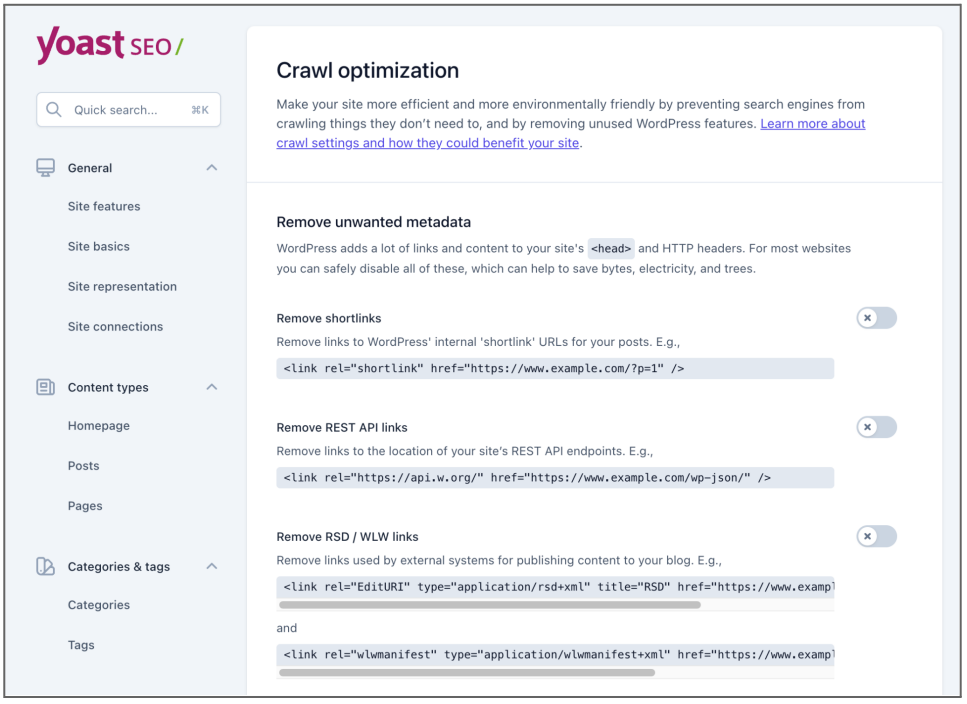


Image 8: The crawl optimization settings in Yoast SEO

Language support

Our mission is "SEO for everyone". That's why we work hard to enable people all over the world to use our SEO tool in their own language. Currently, Yoast SEO can do a keyphrase analysis for most languages. However, some checks are language-specific, and they behave differently for different languages. That is why we work hard to keep the list of languages we support growing! So, make sure to keep an eye on our releases!

2. What does Yoast SEO Premium do?

We've seen that the free version of Yoast SEO is already awesome, so why should you buy Yoast SEO Premium? If you're really serious about SEO, this is the plugin you should have. We'll discuss the most important features you'll get when you buy the Premium version.

Key features of the Yoast SEO Premium plugin

Let's dive into the key features of Yoast SEO Premium. What extras will you get when you upgrade and why are these features useful and important for your site's SEO?

The Premium SEO and readability analyses

Yoast SEO Premium gives you access to the *Premium* SEO and readability analyses. These analyses both come with additional assessments, like the word complexity check and the keyphrase distribution check. If you go to the Insights tab, you'll find even more Premium tools, like the prominent words feature that helps you make sure your page is on topic.

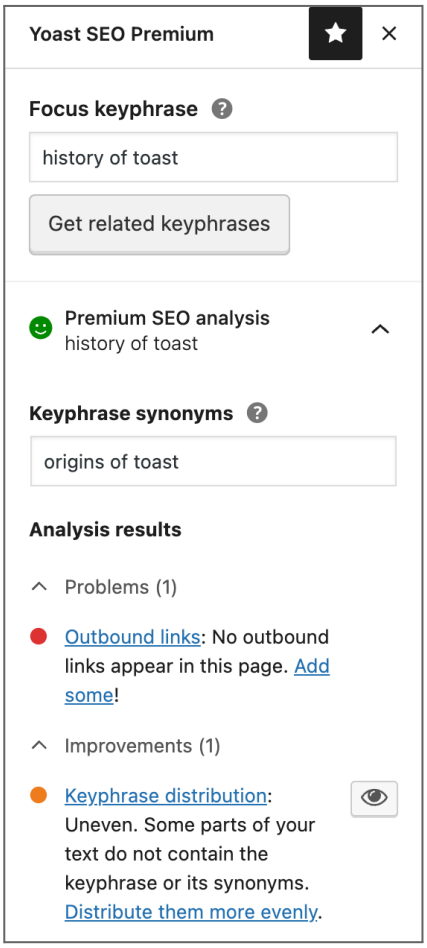


Image 9: The Premium SEO analysis

Optimize for multiple keyphrases

With the free version of our plugin, you can choose one focus keyphrase to optimize your text for. However, it might help to make your post or page rank for that focus keyphrase by strengthening it with other, closely related topics. In Yoast SEO Premium, you can add up to four related keyphrases. Use them, as Google is getting better at recognizing relationships between words and topics.

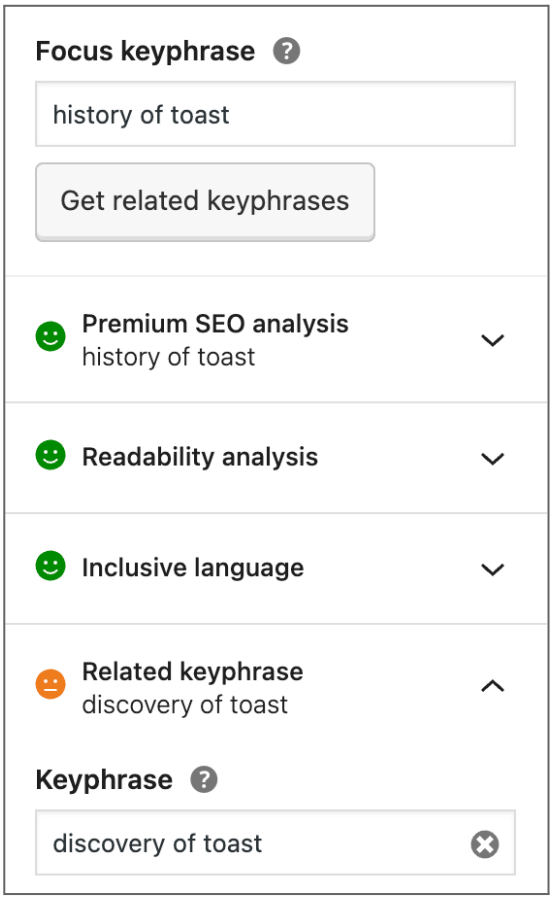


Image 10: Add related keyphrases in Yoast SEO Premium

You have the option to add related keyphrases manually, or you can take advantage of the tool we developed in collaboration with Semrush. This tool not only assists you in discovering but also adding high-performing related keyphrases to your content.

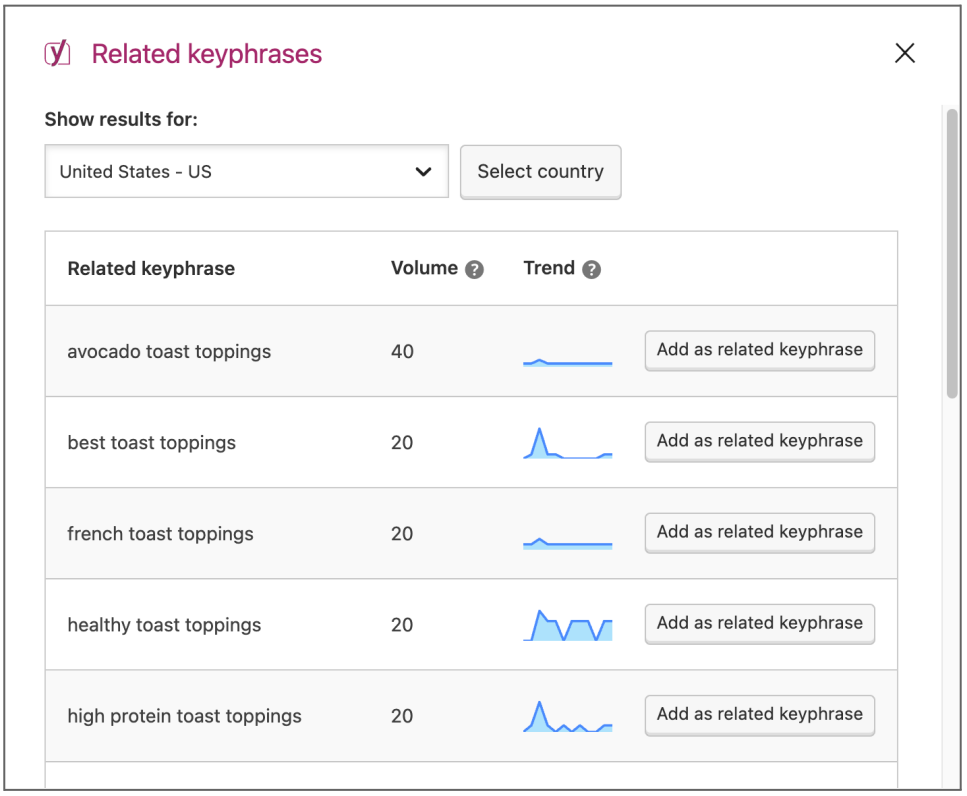


Image 11: Get related keyphrases with the Semrush integration

Word forms & synonyms

The Premium plugin recognizes several types of word forms, like singulars, plurals, comparatives, and past tense. This makes the analysis that much stronger, as it takes the different forms you use into account. For example, words like 'books,' 'booking,' 'booked, are all recognized as forms of 'book'.

Furthermore, there's no more need to repeatedly use your keyphrase throughout the text too much, as you can use synonyms in Yoast SEO Premium. If you're optimizing for 'ballet shoes,' just add 'dancing shoes' to its synonyms in Yoast SEO, and the plugin will consider those synonyms in ints analysis. The recognition of synonyms and word forms helps you write readable, understandable, and findable texts.

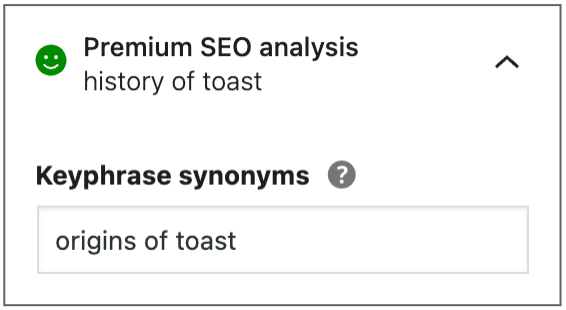


Image 12: Add synonyms of your keyphrase in Yoast SEO Premium

Redirect manager

Upgrading to Yoast SEO Premium also gives you access to the redirect manager. A lot of our users upgrade for this tool alone. Why? Because it saves you a ton of time and hassle.

When you delete a page, it doesn't just disappear from the search engine index. People can still land on it, and when they do, they'll see a 404 error. That's a poor user experience and can hurt your SEO. Plus, you lose any value that page had from links and mentions.

Therefore, it's crucial to avoid those dead-ends by redirecting users to another page. The redirect manager in Yoast SEO makes this super easy. Every time you delete a post or change your URL, the plugin will warn you. Then, all you need to do is click a button, add the URL you want to redirect to, and let the plugin handle the rest. No more manual redirect creating for you! In addition to the notifications, you also get access to a redirect overview page, where you can manage all of your redirects.



Image 13: Yoast SEO Premium warns you when you delete a post or change a URL

Internal linking tool

With our internal linking tool, it's really easy to link to related posts. The tool shows you which posts are related to the one you're working on, so you can easily structure your content. This way, you can show both Google and your users which posts are related and which are most important.

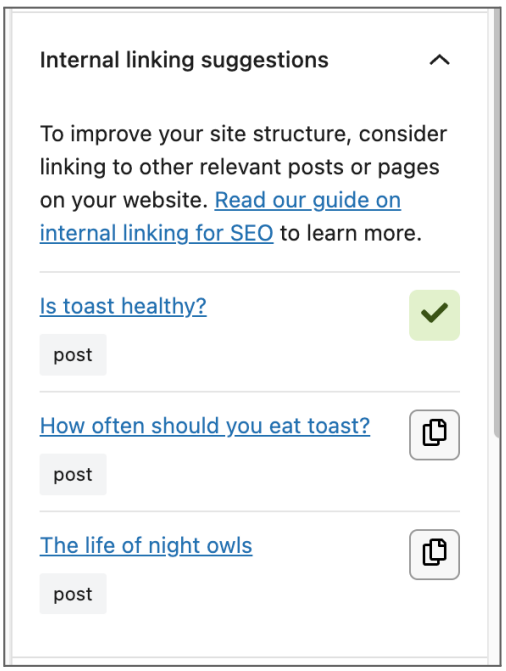


Image 14: The internal linking tool in Yoast SEO Premium

Internal linking blocks

Yoast SEO Premium features four Premium blocks that make internal linking even easier. Using your website's hierarchical structure, you can link your pages together with the Subpages block, the Siblings block, and the Related links block. In addition, you can add structure to your posts and pages with the Table of contents block.

Premium filters

In addition to the cornerstone content filter that's available in Yoast SEO free, Yoast SEO Premium also comes with two extra filters in the posts and pages overviews: the orphaned content filter and the stale cornerstone content filter.

Orphaned content filter

Orphaned content refers to the content on a website that does not receive any links from other posts or pages, making it difficult for search engines and visitors to locate it. Previously, identifying orphaned content was a challenge, but with the orphaned content filter in Yoast SEO Premium, it is now effortless. By using the internal linking tool and this filter, you can quickly link these posts, increasing their visibility.

Stale cornerstone content filter

The stale cornerstone content filter keeps track of the posts you have marked as your most important content, your cornerstone content, and alerts you if these articles haven't been updated in six months. With this filter, you can ensure that your essential content remains fresh and up-to-date.

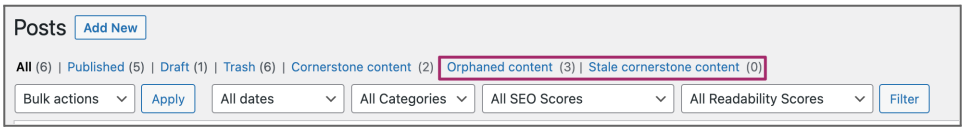


Image 15: Extra filters in Yoast SEO Premium

SEO workouts

In Yoast SEO Premium you'll also find SEO workouts that help you tackle specific tasks, like improving your internal linking structure or cleaning up outdated content. In these workouts, we'll guide you through the steps, so you don't have to figure it out on your own.

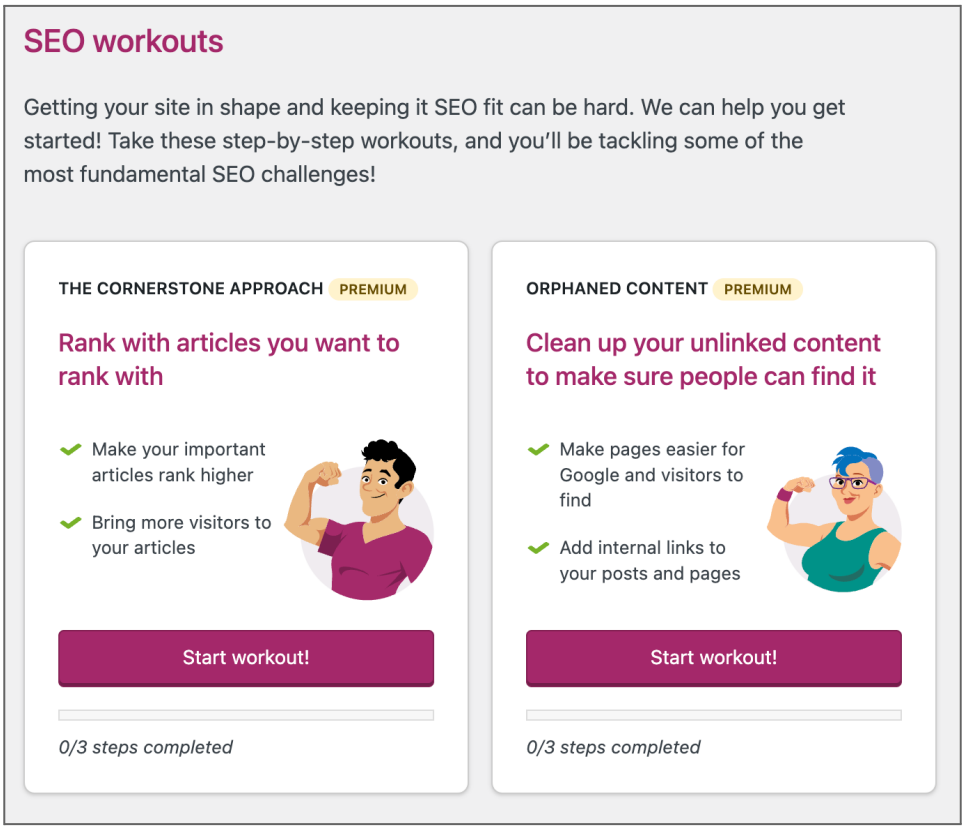


Image 16: SEO workouts in Yoast SEO Premium

Social previews

With Yoast SEO Premium, you can check what your post will look like on Facebook or Twitter without even going to these platforms. While working

on your post, you can just go to the Yoast SEO meta box or sidebar, click Facebook preview or Twitter preview, upload the image you'd like to show, and preview it to make sure it looks like you want it to.

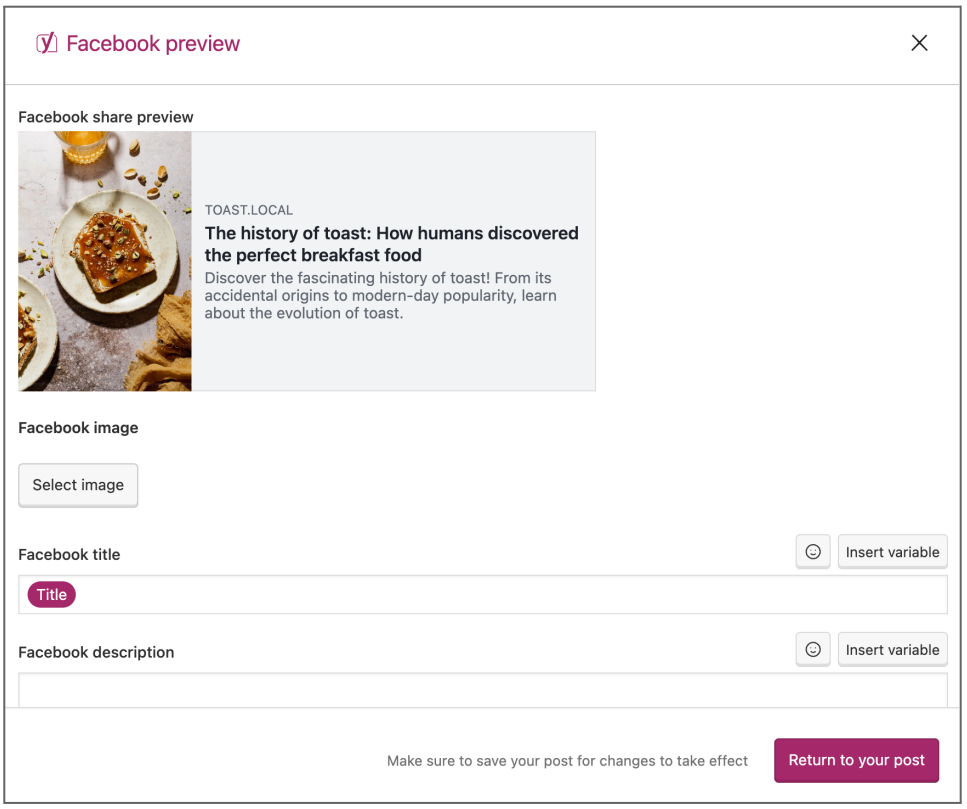


Image 17: The Facebook preview in Yoast SEO Premium

Social templates

And here's another cool thing: with Yoast SEO Premium, you can create default social templates for each page, custom post type, taxonomy, and archive. This lets you decide how your content will look when it's shared, whether you're the one doing the sharing or not. In this way, you'll have more control and save loads of time.

Emoji picker

Yoast SEO Premium also allows you to include emojis in your social title and description to make them more eye-catching. And if you feel it suits your audience, you can also use emojis in your SEO title and meta description. Emojis are a fun way to capture attention, so why not give it a shot?

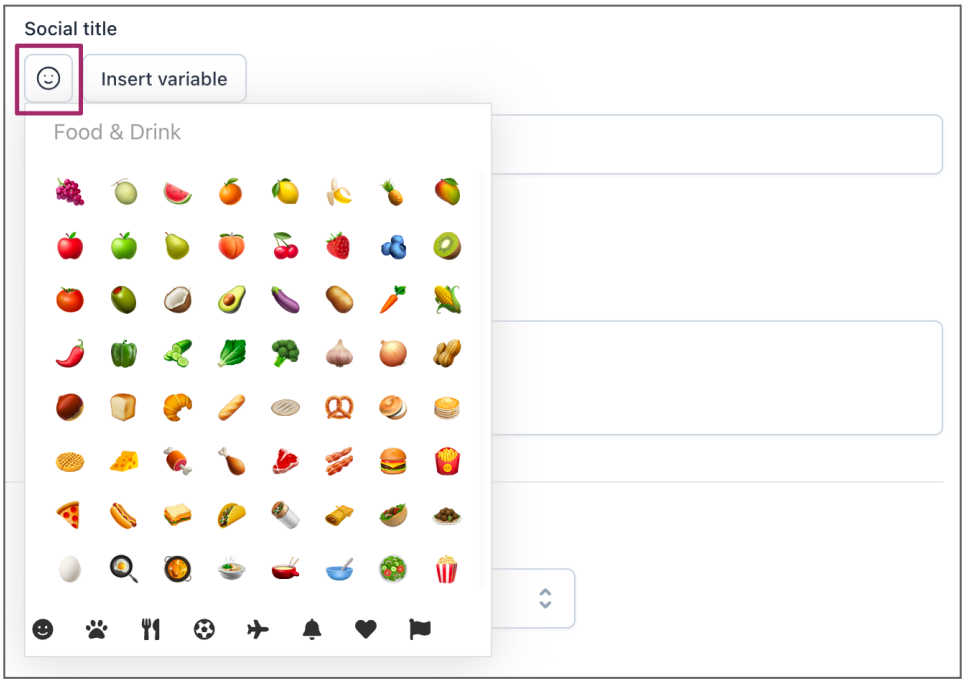


Image 18: Emoji picker in Yoast SEO Premium

Integrations

We've already mentioned Semrush, but Yoast SEO Premium comes with more integrations, like an integration with Algolia. Algolia is a powerful site search engine that significantly enhances your internal search results. When combined with Yoast SEO Premium, Algolia makes sure that your most important content is ranked at the top of the search results.

IndexNow

Another Premium feature is the IndexNow API. With this API, all search engines that participate in the IndexNow protocol will be automatically notified whenever you publish, update, or delete a post, enabling your content to be indexed more quickly. This not only speeds up the process of getting your content noticed but also helps reduce energy consumption, making the web more efficient and eco-friendly.

Support

When you buy Yoast SEO Premium, you get access to our awesome support team. This means you can send us an email at any time with questions about the setup and basic use of the plugin.

Access to Yoast SEO academy & new features

As a Yoast SEO Premium user, you'll have access to all Yoast SEO academy training courses. Plus, you'll get to try out new features and tools before they're released to the public.

Ad-free

Last but not least, the Premium version of Yoast SEO is completely ad-free.

3. What should you do yourself?

Our plugin helps you to optimize your website for search engines. And it does that well, but it needs your input. So, what are the things you should do yourself in order to optimize your site for search engines?

1. The first thing you need to do is **configure the plugin in the right way.** The settings should be in line with your website. The first-time configuration helps you to easily configure your site, to have the optimal SEO settings.

2. In addition, you should execute **keyword research**. This is the most important part of your SEO strategy because you should optimize your site for the right words. You need to get inside your audience's heads to find out which words people are searching for. Next, you should know your competition and estimate your chances to rank, because if you're optimizing for a really competitive term, you won't get any traffic.

3. You should **write awesome content**. This is not something we can do for you, this has to be done manually. However, the plugin helps you to write SEO-friendly and readable texts, by carrying out content and readability analyses. You can use the results of these analyses to make sure your text is well-optimized for search engines. In addition, we have also written a lot of blog posts about content writing, and you can follow our SEO copywriting training.

4. It's very important to establish your **internal linking structure** because this helps Google understand your website. Yoast SEO can help you with the internal linking feature, but you have to do this yourself.

5. An important part of your SEO strategy should be your **social strategy**. Yoast SEO can help you make those posts on Facebook look good, but you still have to write the content and hit that button.

6. The same goes for the **redirects**. Yoast SEO can help you detect errors and automatically presents you the most common options of solving them. It can even fix the easiest ones. However, in most cases, you still have to choose and select the one you prefer.

As you have seen, most of the technical stuff in the background is taken care of automatically. However, there are a few things our plugin cannot do for you: it needs your input. But we still try to help you with that, with our courses and blog posts.

I've optimized my site with Yoast SEO, so why am I not ranking?

The Yoast SEO plugin helps you to optimize your site and its pages easily. This could definitely result in higher rankings. But unfortunately, green lights do not magically put you on top of the search results. We'll discuss two possible reasons why a post doesn't rank, even though it has been optimized with Yoast SEO.

Too much competition

In most cases, the reason a post doesn't rank on top is that there's simply too much competition. If you optimize your blog post for Justin Bieber, chances are high you won't rank for that term. Too many sites and blog posts have established themselves in this niche. Your site doesn't have the authority that some other sites do have. And a large portion of the other sites in this niche is probably also capable of writing SEO-friendly texts.

If you really want to rank for those highly competitive terms, you should try a long tail keyphrase strategy. Blog about all the nuances and little variations around the competitive keyphrases. If these long tail articles start ranking, you'll be able to rank for more competitive terms as well. Such a strategy requires long-term efforts, but in the end, it will pay off.

A lack of patience

At Yoast, we propose a holistic SEO strategy, in which you have to be the best result. When you're just starting out, you're probably not the best result yet. Unfortunately, SEO is a long-term strategy. You just need to have a little patience. Try to focus on all aspects of website optimization, try to be that best result. It will pay off eventually!

Key takeaways

- The **free version of the Yoast SEO plugin** comes with many useful features like:
    - the SEO analysis, readability analysis and inclusive language analysis;
    - Google preview;
    - Schema functionality;
    - XML sitemaps;
    - breadcrumbs;
    - canonical URLs;
    - robots meta tags;
    - crawl optimization settings;
    - and support for multiple languages.
- The **Premium version of Yoast SEO** gives you even more features. When you upgrade to Yoast SEO Premium, you'll get access to:
    - the Premium SEO and readability analyses;
    - optimizing for multiple keyphrases;
    - word forms and synonym recognition;
    - the redirect manager;
    - the internal linking tool;
    - internal linking blocks;
    - filters;
    - workouts;
    - social previews and templates;
    - emoji picker;
    - integrations;
    - IndexNow;
    - 24/7 support;
    - access to Yoast SEO academy and early access to new features.
- Although Yoast SEO helps you to optimize your website, it does need **your input**. You should configure the plugin, do keyword research, write awesome content, set up an internal linking structure and a social strategy, and take care of your redirects yourself.