

FAQ: Crawling, indexing & ranking(Google Webmaster Help)

#contact-google

Q: How can I contact someone at Google about my site's performance?

A: Our forum is the place to do it! Googlers regularly read the forum, investigate the issues that you report, and--to the extent possible-reply to posts. We do not offer phone or email support for webmaster issues at this time. Please don't write "Hey [insert Googler's name]! HELP!!!" These posts are less likely to get our attention (because, let's face it, would you really want to see a whole forum filled with subject lines like that?). Including your URL in your post, and showing that you've made an effort to read our documentation (Help Center, blog, FAQs) before posting, is more likely to get you a response.

#pagerank

Q: My site's PageRank has gone up / gone down / not changed in months!

A: Don't worry. In fact, don't bother thinking about it. We only update the PageRank displayed in Google Toolbar a few times a year; this is our respectful hint for you to worry less about PageRank, which is just one of over 200 signals that can affect how your site is crawled, indexed and ranked. PageRank is an easy metric to focus on, but just because it's easy doesn't mean it's useful for you as a site owner. If you're looking for metrics, we'd encourage you to check out Analytics, think about conversion rates, ROI (return on investment), relevancy, or other metrics that actually correlate to meaningful gains for your website or business.

#not-indexed

Q: My site isn't indexed yet!

A: Crawling and indexing are processes which can take some time and which rely on many factors. In general, we cannot make predictions or guarantees about when or if your URLs will be crawled or indexed. When looking at a site's indexing in Webmaster Tools, make sure that you have both the "www" and the "non-www" versions (like "www.example.com" and "example.com") verified and have a set a preferred domain. Keep in mind that while a Sitemap file can help us learn about your site, it does not guarantee indexing or increase your site's ranking.

We have several Help Center articles that explain these processes:

- * Google Basics - explains how crawling, indexing and ranking works
- * My site isn't doing well in search - explains common questions and issues
- * Google-friendly sites - provides some information about how to create a website so that it can easily be crawled and indexed
- * Google's Webmaster Guidelines - provide technical, content and quality guidelines for webmasters
- * Adding a site to Google - for specific advice and additional tips

* Your site in Google's index - gives some simple ways to check your site's indexing

In general, these are the most common reasons why a website might not be indexed yet:

* A website might not be well connected through multiple links from other sites on the web.

* The design of the website might make crawling and indexing difficult. Maybe the site itself is even explicitly blocking crawling or indexing?

* Perhaps it was temporarily unavailable when we attempted to crawl? You might find crawl errors in Webmaster Tools in this case.

* Verify that the website complies with our Webmaster Guidelines and hasn't been hacked or otherwise modified by a third party.

* In very rare cases, it might be that content previously hosted on a domain name is causing issues. In this case, you may wish to submit a reconsideration request detailing the change of content and ownership.

* If the website recently moved to a different address, make sure that you follow our guidelines for moving a site.

* It's possible that a previous owner or someone else with access to the website requested removal through Webmaster Tools. You can cancel these requests by going to "Site configuration" / "Crawler access" / "Remove URLs" in your Webmaster Tools account.

#redirect

Q: I have the same content available on two domains (example.com and example2.org). How do I let Google know that the two domains are the same site?

A: Use a 301 redirect to direct traffic from the alternative domain (example2.org) to your preferred domain (example.com). This tells Google to always look for your content in one location, and is the best way to ensure that Google (and other search engines!) can crawl and index your site correctly. Ranking signals (such as PageRank or incoming links) will be passed appropriately across 301 redirects. If you're changing domains, read about some best practices for making the move.

#duplicate-content

Q: Do I have duplicate content? Am I being penalized for it? What should I do about it?

A: In most cases, having duplicate content on your site does not mean your site is penalized. Read this article right now. If you're still concerned or want to know more, read these articles (you're not the first person to ask about duplicate content!):

Dealing with duplicate content

Duplicate content caused by URL parameters

Duplicate content caused by scrapers
Even more info about duplicate content!
About rel="canonical"

#links

Q: I have [thousands/several/at least two] links to my site, but when I search on Google it says I have [zero/not that many] links. What gives?

A: If you do a Google search using the link: operator [link:example.com], you'll see a sampling of pages that link to your site. For a more complete list of pages that link to yours, verify your site in Webmaster Tools and check out the link reports. Note that, although these reports are more comprehensive than a link: query, they may not include 100% of all links that you know about. This is normal and you don't need to worry about it. Webmaster Tools does not always show 100% of the links that Google knows about, so just because a particular link doesn't appear in Webmaster Tools doesn't mean that Google doesn't know about that link, or that your site isn't "getting credit" for that link.

Note that the link report in Webmaster Tools only shows whether a site is linking to yours; it doesn't show which links are most significant, and it can include links that are nofollowed or that don't pass PageRank.

#sitelinks

Q: How can I get those links displayed under my site's listing in Google's search results like some other sites have?

A: Those are called sitelinks. Our process for generating sitelinks is completely automated and cannot be purchased or requested. We show them when we think they'll be most useful to searchers, so one site may show different sitelinks for different queries. If you think the sitelinks displayed for your site are inappropriate or incorrect, you can manage them in your Webmaster Tools account.

#reconsideration

Q: How long does it take Google to review my reconsideration request? Will I get a response?

A: Please allow several weeks for the reconsideration process. Unfortunately, we can't reply individually to reconsideration requests at this time.

If it's been several weeks since you submitted your request and you haven't seen any change in your site's performance, this probably means one of two things:

- 1) Your site is still in violation of Google's webmaster guidelines; or
- 2) There was nothing wrong with your site in the first place, other than that it wasn't ranking as well as you'd like.

Please see this thread for a lot more advice on understanding reconsideration requests and what you can do in this situation.

#dont-index

Q: How do I keep my content out of Google's search results?

A: First, read this article:

<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=93708>

If your content is private, you must use server side authentication (password-protection) to block access to it. Do not rely on robots.txt or meta/header tags to keep private content from becoming public.

Note that using a robots.txt file to prevent Googlebot from crawling parts of your site does not guarantee that those URLs won't be indexed. If we find other pages linking to yours, we may include your URLs in our index without actually crawling them. If those URLs are already indexed, we'll most likely keep them in our index for awhile even if we are not able to recrawl them.

If you've put a noindex meta tag on a page, make sure that that page is not disallowed in your robots.txt file. If we're not allowed to crawl the page, we won't be able to see the meta tag on it.

You can also use the X-Robots-Tag directive, which adds Robots Exclusion Protocol (REP) meta tag support for non-HTML pages. This directive gives you the same control over your videos, spreadsheets, and other indexed file types.

#remove-content

Q: How do I remove content from Google's search results?

A: You can put a noindex meta tag on a page, a noindex X-Robots-Tag in the header, password-protect that page, or return a 404 or 410 HTTP status code. After we recrawl the page, it will naturally drop out of our index after awhile.

If you need to urgently remove content, you can use our URL removal tool to request removal of URLs or cached pages from Google's search results.

#subfolder-subdomain

Q: Is it better to use subfolders or subdomains?

A: You should choose whatever is easiest for you to organize and manage. From an indexing and ranking perspective, Google doesn't have a preference.

#valid-code

Q: Does validating my site's code (with a tool such as the W3C validator) help my site's ranking in Google?

A: No, at least not directly. However, to the extent that cleaning up your HTML makes your site render better in a variety of browsers, more accessible to people with disabilities or folks accessing your pages on portable or other devices, and so on, it

can improve the popularity of your site... increasing traffic, natural links to your site (which can help with your Google ranking), and so on.

#searchwiki

Q: My site has dropped in the search results and I noticed that others have made negative comments on my links via SearchWiki. Is that hurting my ranking?

A: Comments or notes made on links via SearchWiki do not affect rankings or cause any penalty.

Spam

#new-domain

Q: I recently purchased a domain that was previously associated with a spammy website. What can I do to make sure that spammy history doesn't affect my site now?

A: Verify your site in Webmaster Tools, then request reconsideration of your site. In your request, let us know that you've recently acquired the domain.

#report-spam

Q: I found spam in Google's search results. Where can I report it?

A: Through the Help Center, you can report spam in our index. To do this, you need to log in with your Webmaster Tools account. If you don't already have a Webmaster Tools account, you can create one in less than a minute. Spam reports sent via the Help Center carry more weight than reports via our unauthenticated (open) spam report page. If you don't want to create a Webmaster Tools account, you can submit spam reports at www.google.com/contact/spamreport.html. Only the address of the page (URL) is required; however, the more information you can give us, the better we can use your report.

While we take all spam reports seriously, you may or may not see immediate changes based on your report. We use the feedback from many of these reports to improve our algorithms over time, which is much more scalable and effective than trying to fight spam on a case-by-case basis.