Thesis Tutorial – SEO for Everyone

"I once was lost but now am found..."

John Newton, "Faith's Review and Expectation" - 1779.

Does SEO Really Demand Amazing Grace?

You may know nothing about SEO or how search engines function. That does not mean SEO does not know about you. And you know more about the principles of "SEO" than you think.

SEO definitions are protean, changing shades of meaning as its advocates and practitioners evolve tactics and roles. For the purposes of this tutorial, we'll define SEO using a variation on common "white-hat gray-hat" traditions.

> 1) SEO - n. Abbrev - Search Engine Optimization. The ethical provision of information, by the publisher thereof, the goal of which is to improve traffic and end-user experience via facilitation of the robotic sorting and phrase association that seek to generate relevant and accurate clustering of search results (SERPs) into semantic buckets; such clustering intends to clearly answer queries by the target audience of said published material.

> 2) SEO - n. A damned fool who is incapable of defining SEO.

For the layman, SEO is simply a blend of established techniques. It's a recipe. The chefs may argue over how much paprika to use, or whether you should add celery. In the end, it's still a pot roast.

These techniques and recipes are *not* tricks or secrets.

On-page SEO strategies are generally stable and directly address a fundamental opportunity that comes with publishing web-accessible content: *you may either be lost or found.*

The choice is yours.

The Thesis theme for WordPress is the best enabler to become "found" like never before.

Thesis does not pretend to "do it all" for you - instead, Thesis empowers everyone - however new to online publishing - to directly compete in on-page SEO.

If you have ever "gone live" with a single solitary salvo of unique content, you have engaged in the first step of SEO - publishing original material online.

See, you know basic SEO already!

What Does the Thesis Theme Do for *Me*?

The arrival and growth of Thesis has presented novice bloggers, designers, and enthusiasts with the single most powerful and intuitive SEO tool to date. It's an extension of building content that helps your content get "found" by searchers.

Thesis, properly used, allows everyone a chance to maximize their visibility, traffic, and online brand presence. This has been proven, time and again, by myriad users of the theme, experts and "newbies" alike.

At the time of this writing, self-hosted WordPress 2.7.x and Thesis 1.4.x are the current best-practice method to leverage Thesis fully. Self-hosted means having your own domain [www.yourdomain.com] along with PHP5 and mySQL.

Hosting on WordPress or other "free" sites can work at a rudimentary level, but not to full advantage. As that gets into off-page SEO, we'll ask you to take our word on that.

There are, have been, and will continue to be decent "plug-in" modules that can assist basic WordPress themes in allowing for varying amounts of SEO control by the end user (that would be you).

So. Why should you buy Thesis, which presently costs either $87 for a single domain or $164 for the "every domain I personally own" developer membership option?

A number of reasons.

While we focus here on how to use Thesis and SEO to grow traffic, subscribers, and organic search rankings, Thesis is also - unlike plugins - a highly flexible design theme that offers users limitless capability to create "unrecognizable" versions of the default Thesis construct.

These customizations are unaffected by updating versions, as they are maintained in a folder specifically intended for this purpose.

The *SEO reason* to buy Thesis is also clear - it rocks.

Chris Pearson, the carpal tunnel at the end of Thesis, is an established and lauded WordPress theme expert. He tirelessly updates and improves the theme, with free versions available to one-pay members. Chris knows SEO, knows blogs, has a large and active Thesis user forum - and he continually works in the Thesis community to implement suggestions and consider wish-list feedback.

In short, Thesis gives you every core SEO function with a "no coding needed" initial setup/install. Thereafter, you'll get right-there access to SEO fundamentals, each and every time you make a new post on your WordPress blog or domain.

Thesis gives you the most powerful "white hat" SEO functions and avoids confusion, overkill, and a number of novice pitfalls.

That's game changing.

There is no other product available that provides concepts such as validating code and quality SEO right out of the box.

Convinced?

Good, you either have Thesis already or can smarten-up and [buy it now](#).

All Right, I Bought Thesis… Now What?

Initial installation is well documented elsewhere on a technical level.

There are also many great "advanced user" and "moderate user" tutorials out there, a list of which we'll toss at the end.

What you are getting here is the "Thesis - SEO for Everyone" tutorial.

Here goes.

You will want to initially visit the Thesis Options Section. In WordPress 2.7, left side, Appearance, Thesis Options as shown.
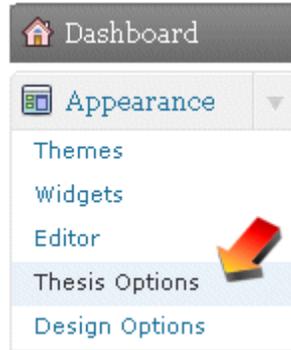
SEO Considerations of the "Thesis Options" Section

Left Side

Keep in mind, Thesis is made for you. So is this tutorial. You can take or leave recommendations as you wish. Most of our recommendations are meant to focus on "strong" emphasis, the sort of SEO basics that hurt or help measurably.

Other choices are yours to make, and bleed into the realm of "if you really want to maximize your online presence" - and these latter can have drawbacks to consider. SEO traffic is nice, but raw traffic is nothing without user focus to encourage conversions and repeat visitors.

So what are the big, heavy-hitting SEO basics?

The Title Tag is perhaps your most your powerful friend. It's what you see in the top-left corner of nearly all browsers, and for most of the target audience of this tutorial, Title content is what will appear as the top line of your page result in a Google search.

It is commonly offered that a Title tag ought to be roughly 5-15 words. Every word, its position among the rest, and whether or not it is considered to be "filler" is worth consideration. Fillers are words such as "a, the, an, and" and so forth.

This does not mean you must only Speak Keyword Tarzan.

That said, reduce filler count in your Title tag when possible. Think newspaper headlines.

As you can see in the image, you may choose to have your site name and tagline in the title. This will *only* occur on your home page based on this Thesis option. If you have carefully considered your site name and title, it's a fine idea.

Display Options

Title Tag `<title>`

Home page settings:
- ☑ Show site name in title
- ☑ Show site tagline in title
- ☐ Show tagline before title

All other pages:
- ☐ Append site name to page titles

    —

Character separator in titles (where applicable)

You probably do not want to check "Append site name to page titles" however. That is the first strong recommendation, unless your site name is itself a key word or phrase, very short, and correctly applies as a related term to all posts and pages on your blog or web site.

Next is the meta Description for your Head tag on the home page. Power tag number two.

Your Description should run "a short paragraph" that touches with high keyword density on the basic theme and purpose of your entire blog or site. Again, this is applicable here only to the home page.

Document Head `<head>` [+]

Meta description for your home page

    Make this good!

    These, do, not, matter, much

Meta keywords for your home page

We shall see both the meta Title and Description again in the future area of individual posting situations, so remembering these guidelines is quite helpful.

File it away: your Title and Description tags are in the highest tier of on-page SEO "pound per pound" ranking power.

Skipping across options here, it is advised that you "check" every option to nofollow and noindex. The brief reason is this deals with concepts of duplicate pages and site power-shaping, which is out of scope for this tutorial. Suffice to say that if you post "the same page" twice, search engines will reduce the power of one or both - that's bad for SEO.

So we don't do that.

Showing previous/next post links on Single Entry Pages is a good way to help spiders and crawlers find all of your content, especially if you are upgrading an existing content blog to Thesis. First-time publishers with proper pinging, site maps, deep-linking, and other fundamentals may not *need* to do this, but it's a good way to improve average pages/visitor and reduce bounce rates, in addition to indexing and crawling benefits.

That's it for the left side of "Thesis Options" for basic SEO purposes.

SEO Considerations of the "Thesis Options" Section

Right Side

Syndication/Feed - an item of of significant SEO interest here, though it is neither a WordPress nor Thesis provision. Make certain you have an RSS feed. If you do not have one right now, get one later and return to this area before bothering to post.

The Google-owned [Feedburner](#) service is one option, as this "watches" for your new posts and content. Such services help ensure you correctly ping large aggregators and feed readers to more rapidly index and distribute your information.

Showing your feed link is a personal choice. This is a great way to begin building readership and influence. Without this option selected, few readers will become "subscribers" to your feed, which is to say, your output of content.

Showing your Feed Link in the navigation menu? Good idea.

Again, given this is Thesis - SEO for *Everyone*, and because more advanced use of navigation menus, the multimedia box, Thesis hooks, and so on are excellently reviewed elsewhere, we shall ignore these as "higher-grade" options that are good to explore, but are not of immediate necessity to a starter blog.

We here end the "right side" recommendations on the Thesis Options page by noting that if you do not have a free Google Analytics account (or a similar form of metrics tracking) to paste into the "Footer Scripts" section, you will be hard pressed to view and evaluate your blog or site from a data perspective.

Or in other words, if you want to know how many visitors you get, from where, and for which key words and phrases, Footer Scripts is the place to get that started.

Big Ass Save Button

The Big-Ass Save Button. It's green.

Be sure you click it when you are finished here!

We now move our mouse back to the WordPress dashboard navigation...

**WordPress 2.7, left side - Appearance, [Thesis] Design Options.**

There's not much here of fundamental SEO concern.

Thesis handles fonts and column layouts for you - select the layout that fits your practical needs. Most users will do best to have at least one "sidebar" column, as a single column layout is more often used in specialized designs.

Remember though, Thesis allows you to move back and forth among layouts with minimal fuss - so you only need to save, preview, and see what you like, remembering the "blank" columns will be quickly populated once you're rolling in posts, comments, widgets, etc.

Teasers deserve special focus in this section. Functionality new to Thesis 1.4,x, the Teasers are both visually appealing and can be optimized to enhance your SEO efforts nicely.

On the right side / middle of the "Design Options" section you will see "Home Page Layout" which is where you can select "Features & Teasers" versus a standard blog format. With Thesis, this means you will get attractive, condensed set of "previous posts" on your home page, presuming a typical installation/design.

Home Page Layout [+]

Features & teasers

Features & Teasers [+]

Number of featured posts to show

1
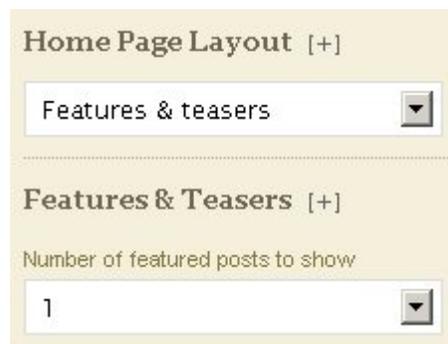
As to current posts, directly below is another dropdown for "Features and Teasers" which allows you to select how many featured posts to show. Depending on your writing style and the amount of dreck flooding down your sidebars, you may wish to pick among 1, 2, 3... and even zero can be a fine choice.

Given a 300-500 average word count, it would be our recommendation to choose 1 featured post. Keep in mind that your post will eventually reside forever on what is called a *permalink*. It's not "lost" or unimportant just because it's not on the home page.

While the right-now power of home page presence is limited by time, if you've installed a feed and are pinging correctly, the major search engines will usually find and index your permalink within a few hours or days as well. This permalink can be very powerful over time, especially for long-tail search phrases.

Note: "long tail" is defined briefly here to be a near-infinite permutation of words and phrases that you may rank for and receive traffic from - on purpose or by accident. The long tail can drive as much as 75% of all traffic compared to your "core" one- to three-word phrases.

We'll use an example later to make these concepts more tangible.

Backing up a moment... who would want to have *zero* featured posts?

If you exclusively blog, this may not be applicable, though there are exceptions. But if you have a more traditional web site built upon the powerful WordPress/Thesis framework, zero featured posts may be a fine choice.

Thesis is blurring the lines between blog and site.

That's a good thing!

Whether blog or domain, having 0 featured posts can be useful if you have "sticky" introductory site content you wish to be a permanent "home" face presented to visitors. You might blog away on a variety of topics, but perhaps you want to keep the home page focused on your core service, idea, or cause.

Whatever you decide, 0-3, keeping featured posts from extending the number of "scrolls" on your home page is a good idea. Few readers will scroll more than once or twice per page. You may rest assured the authors of this tutorial are keenly aware of their hypocrisy as you reach for your scroll wheel.

Enough on that - back to the Teaser Display Options!

Some of these options are cosmetic, but some have mild SEO impact as well.

Including the post title is advised. Unless you invite a number of well-known guest authors or have a collaborative blog, author name is not necessary.

The date is a nice user feature, but it's your discretion - we'd recommend it if you are undecided. Using the WordPress login/dashboard to edit links is not difficult, so why clutter and dilute your content with a half-dozen "edit post" links?

Uncheck the edit links unless you are a sloth, on a dial-up modem, or wouldn't stretch across a long table for a big slice of deep dish.

If you have added keyword-rich descriptions to your primary categories, you may wish to enable categories. Otherwise, it may not be worth the loss of real estate to bother. Highly recommended is to include a post excerpt (you will want to remember "post excerpt" for later discussion in the single-post sections).

Remember, everything shown here is specific *to the home page only*. Thus with tags, like descriptions, use your best judgment. Did you set up tags carefully and with SEO in mind? If not, why waste space with tags showing in the teaser area? Your title and excerpt should easily convey the thematic content - and tags in such a case are redundant.

If you expect regular comments, it can be a usability "teaser" of another kind to include the "number of comments" link. If you average 0-1 comments, it may not be worth the space, and there are more creative ways to poke fun at yourself than being unworthy of comment.

Will you link to the full article content? If your answer is no, you probably still hold Yahoo stock certificates. Check the dang box and move along.

Down a bit further, this is "your call" territory. There are sensible arguments for and against a site-wide feature box. We'll recommend not using the feature box "site wide" unless you feel it increases click-around or time-on-site rates and generally adds to the visitor experience. You'll also want to read-up on hooks to use it in Thesis 1.4.x as of this writing.

We'll here ignore thumbnails, which are smaller-sized copies of the 458-pixel images* you may have included originally in larger format. Thumbnails are not a major SEO interest. However, the

bigger the thumbnail, the less of an excerpt text teaser you can cramp into a given area, and the excerpt can be of SEO interest.

458 pixels is applicable only to 2- or 3-column layouts using default fonts and sizes, and with a presumed automatic frame applied. 458 pixels is, in such a case, the largest image width that works perfectly and without resizing.

A big thumbnail is not, in all cases, a bad thing. Image-rich sites have shown they can make exceptional use of "title + thumbnail" with no or minimal excerpting. If you're not going for a luxurious, graphics-heavy experience though, the defaults work well.

There's that Big Ass Save Button Again!

Click that Big Ass when you're done, we're halfway through!

This ends "initial setup" for Thesis 1.4.x in a nutshell. You may, of course, return to these sections at any time, as a key feature and benefit of Thesis is the ability to quickly modify your layout or design without massive amounts of coding or formatting by hand.

Creating New Posts: Thesis "SEO for Everyone" Power Tips.

We turn now in WordPress to "Posts, Add New" and begin taking over the universe!

You should feel a gnawing excitement at this point. If not, you probably ate something in the past 12 hours.

Your loss.

Those who have used a non-Thesis WordPress 2.7 admin screen will find little new in the top fold of the page.

Your Title - the first blank text input - is important. Very important. It is *not*, however, the same data field as your *meta* Title. Here, it's the visitor-visible title of your post.

As we talk through such terms as meta or visible Titles, bear in mind that "SEO" is a broad term, one that has often become a misnomer or simplification. Acronyms such as SEM, SM, and OM (search engine marketing, social marketing, online marketing) are part and parcel of success. Traffic without action is meaningless. SEO often implies these acronyms as well, mostly to confuse and distract novices.

This in mind, your Title need not be "My String of Keywords" simply because it sounds like good SEO. In fact, this clobbering method is often a sign of spammy robo-blogs that suck.

Similarly, you may wish to try "link baiting" instead of SEO "stuffing" - as a short definition, link baiting can be thought of as "inciting discussion" without necessarily worrying about the keywords - a title such as "Did You Punch a Kitten Today?" would be linkbait without much care towards SEO in the visible title.

But for basic "Thesis - SEO for Everyone" purposes, let us confine ourselves to a visible post Title that is descriptive, avoids as many filler words as possible, and is brief in both word and character count.

Sound hard? Let's fix that.

It is time for an example to aid understanding and provide some visuals.

Let's say your blog is going to be all about mules. Your key terms may include mules, horses, and other domesticated animals that can be shod with metal shoes. You may go "long tail" into blacksmithing, saddles, plows, mule history, temperament, breed reviews - in other words, you have defined your niche.

Mule aficionados that we all now are, for our first post we will choose to create a keyword -rich, informative post about *aluminum mule shoes* and how to select and install them.

Our visible new post Title - the text box right beneath "Add New Post" - might go like this:

> Aluminum Mule Shoes: How to Shod Stubborn Mules

Notice the limited use of "filler" words - we have only one, and it's a possible. In this context, "to" may be useful in conjunction with "how" in that "how-to" is a common and popular article type.

We also sneaked in a count variation, mule/mules, which weights the page slightly to that word. Don't "stuff" without reasons (repeating the same words many times in many ways), but do watch for opportunities to naturally hit on your big points from different angles.

Also notice "shod" in our visible Title. This word is very specific. It is primarily applicable to animals. While "semantic search" is a toss-up, with luck the search engine algorithms will recognize that our first post is not meant to compete with Nike, but rather is associated semantically with horse shoes and related phrases.

As an aside, when considering post topics - if you are unsure whether you are aiming "too narrow" or "too broad" perform a Google search for your key terms, or portions of them. For example, searching for "Aluminum Mule Shoes" on Google (today) returns 13,700 competing pages of results. That's narrow. "Mules" by itself returns 8M results. That's competitive. "Aluminum" returns 93M result. That's insane.

Presuming you intend to "blog" frequently, one strategy is to initially chase narrow to moderate terms. If you compete for attainable phrases for 20-50 posts over a period of several months, your content will grow - and your off-page SEO should naturally begin to increase.

Over time, the same on-page SEO will begin to allow you to break into top or worthwhile rankings for ever more competitive terms. Because a lack of immediate success is deadly to many a blogger, let's state that again.

Once your blog is ranking well in your niche, and has become an established presence within that niche, you can then begin nipping at the heels of more competitive phrases with greater success. And because you were realistic going in, you'll have seen - and appreciated - the traffic from the "long tail" up to that point.

Back on theme, we have hit the visible Title, and we now want to adjust our *permalink*. If you recall - pop quiz! - this is the permanent home of your post.

Our beloved first-ever post will someday be bumped from the home page... but it will reside forever on our permalink, which we set here.

For a link naming convention, you *could* go with a repeat of your title. Often it is better to review and expand or lightly modify your key terms. Use dashes between words - no spaces - and, as with most SEO strategies, recognize that a very long string of words here can look like spam. Spam is bad.

We'll keep our permalink fairly short - it's our first post and all - and note that *here* we can go Tarzan; visitors will seldom notice the URI of the permalink. For our example, let's go with:

aluminum-mule-shoes-shod

Save and done.

Our permanent link is thus:

http://www.yoursite.com/aluminum-mule-shoes-shod/

That's fairly long, but not ridiculously messy.

Now for content!

Or rather, we shall merely say here that there are many excellent, Thesis-independent posts on writing clear, tight, and engaging [marketing copy](). See the end of the tutorial for other recommended links.

As a quick run-down, it is best to keep your post content short.

The world's attention span and the devices that help drive "new tech" advances (e.g. social media sites and micro-blogging) give you far less time and space than might feel natural to those of us who were raised on 2,500 word-count essays in university, or of the kind of "posts" one still finds in some traditional periodicals.

Aim low!

Roughly 200-500 words should be fine. If you find yourself in need of ten times that number, consider breaking this into a short series of posts. A logical sequence spread over a period of several days can have SEO benefits as well, honing your aim within each section.

For SEO purposes, don't be afraid to link-out to other informative posts and sites in your blog content. You *could* manually "nofollow" out-going links, but this is a more advanced "code view" function, and is of increasingly limited value in the grand scheme of things. As you scratch backs, so shall you be scratched.

Or such is the hope.

An SEO tip that doubles as a cosmetic suggestion: use an original and creative "on-topic" image in your posts whenever possible, see our note on 458-pixel images previously. Not only do pictures keep visitors on each page longer and encourage return visits, adding an image in Thesis is easy, and you know what they say about pictures and words!

There exists a second benefit of using images in your posts... Google Image Search, and other such applications, can drive as much or more traffic than your written content! But the search engines can only do so if you *tell* the "robots" what your image represents.

In keeping with the basic tenet of "fairly short, descriptive, low-filler" you should name your image descriptively, then apply similar descriptions to the alt text. Thesis provides - below the blog main content box - a helpful "post image alt text" input for this purpose.

Let's revisit our example of mule shoes. We will ignore rights management and copyright here, aka "how to not get burned for swiping protected images" - for more information on that, [Blogger Law 101](#) is a start. In brief, be safe! And be courteous.

We presume for our example that we like mules. We thus have an original photograph of something mule-related that we resize to 458 pixels wide. The image height does not "matter" to Thesis or to SEO, but go beyond 300 pixels in height and you risk shoving your content "down the fold" of the page. Have you enjoyed scrolling here? Your visitors won't, either.

We might name our image as so...

> aluminum-mule-shoe.jpg

Note: underscores may be slightly less valuable to search than dashes. Spaces are evil, avoid them. Okay, our image is named - now for the alt (alternate) text to further describe it.

We could use this alt text for the purposes of generating additional traffic from image searching:

> Aluminum mule shoes are a common substitute for steel shoes, and are fitted to each mules hoof.

Go with your instincts on image names and alt text.

Be honest in your alt text. There is little to gain but a bounce from misleading as to the visuals of an image. It's also unpleasant for vision-impaired visitors.

Note that, here and elsewhere, Thesis 1.4.x provides a helpful [+] more info that will slide down to give hints and instructions on nearly all Thesis options. Obviously you will be printing this tutorial to hang above your desk, but the [+] can be useful when on the road.

Adding a frame makes your image look nice. If you wish to go that route, as noted we have resized to 458 pixels wide, which is the maximum framed-image in a 3-column layout that will "fill the screen" yet not cause distortion or cropping.

Be sure your posts do not work directly from 20MB monster original images. Resizing is easily done on your desktop, and is well worth the light effort. Nothing kills a good blogging rhythm like a 30-minute upload.

Thesis does a fine job at resizing and cropping thumbnails, but get the "big one" post images handled manually if possible.

Speaking to thumbnails, rinse and repeat the "post image" instructions here in terms of resizing. If you wish to chase image search heavily, you can use slightly different keywords in your thumbnails' alt text. You are such a Jedi.

And now we reach the final third of the "new post" page...

The Meat and Potatoes of Thesis SEO for Individual Posts

If you have ignored everything else and skimmed along and digested nothing above, slow the hell down and read this. The Thesis 1.4.x theme pays for itself right here, time and again. Behold the mighty "SEO Details and Additional Style" section of WordPress posting.

The Custom Title Tag. This will not affect your home page. We set that earlier, remember? What the custom (meta) Title tag seen here *will do* is polish the permalink "home" for your post.

We have now seen a dazzling array of Titles. Overall site meta Title, individual visible blog post title, and now, the per-page meta Title for the permalink page. Slow down, have a tea, and try to hit your key terms a final time.

Back from tea? Oh good.

We are talking here about our new post's permanent meta Title tag, the one that appears in the upper-left corner of browsers and (usually) is the top line of Google SERP results. We want it to be keyword rich, but also compelling visually. A "vomit list" of words looks like spam, and often is. Smart people do not visit pages of spam vomit.

We'll go with this for our meta Title permalink new post example:

> Farriery | Aluminum Mule Shoes | How to Shod Mules

This meta Custom Title Tag hits very specific phrases, ones you would obviously adjust to target your own niche.

As mentioned earlier, being very focused in your early stages can be rewarding versus swinging for "impossible" terms such as "shoes" or the equivalent. Disambiguation and competing sites will make "shoes" all but impossible for a young blog to reach into top 10 SERP results in Google and all other mainstream engines.

> *[Editor's Note]*

The author of this tutorial displays an utter lack of fashion sense, else they'd have known that "mule shoes" are not confined to half-circles of metal nailed into hooves. Mule shoes are a popular human item as well. There goes the semantic relevance. Surprises lie in wait for even the most thorough of online publishers. Identify unanticipated results using your analytics/metrics software, then adjust future content and direction as needed - you'll do great!

Our selection of meta Custom Title tag content was similar to, but not a direct repetition of, our visible "blog post title" and also our permalink.

For the sake of quick-posting simplicity, you can test duplicating your visible blog Title, permalink, and meta Title - and this may, in fact, be a functional model for your moderate-competition terms. However, the "long tail" may be diminished when fewer terms get tossed about.

The meta Description tag is second only to the meta Title for on-page SEO muscle. Recognizing this, Thesis puts "Description" next. Duh. Remember, we are now discussing individual posts, *not* the home page or entire blog domain.

In the meta Description lies your chance to use longer - and slightly different - words and phrases.

Google search results for "young" blogs commonly use the meta Description as part of the displayed SERP content. The Description, or most of it, often shows below the meta Title and just above your URL (landing) on results pages.

Your Title Will Appear Here in Google Results
This would be your meta description content in the majority of cases. Choose wisely! Running along forever will eventually cause an elliptical break in your ...
www.yoursite.com/thesis-kicks-tail/ - 21k - Cached - Similar pages

The meta Description, as you can see above, plays out quickly in terms of space.

Use short, compelling text that entices a visitor to click - and with an eye to your key words as well. For Twitter fiends, think of your meta Description like a "tweet" or SMS message: you get a limited character count to say what matters most.

There are many tools to predict traffic for a given term. While useful to a degree, common sense is a wonderful thing indeed. Use yours generously.

For our example, we will opt for this meta Description:

How to find and fit the best aluminum mule shoes. Steel shod is better for stubborn plowing. Aluminum shoes protect hooves on hard surfaces.

The example runs about right, though it may be truncated mid-way with the usual (...) by some search engines.

Play around as you go; shorter is often better in SEO!

Meta Description [+] more info

How to find and fit the best aluminum mule shoes. Steel shod is better for stubborn plowing. Aluminum shoes protect hooves on hard surfaces.

‹meta› description

Here in our meta Description, we have woven into the Description a "competitor" product (steel), we've repeated (once!) a core term in hopes of a boost that won't set off any robotic alarms, and we've "cleverly" used a term - stubborn - that is associated with our subject matter, mules.

Meta keywords? Nothing worth value there, and Thesis knows it! Meta keywords are the abused forebears of blog tags. Lay down 2-10 words or phrases, separated by commas, and call it a day.

Our example will use these, thirty seconds to done:

Mule shoes, aluminum, stubborn, mules

Close enough.

Meta Keywords [+] more info

mule shoes, aluminum, stubborn, mules

‹meta› keywords

We'll end with skipping down to your Excerpt. If you have chosen the Thesis layout that employs excerpts, write one. It should resemble your meta description, but lean towards end-user experience here, as excerpts are visitor-visible and meant to be read. The meta Description tags are often skimmed in a cursory manner, and you can afford to be somewhat less compelling or more Tarzan in removing Description filler.

Your excerpt can aid SEO for as long as the given post graces your home page - which can be a month or more for casual, single-author blogs.

Categories and tags?

These we will ignore for purposes of basic SEO with Thesis, as categories and tagging are general WordPress features, and not exceptionally useful ones to SEO if you're doing everything else above. However, it should be noted that Thesis can make excellent use of select categories and pages in the fabrication of your top navigation bar - and this has an SEO impact of its own.

Well then! You're done!

But we're not...

Real World Results of On-Page, Basic "SEO for Everyone"

In editing and reviewing this tutorial, your friendly mules figured - hey, why not put this guide to the test?

Better still, let's use our nonsensical example with *no further editing*.

The whole "mule" thing was not entirely random: DoubleMule.com is a relatively new, unestablished domain and is driven by 2.7 WordPress and 1.4 Thesis. The authors of this tutorial proceeded to cut-and-paste everything that you've seen used as samples and settings in the tutorial above.

We added "content" to the post, but nothing very special. How much can one say about mules and their shiny shoes? The content used no "tricks" or techniques outside the scope of discussion in this tutorial - or that of common-sense writing. We slapped in a 458-pixel image for cosmetic reasons. Feedburner handled syndication and pinging.

And this is what happened:

Within an hour of publication, our example blog post was #1 and #2 in Google's organic rankings for "aluminum mule shoes." With a sparse 13,000 competing pages, that's not the type of high-dollar phrase that keeps leading PPC and affiliate marketers flush with cash.

But it worked. From textbook to the real world, it worked.

For those who find our example post of use, long tail terms consisted of what were found to be other top-10 rankings, such as "shod mules" and even "find steel shoes for a mule." Of some interest was a Yahoo Glue (beta) referring URL, which was found to have aggregated a Google Blog Search for "stubborn plowing." The Internet is a magical place.

Remember permalinks? When the new post settled from a "home page post" into its permalink, "how to shod mules" bounced up one slot (to #2 and #3) in Google, replacing a page on (human variety) mule shoes from About.com - one of the top 100 sites by traffic in the world.

While these terms are not typical "high value" sets, it's important for beginners to remember that a valuable niche or term may have no greater competition than that for the "mule" niche.

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