5 Quick and Easy Tips for Better WordPress SEO

Written *by* Jim Wright

In this edition of Tech Corner, we'll look at some simple things you can do to improve your WordPress site's Search Engine Optimization, even if you can barely spell SEO.

While it's true that the field of SEO can be quite technical and complicated, there are a surprising number of quick and easy things you can do that will cover a lot of ground … and help you get found.

But first, a confession: I don't worry too much about SEO.

It sounds counterintuitive, but the best SEO has nothing to do with S, E, or even O for that matter.

When you look at the big picture, your content is really your best SEO strategy.

Without helpful, entertaining, and quality content, all the other stuff won't matter much in the long run.

As Stephen Covey said: "The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing."

And where SEO is concerned, the "main thing" is your content.

When your primary focus is on creating that great content, your SEO battle is already half won.

When in doubt, remember: reader first, Google second.

And you know how to produce great content, so let's get to the other half!

1. Permalinks and Page Titles

One of the simplest and most effective things you can do within WordPress is to change how the page titles are displayed. WordPress calls this "Permalinks."
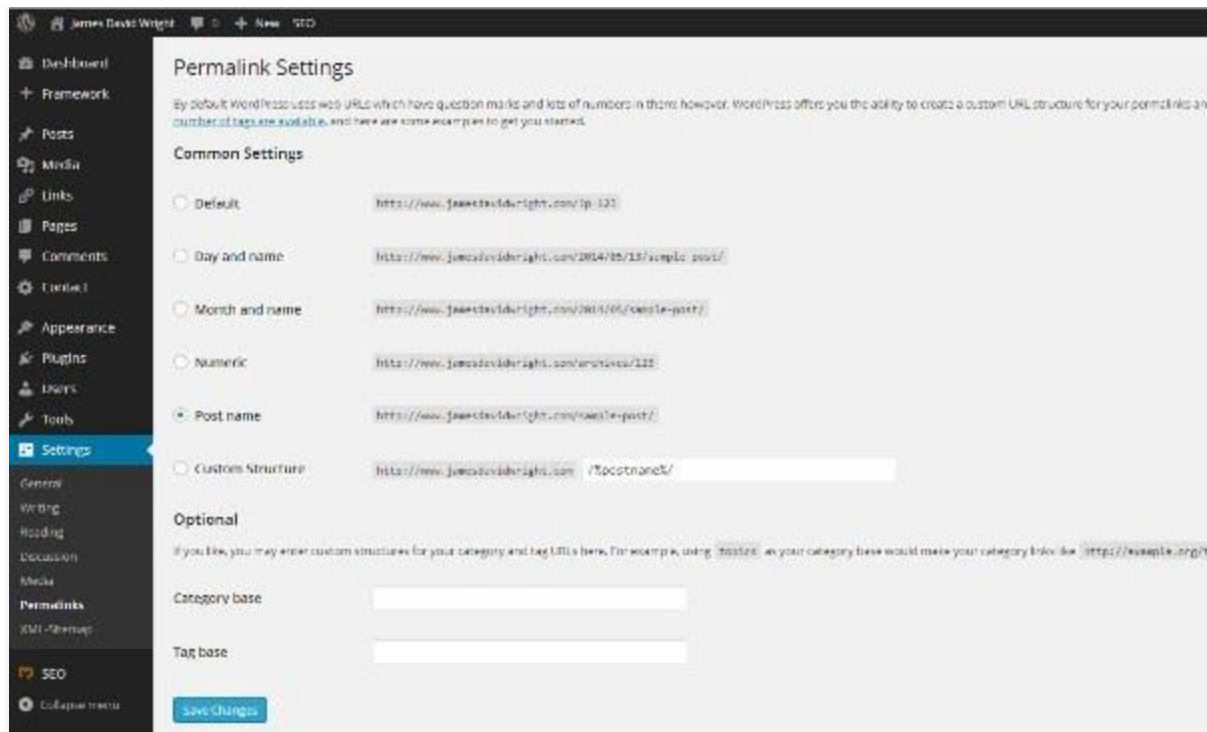
By default, WordPress URLs are displayed like this:

```
http://www.yourdomain.com/?p=4530636
```

This can easily be changed in your WordPress settings to:

```
http://www.yourdomain.com/quick-and-easy-wordpress-seo-tips
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This change can be made in WordPress Settings in the dashboard as shown below:

Simply change the setting from "default" to "Post name" and click "Save Changes."

2. Don't Forget Your Images

As far as WordPress is concerned, everything is content … including your images.
This is one of the rare exceptions to the "write for readers, not for search engines" rule.
Readers probably won't see the titles of your images, but the search engines definitely will.
Before you upload an image to WordPress titled "DSC_5120.jpg," rename it to something more descriptive, like "change-wordpress-permalinks.jpg."

3. Submit an XML Sitemap

An XML Sitemap is just a list of pages on your site that you submit to Google and the other search engines for indexing.
The Googlebot usually finds out about your pages by crawling around the Web, following links, eventually landing on one of your pages, where it then pops it into its huge database of pages.
This process is known as indexing.
And while the search engines will eventually find your pages, the XML Sitemap works like an indexing facilitator, helping to get your information to the search engines directly without all that crawling.
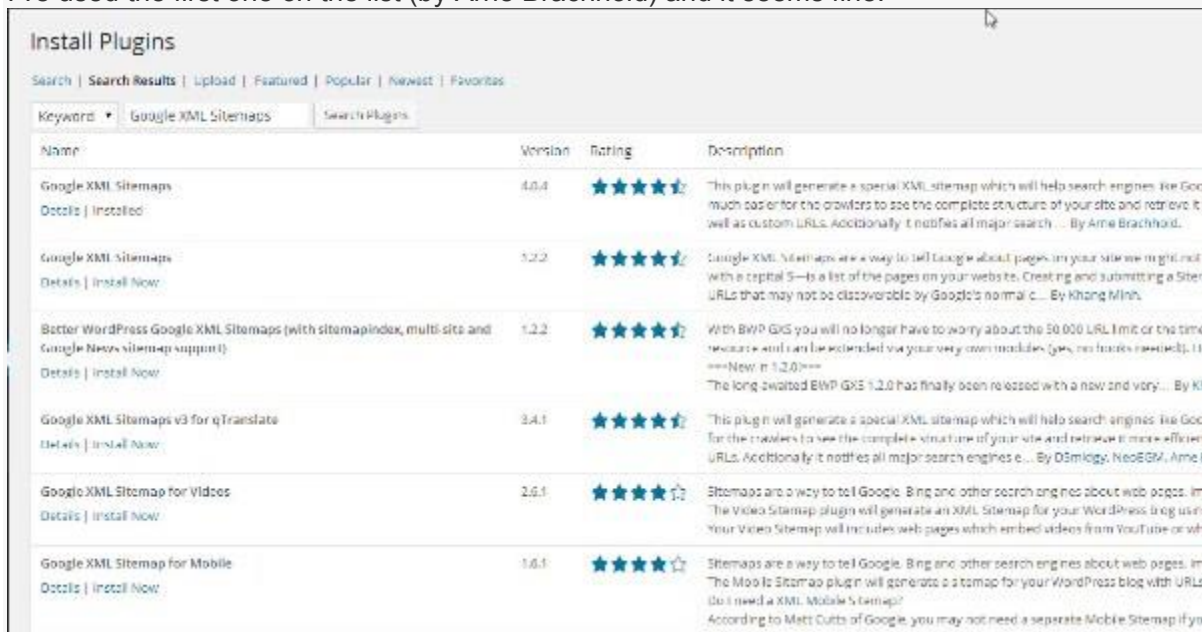
While some will say this isn't necessary, since the bots will eventually get to your pages, that indexing process does depend on following links, so it's possible some of your pages might never be indexed.

Besides, Google recommends you do this, so that's reason enough for me!

And although this all sounds pretty "techie," there are XML Sitemap plugins you can find to do all of this for you.

From your WordPress Dashboard, just click "plugins," then click "Add New," and type "Google XML Sitemaps" in the search box.

I've used the first one on the list (by Arne Brachhold) and it seems fine.

Once you install it, you will see an added option in the WordPress settings for the XML Plugin.
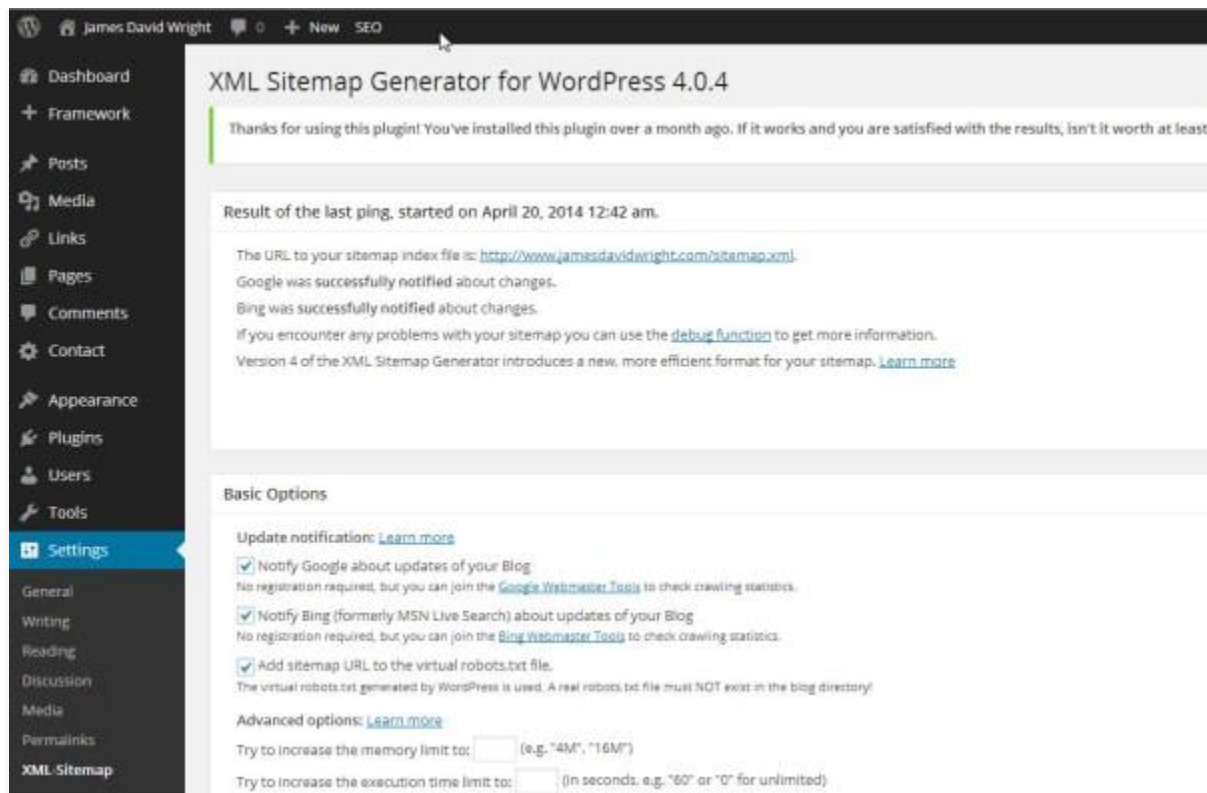
Once installed and working, all of this submitting will happen automatically and without you having to do anything.

4. Use an SEO Plugin

As you might expect, there are a variety of SEO plugins available for WordPress.

However, as we discussed in the article on Better WordPress Security, there are pros and cons to consider before using these "total-solution" plugins.

While they do a pretty good job of getting to all of the hot spots and can really enhance SEO, they can also have the following disadvantages:

1. Depending on your hosting and bandwidth, they can become resource hogs, and end up slowing down your site, which may actually hinder your ranking.
2. The sheer number of options available can make these programs quite overwhelming for the non-techie user.

Additionally, many of the functions they address are ones we've been discussing in this article.

Also, don't overlook your theme.

If you're using a professional WordPress theme, chances are it includes quite a few SEO options you can use already.

If you're considering an SEO Plugin, two of the most popular are WordPress SEO Plugin by Yoast and All in One SEO Pack by Michael Torbert.

5. Be a Speed Demon

There are myriad factors that can influence where you rank in the search engines … some you can control, others, not so much.

One often overlooked area where you can help out is with speed.

Site load times are a factor in the SEO equation, so anything you can do to speed things up will help. Here are a few tips:

1. Get rid of excess baggage. Have a bunch of unused themes and plugins you're not using? Dump them! This has the added benefit of helping out with security, as unused and outdated themes and plugins can be exploited.
2. Put your images on a diet. Images are usually displayed quite small in WordPress, so shrink them down before you upload them — this will also help cut down on load times.
3. Keep an eye on your site speed … Google does! Most hosting is shared hosting, and you never know who you're sharing with. Despite your best efforts, if your web host is just plain slow, there's not much you can do other than move to a faster host.

At the end of the day, remember that from a business point of view, Google wants you to have a great search experience. Its business, at least in part, depends on it.

When you focus on creating genuinely helpful content that people want to find, instead of trying to manipulate the system, your interests are in line with those of the search engines.

And when that's the case, you won't have to worry too much about what they're doing in the search algorithms.

In conclusion …

You can achieve a lot of SEO points by just doing the following:

- Write awesome reader-focused content
- Take care of the basics (titles, keywords, descriptive image names, etc.)
- Use and submit an XML Sitemap
- Use the SEO options available in your theme
- Keep an eye on your speed
- When you're ready, consider using an SEO Plugin

Implement these quick and easy tips, and you'll be well on your way to increased search engine rankings.