



THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE

Ahrefs SEO Course for Beginners

A follow-along companion to Sam Oh's course

Read each lesson while the video plays. Every section follows Sam's actual on-screen order, with timestamps, plain-English translations, and quick checks.

14 lessons · ~2 hours · paired with the SEO Sensei interactive app

✓ = verified timestamp · ~ = approximate (glance at the video to confirm)

How to use this guide

This is a companion, not a replacement, for the videos. Open a lesson on YouTube and read the matching section here as it plays.

- Each lesson follows the video beat-by-beat, in Sam's order — not reorganized. Read top to bottom and you stay in sync.
- Every beat has three layers: what Sam says, a “plain English” translation of the dry parts, and a quick check question with its answer.
- Timestamps marked ✓ are verified against the video; ~ are approximate.
- Pair this with the SEO Sensei app for flashcards, quizzes, a cheat sheet, glossary, the worked project, and an AI-tutor prompt.

Contents

Intro · What is SEO and Why is it Important?

Getting Started · 8:20 · youtube.com/watch?v=btwC4zmewss

The gist: The big picture. Sam defines SEO, gives the 'library' analogy, explains why SEO is the best traffic source, then how Google works (crawl → index → rank) and what ranking factors are.

0:00 What this course is

Sam frames the course: hands-on and execution-focused, broken into 4 modules — keyword research, on-page SEO, link building, technical SEO — plus this SEO-101 intro.

In plain English: The course is a sequence, not random tips. Hold the 4 modules in your head; everything later slots into one of them.

Check: What are the 4 modules of the course? → *Keyword research, on-page SEO, link building, and technical SEO.*

1:37 ✓ What is SEO?

SEO = Search Engine Optimization: optimizing content so it's discovered through a search engine's organic (unpaid) results. Library analogy: a search engine is a library storing copies of web pages instead of books. When you search, it looks through its index and returns the most relevant results. SEO proves your page is that result.

In plain English: The key word is 'organic' — the free results, not ads. Keep the library image: you want to be the book the librarian hands over for a question.

Check: In the library analogy, what is the 'index'? → *The stored collection — all the web pages the engine has copied and catalogued, which it searches to answer a query.*

~2:30 Why SEO? The 3 reasons it's the best traffic source

Three properties: (1) FREE — no pay-per-click; (2) PASSIVE & sustainable — rank once and keep getting clicks, unlike ads that stop when you stop paying; (3) high-INTENT — people are actively searching, so traffic converts well.

In plain English: Free + passive + high-intent. That trio is the whole business case for SEO. Ads are instant but rented — kill the budget and the traffic dies.

Check: Name the 3 properties that make SEO attractive vs ads. → *Free traffic, passive/sustainable traffic, and high-intent traffic.*

3:40 ✓ How Google works: crawl → index → rank

CRAWLING: Googlebot follows links to discover pages. INDEXING: pages are processed and stored in the index. RANKING: for a query, Google pulls the most relevant pages and orders them best-first on the results page (SERP).

In plain English: Crawl → Index → Rank, in that order. A page can't rank if it was never crawled and indexed — exactly what Module 4 (technical SEO) protects.

Check: Put the 3 stages in order. → *Crawling (discover via links) → Indexing (store in index) → Ranking (order results for a query).*

4:37 ✓ Google's ranking factors

Google uses many signals to decide order. Beginner version: the big controllable levers are relevance/content quality, backlinks (authority), and technical accessibility. You don't need all ~200 signals — you need to satisfy the searcher better than the other results.

In plain English: Don't chase the algorithm; satisfy the searcher. The factors you control map onto the next 4 modules.

Check: Sam's beginner takeaway on ranking factors? → *You can't memorize every signal — be the most relevant, highest-quality, accessible answer for the searcher.*

~7:10 Wrap & what's next

Recap, then a bridge into Module 1: keyword research, starting with what keywords are and how to choose them.

In plain English: Now that you know Google serves answers to queries, the first skill is finding which queries are worth answering.

Check: What's the next topic? → *Module 1 — keyword research (1.1: what keywords are and how to choose them).*

1.1 · What are Keywords and How to Choose Them?

Module 1 · Keyword Research · ~9 min · youtube.com/watch?v=qkBLg40iH-c

The gist: Keywords are the phrases people type into search. Generate ideas from 'seed' words + a keyword tool, then choose among them using search volume, traffic potential, business potential, and difficulty.

~0:00 What is a keyword?

A keyword is a word or phrase a person types into a search engine. Each represents a topic someone wants information on. Keyword research is finding the ones worth targeting.

In plain English: Keyword = a real query a real person types. If someone could type it into Google, it's a keyword.

Check: In one sentence, what is a keyword? → *Any word or phrase someone types into a search engine.*

~1:00 Seed keywords

Start with 'seed' keywords: the obvious, broad words describing your topic or business. Seeds are the input you feed into a keyword tool to generate hundreds of ideas.

In plain English: Seeds are starting points, not final targets. The tool expands them into specific, rankable phrases.

Check: What is a seed keyword for? → *A broad starting phrase fed into a tool to generate specific keyword ideas.*

~2:30 Using a keyword tool

Drop seeds into a keyword tool — Ahrefs' Keywords Explorer (or the free Keyword Generator). It returns ideas plus metrics: most importantly search VOLUME (rough monthly searches) and a difficulty score.

In plain English: The tool turns one seed into a menu of options with numbers attached, so you choose with data, not guesses.

Check: What does a keyword tool add over brainstorming? → *Real metrics per idea (volume, difficulty), so you choose objectively.*

~4:00 How to CHOOSE — the criteria

Evaluate each keyword on: (1) VOLUME — enough demand? (2) TRAFFIC POTENTIAL — total traffic the top page gets across ALL its keywords (judge the topic, not one phrase). (3) BUSINESS POTENTIAL — how naturally it leads to your product, scored 0–3 (3 = your product is the answer). (4) DIFFICULTY — how hard to rank (detailed in 1.4).

In plain English: Volume + Traffic potential + Business potential + Difficulty. A high-volume keyword you can't rank for, or that never sells, is a bad target.

Check: What does a business-potential score of 3 mean? → *Your product is essentially the answer to the searcher's problem.*

~6:00 Putting it together

Choosing keywords balances demand against winnability and business value. Next: 1.2 intent, 1.3 finding keywords at scale, 1.4 difficulty.

In plain English: You can now generate and roughly rank ideas. Next (1.2): match WHY people search — intent.

Check: What's the next skill after choosing keywords? → *Search intent (lesson 1.2)*.

1.2 · How to Analyze Searcher Intent

Module 1 · Keyword Research · ~7 min · youtube.com/watch?v=zXPZ0L2cOw4

The gist: Search intent is the WHY behind a query. Google ranks pages that match it, so match intent before anything else. Read it off the current top results using the '3 C's': content type, format, angle.

~0:00 What is search intent?

Search intent (user intent) is the reason behind a search — what the person actually wants. Google's job is to satisfy it, so the pages already ranking reveal what Google thinks the intent is.

In plain English: Before optimizing anything, ask: what does someone typing this actually want? The SERP already answers that.

Check: What is search intent? → *The reason/goal behind a search query — what the searcher actually wants.*

~1:30 The 3 C's of search intent

Read intent off the top-ranking results using 3 C's. CONTENT TYPE: blog post, product page, category page, landing page, video. CONTENT FORMAT: how-to, list post, news, opinion, review, comparison, tool. CONTENT ANGLE: the dominant hook/selling point (e.g. 'for beginners', the current year, 'easy', 'cheap').

In plain English: Type = what kind of page. Format = how it's structured. Angle = the spin searchers reward. Match all three.

Check: Name the 3 C's of search intent. → *Content type, content format, content angle.*

~3:30 The 4 intent types

Broad buckets: INFORMATIONAL (learn/answer), NAVIGATIONAL (find a specific site), COMMERCIAL (research before buying), TRANSACTIONAL (act/buy now). Wording often signals it — 'how to' vs 'buy' vs 'best'.

In plain English: The phrasing leaks the intent: 'how to clean diamonds' (informational) vs 'buy diamonds' (transactional).

Check: The 4 search-intent types? → *Informational, Navigational, Commercial, Transactional.*

~5:00 Don't fight the SERP

If page one is all listicles and yours is a sales page, you'll struggle. The ranking pages passed Google's 'intent test', so mirror the dominant pattern first — then differentiate with a better angle. Matching intent isn't copying; it's covering the topic better or from a sharper angle.

In plain English: Google already showed you the winning format. Don't reinvent it — beat it.

Check: Why look at the current top results? → *They passed Google's intent test, so they show the content type/format/angle you must match.*

1.3 · How to Find Keywords for Your Website

Module 1 · Keyword Research · ~10 min · youtube.com/watch?v=Fv5_q4IN6mw

The gist: A repeatable idea-generation workflow: brainstorm seeds, mine a keyword tool's reports, steal competitors' keywords, and listen to communities.

~0:00 Brainstorm seed keywords

List the obvious words describing your product/topic. These seeds feed every later step.

In plain English: Just dump the plain words a customer would use. Polishing comes later.

Check: Step 1 of finding keywords? → *Brainstorm seed keywords*.

~1:30 Mine the keyword tool's reports

In Keywords Explorer, work the idea reports: MATCHING TERMS (phrase match — keywords containing your seed), RELATED TERMS (what the top pages also rank for), and QUESTIONS (question-form queries, great for blog content).

In plain English: One seed → three different idea lists. Questions are gold for blog posts and FAQs.

Check: Name 2 keyword-idea reports. → *Matching terms (phrase match), Related terms, and Questions (any two)*.

~3:30 Steal competitors' keywords

Use Site Explorer's Organic Keywords on a competitor to see what they rank for. Use CONTENT GAP to find keywords several competitors rank for but you don't — a ready-made target list.

In plain English: Why guess when competitors already validated the keywords? Content Gap hands you a to-do list.

Check: What does Content Gap show? → *Keywords competitors rank for but you don't*.

~5:30 Listen to communities

Reddit, Quora, Facebook groups, and niche forums reveal the real language and questions your audience uses — keywords a tool might miss.

In plain English: Real people phrase things in ways tools don't predict. Mine those phrasings.

Check: Why check forums/communities? → *They reveal real audience language and questions tools may miss*.

1.4 · Understanding Ranking Difficulty

Module 1 · Keyword Research · ~8 min · [youtube.com/watch?v=qCcIrHvLBhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCcIrHvLBhA)

The gist: Keyword Difficulty (KD) is a 0–100 score estimating how hard the top 10 is, based mainly on backlinks to the ranking pages. It's a guide — look past the number.

~0:00 What is Keyword Difficulty (KD)?

Ahrefs' KD is a 0–100 score estimating how hard it is to reach the top 10, calculated mainly from the number of referring domains (backlinks) to the pages already ranking.

In plain English: Higher KD ≈ the ranking pages have more links. It's a proxy, not a verdict.

Check: What is KD mainly based on? → *The backlinks (referring domains) of the pages already ranking in the top 10.*

~2:00 Look past the number

Don't trust KD blindly. Manually check: how many referring domains the top pages have, the authority of those sites, whether the content actually matches intent and is beatable, and your own site's authority (Domain Rating).

In plain English: A scary KD can hide an easy win if the top pages are weak or off-intent — and a low KD can still be hard for a brand-new site.

Check: Name 2 things to check beyond the KD number. → *Referring domains of top pages, authority of ranking sites, intent match/quality, your own DR (any two).*

~4:00 Beginner strategy: go long-tail

New, low-authority sites should target the long tail — longer, more specific, lower-volume, lower-competition phrases with clearer intent. Win small, build authority, then graduate to harder terms.

In plain English: Don't pick a fight with giants on day one. Stack small wins first.

Check: What should a new site target first? → *Lower-difficulty long-tail keywords.*

2.1 · What is On-Page SEO?

Module 2 · On-Page SEO · ~6 min · youtube.com/watch?v=PglRm2nWyrM

The gist: On-page SEO is optimizing the content and HTML on the page itself. It splits into content (intent match, quality) and HTML elements (title, headings, URL, meta, images). Content matters most.

~0:00 Definition

On-page SEO is everything you optimize on the page itself so users and search engines understand it — as opposed to off-page (links) and technical SEO.

In plain English: 'On the page' = words and HTML you control directly on that URL.

Check: What is on-page SEO? → *Optimizing the content and HTML elements on the page itself.*

~1:30 Two halves: content + HTML

On-page splits into CONTENT (the words — does it satisfy intent, is it high quality and complete?) and HTML ELEMENTS (title tag, headings, URL, meta description, image alt text). Content is the bigger lever.

In plain English: Tags help engines understand the page, but they can't rescue content that doesn't satisfy intent. Content first.

Check: The two halves of on-page SEO? → *Content (the words/intent/quality) and HTML elements (title, headings, URL, meta, images).*

2.2 · How to Optimize a Page for a Keyword

Module 2 · On-Page SEO · ~13 min · youtube.com/watch?v=Ny1jRBbBn00

The gist: A practical on-page checklist for one target keyword: satisfy intent, then optimize title, URL, meta, headings, coverage, images, internal links, and readability.

~0:00 Satisfy search intent first

Before tweaking tags, make sure the page matches the content type, format, and angle the SERP rewards. Nothing else matters if intent is wrong.

In plain English: Step zero. A perfect title on a wrong-intent page still won't rank.

Check: First step in optimizing a page? → *Satisfy search intent (match type/format/angle).*

~1:30 Title tag & URL

Title tag: include the keyword naturally, keep under ~60 characters, make it compelling to click. URL slug: short, readable, includes the keyword.

In plain English: The title is your SERP headline — clear + clickable. The URL should be human-readable, not a jumble.

Check: Title tag best practice? → *Include the keyword naturally, under ~60 chars, compelling/clickable.*

~3:30 Meta description & headings

Meta description: not a ranking factor, but a clickability pitch (~150–160 chars). Headings: one clear H1; use H2/H3 to structure the page and cover subtopics.

In plain English: Meta = your ad copy in the SERP. Headings = the page's skeleton and a map of what you cover.

Check: Is the meta description a ranking factor? → *No — it's a clickability pitch in the SERP.*

~5:30 Cover the topic fully

Answer the subtopics and questions the top pages cover; match their depth. Use the ranking pages and the People-Also-Ask/Questions to find what to include.

In plain English: Completeness wins. If every top result answers X and you don't, you look thin.

Check: How do you know what to cover? → *Mirror the subtopics/questions the top-ranking pages cover; match depth.*

~7:30 Images, internal links, readability

Descriptive, keyword-relevant image ALT text (accessibility + image search). Internal links to/from relevant pages with descriptive anchor text. Readability: short paragraphs, simple language, visuals, scannable.

In plain English: Make it easy for both a crawler and a tired human to parse. Alt text, smart internal links, and white space all help.

Check: What does image alt text help with? → *Accessibility and image search.*

3.1 · What is Link Building and Why is it Important?

Module 3 · Link Building · ~7 min · youtube.com/watch?v=Pj3Eb9b1bsg

The gist: A backlink is a link from another site to yours — Google treats it as a vote of confidence and a major ranking factor. Link building is earning these.

~0:00 What is a backlink?

A backlink is a link from another website to yours. Search engines treat links as votes — pages with more high-quality, relevant votes tend to rank higher (the original PageRank idea).

In plain English: Think of links as recommendations. Lots of credible sites pointing to you = you're probably trustworthy.

Check: What is a backlink? → *A link from another website to yours; a vote of confidence.*

~2:00 Why links matter

Backlinks are one of Google's strongest ranking signals. They build a page's and a site's authority. Without links, even great content can struggle to outrank established pages.

In plain English: Content gets you in the game; links often decide who wins competitive queries.

Check: Why do backlinks matter for ranking? → *They're a major ranking signal that builds authority.*

3.2 · 3 Link Building Strategies to Get Backlinks

Module 3 · Link Building · ~9 min · youtube.com/watch?v=BqEPC5tBV3U

The gist: Three umbrella strategies: create link-worthy assets, do outreach, and replicate competitors' links / use existing relationships.

~0:00 1) Create link-worthy content

Build 'linkable assets' people naturally cite: original research/data, free tools, definitive guides, infographics. Links come because the asset deserves them.

In plain English: The durable strategy: make something genuinely worth linking to, so links happen with less begging.

Check: What's a linkable asset? → *Content built to attract links — data, tools, guides, infographics.*

~2:30 2) Outreach

Find people who'd value your content and ask them to link — guest posting, broken link building, resource-page pitches. Relevance and a real reason to link are key.

In plain English: You can have the best asset and still need to tell the right people it exists.

Check: What is outreach in link building? → *Contacting relevant people/sites and asking them to link to your content.*

~5:00 3) Replicate competitors / use relationships

Use Site Explorer to see who links to competitors, then pursue those same sources (Link Intersect finds sites linking to several competitors but not you). Also tap existing relationships — partners, suppliers, sites that already mention you.

In plain English: Competitors already did your prospecting. Their backlinks are a target list.

Check: How do you replicate competitors' links? → *Use Site Explorer/Link Intersect to find who links to them, then pursue those sources.*

3.3 · What Makes a Backlink "Good"?

Module 3 · Link Building · ~8 min · youtube.com/watch?v=D6u0_2T0Kts

The gist: Not all links are equal. Quality depends on authority, relevance, anchor text, placement, follow vs nofollow, and whether the link sends real traffic.

~0:00 Authority & relevance

AUTHORITY: links from high-authority (high DR) pages/sites pass more value. **RELEVANCE:** a link from a topically related site counts more than an unrelated one.

In plain English: A link from a respected, on-topic site beats a random link every time.

Check: Two top signals of a good backlink? → *Authority (of the linking site) and relevance (topical fit).*

~2:30 Anchor text & placement

ANCHOR TEXT: descriptive, relevant anchor gives context — but avoid over-optimized exact-match spam. **PLACEMENT:** an editorial link inside the body content beats a footer or sidebar link.

In plain English: Where the link sits and what it says both matter. In-content + natural anchor = strong.

Check: Best link placement? → *Editorial, inside the body content (beats footer/sidebar).*

~5:00 Follow vs nofollow & traffic

FOLLOW links pass authority; **NOFOLLOW** generally don't (still useful for traffic and a natural profile). A link on a page that gets real visitors can also send referral **TRAFFIC**.

In plain English: Followed, in-content links from relevant authority sites that actually get visited = the gold standard.

Check: Does a nofollow link pass authority? → *Generally no — but it's still useful for traffic and link diversity.*

3.4 · Link Building Tactics for Beginners

Module 3 · Link Building · ~10 min · youtube.com/watch?v=M2sFgQYELpc

The gist: Concrete beginner tactics: guest blogging, broken link building, the Skyscraper Technique, resource-page links, and reclaiming unlinked mentions.

~0:00 Guest blogging & broken link building

GUEST BLOGGING: write for relevant sites in exchange for a contextual link. **BROKEN LINK BUILDING:** find dead links on relevant pages and offer your resource as the replacement.

In plain English: Both give the other site a reason to say yes — useful content, or a fix for their broken link.

Check: What is broken link building? → *Finding dead links on relevant pages and offering your content as the replacement.*

~3:00 Skyscraper Technique

Find popular, heavily-linked content, create something clearly better, then pitch it to the sites that linked to the original.

In plain English: Stand on the tallest building and add a floor — then tell everyone who admired the old one.

Check: What is the Skyscraper Technique? → *Make better content than a heavily-linked piece, then pitch it to its linkers.*

~6:00 Resource pages & unlinked mentions

RESOURCE PAGES: get listed on curated 'useful resources' pages. **UNLINKED MENTIONS:** find brand mentions without a link (Content Explorer / Alerts) and ask for the link.

In plain English: Some links just need asking — you're already relevant or already mentioned.

Check: What's an unlinked mention? → *A brand mention with no link — ask the author to add one.*

3.5 · How to do Blogger Outreach for Backlinks

Module 3 · Link Building · ~9 min · youtube.com/watch?v=3vUQHnQNOck

The gist: The mechanics of outreach: build a quality prospect list, find the right contact, and send a concise, personalized, value-first pitch.

~0:00 Build a prospect list

Identify relevant sites worth a link request — competitors' linkers, resource pages, sites covering your topic. Quality and relevance over quantity.

In plain English: A small list of genuinely relevant targets beats blasting hundreds of randoms.

Check: What makes a good prospect? → *Relevance to your topic and a real reason they'd link.*

~2:30 Find the right person

Reach the actual author or editor, not a generic inbox. Personalization starts with sending it to someone who can act.

In plain English: info@ goes nowhere. Find the human who owns the page.

Check: Who should you email? → *The specific author/editor who can act — not a generic inbox.*

~5:00 Send a value-first pitch

Keep it short and personalized: why you're reaching out, the specific value to them and their readers, and a clear, low-friction ask. Don't be generic or demanding.

In plain English: Lead with what's in it for them. Short, specific, easy to say yes to.

Check: What makes a good outreach email? → *Short, personalized, value-first, with a clear low-friction ask.*

4.1 · The Basics of Technical SEO

Module 4 · Technical SEO · ~7 min · youtube.com/watch?v=5Q5n5tcVf5g

The gist: Technical SEO ensures engines can crawl, render, index, and understand your site. If pages can't be crawled or indexed, content and links don't matter.

~0:00 Crawlability & indexability

CRAWLABILITY: can bots reach your pages (internal links, robots.txt, site structure)?

INDEXABILITY: can pages enter the index (watch noindex tags, canonicals, duplicates)?

In plain English: Two gates before ranking: can Google reach it, and is it allowed in the index?

Check: Crawlability vs indexability? → *Crawlability = bots can reach the page. Indexability = the page can enter the index.*

~2:00 Key files & tags

ROBOTS.TXT tells crawlers what not to crawl. XML SITEMAP lists your important URLs to aid discovery. CANONICAL TAGS mark the 'master' version of duplicate/similar pages.

In plain English: These are the levers that steer crawling and indexing. Misconfigure them and good pages vanish.

Check: What does a canonical tag do? → *Signals the master version among duplicate/similar pages.*

4.2 · Technical SEO Best Practices for Beginners

Module 4 · Technical SEO · ~6 min · [youtube.com/watch?v=qz0aGYrrlhU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qz0aGYrrlhU)

The gist: The 80/20 checklist: HTTPS, mobile-friendly, fast, crawlable/indexable, sitemap in GSC, canonicals, fix errors, logical structure.

~0:00 Security, mobile, speed

Use HTTPS (a confirmed ranking signal). Be mobile-friendly/responsive (Google indexes mobile-first). Improve page speed / Core Web Vitals — fast pages rank and convert better.

In plain English: Secure, mobile, fast: the table stakes. Get these before anything fancy.

Check: Name 3 beginner best practices. → *HTTPS, mobile-friendly, fast (Core Web Vitals).*

~2:00 Structure, sitemap, duplicates

Logical, shallow site structure (important pages within a few clicks). Submit an XML sitemap via Google Search Console. Avoid duplicate content with canonicals and consistent URLs.

In plain English: Make it easy to navigate and easy to discover; don't split your power across duplicate URLs.

Check: Where do you submit your sitemap? → *Google Search Console.*

~3:30 Audit and fix

Run a Site Audit (monthly). Fix ERRORS first, then warnings. Most small sites don't need advanced technical SEO — nail the fundamentals.

In plain English: Don't gold-plate. Find what's broken, fix the errors first, move on.

Check: After an audit, fix what first? → *Errors, before warnings and notices.*