FIELD GUIDE · 36 CHECKS

The AEO *Checklist.*

2026 edition

36 checks to get your pages picked as the answer in ChatGPT search, Perplexity, Claude, Copilot and Google's AI Overviews.



4

separate search crawlers to allow: Googlebot, OAI-SearchBot, PerplexityBot and Claude-SearchBot.

OPENAI, PERPLEXITY, ANTHROPIC DOCS

11%

of domains cited by ChatGPT were also cited by Perplexity. Each engine picks differently.

OMNIBOUND, 2026

~10%

of 300,000 domains have an llms.txt file. Researchers found no link to AI citations.

SE RANKING, 2026

PREFACE · HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Start at the top. *Work down.*

Answer engines read a page, pull out the part that answers the question, and cite the source. AEO is the work of making your page the easiest one to quote correctly.

Two things decide it. The engine's crawler has to be allowed in, and the answer has to be clearly written, near the top, in words that make sense out of context.

This checklist assumes your SEO basics are in place. Google said in May 2026 that its AI features run on core Search systems, and ChatGPT, Perplexity and Claude each run their own search crawler on top of that. Miss one in robots.txt and you disappear from that engine.

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i.

Tick what's done

Print it or open it in any PDF app. Every check has a box and a quick way to verify it.

ii.

Fix the red tags first

They block everything else. Quick wins come next, then the ongoing habits.

iii.

Score yourself

Count your ticks at the end and see where your site stands.

KEY FIX FIRST Blocks results QUICK WIN Under a day ONGOING Monthly habit

CHAPTER 01 · ACCESS

01 Let the *engines in.*

- [ ] 01 robots.txt allows OAI-SearchBot (ChatGPT search). OpenAI says blocking it removes you from ChatGPT search answers. — FIX FIRST
  ↳ Look for User-agent: OAI-SearchBot
- [ ] 02 robots.txt allows PerplexityBot and Claude-SearchBot. — FIX FIRST
  ↳ Test with a crawler checker or curl -A
- [ ] 03 Bingbot is allowed. Copilot and several other assistants lean on Bing's index. — FIX FIRST
  ↳ Bing Webmaster Tools > URL Inspection
- [ ] 04 Your CDN or firewall isn't silently blocking AI crawlers. Cloudflare turned on default AI bot blocking for many sites. — FIX FIRST
  ↳ Cloudflare > Security > Bots
- [ ] 05 Decide on training crawlers (GPTBot, ClaudeBot, Google-Extended) separately. Blocking them does not remove you from AI search answers. — QUICK WIN
  ↳ Write the decision down so nobody 'fixes' it later
- [ ] 06 Key answers are in the server-rendered HTML, not loaded only by JavaScript after the page opens. — QUICK WIN
  ↳ View source (not Inspect) and search for the answer text
- [ ] 07 No nosnippet or max-snippet:0 on pages you want quoted. — QUICK WIN
  ↳ Search source for 'nosnippet'
- [ ] 08 The site is submitted to Bing Webmaster Tools and IndexNow is on. — ONGOING
  ↳ bing.com/webmasters

8 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 8

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 02 · ANSWER-FIRST WRITING

02 Put the answer *where it's found.*

- [ ] 09 Headings use the words people actually ask: 'How much does roof coating cost?' — FIX FIRST
  ↳ Pull questions from sales calls, Search Console and People Also Ask
- [ ] 10 The first sentence under each question heading answers it directly. — FIX FIRST
  ↳ Read only the first line under each H2
- [ ] 11 Answers make sense when quoted alone. Name the subject instead of 'it' or 'this'. — FIX FIRST
  ↳ Copy one paragraph into a blank doc. Is it still clear?
- [ ] 12 Numbers are specific: prices, ranges, timelines, dimensions, with the conditions that change them. — QUICK WIN
  ↳ Replace 'affordable' with a figure
- [ ] 13 Definitions, steps and comparisons use real lists and tables in HTML. — QUICK WIN
  ↳ Check the markup, not just the visual
- [ ] 14 A short summary or key-facts box sits near the top of long guides. — QUICK WIN
  ↳ Five lines or fewer
- [ ] 15 Keep pages whole and readable. Google's May 2026 guide said there's no need to chop content into tiny fragments for AI. — ONGOING
  ↳ Write for a person first

7 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 7

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 03 · TRUST SIGNALS

03 Give them a reason *to cite you.*

- [ ] 16 Claims cite their sources with links to the original study, standard or dataset. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Every statistic has a link
- [ ] 17 Pages show a named author with relevant experience and a link to their bio. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Byline at the top
- [ ] 18 A visible 'last updated' date that changes only when the content really changes. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Match it to dateModified in schema
- [ ] 19 Original data appears where you have it: your prices, your project counts, your survey results. QUICK WIN
  ↳ What do you know that nobody else publishes?
- [ ] 20 Outdated facts (old prices, retired services, past team members) are removed site-wide. ONGOING
  ↳ Quarterly content sweep

5 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 5

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 04 · STRUCTURED DATA

04 Label the *facts clearly.*

- [ ] 21 Organization schema with legal name, logo, founding date, contact and sameAs links to every official profile. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Rich Results Test or validator.schema.org
- [ ] 22 FAQPage schema on real FAQ sections, matching the visible questions word for word. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Google limits FAQ rich results, but the markup still labels Q&A for machines
- [ ] 23 Service, Product or LocalBusiness schema with prices or price ranges where you can share them. QUICK WIN
  ↳ validator.schema.org
- [ ] 24 Article schema with author, datePublished and dateModified. QUICK WIN
  ↳ validator.schema.org
- [ ] 25 Person schema for key people, linked to their LinkedIn and other profiles. QUICK WIN
  ↳ sameAs array
- [ ] 26 Schema stays in sync with the page. Wrong schema is worse than none. ONGOING
  ↳ Re-test after every content edit

6 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 6

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 05 · FORMATS ENGINES QUOTE

05 Build pages that *answer whole questions.*

- [ ] 27 A pricing or cost page that explains what drives the number, even if you only give ranges. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Top question in almost every service industry
- [ ] 28 A comparison page for each common 'X vs Y' choice your buyers weigh. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Be fair to the option you don't sell
- [ ] 29 A glossary or definitions page for your industry's terms. QUICK WIN
  ↳ One clear sentence per term
- [ ] 30 Step-by-step how-to pages for processes customers ask about. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Numbered steps in an ordered list
- [ ] 31 Short videos with transcripts on the page. Google's guide recommends multimedia alongside text. ONGOING
  ↳ YouTube embed plus full transcript

5 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 5

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 06 · MEASUREMENT

06 See where *you're cited.*

- [ ] 32 GA4 reports referrals from chatgpt.com, perplexity.ai, copilot.microsoft.com, gemini.google.com and claude.ai as their own channel. FIX FIRST
  ↳ GA4 > Admin > Channel groups > add an AI channel

- [ ] 33 Search Console's generative AI report is checked monthly for AI Overviews and AI Mode impressions. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Search Console > Performance

- [ ] 34 A list of 20 to 30 buyer questions is tested monthly in each engine, noting who gets cited. ONGOING
  ↳ Simple spreadsheet: question, engine, cited sources, you yes/no

- [ ] 35 Pages that win citations are studied and their structure copied to similar pages. ONGOING
  ↳ What do your cited pages have in common?

- [ ] 36 Server logs are checked for AI crawler visits to confirm they can reach you. ONGOING
  ↳ Filter logs by user agent

5 checks in this chapter Done: _____ / 5

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

APPENDIX · WHAT TO IGNORE

Three things *to stop doing.*

Skip it

~~llms.txt gets you cited~~

An Ahrefs study found 97% of llms.txt files got zero requests, and Google says it ignores the file. Add one for coding agents if you publish docs, not for citations.

Skip it

~~Special 'AI markup'~~

Google's 2026 guide says there's no AI-specific markup to add. Standard schema and clean HTML do the job.

Skip it

~~Micro-chunking every page~~

Google explicitly said you don't need to break content into tiny pieces. Clear sections with direct answers are enough.

SCORECARD · TOTAL TICKS OUT OF 36

0 – 14	**Foundations missing**	Start with every red tag. Most of your effort elsewhere is leaking away until these are fixed.
15 – 25	**Building**	The basics work. Clear the quick wins and you'll see movement within a few weeks.
26 – 32	**Competitive**	You're ahead of most sites in your space. Consistency on the ongoing checks decides the rest.
33 – 36	**Leading**	Keep measuring. At this level the gains come from original data and earned mentions.

SOURCES

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COLOPHON · DONE-FOR-YOU

Rather I run this *for you?*

I'm Marc. I design, build and optimize sites for B2B and service businesses in the US, Europe and Africa, and I work through this list on every one. Book 30 minutes and I'll audit your site live on the call and show you which checks are costing you leads.

BOOK A CALL

Free 30-minute live audit

marcfriedmanportfolio.com/contact

FREE TOOL

See how AI engines see your brand

marcfriedmanportfolio.com/free-geo-audit

5.0★	50+	98	< 2s
25 reviews on Google, Clutch and LinkedIn	Projects shipped across three continents	Lighthouse score on recent builds	Load time standard on every site

"Marc was able to execute the vision perfectly. He dedicates his time to the client, ensuring the client is completely satisfied at each step of the process."

OMAR TURNER · CEO, BINNS MEDIA GROUP

Also in this series: The SEO Checklist · The GEO Checklist

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