An on-page SEO audit is where good SEO meets reality. The theory is simple, but the execution is messy: pages share templates, editors rewrite copy on deadlines, internal links drift over time, and the "one change that should help" often turns out to be a bundle of small issues.

What makes an on-page audit valuable is not that you discover whether a page has an H1. You already know that. The value is in finding what's *stopping* the page from performing: mismatched intent, thin sections that don't earn visibility, weak internal pathways, metadata that fails to persuade, or markup that doesn't line up with how the page actually works.

Below is a complete, practical template you can reuse. It's written like a workflow you can run on one important URL or a whole content cluster.

What you are auditing, and what you are not

On-page SEO sits between content quality and technical SEO. It includes both. If you skip the boundary, audits become either too vague or too technical.

For this template, treat "on-page" as everything you can inspect and improve directly on the page or through its content settings, including:

- Content and structure (headings, sections, topical coverage)
- Metadata and snippets (title tag, meta description, SERP intent fit)
- Internal linking (anchors, placement, crawl paths)
- On-page elements (images, alt text, tables, FAQ sections)
- Markup that lives with the page (structured data, robots tags only insofar as they affect that page's presentation)

You can also collect some adjacent signals, like page speed and mobile usability, but use them to inform prioritization rather than pretending this is a full technical crawl.

A good rule: if the fix changes the text, layout, link structure, media, or snippet messaging, it belongs in the on-page audit.

Prep work: collect the URLs and define the target outcomes

Before you open spreadsheets, decide what "success" means for this audit. On-page improvements vary wildly depending on your goal.

Are you trying to:

- Grow organic impressions for an existing page?
- Recover rankings after content decay?
- Stop a page from cannibalizing a better one?
- Help a page finally match the query intent it's already close to?

Also, decide the scope. A full site audit without a target outcome becomes a list of symptoms. For a usable audit, pick either a content cluster (for example, all pages targeting "project management templates" variations) or a set of URLs that share a template and earn similar impressions.

For each URL in scope, capture three things up front:

1. The current URL.
2. The main keyword or query theme you want to rank for.
3. The business intent for the page (informational, comparison, transactional, support).

If you have access to Search Console, export the queries for each URL. If you don't, you can still do the audit, but prioritize the "intent fit" checks more heavily.

The "Page Card": your reusable worksheet fields

Create a page-level document (spreadsheet row or Airtable record, whatever your team uses) called a Page Card. Every URL gets one Page Card filled out from top to bottom.

Here are fields that make the audit actionable:

Identifiers

- URL
- Template type (if known): category template, blog template, product template
- Target content type: guide, landing page, comparison page, support article
- Primary query theme (plain language, not a keyword you found in a tool)

SERP and intent context

- Primary intent observed: informational, commercial investigation, transactional, navigational
- SERP notes: what the top ranking pages look like (length, format, angle)
- Your page's current "angle": what it appears to promise in the first screenful

On-page checklist status

- Title tag and snippet quality (status plus short reason)
- H1/H2 structure quality
- Content depth and coverage gaps
- Internal link structure gaps
- Image and media handling
- Markup and rich results eligibility (if applicable)
- E-E-A-T signals present and credible
- Conversion friction (only if it affects on-page SEO, like intrusive overlays)

Priority

- Issue summary
- Impact estimate (high, medium, low)
- Effort estimate (high, medium, low)
- Proposed fix owner (content, design, dev, SEO)
- Deadline feasibility (yes, no, maybe)

This Page Card is what turns an audit into a plan.

Step 1: Snapshot the page as a user would see it

A lot of on-page audits start by looking at HTML. It's faster, but it's also how you miss the real problem.

Open the page in an incognito window, disable browser extensions, and spend two minutes reading it like you're the target user.

Ask yourself:

- What does the page promise in the first screen or two?
- Does the content immediately confirm you're in the right place?
- Are there obvious distractions, like pop-ups, sticky banners, or layout shifts?
- Do the headings help you scan, or do they read like generic placeholders?

Write a short note on each Page Card. This will save you later when you try to explain findings to someone who never touches the HTML.

A quick anecdote

I once audited a well-written guide that was getting impressions but not clicks. The SEO metadata was fine, but the page opened with a long "what we do" section and a cramped table before the actual answer. The headings were technically correct, yet users had to scroll past the delay before confirming value. The fix was not "add more keywords." It was moving the real answer higher and rewriting the first paragraph to match the query phrasing users were typing.

Step 2: Title tag and snippet messaging audit

Your title tag is the first persuasion layer. Metadata isn't "ranking by itself," but it influences click-through, which affects real-world performance. Also, search engines increasingly expect the snippet to reflect the page content. Titles that don't match what follows often lead to poor engagement or the wrong queries.

For each URL, evaluate:

- Is the title aligned with the primary query theme?
- Does it avoid vague phrasing like "Guide" or "Welcome"?
- Does it communicate a unique angle or outcome?
- Is it too long or truncated in common cases?
- Does the page content actually deliver the promise implied by the title?

Then check the meta description. Don't treat it as mandatory, but as a chance to reduce ambiguity. Good descriptions often include a specificity cue: scope, timeframe, level, or deliverable.

If you have multiple pages competing for similar queries, check whether the title messages overlap too much. Cannibalization often starts as "the same promise, different URL."

On-page rewrite trigger

If the title and the first section feel like they belong to different pages, that's an audit red flag. You can fix the markup later. First, make the snippet and the on-page reality match.

Step 3: H1 and heading structure (without turning it into theater)

Headings are navigation for both users and search engines. The goal is not to use many headings. The goal is to create a logical map that matches user expectations for that topic.

On your Page Card, capture:

- Does the page have exactly one clear H1? If there are multiple, are they semantically justified?
- Do H2s align with the main subtopics a user would look for?
- Are sections under each heading actually about that heading?
- Are there "thin" headings that introduce no meaningful new content?

A common mistake in audits is turning headings into a keyword list. The better approach is to make headings reflect the information architecture of the topic.

For example, if a user is searching for "email outreach templates," the headings should represent use cases and stages, not generic filler like "Tips" and "Benefits." Those are readable, but they don't help someone find the specific template they want.

If you need to make headings more precise, do it by rewriting the section intros and the first one or two paragraphs under each heading. Headings alone rarely fix misalignment.

Step 4: Content coverage and intent fit (the heart of the audit)

This is search engine optimization where you stop guessing and start comparing.

Take the top ranking pages for your query theme. Don't copy them. Compare them. Look for:

- What questions do they answer early?
- What examples do they include?
- What objections do they preempt?
- How do they structure the information for scanning?
- What unique assets do they offer (templates, checklists, screenshots, data, step-by-step instructions)?

Then evaluate your page against that reality.

Use a gap statement, not a vague verdict

Instead of "content is thin," write a gap statement like:

- "The page explains concept X but does not provide the step-by-step workflow users need to implement it."
- "The page covers definition and tools, but it does not address the scenario Y that appears in the SERP intent."
- "The page repeats introductory material but compresses the actionable section into a short paragraph."

Make the gap specific enough that a writer can fix it without reinterpreting the entire brief.

Where "thin" hides even in long pages

Length is not the problem. Weak structure is often the problem. Thin content can look like:

- Long sections that never reach a clear decision point
- Examples that are generic and not relevant to the scenario the searcher cares about

- Advice that doesn't include constraints, trade-offs, or the "what to do next"

If the page doesn't help someone move forward, it will struggle even if it's 2,000 words.

Step 5: Internal linking audit (anchors, placement, and pathways)

Internal links are the easiest part of on-page SEO to improve, and they often have the biggest compounding effect.

But internal links can also be clutter. A template that automatically inserts "read more" links everywhere may create noise instead of a clear crawl and user journey.

Audit internal linking in three dimensions:

1. Do key sections of this page include links to supporting pages where users would expect them?
2. Are the anchor texts descriptive enough to indicate what the target page covers?
3. Do the links strengthen the right relationships, or do they keep users looping in the same content silo?

Also check whether this page receives internal links from other pages that should logically point here. If your cluster has a hub page, verify that the hub links to the supporting pages and vice versa.

A practical placement rule

If a link appears only after the user has already found the answer, it's too late. Links should support navigation before the decision point, or they should expand the content at the exact moment a user wants the next detail.

Step 6: Images, media, and accessibility that affect SEO

Alt text is not a magic ranking lever, but it affects comprehension and accessibility. It also helps search engines understand images in context.

For each major image or graphic on the page, check:

- Is the image relevant to the section?
- Does the alt attribute describe the image purpose, not just the filename?
- If it's decorative, is it handled appropriately (for example, empty alt text in many implementations)?
- Are screenshots readable on mobile?
- Are the images compressed enough that they don't cause heavy load times?

This is also where you catch "pretty but useless" assets. I've seen pages with elaborate diagrams that don't have any supporting text around them. Users struggle. Search engines struggle. The fix is often to add a short explanation under the graphic and make sure the heading and caption reflect the meaning.

search engine optimization guide

Step 7: Structured data and rich results eligibility (only where it makes sense)

Structured data can help you qualify for rich results, but it cannot rescue content that doesn't meet quality expectations. Also, structured data has to match the page content, not your hopes.

In your audit, capture:

- Does the page include relevant structured data types for its content (for example, FAQPage for genuine FAQs on the page)?
- Are required fields present and consistent with visible content?
- Are there conflicts, like markup stating an author that's not displayed?
- Are you marking up things that are hidden behind interactions or not actually present?

If structured data is absent, decide whether it's worth adding based on the content type and your ability to maintain accuracy. A brittle implementation is worse than none.

Step 8: E-E-A-T signals that feel real, not ornamental

E-E-A-T is often described like it's a checklist, but in practice it's about credibility signals that a reader can verify.

On your Page Card, look for:

- Author attribution with meaningful context (not just "John from marketing")
- Evidence of firsthand experience (screenshots, metrics, personal process, real constraints)
- Citations where appropriate (especially for claims that need support)
- Clear date and recency indicators for topics where freshness matters
- Consistent brand and contact information when the page is transactional or sensitive

If your niche is regulated or high-stakes, don't treat E-E-A-T as a style choice. It impacts whether the audience trusts and acts on the page. It also affects whether you feel comfortable making recommendations.

A judgment call you'll need to make

Some pages benefit from author profiles and bios. Others do better with a "team process" explanation or by publishing methodology. Your audit should capture what type of credibility fits the page's role.

Step 9: On-page UX friction that can derail performance

This is still on-page SEO because UX affects engagement, and engagement affects outcomes. Your goal is not to measure everything. It's to identify obvious friction.

Watch for:

- Pop-ups that appear before content is usable
- Intrusive interstitials on mobile
- Layout shift from late-loading elements
- Overly aggressive sticky headers that cover headings
- Hard-to-read typography and poor contrast
- Hidden content behind tabs that search engines might not interpret as you expect

You do not need to replicate a full UX audit. You need to spot the few issues that reliably reduce time on task or frustrate users.

Step 10: Scoring and prioritization that your team can actually execute

After you've filled out the Page Card fields, you need a way to turn findings into a plan. The biggest failure mode is listing ten problems and assigning them to nobody.

Use a simple impact-effort matrix. Keep it practical.

Here's one prioritization approach that works well in real audits:

- High impact, low effort: fix immediately
- High impact, high effort: schedule with a proper brief and acceptance criteria
- Low impact, low effort: bundle with other content updates
- Low impact, high effort: defer unless it's blocking another improvement

To make this concrete, assign each issue a pair of ratings based on evidence from your audit notes: intent mismatch, content gaps, internal link failure, snippet confusion, or UX friction.

Issue triage list (use sparingly, max once per page)

1. Fix first: intent mismatch in the first section or headings that mislead readers
2. Fix next: internal links that don't support the cluster's navigation
3. Fix when resources allow: deeper content expansion with examples and decision points
4. Fix only if it's safe: structured data updates with visible content alignment
5. Defer: cosmetic changes that don't resolve the observed gap

This keeps you focused on outcomes, not perfection.

Your complete on-page SEO audit template (copy and fill)

Below is a fill-in template you can paste into a document per URL. Treat it like a script. You will move through it quickly once you've run it a few times.

Page card: URL basics

- URL:
- Template type:
- Page type (guide, landing page, product listing, support):
- Primary query theme:
- Primary intent (your best assessment):
- Primary CTA (if any):

Step 1: user snapshot

- First-screen promise matches query? (yes/no + one sentence why)
- Clarity score (1 to 5):
- Biggest friction noted:

Step 2: title and snippet

- Title tag observed:
- Title alignment with query theme: (strong/weak)

- Title uniqueness vs similar pages:
- Meta description present? (yes/no)
- Snippet expectation match: (strong/weak)

Step 3: headings

- H1 observed:
- Heading logic (are H2s real subtopics?): (good/needs work)
- One section where headings do not match content:

Step 4: content and intent fit

- What the page answers well:
- Where intent breaks (top gap statement):
- Missing subtopics compared to SERP leaders:
- Evidence gaps (examples, data, screenshots, firsthand process):

Step 5: internal linking

- Links to supporting pages in key sections: (strong/weak)
- Anchor text clarity: (strong/weak)
- Links that should be added but are missing:
- Links that distract users or send them away too early:

Step 6: media

- Key images and whether they support the content:
- Alt text quality (good/needs work):
- Any heavy or unreadable assets on mobile:

Step 7: structured data

- Structured data present (types):
- Accuracy and match to visible content: (good/needs work/not applicable)

Step 8: credibility signals

- Author or brand credibility present (yes/no):
- Firsthand experience or evidence present (yes/no):
- Recency signals present (yes/no, and where):

Step 9: UX friction

- Any intrusive elements (yes/no):
- Layout shift risk observed (yes/no):
- Mobile readability issues (yes/no):

Step 10: priority plan

- Top 1 issue to fix:
- Top 2 issue to fix:
- Proposed owners (content, design, dev, SEO):
- Estimated effort (low/medium/high):
- Expected impact (low/medium/high):

Keep the language honest. If you're uncertain, say what you need to verify rather than guessing.

Common on-page audit findings (and what fixes usually look like)

Even without running a tool, you'll see repeat offenders. The trick is to fix the root cause, not only the symptom.

Here are the patterns I've seen most often:

1) Metadata says one thing, the page says another

Fix: rewrite the first paragraph and one or two supporting sections to match the promise in the title, then adjust the title only after the page content aligns.

2) Headings are present but not meaningful

Fix: rewrite headings to reflect actual user questions, then ensure the first screenful after each heading answers that question.

3) The page covers the topic but not the decision

Fix: add decision points, comparisons, constraints, "when to choose X," and examples. Users search for guidance that helps them act, not definitions they already understand.

4) Internal linking is template-driven and stale

Fix: add contextual links inside the sections where users will need the next step, and prune links that send people to tangents.

5) Credibility signals are decorative or missing

Fix: replace vague author bios with meaningful context, add proof of work, and include dates where freshness matters.

Acceptance criteria: how to know the fix worked

An on-page audit is only half the job. The other half is measuring whether the changes did what you intended. You can do this without inventing fancy analytics.

For each prioritized change, define acceptance criteria that are observable:

- Title updated and now matches the first section promise.
- H2s reflect the real subtopics users expect for the query.
- Added one actionable section with examples, not just more words.
- Internal links added inside relevant sections with descriptive anchors.
- Structured data, if added, matches visible content and validates cleanly.

Then monitor Search Console for query and page-level impressions and clicks over a few weeks. Rankings can take time, especially with competitive SERPs, but click-through changes often show up sooner if the snippet and intent alignment improved.

Final notes that make the template work in the real world

A template is only useful if it survives contact with deadlines.

- Use the Page Card to avoid leaving gaps. If you don't fill it out, you didn't finish the audit.
- Be ruthless about the first section and the heading map. Most pages lose momentum there.
- Prioritize based on intent fit and navigational clarity, not only "keyword coverage."
- Treat internal linking as part of content design. Don't let it be an afterthought.

Run this template on one URL first, then reuse it across the cluster. You'll start seeing the same issues repeat across templates. That's when on-page SEO becomes efficient: you stop fixing one page at a time and start improving the system that creates them.