

AEO CONTENT CITATION CHECKLIST

A practical content checklist for improving the likelihood that your brand is understood, retrieved, and cited in AI-generated answers.

Answer → Evidence → Depth → Originality → Corroboration

How to use this checklist: Use it when creating a new page, refreshing an existing page, or prioritizing content after an SEO/AEO audit. Not every item applies to every page; focus on the actions that help answer the customer's real question clearly and credibly.

1. Choose the Questions Worth Answering

- ☐ Identify the real conversational questions customers ask about the topic, product, service, problem, or category.
- ☐ Map each priority question or AI prompt to a page that can answer it directly.
- ☐ Review the sources currently cited in AI answers for priority prompts and note what information they provide.
- ☐ Look for missing questions, evidence, perspectives, examples, or data that your page can uniquely contribute.
- ☐ Keep traditional SEO/search demand in the strategy; AEO should complement discoverability, not replace it.

2. Make the Page Answer-First

- ☐ State the primary answer near the top of the page rather than burying it beneath a long introduction.
- ☐ Make the first answer concise enough to stand on its own if quoted outside the page.
- ☐ Follow the direct answer with explanation, context, evidence, examples, and useful nuance.
- ☐ Use descriptive H2/H3 headings that reflect real customer questions or subtopics.
- ☐ Break long sections into focused passages, with each section addressing one clear idea.
- ☐ Remove filler introductions and unnecessary promotional language that delays the answer.

3. Make Claims Citation-Worthy

- ☐ Use specific, verifiable facts instead of vague marketing claims.
- ☐ Support factual claims with credible primary or authoritative sources where appropriate.
- ☐ Clearly distinguish facts, expert opinion, interpretation, and brand claims.
- ☐ Include methodology or context when presenting research, testing, surveys, or statistics.
- ☐ Use concrete examples or case studies to demonstrate important claims.
- ☐ Explain why recommendations are being made rather than simply stating them.
- ☐ Date information where freshness matters and review it regularly for accuracy.

4. Add Information Gain & Original Value

- ☐ Include proprietary data, customer insights, surveys, experiments, testing, or internal trend analysis when available.
- ☐ Add original expert commentary from identifiable subject-matter experts.
- ☐ Include first-hand experience, observations, or examples that competitors cannot simply replicate.
- ☐ Publish useful case studies with real methodology, context, and outcomes.

- ☐ Create original frameworks, definitions, calculators, tools, charts, or reference resources when they genuinely help the user.
- ☐ Ask: What does this page contribute that is not already repeated across the top-ranking or commonly cited sources?

5. Cover the Full Customer Question Space

- ☐ Answer relevant definition questions: What is it?
- ☐ Answer process questions: How does it work?
- ☐ Address suitability: Who is it for? Who may not be a fit?
- ☐ Cover benefits, drawbacks, limitations, risks, or tradeoffs where relevant.
- ☐ Address cost, pricing, timing, requirements, or eligibility when customers commonly ask about them.
- ☐ Cover meaningful alternatives and comparison questions.
- ☐ Answer natural follow-up questions customers are likely to ask after the primary answer.
- ☐ Build supporting pages around important topics rather than relying on one isolated article.

6. Clarify the Brand, Product & Entity

- ☐ Clearly state what the company does and what category it belongs to.
- ☐ Clearly describe each important product or service in plain language.
- ☐ State the audience, use case, or problem each product/service is designed to address.
- ☐ Use consistent names and terminology across product, service, About, FAQ, and supporting content.
- ☐ Explain differentiators with evidence rather than unsupported superlatives.
- ☐ Make relationships between the brand, product, problem, audience, and outcome explicit.

7. Demonstrate Expertise & Source Transparency

- ☐ Identify the author of substantive content.
- ☐ Provide relevant author credentials, experience, or expertise.
- ☐ Identify expert reviewers or contributors where appropriate.
- ☐ Attribute expert quotations and original commentary.
- ☐ Maintain a substantive About page that explains the organization and its expertise.
- ☐ Link to relevant supporting research, source material, or additional expert content.

8. Create Useful Comparison Content

- ☐ Publish comparison content when customers genuinely evaluate alternatives.
- ☐ Use clear, meaningful comparison criteria rather than superficial feature lists.
- ☐ Use tables when they make complex differences easier to understand.
- ☐ Explain which option may suit different needs, situations, or priorities.
- ☐ Acknowledge legitimate tradeoffs or competitor advantages when relevant.
- ☐ Keep comparison facts, pricing, features, and availability current.

9. Make Content Easy to Extract & Understand

- ☐ Keep paragraphs focused on one main idea.

- ☐ Put the conclusion before lengthy explanation when that improves clarity.
- ☐ Use descriptive headings rather than clever or ambiguous labels.
- ☐ Use numbered steps or bullets for processes, requirements, criteria, and recommendations.
- ☐ Use tables for structured comparisons and data when appropriate.
- ☐ Define unfamiliar terminology and reduce unnecessary jargon.
- ☐ Name the subject clearly instead of relying excessively on vague pronouns such as “it,” “they,” or “this solution.”
- ☐ Make each important section understandable with limited surrounding context.

10. Build External Corroboration

- ☐ Identify credible third-party sources that AI systems cite for important category questions.
- ☐ Pursue legitimate editorial coverage, expert contributions, interviews, or industry mentions.
- ☐ Turn proprietary research or useful original data into PR and outreach opportunities.
- ☐ Participate authentically in relevant professional and community discussions where appropriate.
- ☐ Encourage legitimate customer reviews and independent discussion of the brand or product.
- ☐ Keep core brand and product facts consistent across credible third-party profiles and listings.
- ☐ Prioritize genuine third-party validation over manufactured mentions or low-quality link placement.

11. Final AEO Content QA

- ☐ Can a reader understand the page’s main answer within seconds?
- ☐ Could the primary answer be quoted accurately without needing the entire page for context?
- ☐ Are important claims supported by evidence?
- ☐ Does the page provide something meaningfully original or more useful than competing content?
- ☐ Does it answer likely follow-up questions?
- ☐ Is the brand/product/entity clearly identified and consistently described?
- ☐ Are authorship and expertise transparent?
- ☐ Is the information current?
- ☐ Is the page useful to a human even if it never receives an AI citation?

AEO Guardrails

- ☐ Do not treat llms.txt as a requirement for AI citation.
- ☐ Do not assume FAQ schema or other structured data directly causes AI citations.
- ☐ Do not force every answer into an arbitrary word count; prioritize clarity and completeness.
- ☐ Do not create thin FAQ, comparison, or definition pages solely to target AI prompts.
- ☐ Do not sacrifice accuracy, usefulness, brand voice, or human readability for supposed AI optimization tricks.
- ☐ Do not guarantee citations. AI systems change frequently, and citation behavior varies by model, query, retrieval method, and source availability.

Page Review Snapshot

Area	Status	Priority / Notes
Answer clarity	☐ Good ☐ Improve	
Evidence	☐ Good ☐ Improve	
Depth	☐ Good ☐ Improve	

Originality / information gain	☐ Good ☐ Improve	
Entity clarity	☐ Good ☐ Improve	
Expertise / authorship	☐ Good ☐ Improve	
Extractability	☐ Good ☐ Improve	
External corroboration	☐ Good ☐ Improve	
Freshness	☐ Good ☐ Improve	