

WordPress Meetup Activity

SEO Foundations: What WordPress Does and When You Need More

60 minutes · Beginner to Intermediate · WordPress Playground

What We Will Cover Today

Part 1 — What WordPress Already Gives You

15 min

Part 2 — Do You Actually Need a Plugin?

10 min

Part 3 — RankMath Setup Wizard

15 min

Part 4 — Optimize a Real Post or Page

15 min

Debrief

5 min

What Is SEO — and Who Is It Really For?

1. **Search engine optimization** is helping search engines understand your content so the right people can find it.
2. **WordPress is already SEO-friendly** out of the box. Clean URLs, sitemaps, semantic HTML, and image alt text are all built in.
3. **A plugin fills specific gaps** — not all of them, and not always the ones you think. We'll identify exactly which gaps matter for your site.
4. **Content is still the foundation.** No plugin compensates for pages that don't answer what people are actually searching for.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this activity, you will be able to:

1. Locate and verify the SEO features built into WordPress core — no plugin needed.
2. Evaluate whether your site needs an SEO plugin based on specific goals, not assumptions.
3. Configure RankMath using the setup wizard to establish sensible site-wide defaults.
4. Write an optimized meta title and meta description for a post or page.
5. Identify your WordPress sitemap and understand how to submit it to Google Search Console.
6. Take one concrete action to improve your site's search visibility today.

What You'll Need

1. A device with a modern web browser (Chrome, Firefox, Edge, or Safari).
2. An internet connection.
3. The Playground environment below — plain WordPress, no plugins installed.
4. That's it.

Note: Open now: playground.wordpress.net — plain WordPress, no plugins installed. First load may take 10-20 seconds on slower connections.

What WordPress Already Gives You

1. playground.wordpress.net in a new tab. This is plain WordPress — no SEO plugin installed.
2. Go to **Settings > Permalinks**. Default is Day and name — change to **Post name** and **Save Changes**.
3. Go to **Settings > Reading**. Confirm **Search engine visibility** is NOT checked. This is your site's sitewide on/off switch.
4. In the Playground address bar, add **/wp-sitemap.xml** after the domain. WordPress generates this automatically — no plugin needed.
5. Go to **Media > Add Media File**. Upload any image and add alt text. This helps search engines and screen readers.
6. Go to **Posts > Add New**. Write a short post with a clear title. Click **Publish** — confirm in the pre-publish panel. Optimize in Part 4.

What WordPress Core Handles — No Plugin Needed

Feature	What it does
Permalink structure	Settings > Permalinks > Post name — clean, keyword-rich URLs.
XML sitemap	/wp-sitemap.xml — auto-generated, always current. Submit to Google Search Console.
Search engine visibility	Settings > Reading — one toggle controls sitewide noindex.
Title tags	Generated from post/page titles. Semantic H1 hierarchy for every post.
Image alt text	Alt text fields on every image. Helps search engines and screen readers equally.
Clean semantic HTML	Block editor output is well-structured. Search engines can read it without help.

Do You Actually Need a Plugin?

Individual reflection (2 min) — then facilitated group discussion (8 min)

Reflect on:

1. What are you trying to achieve with SEO on your site? (More traffic? Better social previews? Rich results?)
2. Does your site have consistent, quality content published regularly?
3. Which of these do you actually need: custom meta descriptions, social sharing previews, schema markup, redirects?

The gaps core doesn't fill:

1. Custom meta descriptions per post/page
2. Social sharing previews (Open Graph / Twitter Cards)
3. Schema markup for rich results (events, recipes, reviews, FAQs)
4. Redirect management

RankMath Setup Wizard

1. Go to **Plugins > Add Plugin**. Search for **RankMath**. Install and Activate.
2. Click **RankMath** in the sidebar. On the **Connect FREE Account** screen, click **Skip Step**. Select Easy Mode and click **Start Wizard**.
3. Step 1 — YOUR SITE: select your site type. This sets your default schema.org type.
4. Step 2 — Analytics: Skip for now. Search Console requires a verified live site.
5. Step 3 — Sitemap: Leave enabled. RankMath will manage an enhanced sitemap.
6. Step 4 — Optimization: Review defaults and click **Save and Continue**.
7. Click **Finish Setup**. Your post from Part 1 is still here. On to Part 4.

What RankMath Adds to WordPress Core

Feature	What it does
Meta descriptions	Write a custom description per post/page — the text that appears in search results.
Title tag templates	Control the format across the whole site: 'Post Title Site Name'.
Open Graph / social previews	Control how posts appear when shared on Facebook, LinkedIn, X.
Schema markup	Structured data (schema.org) that enables rich results: FAQs, reviews, events.
Redirect manager	Handle 301/302 redirects without editing server config files.
Content analysis	Keyword density, readability, and metadata length feedback as you write.

Optimize a Real Post or Page

1. Go to **Posts** and open the post you published in Part 1 (or the Hello World post).
2. In the block editor toolbar, find the RankMath score badges — **1/100** (SEO) and **0/100** (Readability). Click either badge.
3. Click **Edit Snippet**. This opens the Preview Snippet Editor modal with Title, Permalink, and Description fields.
4. Write a meta title: aim for up to 60 characters (RankMath shows a character counter). Put your main keyword near the front.
5. Write a meta description: aim for 150-160 characters. Write for the human reader — this is your search result ad copy.
6. Check the snippet preview. Does it look like something you'd click?
7. Click **Update** to save. Your post is now optimized.

Writing Effective Meta Titles and Descriptions

	Meta Title	Meta Description
Length	Up to 60 characters	150-160 characters
Affects ranking?	Yes — keyword placement matters	No — affects click-through rate
Key tip	Main keyword near the front	Write for the human reader — treat as ad copy
Format	Primary Keyword — Site Name	Include a call to action when natural
Unique per page?	Yes	Yes — each page needs its own

Debrief + Discussion (5 minutes)

- 1 What one setting from Part 1 are you going back to check on your real site?
- 2 After the Part 2 discussion: do you think you need a full SEO plugin, or are WordPress core's built-in features enough for where you are right now?
- 3 What would make a meta description compelling enough that you'd click it in search results?

The win: Today you found what WordPress already does for search engines — more than most people expect. You identified the specific gaps a plugin fills, made an informed choice about when to use one, and optimized a real post. That's a more thoughtful approach to SEO than most sites ever take.

Next Steps + Resources

Google Search Console — Submit your sitemap, monitor indexing, track search performance	https://search.google.com/search-console/about
RankMath documentation — Full setup guide and feature reference	https://rankmath.com/kb/
WordPress SEO documentation — Core features, permalinks, sitemaps, and meta tags	https://wordpress.org/documentation/article/search-engine-optimization/
Learn WordPress — SEO Strategies — Content strategy, keyword research, link building	https://learn.wordpress.org/lesson/seo-strategies/
Learn WordPress — Advanced SEO (2 parts) — Schema markup, Open Graph, Search Console audits	https://learn.wordpress.org/lesson/unlocking-advanced-seo-techniques-part-1-2/
Google PageSpeed Insights — Check site speed — a core SEO signal no plugin can fix for you	https://pagespeed.web.dev/



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