ARKCES

GUIDE AND TEMPLATE

Answer-First Content Guide

Write pages that readers, Google and AI assistants can use straight away. Principles, before-and-after examples and a one-page content brief.

Free resource from Arkces, a South African digital agency.
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Why answer first

People arrive with a question. Answer it in the first two sentences, then earn their trust with detail.

Search engines pull short passages into featured snippets and AI answers. A passage that states the answer clearly, with specifics, is easier to select and quote. Readers benefit in the same way: they get what they came for and decide whether to read on.

Answer-first does not mean short. It means the order is right: answer, then reasons, then evidence, then nuance.

Seven rules

1. **Lead with the answer.** The first sentence under a heading answers the heading.
2. **Use the reader's question as the heading** when the section answers one question.
3. **Be specific.** Ranges, prices, timeframes, names and places beat adjectives.
4. **Show where facts come from.** Link the source and give the date.
5. **Add what only you know.** Your process, your prices, your test results, your local experience.
6. **Make each section stand alone.** Avoid "as mentioned above". Repeat the key noun.
7. **Use plain words.** If a simpler word works, use it.

Before and after

Example 1: a service page

Before	After
In today's fast-moving digital world, your website is more important than ever. Our passionate team crafts bespoke solutions that help your brand stand out from the crowd.	We design and build business websites for South African companies, usually in four to eight weeks. Every site is built on WordPress, loads in under two seconds on mobile and can be edited by your team without a developer.

Example 2: a blog answer

Before	After
There are many factors to consider when thinking about whether you should block AI bots, and every business is different.	Block AI training bots if you don't want your content used to train models, but keep AI search bots allowed. Blocking OAI-SearchBot removes you from ChatGPT search answers; blocking GPTBot does not.

Example 3: a FAQ

Before	After
Q: How long does SEO take? It depends on lots of things, so it's hard to say.	**Q: How long does SEO take?** Most sites see technical fixes reflected within weeks and content results in three to six months. Competitive national terms can take longer. New sites usually take longest.

Page structure that works

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H1: The main question or topic, in the reader's words
  First paragraph: the answer in one or two sentences.
  Second paragraph: who this is for and what the page covers.

H2: First sub-question
  Answer sentence.
  Detail, example, list or table.

H2: Second sub-question
  ...

H2: Common questions (only real ones)
  Short Q and A pairs.

Next step: one clear link (contact, related service, related guide).
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Phrases to cut

These add length without meaning. Replace them with a fact or delete them.

- In today's digital landscape
- Look no further
- Unlock the power of
- Take it to the next level
- It's no secret that
- A wide range of solutions
- Cutting-edge, world-class
- We are passionate about
- In conclusion
- When it comes to

Content brief template

Fill one in before writing. Print this page or copy it into your document.

Working title
Main question the page answers
Answer in two sentences
Who is reading, and what they do next
Primary keyword and intent
Related questions (H2s)
Original input (our data, prices, process, examples)
Sources to cite, with dates
Pillar page this links to
Pages that should link here
Author and reviewer
Call to action
Review date

Pre-publish checklist

- [ ] The first two sentences answer the main question.
- [ ] Each H2 starts with a direct answer.
- [ ] Every statistic has a source link and a date.
- [ ] At least one thing on the page is original to us.
- [ ] No filler phrases from the list.
- [ ] Sections make sense on their own.
- [ ] The page links to its pillar page and two or three related pages.
- [ ] The pillar page links back to this page.
- [ ] The author is named and the byline links to their profile.
- [ ] Title under about 60 characters; meta description states the answer.
- [ ] Images have descriptive alt text.
- [ ] One clear next step at the end.

Plan clusters with the free Content Cluster Planner and pick topics with the Keyword and Search Intent Mapper.

Keep going

This guide is free to use and share inside your business. Updates are published at arkces.co.za/resources/answer-first-content-guide/.

- SEO services
- AEO: answer engine optimisation
- All free resources

Want a hand? Arkces builds, manages and optimises websites for South African businesses. Talk to us.