

Over-Optimization Audit

Companion worksheet to "How Over-Optimizing for Google Hurts AI Visibility"

A page can rank in Google and still earn zero AI citations, because the tactics that move a ranking are the same ones AI reads as commodity content. Use this worksheet to find the ranking-first habits on one of your pages and convert it into analysis an answer engine will actually cite.

1. Spot the over-optimization markers

Pull up one page that ranks reasonably well but has never been cited by AI. Check every marker that applies. The more boxes, the more the page was built to rank rather than to inform.

- ☐ **The same exact-match phrase links to the page from many spots**
"Atlanta realtor" or "Atlanta homes for sale" repeated as anchor text sitewide.
- ☐ **Nearly every H2 contains the target keyword in some form**
The page is built around a term, not around a topic.
- ☐ **The primary keyword hits a 3 to 5 percent density target**
High frequency reads as writing for a machine, not for a reader.
- ☐ **Several thin pages cover slight variants of one topic**
"Atlanta realtor," "Atlanta real estate agent," "Realtor Atlanta GA," each under 400 words.
- ☐ **Read out loud, phrases sound mechanically repeated**
If a reader would hear it, an AI system reads it the same way.

Markers checked: _____ / 5. Two or more means the page likely ranks while AI passes it over as commodity SEO.

2. Rank versus cite

The ranking system and the citation system score the same page differently. Name the gap on the page you chose.

Where it ranks in Google now, and the query it ranks for:

What this page explains that only you, working this market, would know:

3. Count the ranking-first patterns

Pick the page from Section 1. Count each pattern so you can see how much of it was built for a machine.

Exact-match anchor links pointing to this page _____

H2 headings that contain the target keyword _____

Thin variant pages covering the same topic _____

Any count above one or two is a rewrite signal. Consolidate the thin variants into one substantive treatment and let the keyword land naturally.

4. Your commitments

Turn the audit into three concrete moves.

This week.

Pick one page that ranks but earns no citations, read it out loud, and mark every mechanically repeated phrase. Page I will start with:

This month.

Rewrite that page analysis-first: keep the substance, drop the keyword scaffolding, add named first-hand observation. The point I will lead with:

Ongoing.

Brief every new post by what it needs to explain, not the keywords it needs to capture. One habit I will keep: