

Answer Engine Optimization: A Study Guide

How AI search finds, evaluates and cites content, and what to do about it. A structured study edition of the full AEO course: four modules, eleven lessons, with key takeaways, review questions and a working action plan.

Understand: Module 1: how AI search works

Plan: Module 2: assess gaps, find prompts

Execute: Module 3: content, mentions, YouTube, tech

Measure: Module 4: track and prove ROI

How to use this guide. Read one lesson at a time. Each chapter opens with key takeaways, then the full explanation, then a few review questions with answers.

The appendices hold a one-page numbers cheat sheet, a glossary, and a printable action checklist. Each review question is followed by its answer; cover the answer and try to respond first.

About the source. This guide is built from the course transcript. The course teaches with Ahrefs' tools (Brand Radar, Site Explorer, Keywords Explorer, Content Explorer, Web Analytics), so tool steps refer to those. All statistics are as quoted in the course, drawn from Ahrefs' own studies and other cited sources, and reflect the state of AI search when the course was recorded (late 2025 to early 2026). Treat them as directional; they change quickly.

Contents

What is AEO, and why does it matter now?.....	3
Module 1: How AI search works	6
How AI finds and cites content.....	6
Differences between AI search platforms	9
Types of AI visibility	11
Module 2: Strategy	14
Brand gap analysis	14
Keyword and prompt research for AEO	17
Module 3: Execution	20
Creating content that gets cited.....	20
Earning mentions and citations.....	22
YouTube optimization for AI visibility.....	24
The technical side of AEO	26
Module 4: Measurement	29
Tracking your AI visibility	29
ROI, progress and your action plan.....	31
Appendices	34
Key numbers cheat sheet	34
Glossary	35
Your action checklist	36

Introduction

What is AEO, and why does it matter now?

Key takeaways

- AEO (answer engine optimization) means making your content visible and useful to AI systems that deliver direct answers, so they mention or cite you.
- GEO (generative engine optimization) and LLMO (large language model optimization) mean essentially the same thing.
- SEO competes for a *position* in a list. AEO competes for a *mention* inside a synthesized answer.
- AEO builds on SEO rather than replacing it. Play both games.
- AI traffic is small but converts far better than organic search traffic.

The shift in numbers

The course opens with data showing why this matters today:

- As of December 2025, an AI Overview on Google reduces the click-through rate of the number one ranking page by **58%**. Of every 100 clicks you used to get, Google now keeps 58.
- ChatGPT has about **900 million weekly users** and handles roughly **12%** of Google's search volume.
- AI traffic to websites grew **9.7 times** in a year.
- For the course provider itself, in June 2025 AI search was just 0.5% of traffic but drove **12.1% of signups**, a conversion rate about **23 times higher** than organic search.

SEO versus AEO

	Traditional SEO	AEO
What the user sees	A list of blue links	One synthesized answer, with sources cited inside it
What you compete for	A ranking position	A mention or citation
How the user reaches you	Clicks the link and lands on your site	Sometimes a click; often they simply remember your name and search for you later
Stability	Relatively stable positions	Probabilistic; varies from run to run

Why AI will not "kill" SEO

The course cites Ethan Smith (Graphite), who describes a **zero-sum bias**: the assumption that if something new rises, something old must fall. In 2010 people said the app store meant the web was dying. Apps boomed, but the web grew alongside them. AI search is likely the same story. It is growing fast, yet Google still processes billions of searches a day and organic traffic still drives huge business value. The smart move is to play both games.

You may already be getting mentioned

Looking at its own data, the course provider found its content and product pages had been mentioned **7,470 times across 2,390 pages** in AI search with no deliberate optimization, purely because of solid SEO and useful content. Intentional AEO builds on that base: knowing which platforms cite what, how AI decides who to recommend, and actively building the signals that make AI want to mention you.

Course road map

1. **Module 1, how AI search works:** the mechanics, platform differences, and what visibility looks like.
2. **Module 2, strategy:** why brand mentions are the strongest lever, gap analysis, keyword and prompt research.
3. **Module 3, execution:** content, mentions, YouTube, and technical access.
4. **Module 4, measurement:** analytics, competitive audits, and ROI.

Review questions

Q. What are three other names for AEO?

A. GEO (generative engine optimization) and LLMO (large language model optimization). The course uses AEO throughout.

Q. What is the core difference between what SEO and AEO compete for?

A. SEO competes for a position in a ranked list of results. AEO competes to be mentioned or cited inside an AI-generated answer that has no list.

Q. What is the "zero-sum bias", and how does the 2010 app store example illustrate it?

A. It is the assumption that a new thing rising means an old thing must fall. When apps boomed, people predicted the web would die, but the web kept growing alongside apps. The same is likely true of AI search and traditional search.

Q. Why is AI traffic valuable even though it is a small share of total visits?

A. It converts at a much higher rate. The course provider saw AI search drive 12.1% of signups from 0.5% of traffic, about 23 times the organic search conversion rate.

Module 1: How AI search works

The mechanics behind every tactic in this guide. Understanding the "why" makes the rest of the course stop feeling like a random list of tips.

Module 1, lesson 1

How AI finds and cites content

Key takeaways

- AI has two information sources: **training data** (a static snapshot) and **real-time retrieval** (RAG, searching the web live).
- Because of **query fan-out**, one prompt becomes many sub-queries, so you need to be relevant across a whole topic, not just one keyword.
- AI citations are **probabilistic**: think probability distribution, not leaderboard. Talk about AI *visibility*, not AI *rankings*.
- Consensus, freshness and authority raise your odds of being cited.

Source 1: training data

Training data is the massive body of text the model originally learned from: books, websites, PDFs, social media, YouTube transcripts. It is effectively a snapshot of the internet. When you ask ChatGPT who the CEO of Apple is and it answers instantly without searching, that comes from training data. The weakness is that it is static and only refreshed occasionally (the course says roughly every six months). A product you launched last week will not be in it.

Source 2: real-time retrieval (RAG)

Retrieval-augmented generation is the second process. When ChatGPT or Google's AI Mode needs fresh information, or the question is too specific for training data alone, it searches the web through APIs, pulls back a set of pages, reads them, and writes a response from what it found. Patrick Stox's framing: you have the trained model's data, and then a secondary process that fetches relevant pages, each carrying its own probabilities.

What this means for you

There are two routes to influence what AI says about your brand. (1) Be mentioned so widely across the web that you are baked into training data. (2) Make sure your content shows up when the AI searches in real time. Route 2 is exactly what SEO already does: ranking, links and quality content help AI pick up your pages during retrieval.

Query fan-out

Search evolved in three stages:

1. **One to one:** one query, one set of results.
2. **Many to one:** different queries ("Sydney plumber", "plumbing service in Sydney") return the same results.
3. **One to many (AI search):** one prompt is expanded into many sub-queries. This is **query fan-out**.

Example

The prompt "Plan me a 5-day trip to Japan in November" might fan out into sub-queries such as best neighborhoods to stay in Tokyo, November weather in Kyoto, and whether a Japan Rail Pass is worth it. All run at once, results are merged, and one answer is written.

Research from Seer Interactive and Nectiv found the average prompt triggers **9 to 11** fan-out queries, with some reaching **28**. ChatGPT's deep research mode ran **420 searches** for one query about buying a red phone case.

Implication: in traditional SEO you could optimize one page for one keyword. In AI search you need relevance across an entire topic, arguably an entire niche. A page on "how to start a podcast" that skips equipment, hosting and promotion gives the AI a reason to cite someone else.

Fan-out queries are not a keyword list

You can view fan-out queries for ChatGPT and Perplexity prompts in Brand Radar's AI responses report. But they are synthetic and generated on the fly. The same prompt can fan out differently each time, and over 95% have zero search volume because no human would type them. Use them as a window into which *topics* the AI considers important, not as keywords to target one by one.

How AI decides who to cite

Traditional rankings are relatively stable: number three today is probably near three tomorrow. AI citations are **probabilistic**. Patrick Stox describes outputs as probabilities on top of probabilities: training data creates patterns, retrieved pages add their own signals, and a temperature setting adds randomness so the answer differs each time. Ask the same question five times and you might be cited three times, a competitor twice, and someone else once.

Patterns still exist. Factors that raise the odds:

- **Consensus.** If multiple sources say the same thing about your brand, AI is more likely to repeat it. Consistent mentions in more places raise the probability.
- **Freshness.** AI-cited content is about **25% fresher** than what appears in a traditional results page.
- **Authority.** Pages that rank well have a head start: **76%** of AI Overview citations came from pages already in Google's top 10 (see the next lesson for how this figure has since fallen).

Yet **14%** of pages cited in AI Overviews do not rank in Google's top 100 at all, and for ChatGPT the overlap with Google is even lower. Brands that are not dominant in traditional search can still appear in AI.

Review questions

Q. Why can't training data alone tell an AI about a product launched last week?

A. Training data is a static snapshot updated only occasionally. New information reaches the answer only through real-time retrieval (RAG).

Q. Explain query fan-out in one sentence, and state its main strategic implication.

A. One prompt is expanded into many simultaneous sub-queries whose results are merged into one answer. So you must be relevant across a whole topic, not only one target keyword.

Q. Why does the course prefer the term "AI visibility" over "AI rankings"?

A. Citations are probabilistic and vary between runs. There is no fixed position to rank for; it is a probability distribution rather than a leaderboard.

Q. Name the three factors that increase the odds of being cited.

A. Consensus (many sources saying the same thing), freshness, and authority.

Q. Should you treat fan-out queries as a new keyword list? Why or why not?

A. No. They are synthetic, inconsistent between runs, and over 95% have no search volume. Use them to understand which topics the AI considers relevant to a question.

Module 1, lesson 2

Differences between AI search platforms

Key takeaways

- AI search is **not one thing**. Of the top 50 most-cited domains across Google AI Overviews, ChatGPT and Perplexity, only **7 (14%)** appeared on all three.
- Each platform has its own index, biases and source preferences.
- Prioritize by market share (Google's AI features and ChatGPT dominate) and by overlap with what you already do in SEO.
- The link between Google rankings and AI Overview citations is weakening.

Platform comparison

Platform	What it leans toward	Numbers from the course
Google AI Overviews	Authoritative, established sites (health, finance, encyclopedic), Google-owned properties such as YouTube, and Reddit.	YouTube is about 5.6% of citations. A link appears in only 10.7% of brand mentions.
ChatGPT	Publishers and media: Reddit, Wikipedia, Amazon, Forbes, Business Insider, Wired. Partly due to licensing deals.	Median domain rating of top-cited pages is 90. Overlaps with Google's top 10 only about 8 to 10% of the time. A link appears in 26.9% of mentions.
Perplexity	Most aligned with traditional Google search.	28.6% of citations come from Google's top 10. A link appears in 51.6% of mentions.
Google AI Mode	YouTube (top domain by a wide margin), then Google and Wikipedia. Cites Quora 3.5 times more than AI Overviews and draws more from Facebook and Instagram.	Citation overlap with AI Overviews is only 13.7%, even though answers are 86% semantically similar. A link appears in 36.8% of mentions.

A moving number

The course first says 76% of AI Overview citations come from pages in Google's top 10, then notes that more recent research puts it nearer **38%**. AI Overviews increasingly pull from outside the top 10, including YouTube and Reddit. The direction matters more than either number: Google rankings help, but explain less of AI citation over time.

Which platform should you focus on?

1. **Market share.** Google's AI features and ChatGPT account for the vast majority of AI search traffic. Perplexity is growing but is still a fraction.
2. **Overlap with your existing SEO.** If you already rank well in Google, you have a head start on AI Overviews and Perplexity.

ChatGPT cares more about publisher authority and editorial content. Being mentioned on Forbes, in a Reddit thread or on a niche review site may matter more for ChatGPT visibility than your own page's Google ranking. Many of the most-cited domains in AI search get no traditional search traffic at all: AI visibility is its own game.

Practical implications

- If **ChatGPT** is a big driver in your niche, aim for mentions on high-DR editorial sites and publishers.
- If **AI Overviews** matter more, put YouTube and Reddit on your radar.
- You do not need separate strategies for each platform. Quality content, earning mentions and building topical authority help everywhere. Platform knowledge helps you *prioritize*.
- To see a platform's top domains: in Brand Radar run a blank search, open the **Cited domains** report, and filter by AI platform.

Review questions

Q. What percentage of the top 50 cited domains appeared on all of AI Overviews, ChatGPT and Perplexity?

A. 14% (7 out of 50).

Q. Which platform is most aligned with traditional Google rankings, and which is least?

A. Perplexity is the most aligned (28.6% of citations from Google's top 10). ChatGPT overlaps the least (about 8 to 10%).

Q. AI Overviews and AI Mode are both Google products. Do they cite the same sources?

A. No. Citation overlap is only 13.7%, even though their answers are 86% semantically similar.

Q. If ChatGPT drives your niche, where should you seek mentions?

A. High-authority editorial sites and publishers, plus places ChatGPT frequently cites such as Reddit and niche review sites.

Module 1, lesson 3

Types of AI visibility

Key takeaways

- There are three states: **cited and linked**, **mentioned but not linked**, and **not visible**.
- Only about **28%** of AI mentions include a link, but linked mentions cluster on the highest-traffic queries.
- Unlinked mentions still matter: they feed the model's association between your brand and a topic.
- Branded web mentions had the strongest correlation with AI Overview visibility of any metric studied (0.664).

The three types

1. **Cited and linked.** AI links to your page as a source. Best for direct traffic and easiest to measure.
2. **Mentioned but not linked.** AI names your brand without a link. No direct click, but the user now knows your name and may search for you. It works like word of mouth at scale.
3. **Not visible.** You are not in the conversation. Worth knowing, because you cannot fix what you do not know is broken.

How often are mentions linked?

Platform	Mentions with a link
Perplexity	51.6%
Google AI Mode	36.8%
ChatGPT	26.9%
Gemini	16.8%
Google AI Overviews	10.7%

Share of brand mentions that include a link, by platform (course data).

The average is about 28%, meaning roughly seven in ten mentions have no link. If you mostly track AI Overviews, nearly nine of ten appearances carry no link.

Links are rare but land where the eyeballs are

When mentions are weighted by search volume (a proxy for how many people ask similar questions), linked mentions show up on much higher-traffic queries. On Perplexity, links appear in about **78%** of total impressions despite being in 51% of individual mentions. On Gemini, links appear in **71%** of impressions despite being in only 16.8% of mentions.

Why unlinked mentions still matter

LLMs learn by reading the web. Each time your brand name appears on a credible site in connection with a topic, it becomes another training example. The more the model sees the association, the more confidently it mentions you: like "peanut butter" suggesting "jelly", or "Tesla" suggesting "electric cars".

In a study of **75,000 brands**, branded web mentions had a **0.664** correlation with showing up in AI Overviews. That was stronger than backlinks, domain rating, referring domains or any other traditional SEO metric. It is a long game that compounds.

Response types

- **Step-by-step guides** ("how to fix a leaky faucet"): opportunities for service businesses and how-to creators if AI recommends you as the expert.
- **Direct answers** ("capital of France"): being the cited source builds authority for publishers, but you probably will not get a click.
- **Video citations**: YouTube is among the most cited domains, so creators' videos can appear directly in AI responses.

Matching visibility to your business

Visibility is a spectrum, and the type that matters depends on you. If you sell a product, you want to appear when people ask about your category. A query like "best golf balls" surfaces many brands, and a user can click through and buy at once: a citation doing real work. If you are a publisher or creator, training data visibility is your long game: every article or video AI cites reinforces your authority in the model.

Where to see your position

Enter your site in Brand Radar. You can filter by **mentions** (named, not linked), **citations** (linked), **impressions** and **share of voice**. The gap between your impressions and your mentions is your opportunity: AI is answering questions on your topic but not naming you.

Review questions

Q. What are the three types of AI visibility?

A. Cited and linked; mentioned but not linked; not visible at all.

Q. Roughly what share of AI mentions include a link, and which platform is most generous with links?

A. About 28% on average. Perplexity is the most generous at 51.6%.

Q. Why might linked mentions be more valuable than their low frequency suggests?

A. When weighted by search volume, linked mentions occur on much higher-traffic queries (for example, 78% of Perplexity impressions versus 51% of mentions).

Q. Why do unlinked mentions still build value?

A. They act as training examples that strengthen the association between your brand and a topic, and users who hear your name may search for you. Branded web mentions had a 0.664 correlation with AI Overview visibility.

Module 2: Strategy

A two-phase approach. First assess where your brand stands and where the gaps are. Then discover the keywords and prompts worth pursuing.

Module 2, lesson 1

Brand gap analysis

Key takeaways

- A brand gap analysis measures the difference between where your brand *should* show up and where it *actually* does, in search, AI results and across the web.
- Four steps: **map entities, run the audit, identify gaps, prioritize.**
- Look for six kinds of gap: visibility, narrative, topic, format, web mentions and demand.
- Every action falls into one of three buckets: **fix, build, influence.**

Step 1: map your branded entities

Your brand is referred to in many ways. List your main brand name, sub-brands, product names, proprietary features, proprietary metrics and personal brands tied to the company. Each has its own visibility profile, and you can repeat the analysis for each.

Then connect each entity to the topics and attributes people should associate with it. Search engines and LLMs do not understand brand names on their own; they infer meaning from how a brand is described and discussed. Clarify the problems you solve, the qualities you are known for and the context you belong in. A quick way: run keyword research and note recurring adjectives and modifiers used with your brand or category (affordable, AI-powered, enterprise-grade). That is your benchmark for what you should be known and found for.

Step 2: run the audit

Enter your site in Site Explorer for the traditional baseline: domain rating, referring domains, organic keywords, organic traffic and traffic value. Then click into the AI citation metrics to reach the Brand Radar report for each platform. Four numbers matter:

Metric	Meaning
Mentions	How many times your brand is mentioned in AI responses
Citations	How many times your website is cited as a source

Metric	Meaning
Impressions	Estimated exposure, based on how often responses containing your brand are shown
AI share of voice	How often your brand is mentioned compared with competitors

Brand Radar's filters let you isolate useful scenarios:

- Prompts that mention your brand name on a chosen platform.
- Responses that mention your brand *but do not cite your site*. These are miscitation opportunities.
- Queries where a competitor is mentioned and you are not.
- Specific topics, to see whether AI associates them with you or someone else.

Save these numbers as your baseline.

Step 3: identify your gaps (six dimensions)

The framework comes from Despina's brand gap analysis guide.

Gap	What it means	Example
Visibility	You appear less often than competitors in search or AI results	A rival has three times your share of voice
Narrative	How AI or media describes you differs from how you want to be positioned	You are premium, but AI calls you a budget alternative
Topic	Topics you should own but are not associated with	A project management tool that AI never mentions for remote team collaboration
Format	AI cites formats (guides, videos, reviews, comparisons) you do not produce	Competitors' YouTube videos are cited; you have none
Web mentions	External sources (listicles, review sites, forums, publications) mention competitors but not you	You are missing from a major listicle everyone else is on
Demand	Branded or awareness searches in your space that your brand never appears alongside	People search a feature you have, but your name never comes up

Together these show not just how often you appear, but whether you appear for the right things, in the right way, in the right places. Sort your prompts into these buckets as you audit.

Step 4: prioritize

You cannot fix everything at once. Each opportunity is one of:

- **Fix:** improve or optimize something that already exists.

- **Build:** create new content or pages for opportunities you do not cover.
- **Influence:** strengthen off-site visibility through outreach and brand mentions.

Weigh each by three questions: How much demand could it drive? Does it support brand credibility? Does it improve your chances of being cited in AI? Start with quick wins. A page that already ranks and needs a content update to close a topic gap is low effort and potentially high impact. Missing from a listicle all your competitors are on is a web-mentions gap you can close with outreach.

Most of your gaps will fall into one or two buckets, which tells you where to build systems. Also run the same audit on **competitors**: look at their branded queries to see what users and AI connect to them more strongly than to you. Sometimes you already have the feature but lack the content connecting it to your brand.

Review questions

Q. What are the four steps of the brand gap analysis?

A. Map your branded entities, run the audit (Site Explorer plus Brand Radar), identify gaps across six dimensions, and prioritize.

Q. Name the six gaps.

A. Visibility, narrative, topic, format, web mentions, and demand.

Q. What is a "miscitation opportunity"?

A. A response that mentions your brand but does not cite your website, so you can work to earn the citation.

Q. What are the three types of action in prioritization?

A. Fix (improve what exists), build (create new content), and influence (earn off-site mentions).

Q. Give an example of a narrative gap.

A. You are a premium tool, yet AI keeps describing you as a budget alternative, or your key differentiator does not come through.

Keyword and prompt research for AEO

Key takeaways

- Keyword research for SEO and AEO overlaps heavily. The skill is deciding which keywords to target for *clicks* and which for *AI mentions*.
- Vet keywords with the **BID formula** (business potential, intent, difficulty), then apply the **AI filter**.
- Action-oriented queries (tools, calculators, templates) are still largely untouched by AI Overviews.
- For AI-dominated queries, aim to get *mentioned*. Listicles are the pages AI pulls from most.
- Prompts are conversational and unpredictable, so build visibility across a whole topic rather than chasing one prompt.

Step 1: build your keyword list

You need **seed keywords** (broad niche terms) and **modifiers** (add-ons like "best" or "how to" that turn seeds into real searches). A shortcut is to ask an AI assistant for 10 seed keywords of one to two words and five or more modifiers, giving it your site type, revenue model and audience, and specifying that seeds and modifiers must not share words.

Paste the seeds into Keywords Explorer, open the **Matching terms** report, and add modifiers through the **Include** filter. You get hundreds or thousands of real keyword ideas.

Step 2: vet with the BID formula

Letter	Test	Example
B usiness potential	If you ranked number one, would it help your business?	"What is espresso" has volume but the searcher may never buy. "Best espresso machine under \$500" shows intent and budget.
I ntent	Google it. What kind of page ranks?	If every top result is an e-commerce page, a blog post will not rank. Match the intent or move on.
D ifficulty	Can you realistically rank? Check referring domains and DR of top pages.	A few low-DR sites in the top 10 is usually a good sign.

Step 3: the AI filter

Ask: *can AI fully satisfy the user for this query?* If the AI Overview is so good that nobody needs to click, the keyword may be a trap even if it passes BID. The data:

- AI Overviews appear on about **21%** of all keywords.
- Nearly **58%** of question queries and **46%** of queries with seven or more words trigger one.
- **99.9%** of keywords that trigger an AI Overview are informational in intent.

Google the keyword and put yourself in the searcher's shoes: are you satisfied, or do you need to click?

Where AI has not reached

Searches where the user must *do* something still get clicks. "Backlink checker", "mortgage calculator" and "word counter" show no AI Overview, because AI cannot replace using a tool. To find these, use Matching terms with modifiers such as **calculator, checker, generator, tool, template, finder, planner, maker**. You can also set the intent filter to **transactional** to find buy, sign-up and action queries.

Step 4: find AI mention opportunities

Keywords where AI nails the answer are not ignored; they are targeted differently. The goal shifts from earning a click to getting **your brand mentioned in the AI response**. The course's study found **43.8%** of cited pages are **listicles**, likely because they help AI build consensus: if your brand appears across many lists, many sources recommend you.

1. In Brand Radar, enter your site and find your brand.
2. Hover over the AI platform you want and click **Others only**. This shows mention gaps where competitors appear and you do not.
3. Filter for queries containing **best, top, versus, review, alternative**.

That is your short list of queries. Revisit regularly: over **45%** of citations change when an AI Overview refreshes, which happens on average every two days.

Step 5: prompt research

People do not type keywords into ChatGPT, AI Mode or Perplexity. They talk: "I'm a small agency owner looking for a marketing platform. Which one should I choose?" Every person phrases things differently, the same question asked ten ways can return ten different answers with ten different brands, and each prompt fans out into sub-queries that will never repeat. So you cannot hunt exact prompts one by one. **Build visibility across the entire topic**. Execution comes in Module 3.

Review questions

Q. What does BID stand for?

A. Business potential, Intent, Difficulty.

Q. Why can a keyword that passes BID still be a "trap"?

A. If an AI Overview fully answers the query, users will not click, so ranking brings little traffic. Apply the AI filter before committing.

Q. Which kinds of queries are still largely safe from AI Overviews, and how do you find them?

A. Action-oriented, tool-type queries (calculators, checkers, generators, templates). Use Matching terms with those modifiers, or filter by transactional intent.

Q. Why are listicles so heavily cited?

A. They help AI build consensus. A brand appearing across multiple lists represents multiple sources recommending it. They make up 43.8% of cited pages in the course's study.

Q. Why is it a mistake to optimize for one specific prompt?

A. Prompts vary widely by person, the same prompt can return different brands, and fan-out sub-queries rarely repeat. Topic-wide visibility is what works.

Module 3: Execution

The hands-on work: create content AI wants to cite, earn mentions on other sites, use YouTube, and make sure AI can technically reach your pages.

Module 3, lesson 1

Creating content that gets cited

Key takeaways

- Length does not matter (correlation with citation: 0.04). Answering the question does.
- Freshness matters a lot. Make *meaningful* updates, not cosmetic date changes.
- Formats AI can reuse: listicles, original-data content, and comparison pages.
- Four writing principles: **BLUF, atomic content, entity-rich writing, simple declarative sentences.**
- Brand your original ideas, and refresh "sleeper pages".

What the data says

- **Length:** across 174,000+ pages cited in AI Overviews, the correlation between word count and citation was just **0.04**. Over half (**53.4%**) of cited pages were under 1,000 words.
- **Freshness:** AI-cited content is on average **25.7%** fresher than what ranks organically. For ChatGPT, **89.7%** of top-cited pages were updated in 2025 and **76%** within the last 30 days.
- **Format:** listicles (best X, top X, comparisons, reviews) are 43.8% of cited pages. Data-driven content with original stats gets cited because AI likes specific numbers. "X versus Y" pages map directly to how people ask AI questions.

Do you need to write differently for AI?

No special "AI format" exists. AI is trained on what humans find valuable, so content that serves readers well is what AI wants to cite. Four principles help both audiences.

1. BLUF: bottom line up front

Borrowed from military communication: start every section with the answer, not the backstory. Humans skim in an F-pattern, reading the start closely and the middle lightly. LLMs similarly weight the beginning and end of a passage more than the middle.

Before and after

Weak: a section that opens with how link building strategies have evolved over the years because search engines changed how they evaluate link quality.

Strong: "The most effective way to build backlinks in 2026 is to create original research." Then support it with context and examples.

2. Atomic content

Each section should stand on its own. AI systems chunk your content differently and unpredictably, but if every section is self-contained, meaning survives wherever the chunk falls. **Test:** take any H2 section and read it out of context. If it does not make sense without the rest, rewrite it.

3. Entity-rich writing

AI understands text through entities (brands, products, people, places, specific concepts) and the relationships between them. Specific beats vague.

Example

Instead of "This tool helps with SEO", write "Ahrefs' Keywords Explorer helps you find keywords with low difficulty and high traffic potential."

4. Simple and declarative

Short sentences, clear subject-verb-object structure, one idea per sentence. This is not dumbing down; it makes content easy to parse. If a sentence takes two reads, simplify it.

Label your original ideas

LLMs tend to **flatten originality**: if you are the only one talking about a concept, AI may absorb the idea without crediting you. The fix is to attach your brand name (call it the "[Your brand] content scoring matrix" rather than a generic "content scoring matrix"), define it explicitly, and distribute it widely: blog, social, podcasts, Reddit. The more places it appears with your name, the harder it is to flatten into generic knowledge.

Refresh your sleeper pages

Sleeper pages used to rank well but have slowly declined. They already have backlinks and authority and need a refresh. Because freshness is a strong AI signal, this can be one of the fastest routes to AI visibility.

1. In Site Explorer, enter your domain and open **Top pages**.
2. Sort by **traffic change** and look for significant declines.
3. Keep pages with *decent backlinks* (authority) and a clear traffic decline (stale content).

Check the cause first

Confirm the problem is content, not links. If the page never had many referring domains, updating the content probably will not help. And do not just change the publish date; Google can detect that. Update stats, examples and information in substance.

Review questions

Q. What was the correlation between word count and citation in AI Overviews, and what does it imply?

A. 0.04, essentially zero. Long content is not favored; answering the question is. 53.4% of cited pages were under 1,000 words.

Q. What does BLUF stand for, and why does it help?

A. Bottom line up front. Both humans and LLMs weight the start of a passage more, so putting the answer first prevents key points from being missed.

Q. How do you test whether a section is "atomic"?

A. Read any H2 section out of context. If it still makes sense on its own, it is atomic; otherwise rewrite it.

Q. How do you stop AI flattening your original framework into generic knowledge?

A. Brand it with your name, define it explicitly, and distribute it widely (blog, social, podcasts, Reddit) so your name stays attached.

Q. What two signals identify a good sleeper page?

A. Decent backlinks (existing authority) and a clear traffic decline (stale content).

Module 3, lesson 2

Earning mentions and citations**Key takeaways**

- Much of AEO is getting mentioned on *other* people's pages, especially ones AI pulls from.
- Where you are mentioned matters: mentions on highly linked pages had a **0.7** correlation with AI Overview visibility.
- Think in three tiers: **editorial, community (UGC), your own properties.**
- Audit your mentions regularly and correct misinformation quickly.

Tier 1: third-party editorial content

The hardest to earn and the most valuable. Examples: industry publications, review sites (Wirecutter, TechRadar), listicles and comparison posts on authoritative blogs, and YouTube reviews from creators in your space. These are the pages AI loves to cite, and 43.8% of ChatGPT citations are listicles and comparison pages.

How to find targets

- In Brand Radar, open the **Cited domains** report to see which sites AI cites for your topics (for example kbb.com for cars or CNET for tech).
- You do not have to wait for AI to cite a page. Look for pages with many links that cover your topic; they may be cited later.
- In Content Explorer, search for `title:best` or `title:versus` with your topic and a minus operator before your brand name to surface listicles and comparisons where you are not mentioned. Filter for a good number of referring domains.

Tier 2: user-generated content and communities

Reddit, Quora, niche forums and community sites. Reddit is one of the most-cited sources by ChatGPT and a foundational training source for LLMs.

Do not spam

Do not stuff threads with your brand name; it backfires quickly. Find threads where people ask questions your product or expertise can genuinely answer, and contribute a real answer where you are a good fit.

- Use Brand Radar's Cited domains report to see whether reddit.com appears in your space, then find which threads AI pulls from.
- To find niche Reddit pages that already rank: in Site Explorer enter reddit.com, open **Organic keywords**, filter for positions in the top five, and add niche terms to the Include filter. The same method works for niche forums and Q&A sites.

Tier 3: your own properties

Some brands run several authoritative domains that act as extra citation sources. Even with limited resources, the principle holds: your YouTube channel, podcast and LinkedIn content are all indexed and can be sources AI draws from. The more places your brand appears in a positive, topically relevant way, the more training examples AI has.

Audit your mentions

Mentions can disappear when pages are updated or lists refreshed, and AI can pick up wrong information from outdated sources. Run a regular audit in Brand Radar:

- Track mention trends and investigate drops in volume. If a page that used to mention you removed you in an update, look into it.
- Check **sentiment**: are AI responses about you accurate and positive?
- If you find misinformation, **update your own content first**, then ask the publisher for a correction. The faster you fix it, the less time AI has to learn from it.

Review questions

Q. Name the three tiers of mention sources.

A. Tier 1: third-party editorial content. Tier 2: user-generated content and community platforms. Tier 3: your own properties.

Q. Why should you target pages that are not yet cited by AI?

A. Pages with many links that cover your topic are likely to be cited eventually, so getting on them early positions you for future citations.

Q. What is the right approach to Reddit?

A. Contribute genuine answers in threads where you can truly help. Spamming your brand name backfires.

Q. What is the recommended order when you find AI spreading wrong information about you?

A. Fix your own content first, then contact the publisher to request a correction.

Module 3, lesson 3

YouTube optimization for AI visibility

Key takeaways

- YouTube is the most-cited domain in Google's AI Overviews, and YouTube mentions had a **0.737** correlation with ChatGPT visibility, the strongest factor the course studied.
- GPT-4 was trained on over a million hours of YouTube transcripts: YouTube is a platform AI both cites *and* learns from.
- Target **search hits**, not viral hits.
- Three steps: find what works, create videos that rank, layer in AI visibility.

Step 1: find search hits

A **viral hit** spikes and then dies once the algorithm exhausts interested viewers. A **search hit** gets steady traffic from Google and YouTube search month after month, and its clear titles make it the kind of video AI pulls from. If Google already ranks a YouTube video for a keyword, AI Overviews are likely to cite it too.

1. In Site Explorer, enter `www.youtube.com/watch`.
2. Open the **Organic keywords** report.
3. Filter for rankings in the top three and add niche terms to the Include filter.

You get topics where YouTube videos already rank at the top of Google in your space.

Step 2: create videos that rank (checklist)

1. **Keyword in the title.** This is not the place for clever titles. Save the creativity for the thumbnail: the title handles the keyword, the thumbnail sells the click.
2. **Real summary in the description** with the target keyword in the first couple of lines. Google, AI and viewers all read it.
3. **Add timestamps.** They become chapters that can appear in Google for specific queries, giving free extra visibility.
4. **Say the keyword aloud in the video.** Google understands audio (per Google's VP of Search, Liz Reid).
5. **Match the format already ranking.** If tutorials dominate, make a tutorial; if listicles rank, make a listicle. You are matching searcher intent.

Step 3: layer in AI visibility

In Brand Radar, enter a popular brand or YouTube channel, open the **Topics** report, and set a filter where the domain mentioned is `youtube.com`. This shows which queries AI pulls YouTube videos into. Create content on those topics using the same principles: right keyword, thorough and well-optimized video, comprehensive without wasting time.

Every video you publish is also potential training data. Even if it is not cited straight away, helpful, specific and well-structured videos are more likely to be learned from and eventually recommended.

Review questions

Q. What is the difference between a search hit and a viral hit?

A. A viral hit spikes and fades as the algorithm runs out of interested viewers. A search hit earns steady traffic from search over time and is more likely to be cited by AI.

Q. Why should titles be keyword-driven rather than clever?

A. The title carries the keyword people search for; the thumbnail is where you sell the click.

Q. Give three video optimization steps from the checklist.

A. Any three of: keyword in title, real summary description, timestamps/chapters, speaking the keyword aloud, matching the ranking format.

Q. How can Brand Radar help you find YouTube topics for AI?

A. Use the Topics report with the domain-mentioned filter set to youtube.com to see queries where AI pulls in YouTube videos.

Module 3, lesson 4

The technical side of AEO

Key takeaways

- Many sites accidentally block AI. About **5.9%** of 140 million websites block GPTBot, OpenAI's crawler.
- Six checks: robots.txt (plus llms.txt), JavaScript rendering, page speed, clean HTML, schema markup, hallucinated URLs.
- Priority order: robots.txt matters most; llms.txt and schema are low priority for AEO.

1. Check robots.txt

Robots.txt tells crawlers what they may access. Beyond Google, dozens of AI bots now crawl the web. Main ones named in the course: **GPTBot** and **OAI-SearchBot** (OpenAI), **ClaudeBot** (Anthropic) and **Google-Extended** (Google). If they are blocked, and they obey your rules, those platforms will not recommend pages they cannot read.

You may have blocked them unintentionally through inherited templates or old configurations. Cloudflare's feature to instruct AI bot traffic via robots.txt is now enabled by default and updates your file to signal that content should not be used for AI training. If you are on Cloudflare, you could be blocking crawlers without realizing.

How to check

Open `yourdomain.com/robots.txt` and search for GPTBot, ClaudeBot, Google-Extended and OAI-SearchBot. A `Disallow` rule next to any of them means you are blocking that crawler. Ahrefs' Site Audit also flags rules that block AI crawlers.

What about llms.txt?

It is a proposed standard, like robots.txt but aimed at AI, that summarizes your site and points to key content. As of the course, no major provider officially supports it: OpenAI does not use it, Anthropic publishes one but has not confirmed its crawlers read it, and Google has not adopted it. It will not hurt, but do not prioritize it over the other checks.

2. Handle JavaScript

Some AI platforms render JavaScript and some do not. Gemini and Copilot can; ChatGPT's crawler does not. If your content depends on JavaScript (common with single-page apps and some React or Angular setups), ChatGPT gets an empty shell. The fix is **server-side rendering**, sending fully rendered HTML to the crawler. Quick test: disable JavaScript in your browser and visit your site. If the content disappears, you have a rendering issue.

3. Page speed

AI systems fetch, parse and chunk pages in real time. A slow page can be dropped before it is scored, so speed can matter even more for AI retrieval than for classic search. If your Core Web Vitals are already optimized, you are most of the way there.

4. Clean HTML structure

AI parses content by following your HTML. Use a logical heading hierarchy (H1 for the title, H2 for main sections, H3 for subsections), keep paragraphs to one idea, and make each section stand alone, since AI may chunk at any heading boundary. This ties back to BLUF, atomic content and entity-rich writing.

5. Schema markup

Structured data (Article, FAQPage, HowTo, LocalBusiness) helps search engines understand content. The evidence for AEO is mixed: no confirmed data shows it directly improves AI citation, but it does not hurt. Do not spend much time on it for AEO alone, though adding the right types to new pages is a good habit.

6. Optimize for hallucinated URLs

AI assistants sometimes invent URLs that do not exist on your site, so users hit a 404. AI assistants send visitors to 404 pages **2.87 times more often** than Google search does, and ChatGPT is the biggest offender, with about 1% of clicked URLs leading to 404s. Check analytics for pages receiving AI referral traffic but returning 404. If a made-up URL gets steady traffic, **redirect it** to the most relevant real page.

Review questions

Q. Which bots should you look for in robots.txt?

A. GPTBot, OAI-SearchBot, ClaudeBot and Google-Extended.

Q. Why might a Cloudflare site be blocking AI without the owner knowing?

A. Cloudflare's feature to instruct AI bot traffic via robots.txt is on by default and updates robots.txt to signal that content should not be used for AI training.

Q. Which major AI crawler can not render JavaScript, and what is the fix?

A. ChatGPT's crawler. Use server-side rendering so it receives fully built HTML.

Q. Should you prioritize llms.txt? Why or why not?

A. Not over other tasks. No major LLM provider officially supports it yet. It is harmless but low priority; robots.txt matters far more.

Q. What should you do with a hallucinated URL that gets consistent traffic?

A. Set up a redirect to the most relevant real page on your site.

Module 4: Measurement

Measuring AI visibility is harder than measuring SEO, since much of the data is hidden. But three methods, combined with Brand Radar, give a workable picture.

Module 4, lesson 1

Tracking your AI visibility

Key takeaways

- Three pillars: **AI referral traffic**, **AI bot activity**, and **self-reported attribution**.
- Referral data is an *undercount*. Use it for trends, not exact totals.
- If you do only one thing, add a "How did you hear about us?" question.

Pillar 1: AI referral traffic

Visits where someone clicked a link in ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude or another AI platform and landed on your site. It appears as referral traffic in analytics such as GA4 or Ahrefs Web Analytics.

Why it undercounts

Not all platforms pass referral data. Stripped referrals show up as direct traffic in GA4, so you cannot tell they came from AI. Per the course: ChatGPT source links in search results pass referral data, but in-content links on paid accounts use a no-referrer attribute and are invisible. Claude tracks properly. Perplexity tracks on the web but not in its desktop app. Copilot tracks on the web but not on Windows. Grok does not pass referral data at all.

Set it up in GA4

1. Go to **Admin, Data display, Channel groups**.
2. Copy your default channel group and add a new channel called **AI traffic**.
3. Set the source to match a regex including chatgpt.com, perplexity, gemini.google.com, copilot.microsoft.com, claude.ai and deepseek.com.
4. Go to **Reports, Acquisition, Traffic acquisition** and select your new channel group.

Simpler option: Ahrefs' free **Web Analytics** has a built-in AI search channel and separates unknown traffic from direct, which GA4 does not.

What to look at

- **Pages getting AI traffic:** AI already recommends these. Keep them accurate, up to date and with clear calls to action. AI will probably stop sending people to a page not updated in a year.
- **Important pages getting none:** investigate whether it is a content issue, a crawling issue, or simply that AI is not surfacing that topic yet.

Pillar 2: AI bot activity

Track the AI crawlers themselves. Bots visit far more often than humans, so the pages they hit most are likely your strongest citation candidates.

Bot type	Examples	Role
Training bots	GPTBot, Google-Extended	Collect content to train AI models
Search and citation bots	ChatGPT-User, OAI-SearchBot	Fetch pages in real time when a user asks a question; these can drive referral traffic

Use server logs if you have access, or Ahrefs' **Bot Analytics** with its Cloudflare integration (works on a free Cloudflare plan). Look for patterns: a citation bot repeatedly hitting a page suggests it is used as a source. Important pages that bots never visit may be hard to discover, which points to internal linking and site structure.

Pillar 3: self-reported attribution

Much AI impact never appears in analytics. Someone gets your name from ChatGPT and types it into the browser bar (direct traffic), or Googles your brand (organic search). The only way to capture that is to ask. Add "How did you hear about us?" to your signup flow, checkout or post-purchase survey, with options such as *AI assistant (ChatGPT, Perplexity, etc.)* and *AI search (Google AI Overviews)*.

At the course provider, about **3%** of conversions over the last year came from AI by self-report, and AI visitors converted at a much higher rate than organic search visitors, which they would not have known without asking.

Using them together

Referral traffic shows what AI sends to your site. Bot analytics shows what content AI pays attention to. Self-attribution shows what drives revenue. Brand Radar (Module 2) tracks visibility across platforms. No single source is complete; together they give a clear view.

Review questions

Q. Why do AI referral numbers in analytics undercount real AI influence?

A. Some platforms strip referral data (so visits look like direct), and AI influence often shows up later as direct or branded organic visits when people type or search your name.

Q. What is the difference between training bots and search/citation bots?

A. Training bots collect content to train models. Search and citation bots fetch pages live to answer a user's question and can drive referral traffic.

Q. What is the single most useful thing to do from this lesson?

A. Add a "How did you hear about us?" question with AI options to your signup, checkout or post-purchase survey.

Q. What can a citation bot repeatedly hitting one page tell you?

A. That the page is likely being used as a source in AI responses.

Module 4, lesson 2

ROI, progress and your action plan

Key takeaways

- AI referral traffic is small (about **0.25%** of a typical site's traffic; Google sends about 210 times more than top AI platforms combined) but converts far better.
- Much of the value is **brand awareness** inside the AI conversation, which never appears as a click.
- Check progress with four Brand Radar signals monthly, and do a deeper competitive audit quarterly.
- AI can be fed misinformation. Fill information gaps with specific, official content.

Is AEO worth it?

On raw traffic, AI search is small. But quality is high:

- The course provider's AI visitors convert at **23 times** the rate of organic search visitors.
- Vercel reports 10% conversion rates from AI traffic. Tally says AI is its largest acquisition channel and helped add about a million dollars in ARR.
- Reason: when AI recommends you, it has already explained why you are a good fit, so visitors arrive pre-qualified.

- **Growth:** AI traffic grew about 9.7 times in a year. ChatGPT grew 85% since January and now sends more traffic than Reddit or LinkedIn.

The larger value is awareness. Each recommendation is an impression you never had before, and most do not become clicks; they become a later Google search for your name or recognition in a social feed. AEO is not an alternative to SEO but a new layer on top. The main downside is imperfect measurability, but like billboard brand marketing, unmeasurable precisely does not mean ineffective.

How to tell if you are making progress

Return to your Brand Radar baseline and review four things (monthly quick check, quarterly deeper competitive audit):

1. **AI share of voice.** Growth versus competitors means it is working. If flat while a rival grows, find out why.
2. **Cited domains.** Are new domains citing you? This shows whether mention-earning is paying off.
3. **Topic coverage.** Have you closed the gaps you identified, and appeared for new topics?
4. **Mention sentiment.** Is AI saying accurate and positive things about you?

Misinformation: a real risk

The course provider tested this by creating a fake luxury brand, planting three contradictory sources (a blog, Reddit and Medium), and querying eight AI platforms. After planting, **Gemini and Perplexity repeated the misinformation in 37 to 39%** of answers, including fake founders, cities and pricing stories presented as fact. **ChatGPT was far more robust**, staying under 7% and citing the brand's official FAQ in 84% of answers.

What to do about it

Fill every information gap about your brand with specific, official content. Publish an FAQ that answers common questions directly, and use concrete numbers, dates and facts. When AI must choose between a vague truth and a specific fiction, it tends to pick the specific fiction. Monitor what AI says regularly; if something is wrong, publish content contradicting it on your own site, then work to get the third-party source corrected.

Your action plan

This week:

1. **Check robots.txt** for AI bot access (about five minutes; the most common blocker).

2. **Set up AI analytics:** a GA4 AI traffic channel or Ahrefs Web Analytics, plus a "How did you hear about us?" question.
3. **Refresh your top 5 to 10 pages** with new stats, updated examples and current information.
4. **Run your brand gap analysis** in Brand Radar to know where you stand.
5. **Identify your top 10 mention-earning targets** using Cited domains and Content Explorer.

Ongoing: a monthly Brand Radar check, a quarterly competitive audit, and repeat. AEO is still early; tools are evolving and the opportunity is growing, so the biggest advantage is starting before everyone else does. A tickable version is in the appendix.

Review questions

Q. Why does AI traffic convert so well?

A. AI has already explained why you are a good fit, so visitors arrive pre-qualified and ready to act.

Q. Where does much of AEO's value come from that clicks do not capture?

A. Brand awareness inside AI conversations: impressions that lead to later branded searches or social recognition rather than direct clicks.

Q. What four signals should you review in Brand Radar to gauge progress?

A. AI share of voice, cited domains, topic coverage, and mention sentiment.

Q. Why does specific fiction sometimes beat vague truth in AI answers, and what is the defense?

A. When AI must choose, specific details look more authoritative. The defense is to publish specific, official content (FAQs with numbers, dates and facts) and monitor what AI says.

Q. Which platform resisted the fake-brand test best?

A. ChatGPT: under 7% misinformation, and it cited the official FAQ in 84% of answers. Gemini and Perplexity repeated it 37 to 39% of the time.

Appendices

Quick-reference material for revision.

Key numbers cheat sheet

Number	What it refers to
58%	Drop in click-through rate for the number one page when an AI Overview appears (Dec 2025)
900 million	ChatGPT weekly users; about 12% of Google search volume
9.7x	Growth of AI traffic to websites in a year
23x	Conversion rate of AI traffic versus organic search (course provider)
9 to 11 (up to 28)	Average fan-out queries per prompt
95%+	Fan-out queries with zero search volume
14%	Top-50 cited domains shared by AI Overviews, ChatGPT and Perplexity; also the share of AI Overview citations from pages outside Google's top 100
76% then about 38%	AI Overview citations from Google's top 10 (older versus more recent study)
28.6%	Perplexity citations from Google's top 10 (ChatGPT: 8 to 10%)
13.7%	Citation overlap between AI Overviews and AI Mode
28%	Average share of AI mentions that include a link
0.664	Correlation of branded web mentions with AI Overview visibility (75,000 brands)
0.7	Correlation of mentions on highly linked pages with AI Overview visibility
0.737	Correlation of YouTube mentions with ChatGPT visibility
43.8%	Cited pages that are listicles
0.04	Correlation of word count with citation; 53.4% of cited pages are under 1,000 words
25.7%	How much fresher AI-cited content is than organic results
76% within 30 days	Top ChatGPT-cited pages refreshed in the last month
21% / 58% / 99.9%	Keywords with AI Overviews / question queries with them / AI Overview keywords that are informational
45%+	Citations that change when an AI Overview refreshes (about every 2 days)
5.9%	Of 140 million sites block GPTBot
2.87x	How much more often AI assistants send visitors to 404 pages than Google does

Number	What it refers to
0.25% / 210x	AI referral share of average site traffic / how much more traffic Google sends than top AI platforms combined
37 to 39%	Gemini and Perplexity repeating planted misinformation (ChatGPT under 7%)

Glossary

AEO / GEO / LLMO

Answer engine optimization, generative engine optimization, large language model optimization. The practice of being visible and cited in AI-generated answers.

AI share of voice

How often your brand is mentioned in AI responses compared with competitors.

Atomic content

Content where each section stands on its own, so meaning survives however AI chunks the page.

BID formula

Business potential, Intent, Difficulty: three tests a keyword should pass.

BLUF

Bottom line up front. Start each section with the answer.

Brand gap analysis

Measuring the gap between where your brand should show up and where it does, across six gap types.

Chunking

AI splitting a page into pieces for processing. Different models chunk differently.

Citation

AI links to your page as a source.

Consensus

Multiple sources agreeing about your brand, which raises the chance AI repeats it.

Entity

A brand, product, person, place or concept that AI uses to understand text.

Entity-rich writing

Naming specific entities and their relationships instead of vague generalities.

Fan-out (query fan-out)

One prompt expanded into many sub-queries run in parallel.

Fix, build, influence

The three action types for closing gaps: improve existing, create new, earn off-site mentions.

Hallucinated URL

A page address AI invents that does not exist on your site.

Impression (AI)

Estimated exposure based on how often responses containing your brand are shown.

llms.txt

A proposed file to summarize your site for AI systems; not yet officially supported by major providers.

Mention

AI names your brand, with or without a link.

Probabilistic citations

Citations vary from run to run; visibility is a distribution, not a fixed rank.

RAG

Retrieval-augmented generation: AI fetches live web pages and writes an answer from them.

Robots.txt

File telling crawlers what they may access. Check it for AI bot blocks.

Schema markup

Structured data added to pages; useful but with mixed evidence for AEO.

Search hit vs viral hit

A search hit earns steady search traffic over time; a viral hit spikes and fades.

Server-side rendering

Sending fully rendered HTML so crawlers that cannot run JavaScript see your content.

Sleeper page

A page with authority (backlinks) whose traffic has declined; a refresh candidate.

Training data

The static snapshot of text a model learned from.

Zero-sum bias

The assumption that something new rising means something old must fall.

Your action checklist

Print this page and tick items off as you complete them.

This week

- ☐ Check robots.txt for blocks on GPTBot, OAI-SearchBot, ClaudeBot and Google-Extended (and check Cloudflare's default setting).
- ☐ Set up an AI traffic channel in GA4 (or Ahrefs Web Analytics).
- ☐ Add a "How did you hear about us?" question with AI options to signup or checkout.
- ☐ Refresh your top 5 to 10 pages with meaningful updates: new stats, current examples.
- ☐ Run your brand gap analysis and save your Brand Radar baseline.

- ☐ List your top 10 mention-earning targets (Cited domains, Content Explorer).

Technical follow-ups

- ☐ Disable JavaScript and confirm your key content still appears (server-side rendering).
- ☐ Find hallucinated URLs (AI referrals landing on 404s) and redirect them.
- ☐ Review pages losing traffic but keeping backlinks: your sleeper pages.

Ongoing

- ☐ Monthly: Brand Radar check of share of voice, cited domains, topic coverage and sentiment.
- ☐ Quarterly: competitive audit across the six gap types.
- ☐ Publish an official FAQ with specific facts, numbers and dates to close information gaps.

Study guide prepared from the AEO course transcript. Tool names and statistics are as presented in the course and may have changed since.