FREE QUICK-REFERENCE GUIDE

SEO vs GEO vs AEO Quick Reference

A short cheat sheet: what each layer does, which searches trigger it, a one-page optimization checklist and a test sheet to track your AI visibility.

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The three layers at a glance

Search now has three layers. SEO is the foundation, and AEO and GEO build on top of it.

SEO

Rank and earn clicks

Make your site easy to find, read and trust so pages rank higher. Covers technical setup, content, links and local signals.

AEO

Be the direct answer

Write short, clear answers under question headings so featured snippets, People Also Ask, voice and AI answers can lift them out.

GEO

Be cited by AI tools

Make your brand easy for ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity and Google's AI features to find, trust and name in the answers they write.

	SEO	AEO	GEO
Main goal	Rank pages, earn clicks	Be the direct answer on the results page	Be named and cited in AI-written answers
Where it shows	Organic results	Snippets, People Also Ask, voice	ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, AI Overviews, AI Mode
Best format	Pages that match search intent	Short answer under a question heading	Facts with named entities, sources, original data
What helps most	Crawlability, relevance, links, page experience, E-E-A-T	Direct wording, clean structure	Accurate facts, clear entities, mentions on trusted sites
How to measure	Rankings, impressions, clicks	Snippet and PAA presence	Mention rate, citation rate, share of voice
Maturity	Established	Partly documented	Emerging

Google says there are no extra requirements to appear in AI Overviews or AI Mode, and no special markup is needed. A page still has to be indexed and eligible to show with a snippet.

Real examples and numbers

SEO: search intent beats authority

For the keyword "crm" (about 183,000 monthly searches), an Ahrefs study found HubSpot's product page never reached the top spot. HubSpot then published a plain explainer for people who wanted a definition first. **Lesson:** match what the searcher wants, even with a strong domain.

AEO: the answer box gives the basics away

A Google search for "seo vs geo vs aeo" in November 2026 showed an AI Overview that already answered in two sentences. **Lesson:** write self-contained answers a machine can lift out, then add depth that the answer box cannot.

GEO: a young field with early evidence

The 2023 paper "GEO: Generative Engine Optimization" (accepted at KDD 2024) reported that some tactics raised visibility in generative answers by up to 40%, with results varying by topic. HubSpot reports its AI-search citations grew 433% after it tracked mentions, published comparison articles and a glossary, and added FAQs, tables and schema. **Read with care:** HubSpot's figures are its own, shown without baselines, in an article that promotes its own tool.

Which searches trigger which layer?

Search	Type	Layer that leads
"Dentist near me" or a brand name	Local or navigational	SEO
"What is a CRM"	Definition	AEO
"Best CRM for a small business"	Comparison and recommendation	GEO

One-page optimization checklist

You don't need three separate pages. Make one page do all six of these things, and tick them off as you go.

- [ ] **Keep it indexable.** A page Google cannot crawl or index cannot rank or support an AI answer.
- [ ] **Open each section with a short answer.** Put 40 to 60 words under a question-style heading, then add detail.
- [ ] **Make every key sentence self-contained.** Name the brand, product or place instead of writing "it" or "this."
- [ ] **Add first-hand proof.** Use your own data and process, a named author and a short bio.
- [ ] **Cite sources and refresh the page.** Link to primary sources and update key pages every year.
- [ ] **Earn mentions elsewhere.** Roundups, reviews and communities help AI tools trust you.

Where should you start?

Your situation	Start with	Then add
Local business	SEO (local and on-page)	AEO
Online store	SEO (technical and category pages)	AEO for FAQs
B2B or SaaS company	SEO	GEO for comparison questions
Blog or publisher	SEO and AEO	GEO

AI visibility test sheet

GEO needs a manual test. Run the same 10 to 20 buyer questions in several AI tools and log what happens. Print this page or copy it into a spreadsheet, and repeat once a month.

Buyer question	ChatGPT	Gemini	Perplexity	Google AI	Named?	Cited?

How to fill it in: write Y or N in each tool column for whether your brand appears. In the last two columns, mark whether it was named in the text and whether your website was cited as a source. Mention rate = questions where your brand was named, divided by questions tested.

SEO and AEO results show in Google Search Console, which counts traffic from AI Overviews and AI Mode in the same Performance report as regular results.

Want the full explanation?

This sheet is the short version. The full guide explains each layer in plain words, with the examples above in detail, an FAQ and the reasoning behind the checklist.

Read the full guide, or send me your site

Read "SEO vs GEO vs AEO: What Is the Difference?" on my blog, or send your website and I will tell you which layer to work on first.

Read the blog **Send Your Website for an Audit**

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